

EMERALD CITY #102

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Introduction

Well, well, well, who would have believed it? The kindly members of the British Science Fiction Association have nominated my review of *The Thackery T. Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases* (Emcit #97) for one of their award things. I am, of course, duly flattered and flabbergasted. But I have to point out that I could not have written the review had I not had such a wonderful book to talk about. I should also add that in order to understand the review properly you really need to have read Jeff Vandermeer's *City of Saints and Madmen*. Curiously enough, a UK edition of this excellent book will be coming out in the UK in April (thank you, Pan Macmillan) so Eastercon attendees can get it and read it before they vote. And Jeff Vandermeer himself will be in the UK for a signing tour in April, including a visit to Eastercon. All very conveniently timed, really. More details of the BSFA Award shortlists, and the Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist, are in Miscellany below.

Talking of awards, the deadline for Hugo nominations is March 25, so you have less than a month in which to vote. If you don't already have a Torcon 3 or Noreascon 4 membership it is now too late to get nominating rights, but if you do have those rights then please participate. The nominating stage of the Hugos is very important because far

fewer people participate than in the final ballot. That means that your vote will count for a lot more. Just as an example, *Emerald City* got 49 nominations last year (as compared to 79 first place votes in the final ballot). But probably a dozen of those nominations came from folks in the Bay Area who had a membership of ConJosé but don't have one for Torcon 3 or Noreascon 4. Without their votes, *Emerald City* will struggle to get a nomination this year. Don't forget to check out the *Emerald City* Hugo Recommendations Page on the web site (http://www.emcit.com/hugo_rec.shtml).

Still, while another Hugo nomination would be good for my ego, there is actually something that is more important: the Locus Poll. Here, of course, *Emerald City* is in the Best Magazine or Fanzine category, and being up against publications such as *Asimov's* and *F&SF*, not to mention the mighty *Ansible*, all of which have readerships orders of magnitude greater than mine, I stand absolutely zero chance of winning. A respectable performance, on the other hand, could make a world of difference to this magazine. Why? Because *Locus* is read by everyone who is anyone in the industry, and if *Emerald City* manages a good showing in the Locus Poll then it will start to get recognized as a serious part of the SF industry and not "just a fanzine."

There are, of course, a number of publishers and writers who have been very supportive of this publication. Most of the UK publishers, for example, have been very generous. But, if people start to think that getting a book reviewed here is important, then hopefully I'll get a few more review copies (which in my current financial position is pretty much a necessity). And further down the road I might even be able to get some sponsorship so that I can pay contributors, then you wouldn't have to be stuck reading me all the time.

Anyway, you can find the Locus Poll ballot here: <https://amber.site-secure.net/locusmag/2004/Issues/02PollAndSurvey.html>. You don't have to be a member of anything or even a *Locus* subscriber to vote. It is entirely free. And of course there is lots of other good stuff to vote for too.

In This Issue

Risky Business - Richard Morgan arms the economists

Here Comes the Flood - Kim Stanley Robinson gets heated over global warming

Blood, Guts and Style - Jon Courtenay Grimwood plays computer games

Gone Fishing - Amy Thomson looks for the simple life on the high seas

Off to the Tower - Chaz Brenchley's *Outremer* series continues

Still Learning - Part two of Trudi Canavan's *Black Magician* trilogy

Yellow with Fear - A classic re-issue from Robert W. Chambers

Found In Translation - A new column on foreign language SF starts in Finland with Johanna Sinisalo

Interview: Sean Wallace, Prime Books

Lies and Metaphors - Mark Haddon's award-winning tale of an Asperger's Syndrome sufferer

Approaching the New Sun - Peter Wright investigates the deviousness of Gene Wolfe

Short Stuff - Short fiction from Ted Chiang and something called *Aliso*

Miscellany - Lots of award shortlists

Footnote - The end

Risky Business

When you see a book called *Market Forces* your first reaction will probably be to assume that it is about economics. When you see that it is by Richard Morgan (or Richard K. Morgan as we must call him in the US because it is apparently a major social gaffe to go without a middle initial) then you will probably assume that it is about mercenaries. Of course it is about both. Here is the set-up.

The central character (I hesitate to call him a "hero"), Chris Faulkner, is a successful economist who has just been headhunted to work in the Conflict Investment division of the notoriously aggressive Shorn Associates. We are looking about 50 years into the future, and by this time central London is a heavily protected fortress full of rich, employed people, surrounded by the vast wastelands of the Exclusion Zones where the poor manage their own lives as best they can. In these enlightened times, highflying executives are expected to compete with each other on the road. Where there is competition for promotion within a firm, or between firms for a tender, the matter is settled in

a *Mad Max* style car combat. The losers end up dead.

Conflict Investment is a bloodthirsty business too. What Morgan has done here is essentially privatize the sort of thing that the CIA do. You know, "These Islamic guys aren't great business for us in Iraq, let's put some money behind that Saddam Hussein guy and see what he can do for us." The CIA does this for truth, justice and the American way (and maybe for Dick Cheney). Shorn Associates does it for profit.

As you can see, it is an ugly business. Faulkner quickly discovers that one of the firm's partners, Louise Hewitt, sees him as a threat and is determined to get rid of him. The only real friend that he has in the company is the wild and carefree Mike Bryant, whose idea of blood sports is visiting the zones and gunning down a bunch of gang members. Like all Morgan books it is fast-paced and is full of action, dead bodies and acres of cleavage. There will doubtless be people who will love the book just for that, and it will sell very well as a result. There will also be people for whom Chris Faulkner is the ultimate action hero. Many of them will wear suits to work. But as you should know by now, dear reader, it takes more than an excessive body count and loving descriptions of big boobs to get a good review in *Emerald City*. So how does Morgan stack up?

The first problem with the book is that the background doesn't really make a lot of sense. Sure, there are a bunch of aggressive idiots in the investment community, but are you really going to want to risk your top people in a road rage death match against other companies every time you bid for a tender? I doubt it. Morgan makes a brave attempt to justify the practice within companies as a means of weeding out dead wood in a time of

excess staff, but when it comes to tenders the sensible thing to do is to hire professional drivers and get them to risk their lives for you. In any case, the whole system assumes that people who are not successful killer drivers are *de facto* bad economists. That's silly. There's no point in wasting good staff like that.

In addition, the aggressive types are often very bad economists. I've seen a lot of them in my time, and they are pretty easy to dupe. The classic example was when we were selling power stations in Victoria, Australia. The Victorian government hired some consultants to spin a yarn about how the new electricity market would be ripe for the picking and that whoever got in first, if only they were aggressive enough, would clean up. The smart companies hired responsible consultants like my colleagues and I and bid what they thought the assets were worth. The aggressive types demanded that their consultants make a case for paying as much as possible so that they would win the bid. And two years down the line most of the "winners" had lost their shirts and the Victorian government was laughing all the way to the bank.

In any case the whole idea of conflict investment is suspect. It has long been a tradition that countries and companies investing overseas should try to ensure that the local government is friendly (look at a history of the early years of Roman Britain, for example). But deliberately investing in political instability is another matter entirely. Morgan has got hold of the idea that profits come from volatility, so volatility is good for investors, and has extrapolated that to assume that the more volatility you have the better. A state of constant war is about as volatile as you can get. Well that might be good if you are an arms dealer (especially if you are supplying both sides, which is

the smart thing to do), but not if you are an investor looking to back one side or the other.

The point about volatility is a good one. The idea is that a smart company (or perhaps just a large one better able to ride out the bumps) will be able to manage market volatility better than the competition, and thereby make more money. But there is a limit to the amount of volatility that a company should be prepared to tolerate. Most commodity markets are relatively non-volatile and comparatively safe. Electricity, which is the market in which I mainly work, is hugely volatile. And just like gambling, you can't always win. You might be an absolute genius when it comes to the form of horses, but one day your pick is going to trip and fall, or the jockey will have flu. Sooner or later, the market will turn against you, and you have to have enough cash reserves to ride out the inevitable financial disaster. And unlike betting on horses, the amount you can lose is undefined when you place the bet.

The money that you put aside for that is called risk capital, and the more volatile the market in which you are operating the more risk capital you will need. That is money that isn't working hard for you and you don't make much of a return on. Shareholders don't like that, but it is necessary nonetheless. When electricity markets first opened up in the USA most people didn't understand this. Just like Morgan's characters they went gung-ho for maximum profits in minimum time. And when the market turned they had no cover and they went bankrupt, sometimes quite spectacularly. Another example of how ultra-aggressive types are generally bad businessmen.

Now just imagine how much risk capital you would need to be in the conflict investment business. "Sir, our man Hussein in Iraq has just invaded Kuwait.

We are getting lawsuits from all over. We are going to have to go in and bring him to heel." Costly, isn't it. I don't say that it couldn't be done, but it is not a business I would want to invest in.

But the main problem with the book, I think, is that Morgan has spent too much time thinking about sporting metaphors and not enough about game theory. He sees competition purely in terms of a winner and one or more losers. Hewitt does make a speech towards the end of the book about taking advantage of shifting alliances, but she is clearly only thinking of that as a stepping stone to eventually outright victory: her on top, everyone else crawling in the gutter. The real world tends not to work like that, and free markets should never do so. There are such things as win-win solutions, and reaching them doesn't always involve following the most aggressive strategy.

There is a widespread view (particularly in America and amongst people with left-wing political views) that the point of having a free market is to allow one ruthless company to rise to the top and achieve a monopoly, just like in the board game. But if that happens, where is your market? It is gone. The point of having a free market is to have competition (thereby restricting profits and improving efficiency). If you allow someone to achieve a monopoly then the competition is over and the benefits go away.

You can see this confusion at work where Morgan uses the terms "regulator" and "ombudsman" interchangeably and has Faulkner repeatedly call such people "socialists." Now admittedly since the British Labour Party dropped the infamous Clause 4 from its constitution (that was the bit that referred to the ownership by the workers of the means of production) it is hard for us Brits to pin down quite what

the word “socialist” means. Tony Blair is about as committed to free markets as politicians get (probably more so than Bush because the Republicans are in love with the idea of private monopolies). Nevertheless, Morgan is definitely confused. An “ombudsman” is generally appointed by the government to act for consumers in disputes with monopoly industries (whether government owned or private). A “regulator” is someone whose job is to keep the free market functioning, and who should therefore be acting to prevent monopolies from forming. Inevitably, therefore, a regulator should be someone who is in favor of free markets. Again there is some confusion here because the UK government (and probably other governments as well) has created offices of regulation and has then loaded a bunch of ombudsman-like jobs upon them. But the distinction remains and Morgan doesn’t seem to have grasped it.

Even the argument that Morgan has his characters put forward for oppressing the rest of the world is fundamentally flawed. The boss of Shorn says this:

Do you really think that we can afford to have the developing world develop? You think we could have survived the rise of a modern, articulated Chinese superpower twenty years ago? You think we could manage an Africa full of countries run by intelligent and uncorrupted democrats? Or a Latin America run by men like Barranco? Just imagine it for a moment. Whole populations getting educated, and healthy, and secure, and aspirational. Women’s rights, for Christ’s sake. We can’t afford these things to happen.

Well, it is a view, and doubtless the feudal barons were going through the same heart-searching issues during the renaissance. But they were wrong.

European peasants are now educated, healthy, secure and aspirational, and the women have rights. Yet the rich are still much richer than the peasants. Clearly there are issues here with our ecological footprint. With our current levels of technology we can’t all be as rich as Americans. But we don’t need to be as wasteful, and neither is economics a zero sum game as the environmentalists claim. I can see Ian R. MacLeod having characters make that sort of argument in the hope of avoiding any political change, but you don’t have to be a Socialist to reject it. You just have to believe that we should at least try to fix the world rather than wallowing in self-pity or greed.

Where does this leave us? So far we have a book that will probably sell very well into the thriller market, but which doesn’t really make effective arguments about economics because it is based on a flawed understanding of how markets work. Is there anything else to it?

There are times when it appears that Morgan is trying to write an anti-globalization book. Certainly he quotes a bunch of references that could be taken as such. And some of the characters, for example Faulkner’s wife, Carla, and her father, Erik, both express anti-globalization sentiments. Erik is a tired old Socialist who spends his time writing angry columns for newspapers but never offering any solutions. Carla, whom I found quite the most despicable character in the book, spends all of the time whining to Chris about the state of the world and demanding that something be done, but then attacks him when he tries to do anything because people get hurt. Neither of these characters is at all sympathetic so if Morgan was trying to argue against globalization he’s not made a very good case.

There are one or two likeable characters in the book. The most obvious is the Colombian guerilla leader, Vicente Barranco. It is through his words that Morgan manages to sound most like Jon Courtenay Grimwood (and therefore sound like he has some idea of the nature of the problem).

"You don't understand, Señor Faulkner?" Barranco shrugged. "Well I cannot blame you. Sometimes neither do I. Some days, it makes more sense to take my Kalashnikov, walk into any police station or barracks bar and kill everything that wears a uniform. But I know that behind those men are others who wear no uniform, so I change this plan, and I begin to think that I should do the same thing with a government building. But then I remember that these people in turn are only the front for an entire class of landowning families and financiers who call themselves my compatriots. My head spins with new targets." Barranco gestured. "Banks. Ranches. Gated suburbs. The numbers for slaughter rise like a lottery total."

In addition there is one thing that is becoming very clear about Morgan's books, which is that his endings can be very ambiguous. One very plausible interpretation of the book is that Morgan is saying that if you create this sort of society then it will destroy itself from within. Which is pretty much what I was saying way back about aggressive types in business. But in that case why bother to imagine such a society in the first place and glamorize it? Because you think that people actually want it, and you are trying to discourage them? Maybe. As I said, there are people who will see Chris Faulkner as a hero. We just need to watch out for them and divert their undoubted energies into something less damaging. Possibly Morgan does think that everyone

involved in free markets is a gung-ho lunatic who is likely to turn into a Chris Faulkner any day now. In that case it is good that he's trying to discourage them. But to many of us in the business what he is saying sounds less like satire and more like stating the obvious.

By the way, other people have thought about doing something about excess flushes of testosterone. So if you read Morgan's book, you then have to go off and read Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, OK?

Market Forces - Richard Morgan - Gollancz - publisher's proof

Here Comes the Flood

*Lord, here comes the flood
We'll say goodbye to flesh and blood
If again the seas are silent
in any still alive
It'll be those who gave their island to survive*

"Here Comes the Flood" - Peter Gabriel

When China invaded Tibet many Buddhist monks fled to India. But the Indian government had to get on with the Chinese so they suggested to the monks that they cede them some land where they could found their own nation. The land, which the monks called Khembalung, was good: it was farmable, it even had tigers. But it was an island in the Ganges delta, right on the Monsoon track. It averaged maybe 15 feet above sea level, and sea level was rising fast.

I have been waiting for some time for a Kim Stanley Robinson book that I could give an unequivocal recommendation. *Forty Signs of Rain* is not that book, but it

came very close. To start with it is nice and short, around 350 pages. It is also relatively free from padding. Robinson still drops into infodump every so often, but only for short periods and not often on anything deeply technical. The book is also very readable and quite amusing in places.

However, while it presents itself as a novel, *Forty Signs of Rain* is actually something quite different. It is a political manifesto aimed at American scientists with the objective of getting them to rise up against their political masters and get something done about global warming. It is by no means a rant, but at the same time there are many readers who may come away with the impression that Robinson isn't really talking to them.

The plot has been worked out fairly carefully. Charlie Quibler is a political advisor to Senator Phil Chase, one of the few US politicians to actively promote environmental issues. He works part time from home so that he can look after his young son, Joe. Charlie's wife, Anna, has a high-powered job at the National Science Foundation. The story begins when the Khembalis open their US Embassy in Washington, just across the road from Anna's office. She takes pity on the bemused-looking and obviously foreign visitors, and soon realizes that her husband is just the person that they need to guide them through the political zoo.

Joe bounced in Charlie's arms. He liked Metro Center's criss-crossing vastness. The incident of the balloon was already forgotten. It had been unremarkable to him; he was still in that stage of life where all the evidence supported the idea that he was the center of the universe, and miracles happened. Kind of like a US Senator.

Meanwhile Anna's colleague, Frank Vanderwal, on secondment from UCSD, observes goings on with a practiced scientific eye. He considers all behavior from the point of view of sociobiology, and he finds much of humanity wanting. That applies as much to driving behavior on the Beltway to the bureaucracy of the NSF to his friends back in San Diego working for biotech companies. Frank has this nagging feeling that the monkey called homo sapiens isn't coping too well with the environment it has built for itself.

They sat around the bench looking at the mice cages and the rolls of data sheets. A Dilbert cartoon mocked them as it peeled away from the end of the counter. It was a sign of something deep that this lab had Dilberts taped to the walls rather than Far Sides.

Much of Robinson's analysis of the situation is spot on. He is up to date on his knowledge of global warming issues. For example he highlights the potential problem with the Gulf Stream that I wrote about in my blog <http://www.cheryl-morgan.com/blog/archive/2004_02_08_archive.html#107631653538041458>. I suspect he is also right when he has the US President comment that an ice age in Europe would be a good thing for America and is therefore to be welcomed. And of course he has both the scientific bureaucracy racket and the lobbying nightmare that is US politics down pat.

The Democrats had come out of the recent election with a one-vote advantage in the Senate, a two-vote disadvantage in the House, and the President was still a Republican. This was the ongoing American tradition of electing as close to a perfect

gridlock of power in Washington as possible, presumably in the hope that nothing further would happen and history would freeze for good.

Unfortunately Robinson is less sharp when it comes to dealing with things that he doesn't like. In common with many academics (and writers) he dismisses politicians and businessmen as lunatics with whom one cannot have a rational conversation. Given the amount of time he has Frank lecturing us about game theory I would have thought he would have noticed that the main communication problem is that he sees the world as a repeated game, with the payoff accruing to future generations, whereas other people see it as a single-shot. It is all very well getting angry with people who don't see the world the way you do, but it isn't likely to save the planet, especially if they seem to be better at the political game than you are. In addition it is all very well for Robinson to dismiss economics as a "pseudo-science" but he has nothing to replace it. To me his complaints sound rather like someone maintaining that gravity cannot be true because it is unfair that people can't fly.

Additional interesting observations come from Frank thinking about how primitive man lived on the African savannah. Robinson is probably right when he has Frank say that in those times there was no money and a person's standing was dependent entirely on what other members of the tribe thought of them. He is also right in part when he says that science works on a respect system. If you publish good papers then your standing in the community goes up. It is just like Cory Doctorow's Whuffie system.

But just like Doctorow, Robinson is wrong to think that we can go back to such a system. Modern politics and

economics are systems that we have evolved to cope with the fact that "the tribe" is now way too big to be run on a face-to-face basis. They might not be perfect, but they have been developed through thousands of years. In any case, the respect that a scientist has within the scientific community is not transportable to Doctorow's geek community, or to any other sub-group of humanity. Nor is the academic community free of politics. We have to live with the world we have got, not dream about how good things would be if everyone recognized how smart we were and how dumb our enemies were.

Thankfully, dealing with things is where Robinson finally seems to get it right. The reason that the Khembalis are in the story is that Robinson wants a means of changing the mindset of scientists. He has them make a plea to the NSF to adopt a more Buddhist approach to science. One of the ways in which they explain this is an ancient proverb that states, "an excess of reason is itself a form of madness."

Here Robinson is spot on. The way in which scientists concentrate on their own little specialties to the exclusion of all else is very like Asperger's. Because they don't look outside of their own little worlds, scientists often don't see the wider implications of what they are doing, and they are unable to address global issues such as climate change. There is no chance of them engaging in political protest. This is an argument familiar to readers of Justina Robson novels.

And finally, the Khembali's understand that the world is the world and we have to live in it, whether we like it or not. If you are looking for some Buddhist wisdom, here it is.

We die. For fifty thousand years we have known this. Much of our mental energy is spent avoiding this knowledge. We do not like to think of it. Then again, we know that even the cosmos is mortal. Reality is mortal. All things change ceaselessly. Nothing remains the same in time. Nothing can be held onto. The question then becomes, what do we do with this knowledge? How do we live with it? How do we make sense of it?

It is entirely like that in our lifetimes the world we know will change radically. We may not want it to, but we may not be able to communicate well enough with politicians to prevent it. Indeed, it may even be too late. Robinson, I think, recognizes this, and is trying to look beyond anger and despair and worry about what we are going to do when it happens.

And that just leaves one question. Robinson is an American writer. The book is set in and very obviously about America. Why is it only being published in the UK?

Forty Signs of Rain - Kim Stanley Robinson - HarperCollins - hardcover

Blood, Guts and Style

Jon Courtenay Grimwood has become one of the big name writers to leave Simon & Schuster after the demise of Earthlight. This doesn't altogether surprise me, because Grimwood is a superb writer and I rather expected Malcolm Edwards of Gollancz to step in with a very generous offer. But I'm pleased to note that Simon & Schuster are well aware of Grimwood's value too and are therefore ensuring that his back catalogue remains in print. When he was interviewed at Novacon last year Grimwood stated that his first novel,

neoAddix, was dead and buried and would not be seeing the light of day again. But its sequel, *Lucifer's Dragon*, has just been given a new lick of chrome and is back on the streets ready to wreak mayhem once again.

Mayhem? Oh yes, for this is from the period in which Grimwood was being compared to Tarantino. This is before Grimwood discovered that it was possible to be really angry in a novel. There are messages in *Lucifer's Dragon*, but not with the intensity that you find in the likes of *redRobe* and the *Arabesk* series. And not in anywhere near such quantity as the blood or the designer labels.

The plot of *Lucifer's Dragon* follows two separate time streams. The first takes place in the very near future and tells how the bulimic daughter of a West Coast Mafia don, a Thai street thief, a Japanese prostitute and an Irish terrorist manage to found a new country in the middle of the Pacific. The other stream, set decades into the future, not long after the events of *neoAddix*, tells of a popular revolution in that country.

Of course New Venice is not exactly an ordinary country. It is built from a conglomeration of old ships beached on an artificial coral reef on a mid-ocean ridge. Its primary businesses are as a media center and a data haven. And doubtless tourism as well. By the time of the later half of the book New Venice is very rich indeed. Or rather the rich parts of it are. Just like any other city, it has poor areas, and wealth redistribution is accomplished by the traditional method of rich people spending lots of money in casinos and brothels.

All of this is an excuse for fast-paced cyberpunk action and killing people in graphic detail in all sorts of entertaining ways. Yet even this far back in his career Grimwood had a good eye for the way

of the world. He understands money and the media and politics and how they work together to maintain power structures. He also has occasional flashes of prescience. *Lucifer's Dragon* was published in 1997, but Grimwood has his politicians using "international terrorist" as a convenient label to slap on people that they want to kill. And then there was this:

The two rigs came down slowly. Like watching the descent of a giant lift, or seeing New York's World Trade Center collapse through a sidewalk on the downstroke of an invisible piston.

Well, actually the towers didn't go quite like that. But it certainly shakes you to come across an image like that in a book written four years before the event.

So anyway, we learn how Passion (that's the Mafia princess) founds New Venice, and we learn how her descendant, Karo, shakes it up a bit. We learn a lot about political dynamics. We have some fun with elective surgery (cat people, wolf people, vampires, living corpses). We get to meet Razz and Alex Gibson, both characters from *neoAddix*. Most importantly, however, we are given the name Lampedusa. That is, Prince Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. And if you follow that through Google you will come to a novel called *The Leopard* (also a film by Visconti) and you will find the reason why Jon Courtenay Grimwood doesn't do panels on political revolution. It is an important lesson. Don't miss it.

Lucifer's Dragon – Jon Courtenay Grimwood
– Pocket Books – softcover

Gone Fishing

Amy Thomson has been quiet for a while. Those us whom attend conventions in the US know why. She has this incredibly cute and loveable daughter called Katie, and when you have someone as charming and entertaining as that to play with, who would want to write? Nevertheless, Thomson has writing in her blood, and a new novel, *Storyteller*, has finally appeared. It is perhaps no surprise that it is mainly about parenting.

The story is set on the planet Thalassa, a world that is mainly water dotted with a large number of isolated islands. It is a beautiful place to live, but not very rich, which makes it an ideal place to get back to a more rustic existence. It has been settled mainly by people from Mediterranean countries who are comfortable with a maritime way of life. But it is the local life forms that really make a difference. The harsels are giant, sea-dwelling creatures that communicate telepathically. Some humans are able to pick up their thoughts and talk to them. Adult harsels have a large cavity in their backs in which the females store eggs when breeding. Seeing as most harsels are male (they only change sex at their end of their lives to give birth) this provides a natural cargo fleet that is essential to the Thalassan economy.

The other unique thing about Thalassa is the Pilot. Legend has it that, long before the planet was settled, a Jump Pilot was marooned there when her Talent burned out (isn't it great that I can write stuff like that and be confident that you guys will know what I mean). This woman supposedly seeded Thalassa with a large number of Earth plants before the colonists arrived, and stories claim that she continues to help and guide the planet to this day.

I found that the book reminded me of '70s SF in a number of ways. The central characters are tellers of folk tales. That and the whole simple life philosophy of Thalassa are very reminiscent of Le Guin. The telepathic bonding with the harsels brings to mind Anne McCaffrey and her dragons. And the idea that small family groups who love and support each other will naturally triumph over all adversity reminded me a lot of later Heinlein. This is not to say that *Storyteller* is in any way derivative, it just had a very different atmosphere to much modern SF.

As I said, the book is mainly about parenting. The heroine, Teller, and her harsel are both nearing the end of their lives. They decide to adopt an orphan boy, Samad, and the relationship between the three of them forms the core of the narrative. As with any close family, there is much angst generated by people trying to find the right balance between supportive love and suffocating over-protectiveness. Naturally it is something of a tearjerker as a result.

But there is also a wider issue raised. The legend of the Pilot suggests that it is possible for a single wealthy and saintly person to somehow guide a society from behind the scenes. One of the stories, for example, tells how a furious dispute arose between humans and harsels, and how the Pilot was able to sit both sides down and talk sense into them. I look at news reports from places like Northern Ireland and Israel and wonder about this. And I remember Jon Courtenay Grimwood's novels, particularly the wonderful *redRobe*, in which he shows that the harder you try to help people the more people will end up hating you.

Overall I think *Storyteller* is a charming and entertaining book that should be read by parents everywhere. It would also make a great YA novel provided that the parents of the readers don't get

upset by gay sex (or transvestite nuns). But I think we should always remember that no one is going to save the world for us, and that anyone who thinks they can save it by themselves is quite possibly more dangerous than helpful.

Storyteller - Amy Thomson - Ace - softcover

Off to the Tower

Chaz Brenchley says on his web site that the title of book #2 in the Outremer series was the start of everything. Apparently one of the towers in the Krak des Chevaliers is called the Tower of the King's Daughter. That set Brenchley's imagination working, and from that a six-volume series flowed. That's writing in a nutshell for you. Easy, isn't it?

Well, except that you have to do all that stuff about plot and characters and so on, which Brenchley continues to do admirably. In *Tower of the King's Daughter* Julianne gets married and Marron discovers that being a squire to Sieur Anton d'Escrevey is not much easier than being a Brother Ransomer. We also learn much more about the background to the story.

In some ways book #2 feels more like the second half of volume #1 of the UK trilogy rather than volume #2 of the six-book US series. Much of what was mysterious in *The Devil in the Dust* is explained. Much of the background, we could have guessed. But Brenchley also neatly torpedoed a whole set of expected outcomes that would have eventuated had this series been written to the classic fantasy formula. So no, it now seems highly unlikely that Julianne will end up with Sieur Anton. And if Marron is going to end up partnered with anyone there are going to have to be some major

developments to get him out of his current predicament.

"What predicament?" I hear you ask. Ah, well you will have to read the books. Suffice it to say that *Tower of the King's Daughter* has a lot more magic in it than *The Devil in the Dust*. And yes, it does have something to do with the resolution, but no way can this be counted an easy get-out.

Meanwhile, as I said, Julianne finally meets her betrothed and gets married. And here we find something interesting. Brenchley can write romance. He's done other stuff as well: crime, horror, dark fantasy. But he has confessed to me that he cut his authorial teeth on writing love stories for teen magazines. And it shows: he's good at it.

I hasten to add that this does not make the book one of those fantasy-romances against which I have railed in the past. The romance stuff is just one of the elements that Brenchley has thrown into his series, not the be-all and end-all of it. Nor is it at all clear that Julianne will end up spending much time with hubby in the near future.

Much more than that I cannot say. It is the role of middle books in series to move the plot along, and this one is no exception. I suspect that, because of the 3/6 book publishing split, new and exciting things will be revealed in book #3. But the important thing is that I have it available to read. Next month.

Tower of the King's Daughter – Chaz Brenchley
– Ace - softcover

Still Learning

I'm returning to Trudi Canavan's Black Magician series because the US edition of the first book, *The Magicians' Guild*, is

being released around now. Hopefully it will be in the shops by the time you read this. This is a really big deal for an Australian author, because the US market is huge in comparison to back home (there are more people in Los Angeles than there are in Australia).

Anyway, the book, *The Novice*, continues Sonea's adventurers as she is enrolled as a student in the Magicians' Guild and learns to use her powers. And here I am rather disappointed. I said in my review of the first book that it didn't contain any of the formulaic stuff you so often get with fantasy, but much of *The Novice* is pure formula. It is a standard school bullying story. You know the sort of thing. The heroine is in some way different to her classmates. They all pick on her and play mean tricks. The teachers never believe a word she says. It is all boringly predictable.

Which is sad because there is an interesting story being told here. Without giving too much away, at the end of *The Magicians' Guild* Sonea accidentally discovers that there is something rotten amidst the groves of sorcerous academia. The bad guy is too powerful to be challenged outright, and a nice little cat-and-mouse game develops. On the one hand, Sonea's patron, Lord Rothen, tries to contain matters back home, and on the other his friend, Lord Dannyl, goes off around the world seeking knowledge that might help. Meanwhile nasty murders start taking place in the city and the civil authorities start getting suspicious. This could have been really good, but Canavan seems to have put more effort into the schoolgirl story than into the main plot. Obviously the bullying thing does help drive Sonea's character development, but I think the balance was wrong.

Elsewhere there is a nice side-plot about Dannyl and cultural homophobia, and

Canavan gets a chance to show off some of the rest of the world she has created. It isn't the highest quality world building that I have ever seen, but then again it is well above the "all elves are graceful and aloof" stuff that we see so much of.

Canavan's series is largely light entertainment. That's not necessarily a bad thing: there is a good market for such books. And I think it would make good YA material as well. It is certainly very easy reading, and as long as you are not expecting anything too deep you won't be disappointed. But I felt that there was a really interesting plot here that could have made for a much better book if only Canavan had taken it by the throat rather than stick to something safe.

One final word of advice. Don't read the Epilogue: it gives away far too much about the final volume.

As *The Novice* won't be issued in the UK or US for a month or two I'm providing Amazon links to the newly released *The Magician's Guild* as well.

The Magician's Guild - Trudi Canavan - Voyager - softcover

The Novice - Trudi Canavan - Voyager - softcover

Yellow With Fear

There is a lot of debate about the value of e-books, but in my view one of the good things that they do is enable fascinating older works to remain available long after paper book publishers have given up on them. Marcus L. Rowland has preserved some wonderful Victorian SF through his *Forgotten Futures* role-playing game (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/forgott>

enfutures/) and a number of e-book publishers are re-printing classic novels. Of course one of the reasons that they can do this is that the works in question are generally out of copyright, so if you look really hard you may be able to find the text out there on the Web (it amazed me, for example, that text of *The Wizard of Oz* is freely available). However, when an e-book publisher picks up an ancient classic and gets it listed on Amazon, that will surely encourage others to read the book. And that, I think, is a good thing.

So, one of the e-book publishers I get press releases from is Renaissance E-Books (<http://www.renebooks.com/>). They have two imprints: Sizzler, which is for erotica, and PageTurner, which is for genre novels. Their SF&F collection includes many well-known authors including Edgar Rice Burroughs, William Hope Hodgson, Jules Verne and Sax Rohmer. However, the book I want to talk about here is a late 19th Century classic, *The King in Yellow*, by Robert W. Chambers.

Written in 1895, *The King in Yellow* was a favorite book of H.P. Lovecraft, and it is easy to see why. About half the book is given over to stories of what one might call the "Carcosa Mythos". All of the stories revolve around a mysterious book that apparently drives people who read it mad. It is set in an unknown land called Carcosa and apparently treats, amongst other things, of someone or something called Hastur, of the terrible Yellow Sign, and of course of the ghastly King in Yellow. *Call of Cthulhu* players will find this all very familiar. The dreadful tome is, of course, called *The King in Yellow*, and you are reading it.

I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth - a world

which now trembles before the King in Yellow.

I'd hesitate to call the book "horror" these days. Obviously it was when it was written, and in Lovecraft's day, but nowadays people tend to think of "horror" as being lots of people getting killed very messily. *The King is Yellow* is much better described as "suspense" or "dark fantasy". In any case, the second half of the book is non-genre, and by far the most blood and guts in the book comes in the story, "The Street of the First Shell", which is a straightforward tale of love and honor during the Siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War.

But to get back to the genre stuff, there are some good stories in there and the first one, "The Redeemer of Reputations", is wonderful. The narrator, Hildred Castaigne, reports having been thrown by a horse and receiving a bump on the head, after which an idiot doctor had him unfairly confined to an asylum for a while. Castaigne claims to be perfectly sane, if much more serious about the world and ambitious for himself than previously. But the more he tells us, the more we come to doubt him. And when he says of his eccentric friend, Mr. Wilde, "Many called him insane, but I knew him to be as sane as I was", we start to worry about Mr. Castaigne.

But of course this is a fantasy story, and Castaigne is a convincing narrator. Who knows, maybe he has somehow made contact with Hastur or The King in Yellow. Mad as he is, perhaps he can carry out his terrible plans. It makes for an excellent story.

There are oddities arising from the tale's antiquity. Chambers sets it in what for him was far future 1920s America. He talks lovingly about the tremendous political "improvements" that have been made in the new century. For example,

"the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of self-preservation." And if that doesn't boggle the modern mind, the fact that he later talks about a great religious conference at which, "bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves" certainly will. Fortunately "The Redeemer of Reputations" is the only story in which Chambers indulges in futurology. In the rest of the book his 19th Century ideas are mainly just quaint.

Anyway, if you like Lovecraft, and dark fantasy in general, and you don't already have a copy of "The King in Yellow", then you should add it to your library without delay. The PageTurner e-book is a cheap way of doing that.

The King in Yellow - Robert W. Chambers - PageTurner - e-book

Found in Translation

With the Glasgow Worldcon now only a year and a half away I am starting to think seriously about the fact that it is a European Worldcon, not a British one. (It is a Eurocon as well, for that matter.) Whilst many people claim that science fiction is an inherently American form of literature, doubtless Jules Verne would disagree. And in any case the success of SF as a global cultural phenomenon will have ensured that books do get written in languages other than English. There must be a lot of good SF and fantasy out there that I don't get to hear about. So I'm going looking for it. Hence (with a brief nod to Sophia Coppola and Bill Murray), *Emerald City* has gained a new regular column. And the first stop on its world tour is Finland.

Last year's Eurocon was in Finland. Michael Swanwick was a Guest of Honor and he came back enthusing

about a book called *Not Before Sundown* by Johanna Sinisalo. Entirely separately I had been recommended the book by a Finnish reader. This sounded very promising, and it was.

Of course the book's reputation should speak for itself. It is Sinisalo's first novel, but it won the prestigious Finlandia Prize, which is for the best novel of any type in Finnish (and is worth around €26,000). This is a serious accolade, approximately equivalent to China Miéville winning the Booker Prize. Wouldn't happen in the UK. Sinisalo also manages to win the Atorox Prize, which is for Finnish SF&F, with almost Langfordian regularity. This suggests that she is seriously good, and it suggests correctly.

The plot of *Not Before Sundown* revolves around a photographer called Mikael who finds an injured animal near his apartment and takes it in to nurse it. The animal is a troll, a rare Finnish species that may or may not be distantly related to the yeti and sasquatch. It is bipedal, but covered in black fur with a short, tufted tail and much thicker hair around the head. It is a predator. The description rather reminded me of Wolverine in *The X-Men*.

The book has three separate strands to it. The first is exploration of the idea of trolls as a real species: how and why they might have evolved, and what their lifestyle might be. The second trawls through Finnish folklore for information about trolls, which may be simply mythological but may also give answers to the scientific questions (Sinisalo gives an interesting explanation as to why trolls are said to turn to stone in the sun). And finally we have Mikael's story, in which the obvious physical reality of the troll meshes with its mythological role as a creature of darkness. It doesn't help that the troll appears to give off powerful

pheromones that drive humans sex-crazy.

His troll's like a shred of night torn from the landscape and smuggled inside. It's a sliver of tempestuous darkness, a black angel, a nature spirit.

Can you tame darkness?

Perhaps you can if, to start off, it's very, very young, helpless enough, in bad shape...

One of night's small cubs.

In amongst this, Sinisalo weaves an interesting story about gay men. This isn't exactly an area I know much about, but the sex scenes seem far more convincing to me than those in the Slash-influenced *Fall of the Kings*. Plus there is a very neat side-plot where Mikael's imprisonment of the wild troll in his apartment is contrasted with the behavior of one of his neighbors who has purchased a Filipina bride. All in all it is a very complex book that packs a lot into under 250 pages. It also has a rather experimental feel to it that reminded me of Angela Carter and Italo Calvino.

So yeah, score one for Finland. This is a really good book that, with its mix of science and mythology and personal relationships, is right in the middle of the current fashion for genre bending. And it is available in English translation, so you have no excuse for not getting hold of it.

Next month this column is off to Serbia for more from the excellent Zoran Živković. After that something Spanish (or more precisely Hispanic). But I will need help. If you know of any good translated works, please let me know.

Not Before Sundown - Johanna Sinisalo (tr. Herbert Lomas) - Peter Owen - softcover

Interview: Sean Wallace, Prime Books

Prime Books
<<http://www.primebooks.net/>> is one of the most successful American small press operations with a string of critically acclaimed authors and an excellent track record in award nominations. I talked to the man who is Prime Books, Sean Wallace.

CM: Prime has only been going since late 2001 and it has achieved a tremendous amount of critical acclaim in that time. Four books in this year's *Locus* Recommended Reading List, for example. You must be very pleased, yes?

SW: I'm generally very pleased by the reception of a number of Prime titles, especially by readers, national/genre review markets, and the industry. However, most of the blame can be easily laid at the feet of Msrs. VanderMeer and Mamatas, who have encouraged and threatened and cajoled me to send out as many review copies as reasonably possible. I think I was equally as surprised as anyone else by the number of titles on the *Locus* Recommended Reading List, but I'm not complaining! The fact that *The Etched City* by KJ Bishop, *Veniss Underground* by Jeff VanderMeer, *Little Gods* by Tim Pratt, and *Monterra's Deliciosa & Other Tales* by Anna Tambour all appeared on the list is probably indicative of the fact that many small presses are picking up the slack once more, carving out important niches, and filling an obvious broader need in the market. This has been reflected by the reprint sales of a few Prime titles to larger publishers such as Pan MacMillan, Tor UK and Bantam Doubleday Dell in recent months.

CM: Is there anything in particular to which you attribute your success?

SW: My authors, artists, designers, editors, and marketing. Or a more flippant reply: simply being too stubborn and stupid to calling it quits in this crazy publishing business!

CM: Does being able to tap the huge US market make a difference for a small press? Is it easier to be a small fish in a really big pool?

SW: In terms of sales and marketing it is certainly easier to target the US markets as opposed to any others. My British revenues are dwarfed in comparison to my US revenues. It's a relatively easy and simple business decision: I can either make x in the British market or I can make 10x in the US market.

CM: Your web site talks about "pushing back limits one book at a time." Does that indicate a policy of publishing more experimental work that the big name companies might be nervous about?

SW: Prime generally tries to publish cutting-edge material, as much as possible, without much attention to genre, labels, or whatever you might use to identify our books. It's much more important to impress the reader that this is a "damn good book." So, for the most part, it's very hard to pigeonhole quite a few titles, as they tend to straddle a number of genres. Call it what you will: slipstream, New Weird, New Wave, Interstitial, etc. but in the end it's still a damn good read.

CM: Nevertheless the big boys do pick up on some of your material. Pan Macmillan in the UK has taken several books that you first published, and KJ Bishop's *The Etched City* has also been picked up by Bantam in the US. How do you feel about this happening: happy that the book is a success, or concerned that someone else is making the big bucks out of something you started?

SW: Truth be told, I'm actually very pleased when one of my Prime titles is picked up by one of the big boys and reprinted to a much larger market. I want my authors to succeed beyond their wildest dreams, and if Prime Books is a small stepping-stone to bigger and brighter things, so be it.

CM: Roughly what sort of print run do Prime books have? Bishop told me that she didn't qualify for the John W. Campbell Award at this year's Worldcon because *The Etched City* hadn't reached the minimum required print run.

SW: There are no print runs. My business model is to use Print-on-Demand technology. I generally keep a very low stock of most titles, if any, at my offices. However some titles have sold nearly three thousand copies, while others have sold around one thousand to fifteen hundred, through the distribution channels.

CM: So although you have distribution through people like Ingrams that would suggest that you are selling mainly through independent specialist stores, not through the big chains?

SW: Most of my sales are currently from library systems, online bookstores, and independents. I see very few sales actually coming through from chain bookstores, but we're hoping to change that in the near future.

CM: How do you intend to go about that? Mass-market reprints of books that were successful in POD? Going for broke on a new title by a previously successful author, or what?

SW: Effective March 1st, Prime Books has entered into a distribution agreement with Wildside Press, which means that I'll be able to do a number of offset titles (hard and soft) during the year, with the intention of gradually

penetrating the chain bookstore market. If this works well enough to be worth continuing then we'll introduce more and more offset titles over time; titles which have the sales potential to move thousands of copies. In most cases this would be publishing an established author, as taking a chance on a new author would be akin to suicide, I would tend to think, at least for the moment. However, *The Labryinth*, our first offset title, is actually from a new author, Catherynne M. Valente, who was brought in from the cold by Nick Mamatas. She quite literally stumbled onto Nick Mamatas' livejournal message board by accident and contacted him out of the blue and the ball started rolling and I feel confident that this is a book that will definitely succeed as an offset title.

CM: Will selling into chain stores mean that you have to start categorizing books into specific genres?

SW: I imagine so. I can easily categorize the titles with a number of genre labels, to ease the bookseller's dilemma as to where to shelve the books. But you don't necessarily have to slot a book in just one genre for the distribution channel databases, and it's just a helping hand for the booksellers: they'll still shelve 'em where they feel is best.

CM: Peter Crowther of PS Publishing said he avoided dealing with big chains in the UK because of the sale-or-return clauses in their contracts. Does the same problem exist in the US?

SW: Yes. It's a very tricky balancing act, in terms of financial risk, to manufacture and distribute a large print run through distribution channels and possibly have most returned ninety days or more later. This is as true for larger publishing houses as it is for small presses, but the effect on a smaller press is that much more magnified. If the return rates are

too high, it could (and does) cripple the company. So you have to hedge your bets very carefully when it comes to such a move. It's largely a crapshoot, as is anything in publishing!

CM: What about Amazon? It looks to me like they just list your books and go get a copy when someone orders one.

SW: That's the underlying premise to print-on-demand, in that copies are only manufactured and supplied when a customer orders the book.

CM: If readers in Europe, Australasia or elsewhere around the world want to buy Prime books, what is the best way for them to go about it?

SW: Most of my European customers generally order from Amazon.co.uk or from independent bookstores or from online stores in those countries, as Ingram serves quite a number of markets.

CM: Getting back to the books, Jeff Vandermeer's *City of Saints and Madmen* is a beautifully produced book. Is this sort of attention to details something you think that small presses can do well but bigger publishers cannot?

SW: Small presses can occasionally outmaneuver the big boys, in terms of design, marketing, and more. But no, I would not say that the larger publishing companies are not capable of the same. It really depends on the project and the publisher's commitment.

CM: You have a very international cadre of authors. How did you come to be publishing great Australian writers such as KJ Bishop and Anna Tambour?

SW: The blame would have to rest on the shoulders of people like Garry Nurrish, Jeff VanderMeer, Keith Brooke, Nick Mamatas, and many others, who come to Prime and recommend authors or manuscripts that I might be interested in. I trust their recommendations.

CM: And Zoran Živković? Serbia isn't exactly the first place I'd expect a US publisher to be picking up writers.

SW: VanderMeer. He's really the Puppet-master, the man behind the curtain, etc. I'm just his voice-piece. Seriously, though, I was introduced to a number of authors and editors through my association with the Ministry of Whimsy Press, which was at one point an imprint of Prime Books. This is where I first met Zoran Živković, who has actually run his own publishing company for a number of years now.

CM: I see that you now list Živković as your "Foreign Department Head". What sort of material is he going to be bringing you?

SW: Most of my attention is right now on the local US market, but editors like Jeff VanderMeer and Zoran Živković serve as spotters for any European material of interest.

CM: Is there a particular style of book that Prime publishes? It looks from the catalog that most of your books are horror and dark fantasy

SW: In recent months, we've been quickly moving away from pure horror and moving towards science fiction, dark fantasy, slipstream, etc. This is where the sales, the reviews and the accolades, etc. are.

CM: Is there any particular reason why horror is not getting the sales and critical acclaim?

SW: In recent times (say, the last fifty years), horror fiction has been strongly associated with horror movies, Satanism and more, I think. Therefore it has not been accorded the same respect as other genres that have managed to lift themselves by the bootstraps and get a leg up out of the ghetto. However, with horror, it doesn't seem likely that anything will change any time soon, in

contrast to science fiction and fantasy. It's simply too entrenched, too conservative, and too inclined to market its material as **horror** to be much good. The only way around this, unfortunately, is to market and package it as something else entirely, in some attempt at convincing the reader that this is serious literature.

CM: I've reviewed a fair few Prime books recently, but you have a big catalog. Is there anything in there that you are particularly proud of and think I should be reading?

SW: Tim Pratt's first short story collection, *Little Gods*. We worked hard on this book and even issued the hardcover without any lettering on either the back, spine or front as an experiment.

SW: Anna Tambour's first short story collection, *Monterra's Deliciosa and other Stories*; Michael Cisco's *The Tyrant*; and so many more.

SW: Future titles of strong interest include: Catherynne M. Valente's *The Labyrinth*, Robert F. Wexler's *Circuse of a Grand Design*, Michael Cisco's *The San Veneficio Canon*, Boban Knezevic's *Black Blossom*, and Michael Hemmingson's *The Rose of Heaven*.

CM: I notice that you are currently not accepting submissions. Do you commission a lot of work, or have you just been deluged?

SW: Prime is a one-man publishing house. I don't have the time or inclination to deal with slush. If the author's name isn't one that I recognize or that isn't recommended or doesn't have credentials (all of which represents most of the slush submissions), I'm not even going to bother. So it seemed prudent (and a good business decision) to simply make it a closed market. I haven't regretted it since.

CM: If new writers can't send you manuscripts, how do they get noticed by your scouts and recommended to you? Are there particular short story markets you look at?

SW: My editors keep their ears close to the ground, in search of promising new talents and authors, and report everything back to the Queen Bee! It's more a question of knowing (and following) genres very closely and paying close attention to who or what is really hot. In other words, keeping a finger steady on the genre pulse . . .

CM: I heard a rumor on the Net about you and Nick Mamatas going into game books. Is that true, and if so can you tell us a bit more about the project?

SW: We're re-launching the Prime Media imprint later in the year, sometime in September, I believe, with Nick Mamatas heading up this new operation. In essence we're going to be developing a few RPG properties (three so far on the docket) and releasing them in POD hardcover and paperback editions, whenever warranted. We're all about experimentation here at Prime and I'd love to see how this operation works out.

CM: What are your ambitions for Prime in the future?

SW: To expand to such a point where I can invest in printing books with offset printing presses, to enlarge on my marketing programs, and to continue to publish the best authors and books at Prime.

CM: Sean Wallace, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

Lies and Metaphors

Mark Haddon's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, has been something of a publishing sensation in the UK. It won the Whitbread Prize and was well spoken of by several of the Booker judges, although it failed to make the shortlist. It is being reviewed here because it is about an alien. More precisely it is about, or rather supposedly written by, Christopher Boone, a young boy with a serious case of Asperger's Syndrome.

A word of warning here. I'm always nervous reviewing books like this. I'm no expert on Asperger's, and consequently I have this awful feeling that if I praise Haddon's portrayal of Christopher I'll get a bunch of outraged emails from people explaining that Haddon's book is a dreadful caricature and that Asperger charities have been campaigning against it, etc. I'm reasonably confident because what Haddon has done reminds me a lot of what Elizabeth Moon did with *The Speed of Dark*, and I know that was based on actual experience of raising an autistic child. But if I have missed something here, I'm very sorry, please correct me.

Anyway, with the book being supposedly written by an Asperger's sufferer, Haddon has had to put a lot of work into getting inside the head of his subject. That's what makes the book interesting from an SF point of view. In one way it is fascinating to read a consistently portrayed alternate view of reality. In other ways it is kind of scary. On the surface, Christopher is very different from you or I. He is brilliant at math and physics, but he's incapable of reading people's faces and his emotional expression is limited to fear and violent rage. Over some things he is incredibly obsessive.

It is permitted to move the chairs and the table in the kitchen because that is different but it makes me feel dizzy and sick if someone has moved the sofa and the chairs around in the living room or the dining room. Mother used to do this when she did the hoovering, so I made a special plan of where all of the furniture was meant to be and did the measurements and I put everything back in its proper place afterwards and then I felt better. But since Mother died father hasn't done any hoovering so that is OK.

At other times, however, Christopher sounds perfectly logical. It might seem weird that he judges whether or not he will have a good day or a bad day based on whether he sees lots of red cars or lots of yellow cars on the way to school. But, as he points out, other people make this decision based on what the weather is like, even though they spend all day inside offices or factories. Red cars happen to make him feel good, so if he sees lots of them it sets him up for the day. He also has the ability to be frighteningly analytical.

People who believe in God think God has put human beings on the earth because they think human beings are the best animal, but human beings are just an animal and they will evolve into another animal, and that animal will be cleverer and it will put human beings in a zoo, like we put chimpanzees and gorillas in a zoo. Or human beings will all catch a disease and die out or they will make too much pollution and kill themselves, and then there will only be insects in the world and they will be the best animal.

There are occasions too when you catch yourself thinking, "hey, I reason like that at times." And then you start worrying. After all, you may have a science degree.

You may work in programming. You may hang out with science fiction fans. Is it possible that you are a bit like Christopher? Haddon does such a good job of portraying his subject that, even if you didn't think like Christopher before, you start doing so as you read the book. I wonder how Haddon stayed sane while writing it.

Still, he did it, and he produced a fascinating book. For me one of the most interesting things about it was to compare it to Elizabeth Moon's book. Both deal with roughly the same subject, but one is by a genre novel, and one is mainstream. One has been nominated for the Clarke and a Nebula. The other is a Whitbread winner. Is there a difference?

Superficially there is. Moon's book is classic genre material. It has good guys and bad guys. It has evil to be overcome. And if the guy doesn't quite get the girl, at least the plot reaches a conclusion. Also it is set in the near future when autistic people are able to use their particular skills for the benefit of mankind. Haddon's book is resolutely present day. There are no bad guys, only adults with greater or lesser degrees of compassion and patience who try their best to help Christopher but often fail dismally. Haddon does a really good job of getting you to empathize with both Christopher and the adults around him, and at least part of that is because what he is writing is so grounded in everyday experience.

But then I started thinking. Or rather, Christopher set me thinking. You see, people who despise genre novels often claim that they do so because such books are "not real". They are about worlds that never have been and never can be. They are lies. Christopher talks a lot about lies too. Adults are forever lying to him. They say things like, "I laughed my socks off," or "We had a real pig of a

day." They call these things metaphors, but Christopher calls them lies because they quite clearly cannot be true. And yet he loves watching *Star Trek* and other genre-based TV programs. He never explains why, but I suspect he sees them as hypotheses rather than lies.

So then I asked myself, just who is abnormal here: someone who can't understand a metaphor, or someone who can't accept a story set in an alternate world? Sometimes I think that the way humans view the world is not nearly as uniform as we like to think.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time - Mark Haddon - Jonathan Cape - hardcover

Approaching the New Sun

Many years ago, having been recommended the book by Dave Langford, I wrote a review of Gene Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer*. I said something like, "It is a very interesting book, but Mr. Wolfe would sell more copies if he made his works easier to understand." I have been deeply embarrassed about that ever since. But no longer, because on reading Peter Wright's *Attending Daedalus*, an academic study of *The Book of the New Sun*, I discovered that many contemporary reviewers saw nothing in the book but a simple quest fantasy. At least I knew that I didn't understand what was going on. I felt so much better as a result.

Unfortunately my happiness didn't last long, for I soon discovered, reading Wright's survey of Wolfe reviews, that he isn't happy with any of them. Indeed, he thinks that all of them, including stuff by the likes of John Clute, Joan Gordon and Jenny Blackford, are deeply and

profoundly misguided. (Strangely he doesn't mention Dave Langford's reviews at all.) Only he, Peter Wright, has worked out the true secret of Wolfe's masterpiece, and he is about to reveal it to us. What is it about people called "Wright"?

In some cases, of course, Wright's assertion of superiority is justified. Paul Brazier's dismissal of the series as no more than a complex puzzle is either profoundly dumb or deliberately confrontational (I suspect the latter). In other cases, however, Wright seems rather nit-picky. For example, he quotes Roz Kaveney as saying; "It is of course logical when dealing with a novel so concerned with texts within texts that one should have to go for an understanding of it to texts outside it." What Kaveney is perhaps guilty of here is a misuse of the word "logical". Wright claims that study of the texts referenced by Wolfe will not throw any light on the *New Sun* because the references are there as a distraction, not to elucidate meaning. Thus Kaveney's suggested approach is wrong, and as you can't use logic to prove a fallacy it cannot have been logical to do what she suggested. Well yes. But it was entirely reasonable for Kaveney to have tried that approach because it works with most books. In any case, Wright spends much of a later chapter illustrating how study of other dying sun books (Wells' *The Time Machine*, Hodgson's *The Night Land*, Vance's *Dying Earth* series) does shed light on what Wolfe is doing.

But we are getting away from the thread of the argument here. It is very clear early on where Wright is going because he is obviously obsessed with what he perceives as a deeply important difference between "science fiction" and "fantasy". In Wright's world the former is rational and plausible and the latter is, well, fluffy nonsense. Indeed, Wright

claims that if one reads *The Book of the New Sun* as a fantasy then it is nothing more than a stylistically superior version of the sort of thing produced by David Eddings, Terry Brooks and Robert Jordan. I'll come back to that point later, but first more about Wright and fantasy.

Because he has this almost hysterical fixation on books being either SF or fantasy Wright has major problems with Clarke's Third Law. You may remember that Sir Arthur famously said, "Any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic." This worries Wright terribly because where Sir Arthur says "indistinguishable from" Wright is terrified people will read, "Is the same thing as." He therefore proposes a coda that in effect says, "But it is still science, damnit!"

So, as you may have guessed by now, Wright's hypothesis is that *The Book of the New Sun* is something that looks like a fantasy, indeed pretends very effectively to be fantasy, but in which every single apparent magical or mythical element is explainable rationally. In this he is in fact quite correct. However, he then goes further to castigate Paul Kincaid for suggesting then Wolfe's well known Catholicism can have anything to do with the book, and perhaps to suggest that the true message of the book is that religion is bunk, because science can explain all.

I think that Wright comes to this conclusion because he views SF and fantasy as opposite sides of the same coin. A book is either sensible, rational and plausible, or it is feeble-minded nonsense. I would like to argue that in fact SF and fantasy are two different approaches to telling a story. When you write science fiction you write about rational, scientific analysis of the universe, and the political and philosophical implications thereof. When you write fantasy you tend to be

more concerned with questions of morality, of natural justice and with man's relationship with God. These are not mutually exclusive activities. You can do both in the same book. In support of this I would like to quote another Wolfe, of the Gary K. variety. You can find my discussion of his theories of genre in the "Searching for Copernicus" articles in issues #91 and #92 of *Emerald City*.

Wright gets very exercised about whether the "magic" events and "gods" in *The Book of the New Sun* are "real" or whether there are powerful beings pretending to do magic and be gods. Because everything has a rational explanation he claims that the books cannot be real fantasy. But in a fantasy book it really doesn't matter whether things have an explanation or not. Does it really matter whether the dragons of Pern are "just there" or are genetically modified fire lizards that have a justifiable niche in Pern ecology? Do we recoil in Lovecraftian horror when we encounter things that Should Not Be? Most of McCaffrey's readers probably don't even notice. Sure the dragon back story provides an opportunity for some historical origin tales, but I suspect that only a small number of people like Peter Wright would find the Pern books unreadable if and only if McCaffrey had not explained where the dragons had come from. In many ways Wright is very like the mainstream critics who claim that all SF and fantasy is unreadable because it is "untrue". Wright simply moves the goalposts and says that a book is OK if it is unreal but is still rational and scientific, but not if there is no plausible explanation for the unreality.

Of course having put myself out on a limb here I now have to provide my own analysis. This is going to be sketchy, because I'm doing this to a deadline and

I don't have access to the *New Sun* books, or indeed to the wealth of other Wolfe material that Wright cites in support of his hypothesis. However, I need to make a start, and I'd like to do so by going back to Paul Brazier. Wright quotes Brazier as saying, "For me, great literature says something profound about the moral/ethical/political experience of being alive." That is certainly something that fantasy should do. In *The Book of the New Sun*, I submit, Wolfe spends much of his time talking about man's relationship with God. Wright thinks that *New Sun* cannot be a Christian work because it does not re-tell the story of Christ: because it is not Narnia. Yet Christ is reported to have told lots of parables (stories), many of which were simply designed to get his audience thinking about moral and religious issues. Wolfe does the same.

When I reviewed Wolfe's *The Knight* last issue I quoted a passage in which Ben/Able ponders how he would behave if he were God. He quickly realizes that while he could boss people around, he ought not to. And yet God, as parent and guardian of mankind, may occasionally want to nudge us in the right direction. Much of Wolfe's work is concerned with this "can you be cruel to be kind?" message. Which is one reason why Severian is a Torturer. The ultimate "cruel to be kind" act is where the Hierogrammates destroy most of life on Earth in bringing about the New Sun. It is a very Old Testament thing to do.

Then there is the question of what it means for someone to be a "god". A good book to think about in conjunction with *The Book of the New Sun* is Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man*. In that book Moorcock postulates that Jesus was not in fact divine but rather a time-traveling human from our future. Naturally this outraged Christians at the time the book was published, but Moorcock was asking

a legitimate question: "given that Western civilization has lived by Christian values for 2,000 years, does it matter how Christ's message got to us? Is it the message that is important, or the fact that Christ was the Son of God?" By revealing all of the religious iconography in *The Book of the New Sun* to be a sham perpetrated by the all-powerful Hierogrammates and their minions, Wolfe asks the same question.

And he takes it further. Wright believes that all of Wolfe's work since the *New Sun*, including even such seemingly different works as the *Soldier* series, is simply one vast exegesis designed to explain the masterwork to ignorant readers. I think this is rather rude to Wolfe. Firstly it assumes that he had nothing new to say after the *New Sun* series was finished. And secondly it assumes that his thinking was fossilized at that point and has not developed at all since. In the absence of any specific comment from Wolfe, I prefer to think that he is continuing the conversation and giving us new ideas to think about. For example, in *The Book of the New Sun* Wolfe shows us a view of divinity that ends up explainable in rational terms. It is old man on a mountain stuff. In *The Book of the Long Sun* he repeats that motif with Pas and the other uploaded "gods" of mainframe, but also presents the much more numinous figure of The Outsider as a contrast and a potential "real" god.

If Wolfe's true intention in writing *The Book of the New Sun* were to explain that religion was bunk, I fail to understand why he would have created The Outsider, or why he would have written the *Soldier* series and *The Knight*, both of which thus far appear to have genuine magic and real "gods" in them. (Wright suggests that he has succumbed to pressure from readers for more fantasy.) He may be asking us to think about the

relationship between religion and science, and perhaps what religion should look like in a world in which so much is explainable by science. He may even be asking us to think about whether man can become godlike through science, or whether he will always remain merely human. But Wolfe is certainly not rejecting fantasy as an art form. Indeed, by asking so many interesting moral and theological questions he actually creating very good fantasy (as opposed to Eddings and co who tend to just tell escapist adventures and either don't pose moral questions or assume very simplistic "might is right" morality - told you I'd get back to that).

There is much in Peter Wright's book that is very interesting. His analysis throws a great deal of light on Wolfe's work. Of course I should warn you that *Attending Daedalus* is an academic work, and is therefore written in academic style. That includes dredging dark corners of the dictionary and making the same point in multiple different ways (because academics cannot simply state their arguments, they have to prove them). There is also a certain amount of what appears to be counting of angels on pinheads and of highly dubious statistical arguments. (Wolfe includes slightly more extinct species from more recent geological epochs than from distant ones, for example, but the difference in numbers is not really significant and doesn't have to have some deep and secret explanation.) I'd be happy to recommend Wright's book to anyone with a deep interest in Wolfe's wonderfully complex novels. But at the same time I think that the argument that Wright puts forward will ultimately been seen to be just as misguided as every other attempt to fathom the complexities of Wolfe's devious mind.

Attending Daedalus - Peter Wright - University of Liverpool Press - softcover

Short Stuff

Stories of the Universe

This is a book that I have had for some time. I managed to miss reviewing it when it first came out in the US, and with other stuff continually coming out I decided to wait until the book's UK launch, which happened this month. And so at last I get to look at one of the best short story collections of recent times.

For most SF writers short stories are a means to an end, a step on the career with which they can build up a reputation before going on to a more lucrative novel contract. Some of them, for example Michael Swanwick, Ursula LeGuin and M. John Harrison, continue to churn out a lot of quality short fiction even after they become successful novelists. But hardly anyone stakes their reputation on short fiction alone. Then again, not everyone is Ted Chiang.

Chiang doesn't write a lot. There are eight stories in his collection, *Stories of Your Life and Others*. As far as I can make out that is his entire published output. But what stories they are. The title work, "Story of Your Life" won a Nebula for Best Novella in 2000. "Tower of Babylon" won a Nebula for Best Novelette in 1991. And "Hell is the Absence of God" won a Hugo in 2002 and a Nebula in 2003 for Best Novelette. Eight stories: four major awards. That is an incredible achievement.

It may also explain why Chiang's output is so sparse. Reading these stories you are struck by how much thought has gone into them. This is not M. John Harrison type of thought - continually refining the text until it is perfect. Chiang's prose is competent, but not

startling. Rather it is philosophical thought. Chiang writes about big ideas: God, mathematics, the universe. And somehow he manages to work them into something very personal as well.

Possibly the best example of this is "Story of Your Life". At root it is a first contact story, about a linguist struggling to communicate with alien visitors. But Chiang never does anything the easy way. He wanted to make his aliens really alien, for them to have a worldview that is radically different to our own. To explain this he wanders off into a discussion of "variational principles" in physics, specifically Fermat's Principle of Least Time. These ideas challenge the very notion of causality, and suggest a holistic worldview very different from the linear, building-block approach so familiar from human science. And then, because this is, after all, a story, Chiang illustrates the point by having his heroine look back upon the life of her now deceased daughter, viewing it as a whole against the background of the alien visitation.

There is something strange about this story, however. It is quite plain from the text that there are two different species of humans involved. One type is called Government, and they appear to be in charge. The other type, doing all the work, are Academics. It is clear from the text that the two species despise each other. In particular the Academics regard the Government as terminally stupid and ignore or attempt to circumvent everything that they say. It seems rather odd that a group so incapable of understanding and communicating with the other intelligent species on its own planet should be put in charge of alien contact. Odd creatures, humans.

Another fabulous example is "Seventy-Two Letters" which begins with the idea

of the golem, a magical clay being that is animated by means of Cabbalistic magic, specifically a set of seventy-two Hebrew letters placed in a square. Chiang starts with the idea of an entire science based on different arrangements of the letters, each of which produces different effects. By the time he has finished he has touched on Luddism, cloning, population control and genetic engineering.

It is possible to see Chiang's writing as science fiction distilled to its essence. He things really, really big, and he thinks really, really hard. And then he puts the whole thing down as simply as possible, without all of the infrastructure and padding that goes to make up a novel. I can do no better than repeat what Greg Bear said in his blurb for the book.

"His short fiction is startling and essential – you won't know SF if you don't read Ted Chiang."

Greg Bear

Stories of Your Life and Others - Ted Chiang - Tor UK - softcover

Typo Tales

Once upon a time there was a typo. It was Marion Arnott that committed it, so the story goes. She wrote "Alsiso" when she meant to write "Alison". Andrew Hook stared at this for a while wondering, "who or what is Alsiso?" And then he realized that in fact this might be a very interesting question. Thus a book was born.

Alsiso. This is a word which has been hidden up here (Taps forehead) for centuries, and yet appears at random intervals and locations throughout history. It crosses

national borders at will, never changes in spelling or emphasis and yet has never been in popular usage. It's not a word, more a ghost made up of vowels and consonants.

from "Alsiso" by Alasdair Stuart

The book is called *The Alsiso Project*, and it is the end result of Hook's question. It consists of 23 stories, each of them titled "Alsiso", each of them providing their own angle on that mysterious word. For some the word has magical power, for others it is an acronym or contraction, and yet again it may be just the name of a person or place. The writers have applied their imaginations, and 23 very different answers have resulted.

I've often wondered why more anthologies aren't intelligently or capriciously themed. For writers, short-form fiction is the most fun you can have with your clothes on.

Christopher Fowler
from his introduction to *The Alsiso Project*

There is some really good stuff in the book as well. For K.J. Bishop "Alsiso" is a legend. She uses the story to show how over the centuries a word can mutate from being the signature of a notorious assassin to a stock role in theatre to a character in a best-selling novel to a popular name for pet dogs. For John Grant an "alsis" is a type of succubus. For Steve Saville the word is the name of a golem constructed by Michaelangelo for mad monks obsessed with the connection between sin and ugliness. Anthony Mann cunningly converts it into a car number plate, ALS150, for a story about road rage. For Marion Arnott Alsiso is the name of a captured mediaeval city that is the site of a bittersweet tale of a scarred woman warrior and a beautiful young courtesan.

Alsiso's exile lasted two hundred years. He roamed, vagrant, in distant lands, sleeping in fields of sugar cane, searching for his reflection in flooded temples where the bodies of monks had turned to fish, and he drank the ponging lees of sanctity. He kept company with foxes, monkeys and rats. He acquainted himself with the deep nights of the earth, oceanic black hours against which the previous nights of his life were only a procession of shallow ponds.

from "Alsiso" by KJ Bishop

Two stories in particular stood out for me. The best entry in the book is Justina's Robson's creepy SF tale about a planet with a nasty habit of copying things. It looks like the story is set in the world of *Natural History*, although it isn't necessary to know that to follow the plot. For Robson "Alsiso" is a haunting bird cry that helps set the atmosphere of her tale. The other story that caught my eye is by Christopher Kenworthy, because his Alsiso is Viriconium. The story is very like M. John Harrison's later period Viriconium tales in which the fabled city has all but disappeared from reality and is reachable only through disturbing magical practices. Investigating Kenworthy's background I found that he is a British writer now resident in Australia. He does a lot of screenplays, but he has written two novels that have received critical acclaim from Michael Moorcock and Harrison himself. Clearly Kenworthy is someone whom I ought to be reading.

DNA analysis of Delicia Conté has revealed a small discrepancy. The dismembered body found in the bower is already identified as Captain Conté. The woman in medical is also without doubt Captain Conté, but the radiation signatures of some elements in her

body plus the fact that she has significantly shortened telomeres suggest that this Captain Conté is not the original, but a locally made variant.

from "Alsiso" by Justina Robson

As with almost any anthology, not every entry is top notch. In any case Andrew Hook does not appear to have asked specifically for speculative fiction. A few of the stories are standard mainstream stuff about people with unhappy lives. There is also one story that is clearly trying to be a socially aware tale of a love triangle but ends up perpetuating the stereotype that transsexuals are just gay men who take things to extremes. It is unfortunate that material like this is being published just when the UK is about to join most of the rest of Europe in granting a few basic human rights to transsexuals for the first time. Overall, however, there are enough good stories in *The Alsiso Project* to make it well worth investigating. It is rather sad that good experimental stuff like this ends up being published by a small press when the big publishers just keep churning out more "year's best" books.

The Alsiso Project - Andrew Hook (ed.) - Elastic Press - softcover

Miscellany

Chris Moriarty

Oh dear, mea culpa. In my review of Chris Moriarty's excellent novel, *Spin State*, I made a dreadfully sexist assumption that someone called "Chris" who writes hard SF would be male. There is nothing in the book, even in the "about the author" section, to indicate gender, but even so I should know better. Sorry Chris. Hopefully if I can

persuade a load of people to vote for you in the Campbell and the Locus Poll that will make up for it.

Article on Strange Horizons

OK, so it is a bit cheeky plugging my own stuff, but if you like *Emerald City* there's a good chance you'll want to read other things I do. In this particular case I'm talking about a short essay on the origins of science fiction, which you can find on *Strange Horizons*: <http://www.strangehorizons.com/2004/20040209/myths.shtml>

Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist

The finalists for the 2004 Arthur C. Clarke Award (for the best science fiction novel published in the UK during 2003) are as follows:

Coalescent - Stephen Baxter (Gollancz); *Darwin's Children* - Greg Bear (HarperCollins); *Pattern Recognition* - William Gibson (Penguin Viking); *Midnight Lamp* - Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz); *Quicksilver* - Neal Stephenson (Heinemann); *Maul* - Tricia Sullivan (Orbit).

I'm absolutely delighted to see Tricia Sullivan's *Maul* in there, but I must say that I am deeply disappointed that the judges could not find room for Justina Robson's *Natural History* and for Mary Gentle's *1610: A Sundial in a Grave*. Then again, of the four books on the shortlist that I have reviewed, all four are on my Best of 2003 list and two are on my Hugo list. The competition this year really has been very tough.

The winner is determined by a panel of judges and will be announced at a ceremony in May.

I should also take this opportunity to remind you that the Clarke Award is

desperately in need of funds and a home after the twin blows of Sir Arthur's publisher withdrawing funding and the Science Museum raising their fee for use of the premises from £1000 to £7000. If you have some spare cash, or a suitable venue, and you would like to help out one of the world's most prestigious science fiction awards, then Paul Kincaid would be delighted to hear from you. For more information see the award's official web site (<http://www.appomattox.demon.co.uk/acca/>).

BSFA Awards Shortlists

Hot on the heels of the Clarke Award announcement (by about 7 hours, in fact) came the announcement of the shortlists for the British Science Fiction Association Awards. This was a particularly impressive achievement because the award administrator, Claire Brialey (new in the job this year) got the results out the day after nominations closed. That's impressive.

Like the Clarke, the BSFA Awards are for work published in the UK (not work by British writers). The nomination stage is voted on solely by BSFA members, but the final ballot is also open to members of the Eastercon (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/concourse2004eastercon/>). The results will be announced at the convention at a ceremony on the Sunday evening.

Anyway, the shortlists are:

Best Novel: *Pattern Recognition* - William Gibson (Viking); *Felaheen* - Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight); *Midnight Lamp* - Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz); *Absolution Gap* - Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz); *Natural History* - Justina Robson (Macmillan); *Maul* - Tricia Sullivan (Orbit).

(There are six novels on this shortlist because there was a tie for the number of nominations received for fifth place.)

Best Short Fiction: *Dear Abbey* - Terry Bisson (PS Publishing); *The Wolves in the Walls* - Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean (Bloomsbury Children's Books); "Entangled Eyes are Smiling" - John Meaney (*Interzone* #190); "Birth Days" - Geoff Ryman (*Interzone* #188); "Nightfall" - Charles Stross (*Asimov's*, April '03).

Best Artwork: Cover of John Clute's collection *Scores: Reviews 1993-2003* - Judith Clute (Becon Publications); Cover of Philip Reeve's novel *Predator's Gold* - David Frankland (Scholastic); Cover of Tricia Sullivan's novel *Maul* - Lee Gibbons (Orbit); Cover of *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* - Colin Odell (SF Foundation; edited by Andrew M Butler and Farah Mendlesohn); Cover of Justina Robson's novel *Natural History* - Steve Stone (Macmillan).

Best Non-Fiction: "Nothing is Written: Politics, Ideology and the Burden of History in the Fall Revolution Quartet" - John H Arnold and Andy Wood (from *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod*, edited by Andrew M Butler and Farah Mendlesohn; SF Foundation); "The Profession of Science Fiction #58: Mapping the Territory" - Mike Ashley (*Foundation* #87); "Reading Science Fiction" - Farah Mendlesohn (Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn; Cambridge University Press); "A Sick Mind" - Cheryl Morgan (Review of *The Thackery T. Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*, edited by Jeff Vandermeer and Mark Roberts; *Emerald City* #97); *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams* - M J Simpson (Hodder & Stoughton).

A rather different set of novels here, but still a very good collection. And I would not put any store by the fact that some books are in both lists. It is entirely possible that the BSFA and Clarke Best Novel awards will go to books that are not on each other's short lists. I can't say much about the short fiction because I have only read one of the stories.

I'm very impressed with the artwork short list. There have been some fine book covers this year. As for the non-fiction, you guys all need treatment. Thank you very much. And once again a huge thank you to Dr. Jeff Vandermeer and Dr. Mark Roberts, without whose wonderfully silly book my review would not have been possible.

Nebula Shortlists

The good people at SFWA have issued the shortlists for this year's Nebula Awards. The lucky nominees are as follows.

Novels

Diplomatic Immunity - Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen, May02); *The Mount* - Carol Emshwiller (Small Beer Press, Jun02); *Light Music* - Kathleen Ann Goonan (Eos, Jun02); *The Salt Roads* - Nalo Hopkinson (Warner, Nov03); *Chindi* - Jack McDevitt (Ace, Jul02); *The Speed of Dark* - Elizabeth Moon (Ballantine, Jan03).

Novellas

"The Potter of Bones" - Eleanor Arnason (*Asimov's*, Sep02); "The Empress of Mars" - Kage Baker (*Asimov's*, Jul03); *Coraline* - Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins, Jul02); "Stories for Men" - John Kessel (*Asimov's*, Oct/Nov 2002); "Breathmoss" - Ian R. MacLeod (*Asimov's*, May02).

Novelettes

"The Mask of the Rex" - Richard Bowes (*F&SF*, May02); "Of a Sweet Slow Dance in the Wake of Temporary Dogs" - Adam-Troy Castro (*Imaginings*, ed. Keith R. A. DeCandido, Pocket Books 2003); "Ownz0red" - Cory Doctorow (*Salon.com*, Aug02); "The Empire of Ice Cream" - Jeffrey Ford (*Sci Fiction*, Feb 26, 2003); "The Wages of Syntax" - Ray Vukcevic (*Sci Fiction*, Oct 16, 2002).

Short Stories

"Knapsack Poems" - Eleanor Arnason (*Asimov's*, May02); "The Brief History of the Dead" - Kevin Brockmeier (*The New Yorker*, Sep 8, 2003); "Goodbye to All That" - Harlan Ellison (*McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*, ed. Michael Chabon, Vintage, Apr03; and *Envisioning the Future: Science Fiction and the Next New Millenium*, ed. Marleen S. Barr, Wesleyan University Press, Sep03); "Grandma" - Carol Emshwiller (*F&SF*, Mar02); "What I Didn't See" - Karen Joy Fowler (*Sci Fiction*, Jul10, 2002); "Lambing Season" - Molly Gloss (*Asimov's*, Jul02); "The Last of the O-Forms" - James Van Pelt (*Asimov's*, Sep02).

Scripts

Finding Nemo - Andrew Stanton, Bob Peterson and David Reynolds (Pixar/Disney, May03); *Minority Report* - Frank, Scott and John Cohen (Dreamworks, Jul02); "Where No Fan Has Gone Before" - David A. Goodman, (*Futurama*, Apr02); *Spirited Away* - Hayao Miyazaki and Cindy Davis Hewitt & Donald H. Hewitt, (English screenplay) (Studio Ghibli and Walt Disney Pictures, Sep02); *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* - Fran Walsh & Philippa Bowens & Stephen Sinclair & Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, Dec02).

Nalo's book is the best piece of writing amongst that lot. I'm delighted to see Kathleen Ann Goonan get a nomination.

I'm not sure that *Light Music* is the best part of the *Flower Cities* series, but nebula voters have a habit of giving awards for long term achievement rather than specific works and the entire series was wonderfully imaginative.

Why do I have this nagging feeling that the Bujold will win?

In his blog Mark R. Kelly wonders why 5 of the 6 nominees are women. Certainly given the relative proportions of male and female writers in the field it is remarkable. Would it be unforgivably sexist of me to suggest that this is because women writers are happy to vote for each other whereas the guys just vote for themselves?

SFWA has links to most of the nominees here:

<http://www.sfwaworld.org/awards/2004/nebfinal2003.html>. The novel stuff is only extracts, but most of the short fiction is available in full. Of particular interest is Kage Baker's "The Empress of Mars" which is the only '03 story that wasn't already available online. Given the Nebula nomination it is presumably a good bet for the Hugos.

Horror Awards

Not to be left out, the International Horror Guild has announced their award shortlists. There's rather a lot of them so I'm not going to mention them all. You can see the full list here <http://www.ihgonline.org/>. I do, however, want to pass on congratulations to Peter Straub (*lost boy, lost girl* in Novel), KJ Bishop and Jeff Vandermeer (*The Etched City* and *Veniss Underground* in First Novel), Liz Hand (*Bibliomancy* in Collection) Lucius Shepard (*Floater* in Long Fiction), Lucy Sussex ("La Sentinelle" in Medium Fiction), Andy Cox (*The Third Alternative* in Periodical) and Neil Gaiman (*The*

Wolves in the Walls and *Endless Nights: The Sandman*, both in Illustrated Narrative).

I'm pleased but a little concerned to see *The Thackery T. Lambshead PocketGuide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases* listed under Anthology. Either a book is an anthology or it isn't. *Locus* did not include it in their recommended reading list, and I can only think that was on the grounds that it was neither an anthology nor non-fiction. The IHG says the book is an anthology. It is great that the book should get awards, but I worry about controversy here. This leaves the door open for award administrators to arbitrarily disqualify the book because they take one side or the other in the dispute. Here's hoping that the Hugo Administrators let the book in to the Related Book category if enough people vote for it.

BSFA AGM

The British Science Fiction Association will be holding its Annual General Meeting at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1E 4RL on Saturday March 20 from 10:30am to 5:00pm. The guest speakers are Paul McAuley, Al Reynolds and Liz Williams. Admission is free. Sadly I shall be in the USA at the time.

Mountain View of Mars

Bay Area residents may be interested in Contact 2004 (<http://www.contact-conference.com/>), a conference about Mars exploration to be held at the NASA Ames Center in Mountain View on March 12-14. Speakers include Kim Stanley Robinson, Oliver Morton and a whole bunch of top scientists. This is a professional event, not a fannish one, so registration is quite expensive (\$75, or

\$100 including the Saturday banquet). I will probably be in the Bay Area at the time, but I won't be going because of the security procedures required for dangerous foreigners (I'm already too late to have time to get through the vetting process).

Borders Night Schedule

Pat Cadigan has released further schedule details for her SF nights at Borders in Oxford Street. These take place on the top floor of the store from 6:30pm on the following dates.

March 8: Richard Morgan and Rob Grant – Morgan will presumably be discussing his new book, *Market Forces*, which is reviewed here.

April 12: Jeff Vandermeer, Jeffrey Ford and Lucius Shepard – Vandermeer is on a signing tour for the UK edition of *City of Saints and Madmen*. Ford is on a signing tour for the paperback release of *The Portrait of Mrs. Charbuque*. He is a hot tip for this year's Best Novelette Hugo with the excellent "The Empire of Ice Cream". I'm not sure why Lucius Shepard is coming over, but he's always good entertainment.

New Critical Magazine

A new online magazine for critical study of SF and fantasy has been launched. It is called *The Internet Review of Science Fiction* and you can find it here: <http://www.irosf.com/>. The first issue was quite good and very readable. The second followed remarkably quickly afterwards and is notable for an excellent article about fan fiction. Here's hoping it does well. Subscriptions are free at the moment so grab one while you can.

Reviews Web Site

I found an interesting new web site this month. <http://www.galactium.com/> does a range of SF stuff, but the most interesting part for me is that it collates links to book reviews from around the web. That is certainly something that is worth doing, and I'd congratulate the person whose idea it was except that s/he seems determined to remain anonymous.

SLF Bids to Help Small Presses

I have been saying for some time in *Emerald City* that small presses are producing some of the best SF&F literature around today. And yet their books can be very difficult to get hold of. As my series of interviews with small press owners is revealing, most of them simply cannot take the risk of using major bookstores because of the sale-or-return requirements in their contracts. Even though these presses do sell through their own web sites, many readers don't know that the companies exist. I'm doing my bit, but I think that small presses need more help, and hopefully some is on the way.

Mary Anne Mohanraj's Speculative Literature Foundation has just set up a Small Press Cooperative (see here http://www.speculativeliterature.org/Media%20Kit/Release_02_20_04.txt for the full press release). The idea here is to provide a forum through which small presses can get together and help each other. A classic example of this is dealer tables at conventions. A table at Worldcon would be great exposure for a small press. But as most such outfits are run by one or two people that means spending the entire con sat in the dealers' room, which is no fun for anyone.

Anyway, we shall see what comes of it. But hopefully it will lead to more readers getting to see some really good books.

Guy Gavriel Kay Tour Journal

Guy Gavriel Kay has just announced that he will be writing an online tour journal whilst on the road promoting his new novel, *The Last Light of the Sun* (to be reviewed here next month). Kay says:

"It also occurred to me that given internet technology, there's no obvious reason why only people in Vancouver or Ottawa or other tour cities should have access to an author's thoughts while he or she is doing interviews and meeting with readers. There's no way to cyber-sign a book, yet (yet!), but I'm hoping the tour journal for *The Last Light of the Sun* offers some sense of connection for readers and surfers. I'm also hoping that, as I whip from city to city for the next little while, I remain alert and functional enough to keep it lively!"

Given that my itinerary for March involves Swindon, San Francisco, Sydney and Fort Lauderdale, he has my deepest sympathy.

You will be able to read the journal through Kay's official web site, BrightWeavings: <http://www.brightweavings.com/>.

Footnote

That's it for another month. I'm off to a planning weekend for the Glasgow Worldcon very shortly, and will be going on from there to California. But I will be back in the UK before Eastercon. Before then there will be a business trip to Sydney and ICFA in Florida. You

might want to watch the blog (<http://www.cheryl-morgan.com/blog/blogger.html>) to see if I manage to stay awake.

Next issue will see reviews of books by Guy Gavriel Kay, Ken MacLeod, Paul McAuley, Steph Swainston, Mary Gentle, Wil McCarthy, Zoran Živković, Jay Lake & Frank Wu, Chaz Brenchley and R. Scott Bakker, plus some catching up on Dick and Clarke nominees. It is a good job I'll be spending so much time on aircraft.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl