

# EMERALD CITY #111

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## Introduction

I've made a small change to the format of the issue this month. I've noticed that I am getting more and more anthologies and collections to review. When I first started the Short Stuff column I intended it to be for individual stories, but it hasn't turned out that way. Books of stories deserve a section all of their own, I think, so from now on they are getting one. Short Stuff will be mainly for independently published short fiction, magazines and so on.

You'll also note that my grand plans to do a series of articles on SF in Europe are flagging. I have a number of people who have offered to write something, but they need time. And there seems to be very little interest in the project from Western Europe. Maybe I'll end up with a whole series of articles just before Interaction. Maybe I won't get much at all. We shall see.

In the meantime, I do seem to have plenty of material, so hopefully you won't be too disappointed.

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## In This Issue

Desert Blooms - World Fantasy Con comes to Arizona

Something in the Air - Geoff Ryman gets to grips with new technology

A Matter of Honor - Gene Wolfe concludes *The Wizard Knight*

On the Border - Tad Williams' *Shadowmarch* finally makes it to book form

Tricks of the Mind - Lucius Shepard develops an obsession

Tricky Customers - Larissa Lai and a thousand-year-old fox spirit

Angels Bearing Gifts - Gary Gibson on the dangers of alien technology

Interview - Cheryl talks to Jeremy Lassen of Night Shade Books

Found in Translation - Leena Krohn sends letters from the City of the Insects

Peering Down Wells - Warren Wagar examines a great SF writer

Teeth and Applause - Suzy McKee Charnas puts her vampires on the stage

Flying with Style - David Moles and Jay Lake revive our love affair with the Zeppelin

Changing the World - Jeffrey Turner and friends are *Fundamentally Challenged*

Short Stuff - Fiction of the shorter variety Robert Reed, plus a new magazine and some unusual hymns

Miscellany - Awards and things

Footnote - The end

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## Desert Blooms

### An ideal site

World Fantasy Con is a much simpler convention to run than a Worldcon, but it is still possible to have some sites that are much better than others. The Mission Palms Hotel in Tempe, Arizona is, I think, about as good as it gets. To start with, late October is an ideal time to visit Arizona. The weather is still very warm, but there is none of the blazing heat that afflicts the state in summer. Admittedly there is the occasional day of rain, and when it rains it does so seriously, but the rest of the time you can wander around outdoors in comfort.

Usefully the hotel is designed for this. It is built around a large courtyard with plenty of sitting spaces, some of them attached to the restaurant and bar. The *Locus* crew took to having breakfast at one of the restaurant's outdoor tables and holding court there for much of the rest of the day. The bar didn't have the best selection of beer in the world, and the staff seemed incapable of understanding anyone with a British accent, but it still became a major focal point of the con. And if you were desperate for good beer there were an Irish pub and a Gordon Biersch brewery within easy walking distance.

Walking distance, in fact, was an important theme of the convention. The hotel was located right in the middle of the university district, and there were restaurants and fast food venues of all types all around. We had come to Arizona, and we didn't need a car. This was something miraculous. Gastronomic congratulations are due in particular to Chris Roberson for finding the excellent Asian fusion restaurant, Bamboo Club, and to my roommate Gigi for finding

Fatburger, the only American burger joint I have found that serves British chips rather than "French" fries. All in all we had pretty much everything we needed close at hand, and an excellent climate in which to get on with the important job of networking, which is what World Fantasy is all about.

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### Program, what program?

OK, so World Fantasy does have a program. There are typically one or two streams of panels and a stream of readings. Much of this, I suspect, is for the benefit of the newer writers who are still learning their craft. The convention doesn't really cater for fans, save perhaps for the vast mass signing at which the authors often outnumber those with books.

I did go to a couple of panel items. One was about fantasy in Europe, which featured French small press publisher Alain Nevant and Dutch writer, Wim Stolk. This tended to limit the discussion to a rather small sub-set of Europe, but Alain is hugely good value on panel and I'm very much hoping we'll see him at Worldcon in Glasgow. He certainly doesn't mince words when talking about the French publishing industry.

Most of my time, however, was spent talking to people. I did three interviews. I picked up a lot of books to review, and I talked to a lot of authors and publishers. Hopefully you'll see the benefits of much of this over the next few months.

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### Dealers' Room

Previous World Fantasy Conventions I have been to were notable for the high quality of the second hand book dealers they attracted. The dealers' rooms in both Monterey and Minneapolis were

full of books that were so far beyond my price range that there was no point in looking at them.

Tempe was markedly more downscale. The dealers' room looked much more like what you would find at a normal fannish convention, albeit a very bookish one. I'm not quite sure why this was, but I have an awful feeling that it might be due to the fact that book collecting is rapidly becoming an online activity. The small press people seemed pretty happy with the weekend, but then they are doing the convention as much for the publicity and the networking as anything else. Traditional book dealers such as Andy Richards of Cold Tonnage were a lot less pleased with business. If I'm right about the structural reasons for the change in quality of the dealers' room this will be a big shame because the quality of the collectable books on offer was one of the main attractions of the convention for many people.

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### Art Show

Any convention that has Janny Wurts as one of the Guests of Honor is guaranteed a spectacular art show. Wurts herself is one of the big stars of fantasy art, and where she goes her husband, Don Maitz, goes too. Wurts' painting, "The Wizard of the Owls", which was used as the cover for her novel *That Way Lies Camelot*, is one of my all time favorite pieces of fantasy art, and I got to see the original.

Not that it was for sale, of course. And in any case Wurts and Maitz are well out of my league when it comes to buying art. Come to think of it, just about everyone is out of my league when it comes to buying art. I have a book habit to support, after all. But I was seriously tempted, because the art show also included a sizeable exhibit by the very wonderful John Picacio

(<http://www.johnpicacio.com/>). This young man is turning out stunning covers at a very fast rate. The work he has done for, for example, Lou Anders anthology, *Live Without a Net*, or the MonkeyBrain Books re-issue of Michael Moorcock's *Wizardry and Wild Romance*, or the new Tiptree anthology from Tachyon Publications, is just stunning. Picacio has already received an award from the International Horror Guild, and been short-listed for a World Fantasy Award. I don't think it will be long before he appears on the Hugo ballot.

There was a lot of other interesting material in the art show. A couple of names to look out for are Brian Dow (<http://www.briandowstudio.com/>), who is doing some very intricate covers mainly for young adult fantasy, and Sylvana Plath, whose ceramic sculptures overlaid in bronze were the sort of thing I might actually want in a garden.

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### World Fantasy Awards

The full list of World Fantasy Award winners is given in the miscellany section, but for me one of the highlights of the ceremony was that I actually managed to blog it live. Had you been watching my blog at the time, and been patient enough to re-load it every couple of minutes, then you would have seen the awards announced pretty much as they happened. I don't suppose anyone actually did that, but I did score one small scoop.

I was, of course, absolutely delighted that Elizabeth Hand's *Bibliomancy* won for Best Collection. And as I was bouncing up and down in my chair it occurred to me that I was online and could email Liz to congratulate her. I wasn't really expecting her to be online at the time. It was late afternoon in Tempe and therefore early evening in Maine. But while I was getting photos of

the winners taken, Ellen Datlow, who had accepted the award on Liz's behalf, came over and remarked to me about my email. Slowly it dawned on me that I had pre-empted Ellen's congratulatory phone call. Oh dear, sorry Ellen.

Thankfully this won't put Martin Hoare out of work. I don't expect Dave Langford to stay up through the night watching the *Emerald City* blog to find out if he has won another Best Fanwriter Hugo before Martin can call him.

Anyway, congratulations to Liz, commiserations to the many other fine writers whose work I had been hoping would win, and congratulations also to those who did win, most of whose work I hadn't yet got around to reading. Oh dear, so many books...

The usual collection of blackmail photographs can be found on the *Emerald City* web site.

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## Something in the Air

*Call out the instigator because there's something in the air.*

*We've got to get together sooner or later because the Revolution's here.*

Thunderclap Newman

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One of the enduring political ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is that the Soviet Empire was finally brought down, not by its own cruelty or inefficiency, but because its people, by means of telephones and fax machines and eventually email, were able to communicate effectively with the outside world and understand just how badly they were being lied to by their government.

You can argue the truth of that to your heart's content, but if there is even a

grain of reality to it, then how much more true must such ideas be in the age of the Internet? These days global communication is not just possible, it is absurdly easy. I routinely check the British newspapers and BBC news each morning, even when I am living in America. Doting mothers in the USA send photographs and videos of their babies back to grandparents in China by email. We live in an information age, an age in which a villager in India may find it easier and cheaper to get live coverage of Manchester United matches than to get a working toilet. And it will only get better; or worse, depending on your view of the utility of such things.

Geoff Ryman's new novel, *Air*, makes an in depth examination of the issues by focusing on a small, remote village in central Asia. Kizuldah is, for all practical purposes, miles from anywhere. It doesn't have television, and even the roads tend not to survive the rainy season too well. Hardly anyone has a car anyway. But the United Nations has decreed that everyone should have the benefit of communications technology. There are grants, and a program of action. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is coming to Kizuldah, and there is nothing that the villagers can do to prevent it.

Because *Air* is a science fiction novel, Ryman goes a little beyond the current level of technology. The system known as Air doesn't connect computers via the Internet, it connects people via the rolled-up dimensions of string theory superspace. There is a Test, which caught the people of Kizuldah by surprise. Things do not go well. A few error messages are generated.

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*Mae imitated the voices, out of pure, hilarious rage. You all now have a pigpen inside your head and we do not know how to clean it up. "The Pig" is called "Terror." You also have another area marked "Death."*

*Please do not choose "Death." You can choose "Terror" and "Panic" whenever you like.*

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Chung Mae is perhaps the person in Kizuldah with the most to lose from the arrival of the Internet. She is the village's fashion expert. Her business involves the occasional trip into the nearest town, Yeshibozkent, buying cosmetics and Western magazines, and advising the village women on the latest fashions. With simple things like broadband TV the village women will be able to watch fashion shows live from Paris, New York and Tokyo without ever leaving home.

But things rapidly get worse for Mae. During The Test her aged friend, Mrs. Tung, panics and falls into a laundry tub, scalding herself to death. Thanks to some mysterious quirk in Air, Mrs. Tung's spirit becomes lodged in Mae's mind. The good news for Mae is that Mrs. Tung turns out to have been a tough old bird who fought the Communists in her youth. This helps give Mae a bit of get up and go. The bad news is that Mrs. Tung isn't keen on staying dead, and Mae has a perfectly serviceable body.

Full implementation of Air won't happen for another year, but in the meantime Mr. Wing, one of the richer men in the village, discovers that you can get a government grant to have an Internet TV installed in your village. He sets up a company and gets one put in. Realizing that she has to learn new skills or starve, Mae sets out to become the village's expert on new technology. She is helped in this by a bug in Air that has left her hooked up to the system after the test. Looking for educational material, she encounters a kindly old virtual guru called Mr. Gates who gives her a crash course in business theory.

And this is only the beginning. Mae's attempts at setting up an online business get involved in all sorts of other machinations from the very local to the truly global. There is Mr. Haseem, who has ambitions to become the village strongman and covets Mae's husband's farm. There are the government men and city businessmen who take an interest in Mae, especially in her unfortunate accident with Mrs. Tung. There is Mae's friend, Wing Kwan, who sees the Internet as a means of raising awareness of the plight of the indigenous Eloi people, whose culture is being stamped out by the Karzistani government. And there is the international debate about whether Air should use the UN sanctioned operating system, or the more flexible but commercial Gates Format.

All of this, however, is quite probably dressing for the real story, which is not about a remote village in Karzistan at all, but is about us, and about change. If you think about the debates that go on in Kizuldah about the arrival of the Internet you will soon notice that they are exactly the same debates that happen in the West. The conservatives in Kizuldah bring up exactly the same arguments as we do. Some are valid, such as the destruction of local culture. Others, such as the potential corruption of local youth by decadent foreign ideas, are less convincing. It is an argument between the past and the future. Mae knows this well, because she is both middle-aged Chung Mae and aged Mrs. Tung.

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*We all want an anchor, we all want to turn the corner to go home. But home always goes away. Home leaves us. And we get older and then older again, and farther away from home. From ourselves. We die before we die, my dear. We go from village beauties to old crones; from mischievous children to weary*

*adults; from ripe maidens full of love to embittered, used women full of bile.*

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Mrs. Tung may be bitter, but for Mae there is no debate. The conservatives can complain all they like, but the Revolution is coming. There is something in the Air, and if the people of Kizuldah don't adapt they will be swept away in the flood.

So there you have it. Geoff Ryman is brilliant, and *Air* is easily one of the best SF novels of 2004. Go buy a copy. Now.

*Air* - Geoff Ryman - St. Martins - trade paperback

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## A Matter of Honor

One of the disadvantages of reviewing so many books is that it does not allow me time to read Gene Wolfe as he should be read. To start with, I really should have read *The Knight* once again before embarking on *The Wizard*. And this being Wolfe, I'm unlikely to really understand the books until I have read them a second and third time. Sadly there is not room in my schedule for such things, so you will have to put up with this imperfect understanding of what Wolfe has done.

Another problem is that I am going to start saying things that are spoilers for those of you who have not read *The Knight*. I'm sorry, that's the way it is. If you haven't read *The Knight* yet, go out and do so now, you won't regret it.

So where are we? By the end of the *The Knight*, Sir Able had progressed from being a young and frightened American boy, lost in a terrifyingly different world, to being a bold and capable knight. He had fought a dragon, killed it, died, and been taken to Skai by one of the

Valfather's valkyries. Game over? Of course not.

The structure of Wolfe's fantasy world is such that time passes much more quickly the higher up the tree of worlds you go. Twenty years have passed for Able since the events of *The Knight*. During that time he has progressed yet again: no longer is Able just a bold knight, but a champion, a man who can make a difference. Little time at all has passed in Mythgarthr. Lord Beel and his party are still on their way to Utgard, hoping against hope that they can succeed in negotiating a peace treaty with King Gilling of the giant Angrborn. It is time for the Valfather to put Able back into play.

That, of course, makes Wolfe's work sound like just another fantasy novel. Equally certainly it is anything but. This is, after all, Gene Wolfe, and Wolfe doesn't do ordinary. So *The Wizard Knight* (and I'm treating the two books as a single story, as I am sure they were intended) has many of the tropes of a fantasy tale, but yet so much more. Yes, it has the Aelf, but they are not Elves, and they are most certainly not cute. Yes, it has a young boy who becomes a bold knight. But lo, he actually thinks about what has happened to him and worries about what being a knight means.

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*"I didn't understand that when I was younger. I wanted to be a knight, and I became one - not because I chose to be one, but because of the things I did and the way I thought. Good and evil are decided by thoughts and choices too."*

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*"It's by bearing mail and sword that we become strong," Svon said, "and by bearing hardship that we become brave. There is no other way."*

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So although Able has perhaps finished his journey to knighthood, we get to see others make the same journey in the same way. Svon, the cowardly squire from *The Knight*, gets to become a knight himself, and two other young men, Toug and Wistan, start out on that journey. In all cases it is by doing that they learn.

None of which is to say that Wolfe doesn't have a bit of fun along the way. He still has the talking cat, Mani, to dispense his peculiarly feline wisdom. Wolfe, being Wolfe, writes talking cats better than just about anyone I know (except maybe M. John Harrison who has had a lot more practice). Wolfe has also done a reasonable amount of research and, where appropriate, talks a little bit about mediaeval society.

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*A chef put a great roast swan on our table, and at a signal from Arnthor split it with a knife not much smaller than a sword. Split, it could be seen that a goose had been stuffed into the swan to be roasted with it, a plover into the goose, a duck into the plover, and three lesser birds into the duck, all these save the swan having been boned.*

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Ah, eat your heart out, John Madden. [American football reference, apologies to everyone who doesn't have a clue what I'm talking about.]

The main point of the book, however, is not to talk about mediaeval society, but about morality; to talk about the duties of knights, noblemen and kings. The seven-fold structure of Wolfe's world gives him a vehicle for doing this. Whilst worlds become less good as we descend from God, so those in the lower worlds are supposed to worship those above them. Much of the plot structure of the novel derives from those in lower worlds not following the natural order of things. For example, Setyr, a dragon from Muspel, has set himself up as a

king amongst the Aelf, whom he is supposed to worship.

I haven't read these books closely enough to comment on Wolfe's theology. I suspect that he is much too American to have truck with such things as the Divine Right of Kings. But he certainly believes in duty and responsibility, and there are odd flashes in the book where it looks very much like he is talking about a world far from Mythgarthr. For example, towards the end of the book the kingdom of Celidon is invaded by the barbaric Osterlings (people from the East). The Earl Marshall, in common with many people faced by a foreign foe, describes the Osterlings as inhuman. Able, who has encountered genuinely inhuman beings, puts him right.

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*"We'd been defeated." The Earl Marshall wiped his face. "We have been, as I ought to say. They are less than human, those Osterlings."*

*"I have fought them at sea, My Lord, and they are not. The Angrborn often seem very human. King Gilling did in his love for Idnn. But they aren't. The Osterlings don't look as human as King Gilling, yet they're what we may become."*

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Hmm, we are perhaps behaving so dishonorably that we are in danger of becoming just as bad as those terrible people from the East, eh? And just who has been behaving badly? Here Sir Able has a few stern words for King Arnthor, a man whose primary title is "Defender of the West".

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*"I'm a plain American, and I'll say this if I die. Your villages are ravaged by outlaws, by Angrborn, and by Osterlings, because they've been abandoned too. The Most High God set men here as models for Aelfrice. We*

*teach it violence, treachery, and very little else; and you have been our leader."*

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Can we take this literally? The Defender of the West has failed in his duty as a leader and is guilty of violence and treachery? Wolfe, as a plain American, wants to tell him so? I wonder who he can be talking to?

But of course if there is any author in the world into whose mouth it is dangerous to put words then it must be Gene Wolfe. *The Wizard Knight* is perhaps less complex and more accessible than Wolfe's recent work. You don't have to solve all of the puzzles in order to understand the plot. But puzzles there most certainly are, if you like that sort of thing. Gene Wolfe is one of the finest writers of any type working today. If you have any interest in fantasy, you should read *The Wizard Knight*.

*The Wizard* - Gene Wolfe - Tor - hardcover

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## On the Border

The new Tad Williams novel, *Shadowmarch*, marks both a return to traditional fantasy and the culmination of a brave and fascinating publishing project. Williams made his name with the lengthy *Memory, Sorrow & Thorn* series: three fat fantasy books, the last of which was so huge that it had to be split in two for paperback publication. Most people probably expected Williams to follow that series with more of the same, especially as it was widely acclaimed as being amongst the best of its type. Williams, however, decided to try his hand at science fiction, producing the four-volume *Otherland* series set largely in cyberspace. He followed that with the single-volume *The War of the Flowers*, a powerful political satire in which the

lords of Fairyland discover capitalism and industrialization. I thought it was one of the best books of last year, and that it didn't get anywhere near the critical attention that it deserved.

In the meantime, however, Williams had been experimenting in cyberspace himself. He created an online community for his fans, and drew them in with a promise of a novel to be written in installments and posted to the site. Fans would be able to comment on the story as it progressed, and perhaps even influence its development. This was the genesis of *Shadowmarch*.

Given the innovative manner in which it was written, it was perhaps understandable that *Shadowmarch* would be fairly conservative in nature. It is traditional fantasy pretty much through and through, although some of the social background veers into the Renaissance, as there is mention of muskets. There are fairy folk who have been driven from their lands by the humans, and who want those lands back. There are short-statured, stone-working folk called Funderlings whose character is rather more like that of Hobbits than dwarves, from a classical *Lord of the Rings* viewpoint. The hero and heroine are a pair of fifteen-year-old royal twins who have responsibility thrust upon them. And this being Tad Williams there is some comedy relief in the form of a race of tiny pixies called Rooftoppers, whose queen is called Upsteeplebat.

Put baldly like that, *Shadowmarch* doesn't sound very promising. And yet I raced through its almost 650 pages in about a day. Admittedly part of that was because I was stuck on an aircraft for much of the time with little else to do but eat and sleep. But I have read books on aircraft before and seldom have I shot through them this quickly. I'm thinking also of the very long Neal Stephenson books that I have waded painfully



through this year at a very slow pace. Despite its length, reading *Shadowmarch* was easy.

Thinking back to my reviews of the *Otherland* books I suspect I spent a lot of time talking about how Williams loves to head off down sidetracks. *Shadowmarch* has very little of this. It is a long book, and it is volume one of a developing story, but very little of it feels like padding. There is continuous flow of story, with interesting characters and a plot that, while it is clearly just getting warmed up, is full of things to think about. Williams is still writing long, but it no longer feels like he is doing so.

What you won't have seen here so far is those little quotes I am so fond of. There won't be any. In *Shadowmarch* Williams is not aiming for fabulously elegant turns of phrase, nor does he have the sort of pithy political comment that we got from *The War of the Flowers*. That's not to say that *Shadowmarch* doesn't have a political edge. There is plenty in it about feminism, gender identity and racism. It just isn't quite so pointedly topical as *The War of the Flowers*. The main thrust of *Shadowmarch*, however, is entertainment. It is a book that sucks you in, drags you along, and leaves you wanting more. It does it in a genre and a formula that is hugely popular, and it does it way better than just about anyone in the field except maybe George R.R. Martin (soon may he finish his next book) and Guy Gavriel Kay.

It doesn't surprise me at all that Daw could shout, "New York Times Best Selling Author" on the front cover of the book. It probably shouldn't surprise me either that they ignored World Fantasy Con, even though Williams' signing tour started two days after the convention. I suspect that Daw probably sees Williams as something akin to Stephen King. Yeah sure, he writes weird stuff, but it is weird stuff that is very well crafted and

sells by the bucket load. That's not genre, that's Big Name Author territory.

I don't think we should ignore that. There's a tendency in the genre to think of Williams as just another "elves and dragons" author. But he's much more than that. He has proved with *The War of the Flowers* that he can do serious work. And when he does set out mainly to entertain he does it really, really well. Williams first signing of the tour was in Berkeley so I went along to say "hi." He spent a lot of time talking about how bad a lot of the fantasy published today is. I asked him, given the reputation of formula fantasy, why he continued to write books that could easily be confused with all of the rubbish. Clearly he doesn't need to. He has experimented quite a bit over the past few years. Williams replied that it is because he really loves the fantasy setting; it is what he wants to write. And I think it is a very good thing that there is someone out there showing that it can be done well. Don't ignore Tad Williams just because of his subject matter, folks. He is a very good writer doing what he happens to love best. We can't ask more than that from anyone.

*Shadowmarch* - Tad Williams - DAW - hardcover

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## Tricks of the Mind

Have you ever lain in bed looking up at an Artex ceiling and thought you could see a face in the seemingly random patterns? And the more you stared at it, the more obvious the face became. Somewhat unnerved, you turned the light off, but instead of the face disappearing it stayed there in your mind's eye. Slowly but surely you came to realize that there was something very wrong about that face.

This is the sort of thing that, I think, was in the mind of Lucius Shepard when he came up with the idea for his new novel, *Viator*. On the face of it, the book is a very ordinary story about a group of men hired to value the wreck of a freighter with a view to salvaging it. But the ship, *Viator*, has been driven far aground in a forest in Alaska and has been untouched for years. In the peeling paint and rust patches of the decaying hulk, the men begin to see patterns.

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*...he came to anticipate the time he spent searching through the ship, because on each and every occasion he would stumble upon some fascinating object – for instance, a pale green section of the passageway wall outside the officers' mess where the paint had flaked away in hundreds of spots, small and large, creating of the surface a mineral abstract like those found on picture stone, from which (if one studied the wall, letting one's eyes build an image from the paintless spots, from scratches, dents and scuffs) there emerged an intricate landscape, an aerial view of forested hills – firs for the most part – declining toward water, and a large modern city beneath the hills that circled a lagoon and spread along the coast, with iron-colored islands in the offing; ...*

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Did you notice what Shepard has done there. Not one single period in that entire quote; 130 words, and it is only about half the sentence. Shepard has written a book about obsession in long, obsessive sentences that draw you in, ramble excessively, switch focus for clauses on end, meander through a menagerie of images; sentences which...

See what I mean? It can get to you.

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*With the pan cradled in his arms, a crafty smile playing over his lips, Nygaard had the look of a husband who had been caught just*

*as he was about to cook up his murdered wife's liver and thus no longer had any reason to hide the baleful glare of his insanity beneath a humble exterior.*

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I should warn you that *Viator* is not always the easiest book to read. Simply following Shepard's tortured prose can, if it doesn't catch you up in its tentacles, be a frustrating experience. You will find yourself stopping in the middle of a sentence, wondering what it was about, and whether you actually read the previous 50 words, even though, when you read it again, you realize that its images had been clear in your mind all along. The book is only 170 pages long, but don't assume that you can skip through it quickly.

In particular, if you have any interest at all in the craft of writing, you will find yourself stopping and studying what Shepard is doing, looking to see just how he manages to construct all of this madness. *Viator* is a writer's novel. It is a book that I very much want to hear read by a good actor.

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*Something was wrong. The wasted town and the barren earth beyond testified to wrongness as might an unfavorable array of cards; the line of the mountain peaks graphed a feeble vitality and its decline. Weakness pervaded his limbs, tattered his thoughts. He imagined he was fading, his colors swirling, his form blurring, drifting on the wind.*

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I would certainly encourage any budding writer to pick up a copy of *Viator* (though not to copy its style) just to see how it has been done. As for us ordinary readers, while *Viator* might at times be difficult and frustrating, it is also very rewarding. A lot of experimental writing falls very flat. *Viator* does exactly what Shepard set out

to make it do. It creeps you out. Thoroughly. It makes you feel that there just might be something out there after all.

Turn the light back on, would you?

*Viator* - Lucius Shepard - Night Shade Books  
- hardcover

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## Tricky Customers

Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* got a lot of favorable reviews when it was shortlisted for the Tiptree Award in 2003. However, it wasn't easy to get hold of. I still don't have a copy. I was therefore very pleased when Arsenal Pulp Press sent me a copy of another of Lai's books. *When Fox is a Thousand* is not a new book. It was first published in 1995 and got a lot of critical attention but, I suspect, not a lot of commercial success. Hopefully 2004 will prove to provide a better climate for a book that is a combination of old Chinese myths, a modern tale of Chinese immigration to Canada, and a tale of lesbian love affairs.

The narrator of the book is a fox spirit. The Chinese fox is a cunning and mischievous animal, capable of all sorts of magical trickery. In particular it can take on human form. The more magic a fox does, the longer she lives, and if she survives for a thousand years then she will become immortal. Our heroine has only a few years left to go.

Such a significant time in a fox's life occasions a certain amount of reflection, so much of the book is set in ninth century China when the fox was young and she became involved with a woman poet called Yu Hsuan-Chi. This was a dangerous time for foxes, because Confucian priests knew all sorts of clever tricks for killing them.

Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Vancouver is rather short on knowledgeable Confucian priests, but there are plenty of interesting young women for a fox to follow around and prey upon, and they tend to be rather more dangerous than young women were in 9<sup>th</sup> Century China.

Foxes, however, charming though they might be, are perhaps not central to this book. What Lai is trying to do here (and I do have the benefit of her 2004 afterword to call upon for justification for invoking authorial intent) is talk about the difficulties of living in a transplanted community. Are the Chinese of Vancouver Chinese, Canadians, both, or neither? The link to ancient Chinese myths is, amongst other things, an act of provocation. Lai is an American Chinese, born in California. All of the history and mythology she has used she had to read in English translation. Nevertheless she stakes a claim to her right to use it.

The other side of the argument is that being an immigrant teenager in Vancouver is by no means easy. The characters that fill the 20<sup>th</sup> Century parts of the novel are an unpleasant lot. They lie and cheat on each other constantly. They think nothing of stealing from white people. It isn't until they start to grow older that they realize that having a reputation for being totally untrustworthy means you will be horribly alone.

What I think Lai is doing here is explaining how first generation immigrants suffer from lack of community. They are contemptuous of their parents who stick to traditions from the "old country" that the youngsters can see no longer apply. At the same time they are not accepted into the white community. Thus they have no means of acquiring a sense of community and social responsibility.

And then there is all of the lesbian stuff. Because? Because why not. If you happen to be lesbian or bisexual or whatever, why not put such things in your book.

So *When Fox is a Thousand* is a very complex book full of ideas that I don't feel entirely comfortable commenting on; not being Chinese, lesbian or a fox. On the other hand, I can certainly appreciate a well-written, lyrical and intelligent book. *When Fox is a Thousand* is all of these things, and well worth investigating for anyone who doesn't think that "fantasy" has to mean chicks in chain mail and dragons.

Note for web site users: Amazon US does not appear to list the Arsenal Pulp Press edition of this book. They have an entry for the 1995 edition which I have linked to. The Amazon UK link is to the new version of the book.

*When Fox is a Thousand* - Larissa Lai - Arsenal Pulp Press - trade paperback

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## Angels Bearing Gifts

Somewhere not far into our future mankind discovers something interesting out in the Oort Cloud. It is a fully operational space station, obviously built by aliens, but now quite deserted. The aliens are named "Angels" because of a glyph looking like a snow angel that appears frequently about the station. Lots of useful technology is discovered, and human discovery of space proceeds apace as a result. But the most amazing discovery of all is that the station contains a wormhole gateway linking it to a similar station elsewhere in the galaxy. That in turn links to several other stations in a chain. Each station is located close to an Earth-like planet. And near the final station in the chain, on a

planet named Kaspar, explorers find intelligent life.

The Kasparians are clearly not the builders of the stations. They are dog-like creatures with a mediaeval-level society. Kaspar is placed off-limits to allow the natives to develop unhindered. Except, that is, for one very remote and uninhabited part of the planet that contains what appears to be an abandoned Angel citadel. That is given over to tightly controlled archaeological exploration.

A mistake by scientists trying to understand how the wormhole system works accidentally shuts down the Earth end of the chain. Years later, when contact with the other stations is re-established, the team based at the Kaspar station is discovered to have vanished without trace.

All of this is background. Our story is told from the viewpoints of several characters. One is a soldier, the product of experiments with Angel bioware. Another is an archaeologist who led a disastrous mission to the Citadel on which several of her team, including her lover, died. Yet another is an astrophysicist investigating strange goings on at the galactic core. A fourth is a Kasparian priest whose city is under siege from the forces of an aggressive empire. And one is a man with strange powers who is being kept prisoner by one yet more powerful. What brings them all together is the discovery that, millennia ago, the Angels fought a war against another alien species. It is a war that took the concept of weapons of mass destruction to an entirely new level. And it is a war that is still going on.

The book is called *Angel Stations* and it is the first novel by Glasgow-born writer, Gary Gibson. As you will have seen from the above, Gibson has some big

ideas. Mostly he manages to carry them off. You need a little patience to begin with because the first chapter or so is a bit rough. Once you get into the book, however, you'll get carried along by the plot, and by the desire to see if you have taken all of Gibson's hints correctly.

I don't see Gibson making a big splash of an entry onto the scene the way that, for example, Richard Morgan and Steph Swainston have done. There's rather too much in *Angel Stations* that quite clearly happens because it is necessary for the plot to work. Also there's very little attempt to explain or justify Angel technology. A lot of it seems to work like magic, giving the book something of a science fantasy feel. But nevertheless this is a very encouraging debut. I'm also very pleased to see Tor UK taking a chance on a new SF writer rather than just pumping out formula fantasy. Gibson has left sufficient loose ends for there to be a follow-up book, and I look forward to seeing what he does with it. I also look forward to having yet another Glasgow writer to celebrate at Worldcon next year.

*Angel Stations* - Gary Gibson - Tor UK - trade paperback

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## Interview: Jeremy Lassen of Nightshade Books

I have wanted to talk to Night Shade (<http://www.nightshadebooks.com>) for some time now. After all, they have spearheaded the drive to publish M. John Harrison in America, and been responsible for the incredibly silly *Thackery T. Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric & Discredited Diseases*. What more can I ask for a publishing company? It has taken me a while to catch up with them, and even then it

took the ultimate horror of a breakfast meeting to get the interview done. Jeremy, poor boy, was stuck in the Dealers' Room all day at World Fantasy, so this was the only way he could make time for me. Despite being only half awake myself, I'm very glad that he did.

**CHERYL:** Thus far Night Shade has been very successful. You have published some of my favorite books; your books have featured prominently in the Hugos and World Fantasy Awards this year; how did a small press company based out on the West Coast come to do so well?

**JEREMY:** I guess just hard work and luck. The last six years have been very difficult, and we've made plenty of mistakes, but we've been able to overcome those. At the same time we've had a lot of luck; we've got a lot of support from the people in the community. A lot of people like the projects that we have chosen.

**CHERYL:** Presumably that means a good choice of projects somewhere along the line.

**JEREMY:** It is interesting, because my colleague Jason Williams and I have come from different ends of the industry. I started out as a bookseller; he started out as a book collector; and when we met in San Francisco there was a thriving niche market for small press horror publishers. The first couple of books that we did were horror titles, and then we spent the next three years trying to get out from under the label of being "just a horror publisher." So we worked very hard to choose titles that were not the usual suspects—that were not by the authors that everyone was fighting for. We just followed our own idiosyncratic tastes.

**CHERYL:** Talking of idiosyncrasy, you can't get much more strange than the *Lambshead Guide*. It has been an

incredibly successful project for you, but it must have been a big risk to take on something so strange.

**JEREMY:** I guess that depends on how you define risk. When Jeff Vandermeer brought that project to us to look at, both Jason and I said, "Absolutely no risk. We can sell that. It will sell at several times better than the obscure British horror collections that we've done, and THOSE made money." It seemed like a no-brainer to us.

**JEREMY:** It was a kind of odd concept to wrap your mind around if you didn't have the book in your hands. But the editors, Vandermeer and Mark Roberts, presented to us a small portion of what it would be like and we were obviously on the same plane with them.

**CHERYL:** You clearly believed in the book right from the start. You even built a special web site for it.

**JEREMY:** The project was such a whimsical, playful thing, it was a fun project, and we wanted to share that fun amongst all the contributors, amongst the people who were generating word of mouth support for it.

**CHERYL:** Was there any difficulty with managing so many contributors around the world?

**JEREMY:** Yes! It was like doing the equivalent of five projects. There were 70+ contributors. The editors tag-teamed on it, one in Europe and one in North America. They shouldered most of the work. The artist who did all the design work, John Coulthart, worked closely with the editors and contributors. Quite honestly they that did a lot of the hard work. Jason and I had the extremely difficult job of squeezing out the enormous print bill – at that time it was the largest print job we had ever done and it ate up a lot of the company's resources. But it was one of those gut things; we knew it was going to work.

**CHERYL:** As well as being very funny, it is an incredibly beautiful book. John did a fabulous job with the layout and all of the cute typography, especially his own contribution where the type actually contracts a disease and starts drooping. To produce a book like that you need really high quality printing, which is not the sort of thing that people associate with a small press.

**JEREMY:** There are small presses whose niche is high quality collectibles. Companies like Subterranean, or Cemetery Dance whose objective was to produce beautiful, collectible artifacts. You know, carefully printed, leather bound collectors' editions. Jason and I have always been lovers of books, so we have always modeled the quality of our books on their model... Smythe sewn hard covers, acid free paper, cloth boards, etc. We actually use the same printer (Thomson Shore – <http://www.tshore.com>) for our trade editions that Subterranean and Cemetery Dance use for their limited editions. There was never really a question about our printer's capabilities.

**JEREMY:** The preparation before sending it to the printers, that was where the hard work was. But when we sent it to the printers they just turned it around. Or rather they would have except that their attention to detail was so great that with some sections, particularly John Coulthart's "Printer's Evil", they would send galley proofs back to us with notations to check that they were doing it correctly. They took great care to make sure that they were doing exactly what we wanted, even though sometimes it looked rather strange.

**CHERYL:** The huge success of the *Lambshead Guide* has presumably resulted in a lot of demand for it. Have you had any difficulty with distribution at all?

**JEREMY:** No. Thankfully one of the early successes that Night Shade had made something like the *Disease Guide* very possible. The second book that we did was *Really, Really, Really, Really Weird Stories* by John Shirley. That received a starred review in Publisher's Weekly, which is the golden touch for any book — it guarantees that a large number of bookstores will order it.

**JEREMY:** At that point, with it being only our second title, we had no distribution contract. We had sold our first book via direct sales and some limited regional distribution. It was a Lovecraft-related title and we had a handle on that market. What the Shirley book did for us was have Baker & Taylor (the second largest national book distributor in the country) come to us and say, "we have so much demand for this title, we want to distribute your books."

**JEREMY:** More importantly, at that time the shake-out in distribution was just beginning. People like Ingram and Baker & Taylor were starting to create a "short-pants" league for small press publishers: they would say, "we're not going to give you good terms, we're not going to pay you promptly, we're not going to stock your stuff in depth, we're not going to do much for you and you're going to thank us for the privilege of carrying your books." Then there's the grown up league for "legitimate" publishers, where they offer legitimate terms: still difficult terms, but industry standard terms.

**JEREMY:** Thanks to getting with Baker & Taylor from the second book out we had national distribution, two days away from any bookstore in the country, and that sealed our fate. We capitalized on that early success and focused our efforts on doing trade hard covers. By the time we got to the *Disease Guide* we already had the systems in place — that

is, national distribution via both Baker & Taylor, and Ingram. Plus Jeff Vandermeer was just coming to the attention of some of the major industry players at the time, so we were able to get direct contact with the SF buyer at Borders, who really got behind the project. That helped provide a lot of visibility for the book.

**JEREMY:** Moving the 6,000 copies that we did was obviously a strain, but it was a strain that we were able to get through, and it demonstrated that our business model could scale up, and not fail under the weight of a large project.

**CHERYL:** Moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, M. John Harrison is one of my favorite authors, but even some British publishers describe him as unsaleable. For years the big name US publishers wouldn't go anywhere near him. But you guys took a punt on him.

**JEREMY:** Yeah. I had read several of Harrison's short stories before 2000, but it was Graham Joyce who really opened our eyes. Jason was talking to Joyce and asked him, "Who's your favorite author? Who should I be reading?" And Graham said, "You should be reading M. John Harrison." Within a month Jason became a huge M. John Harrison junkie, and that infected me, and so we ran around all of the rare book circles and picked up everything he'd done, and ended up being huge fans in a very short time.

**JEREMY:** Then there was a piece of synchronicity, because around that time China Miéville's first book, *Perdido Street Station*, came out in the United States. China did one signing in the US, and that was in San Francisco, about five blocks away from where Night Shade was headquartered. So one night all of the Night Shade partners headed down to the bookstore, because we had enjoyed *Perdido Street Station* when it came out in the UK, and we were

shocked and amazed to find this really articulate guy spend about 5 minutes talking about himself and 40 minutes talking about M. John Harrison. There is no greater supporter of M. John Harrison than China Miéville.

**CHERYL:** <gives Jeremy THE LOOK>

**JEREMY:** Except you.

**JEREMY:** Seeing that kind of pointed the way to us. There is this perception that there is a salability problem, but at the same time there is word of mouth movement. Graham Joyce turned us on to Harrison; China Miéville had a room full of people clamoring for Harrison's books. So we went to Mike and his agent and said, "what do you want to do? Give us something. We'll do whatever you want."

**JEREMY:** So Mike said, "I want to do a big collection, put my two short story collections together and do story notes." We knew that couldn't be any more obscure than what we had been publishing at the time, so we said, "why not, let's do it!"

**JEREMY:** To a certain extent it was like the *Disease Guide* where we had this epiphany. There was all this word of mouth, lots of attention being focused on Harrison. And our print runs, compared to the big publishing houses, are so small. How could we not make our money back? And even if we don't, a) we are doing books that we love, and b) Harrison is a prestige author that showed we weren't just another small press.

**JEREMY:** That was exactly the case. It wasn't until the Harrison collection came out that people stopped saying "Oh... Night Shade... aren't they that horror publisher?" Although Mike has dabbled in horror, he wasn't known strictly as a HORROR writer, so *Things That Never Happen* was the book that firmly established our reputation.

**CHERYL:** *The Course of the Heart* is my all-time favorite fantasy book, but it is a very long way from the sort of fantasy we see so much of these days. How is it going down with the American market?

**JEREMY:** Pretty good. As I said before, our print runs are so small that it is hard for us to make any grand statements about "the American market." We did 2,200 copies, and it was profitable in the first couple of months. We've made our money back. It is doing fine for us. In the grander scheme of large scale New York publishing, is it changing the world? No it isn't, but we don't need it to. And the right people are noticing what we are doing. It's been getting some nice reviews, and more importantly, it's out there and available for people to read.

**JEREMY:** I think it is his best novel, and I think it is criminal that it has never been in print in the United States before now. As a publisher, that's the opportunity you are looking for. Here's a book that needs to be in print. The fact that I can sell it, and make my money back, that's just gravy.

**CHERYL:** Harrison has been getting some incredible newspaper reviews for *Light*. Has that been helping you sell his books?

**JEREMY:** I'm sure it has. We got some incredible newspaper reviews for *Things That Never Happen*. It got covered in the New York Times; it made the *Times* summer reading list. I think that helped Bantam's publicity and marketing department realize that there is a market for M. John Harrison. It proved that it could be done. And of course Harrison's editor at Bantam, Juliet Ulman, is absolutely fabulous. She has the forceful personality of a hurricane. When she gets behind something she can push it all the way through, and she has done a great job of getting all of Bantam behind *Light*.



**JEREMY:** I felt kind of bad, because *The Course of the Heart* and *Light* came out in the same month. That was completely by accident. We had scheduled *The Course of the Heart* for several months earlier. It does nobody any good to have two books by the same author coming out at once, because you only get one review. If you spread them out you get both books reviewed. So I think that actually hurt us a bit. The newspapers had two Harrison books on offer, and they have tended to cover the Bantam title rather than ours. We haven't got the sort of reviews for *The Course of the Heart* that we got for *Things That never Happen*.

**JEREMY:** But this is where we ran across one of the problems of being a small press. We had a rather large fulfillment problem. The guy doing our fulfillment was called up in the National Guard and sent to Baghdad in January. So we slipped four months of our schedule, because there was a month or so where books just weren't getting shipped out. Which of course impacted cash flow, which is key to getting books out on time. So instead of *The Course of the Heart* coming out in May or June it didn't come out until August. So Bantam and Night Shade ended up kind of stepping on each other there. But in the long run I think it will work out fine.

**CHERYL:** The other issue, of course, is that with the eligibility extension you have *The Course of the Heart*, arguably the best fantasy book ever written, and *Light*, arguably the best science fiction book ever written, both eligible for the Hugos in the same year.

**JEREMY:** You know, this year two Night Shade titles were on the Hugo ballot, and that's extraordinary. The *Lambshead Guide* made it, and so did Kage Baker's *Empress of Mars*. Kage was also on the Nebula ballot. I'm not really plugged into that part of the community very well, and that kind of awards attention

caught me completely by surprise. I was just flabbergasted. So I haven't even begun to contemplate next year. I'm just trying to get the books out there. The awards are just icing on the cake, and are not something I worry about too much.

**CHERYL:** Going back in time a little, you have published a number of books by the likes of William Hope Hodgson and Lord Dunsany. There is a fair amount of plundering of the back catalog going on.

**JEREMY:** Absolutely. We publish what we like, and coming from the rare book field - me selling them and Jason collecting them - gave us an insight into the market place. That was where we were able to see the niche for starting the company. The third or fourth project that we decided to do was a five-volume set of the weird fiction of Manly Wade Wellman. His work was completely out of print everywhere. If you wanted to buy one of his books it was \$100-\$400 just for a reading copy - his work was far out of the reach of the average reader. So we decided that because we liked this stuff we had to get it back into print. We figured no one but libraries would buy it. But very early on in the history of Night Shade, when nothing else was selling because we had made some bad marketing choices, the only thing that kept us going was Wellman. He kept us going, because there was a market for his work that wasn't being served by the larger publishers.

**JEREMY:** So we extended that to William Hope Hodgson. His novels have been in print and reasonably accessible, but his short fiction has not been. The Dunsany "Jorkens" stories were also very hard to find. So we've been following that model of finding what is inaccessible on the rare book market.

**CHERYL:** Back to the present day, one of the other British writers you publish is

Liz Williams. You've just brought out a short story collection, *The Banquet of the Lords of Night*.

**JEREMY:** That came to us as a recommendation from Jeff Vandermeer. He had mentioned to us that Liz was shopping this collection and said we should look at it. We were familiar with her name from her Philip K. Dick Award nominations so we took a look. And the book has been enormously successful for us. It has got a starred review in *Publisher's Weekly*. That book was an example of listening to the people that we respect. We have to know who to listen to, know whose taste we can trust.

**CHERYL:** One of the great mysteries of British SF is why Iain Banks has not made it big on this side of the Atlantic. He's a huge name in Britain, both for his SF and his mainstream fiction, but he has never cracked America. You've just taken *The State of the Art*, which again is a short story collection.

**JEREMY:** I love Iain Banks' work and I would love to publish him regularly here in the States. I know a couple of his mainstream novels have never been published here. Essentially we got very lucky. M. John Harrison's agent, Mic Cheetham, is also Banks' agent. The attention that *Things That Never Happen* got generated a certain amount of good will. And I gather that Iain and Mike are good friends. So we got the Banks collection on the understanding that we couldn't even come close to offering Iain enough money under normal circumstances but he wanted to give us the collection because of what we did for Mike Harrison. That's the sort of thing that an independent publisher has to do — we don't have massive amounts of money, so we have to work hard to generate good will and make people want to work with us.

**JEREMY:** I am enormously grateful to Iain for letting us publish *The State of the Art*. It has never been published before in the United States. Mark Ziesing published the title novella a while ago, but the full collection is a brand new Iain Banks book that's coming out next month, and it's got the Night Shade logo on the spine! I couldn't be happier.

**CHERYL:** Any plans to expand from there? Can we expect to see the whole Culture series made available to America? *Use of Weapons* is my favorite (hint).

**JEREMY:** It is a shame that so much of his back catalog is unavailable in the States. I'm sure that Mic and Iain have some sort of master plan. It seems like more and more of the Culture novels are falling out of print, and from what I understand there won't be any more. Iain's new book is not a Culture novel.

**CHERYL:** Yes, although neither was *Feersum Enjin*, so he could always come back to the Culture later.

**JEREMY:** Well, never say never. I can't begin to speculate. But certainly Iain Banks will always be a solid seller. I see this from working in a bookstore. I still work at Borderlands Books <<http://www.borderlands-books.com>> one day a week so that I can keep my ear to the ground and know what people are buying. Borderlands carries a lot of UK imports, and Iain Banks sells like clockwork. I think any publisher could do pretty well with Iain's work.

**CHERYL:** From Scotland to Wales: Rhys Hughes is another of your British writers. You did his *New Universal History of Infamy*.

**JEREMY:** Ah, my favorite Welsh surrealist.

**CHERYL:** I love his stuff too; it is completely off the wall.

**JEREMY:** Part of the Night Shade philosophy is not to get pigeonholed the way we did early on. We publish what we like, and what we think is high quality, but at the end of the day it has to pass the Night Shade test, which is, “if somebody else published it, would we buy it?” Rhys Hughes is a resounding Yes! It may be 180 degrees away from anything else we have published, but it is what we like. We believe that at the end of the day a publisher should be defined by its editors’ taste, not by some genre marketing category.

**CHERYL:** Lucius Shepard has been very productive of late. He has had lots of short fiction out. But you have a novel. What is *Viator* like?

**JEREMY:** I think it is one of the most challenging works that Lucius has done. It is Lucius playing around with form and structure. Plot-wise it is a novel about a freighter that has come ran aground along the coast of Alaska and has lain fallow there for years until a salvage crew arrives. And then weird shit happens, as only Lucius can do. On top of that Lucius brought this enormously ambitious narrative structure, an almost jazz sentence structure. He has long, drawn-out, almost Salman Rushdie-esque prose. So he’s really stretching himself as a writer with this work.

**JEREMY:** We hounded him mercilessly to get him to turn it in on time, and he would come back with, “Oh, it is killing me, I’ve gotta work on it some more.” We had it bound in proofs and Lucius wanted to rewrite the last two chapters. That’s the kind of level of attention to detail he brings to his work. He doesn’t let anything go. He agonizes over every bit of it.

**CHERYL:** Coming back to the award nominees, Jeff Vandermeer’s *Veniss Underground*, a wonderful book, has

been picked up by Pan Macmillan in the UK and has recently been sold to Bantam in the US. What does it mean to Night Shade to see something you have done be picked up by the big boys?

**JEREMY:** It is very gratifying. Let me also give credit where credit is due, and note that the same month Night Shade published a hardcover edition, the trade paperback edition of *Veniss Underground* Came out from Prime. Jeff had shopped the book to us, and six months later we would have bought up all the rights. But at the time we were unable to make the financial commitment. So we were happy for Jeff when Sean Wallace at Prime Books picked up the project on when we couldn’t. When we got our feet back under us, we offered to do a hardcover edition because we love Jeff’s work.

**JEREMY:** But getting back to the crux of the question, getting one of our books picked up by the majors is a vindication of what we do. We did a gothic horror novel by Tom Piccirilli called *A Choir of Ill Children*. Tom has done quite a few horror novels but I thought that *Choir...* one was the best things he had ever done and took his work to a new level. A year after it came out Bantam picked up *Choir...* as a mass-market paperback. The disease guide was also picked up, by MacMillan in the UK, and by Bantam in the US – Juliet strikes again! Whenever things like this happen we always take it as a vindication of our tastes, and editorial judgment – “Look, it’s not just us, someone else thinks this is good too!”

**JEREMY:** Another example is the M. John Harrison collection, *Things That Never Happen*. That is a combination of two books (plus three other uncollected stories), *Ice Monkey* and *Travel Arrangements*, that were published in England in both paperback and hardcover editions. Gollancz is now bringing out *Things That Never Happen* in

England. *Things That Never Happen* would not have existed if we hadn't gotten a wild hair to do SOMETHING with M. John Harrison.

**JEREMY:** And it's this sense of creation that is really a rush. It is one thing to publish a novel that's already been written, or to do a collection with a commercially successful writer. That's the obvious part of the business. The real thrill is to create a project out of thin air. This type of thing happened with the collection we did with Jack Cady, called *Ghosts of Yesterday*. We went to Jack and said, "we love your work, can we do a collection?" Jack was in the process of being orphaned at St. Martins. That book would never have been done if we hadn't done it. The fact that Jack died in January makes this book all the more special. I was very grateful to have had the chance to work with Jack, who I've been reading for years.

**CHERYL:** Jack is someone I know very little about, but his was the book that you were most keen to press upon me when I came to your table yesterday. Tell me a little bit more about it.

**JEREMY:** I'm very reluctant to compare writers because it's too easy, and can be seen as kind of cheapening; but from the perspective of Jack's position in the commercial marketplace, he was very much an American M. John Harrison. He was always too literary for the fantastic genres and too fantastic for the literary genres. He has been writing since the early 70's, and he's in that American "blue collar everyman" tradition of "been everywhere, done everything." He grew up in the South and that influenced his work. But he also has these influences of magic and the fantastic in what otherwise looks like mainstream work. So he never really fit well into traditional marketing categories. Which of course made him the perfect Night

Shade author. His work is truly stunning.

**CHERYL:** So your latest project is Gwyneth Jones. You are going to be publishing *Bold as Love*, a book that has won the Arthur C. Clarke Award. That puts it on a level with books like *Perdido Street Station* and Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver*. That's big time stuff.

**JEREMY:** Yes, but some Arthur C. Clarke Award winners suffer from being seen as "too British." *Bold as Love* has the same problem with New York publishers as Christopher Priest's *The Separation*. "Oh, it's too British, it won't appeal to American readers." It is that sort of provincial attitude that the marketing departments in New York have that has given me the opportunity to publish *Bold as Love*.

**JEREMY:** I haunt the Arthur C. Clarke shortlists looking for opportunities like this. I read those books as soon as I can. And when I finished reading *Bold as Love* I called up Jason and said, "Hey, you gotta read this! We've gotta publish this!" Of course he said, "I'm not publishing a 400 page book about British politics." And then he read it and he said, "Oh my God! We've gotta publish this!"

**JEREMY:** And we have that freedom. We don't have to justify our books to a marketing department. Editors at New York publishing houses have just as good taste as we do, if not better, but they are shackled with all these burdens. If a book is square peg and it won't fit into the round hole that the marketing department has established as a requirement then it is a very difficult sell. They can't go to war over every book that they want to publish.

**CHERYL:** But if America took to the Rolling Stones and Punk Rock it is going to take to *Bold as Love*, right?

**JEREMY:** I sure as hell hope so. It is like the *Disease Guide*. The Guide made the rounds at every New York publisher. A bunch of smaller publishers passed it up. They couldn't wrap their minds around seeing it succeed in the marketplace. Whereas Jason and I looked at it and immediately saw possibilities. And with *Bold as Love*, it is about Rock 'n' Roll. God, yes! How could we not sell that?

**CHERYL:** One of the fairly unique things about the Night Shade web site is the bulletin board. A lot of big name writers such as Vandermeer and Shepard post to it, and it was home to a furious debate over the New Weird a while back. What do you see as the main advantage of that to Night Shade?

**JEREMY:** The message boards are a way for people to find out about Night Shade. They are guerilla marketing. They provide a reason for people to come to our website. People come to read and interact with these really smart and articulate authors and editors and folks that hang out at our boards. And just maybe, while they are there, they will find out about Night Shade, or one of our books. Publishing is selling one book at a time.

**JEREMY:** The Boards have been SUCCESSFUL as guerrilla marketing because of the kinds of people who got involved, and who have chosen to be active in the community. Jeff Vandermeer came to us with the idea of the message boards, and he was very active in helping create the core seed of people around which the community formed. Good will is probably the only currency that Night Shade has a lot of... People have always been very kind and supportive to Night Shade, and I think that ultimately, the Night Shade Message Boards are a very visible, tangible result of that.

**CHERYL:** Are there any other books of yours that you particularly want to talk about?

**JEREMY:** Anyone who likes M. John Harrison will also like the collection we published this year by Conrad Williams, *Use Once, Then Destroy*. It is a mixture of science fiction and horror, and it has that same attention to detail and literary grittiness that you find in Harrison. We've also got a novel coming out next year called *London Revenant*. And another book we have coming that we think will appeal to Harrison fans is a short story collection by Joel Lane called *The Lost District*.

**CHERYL:** Have you looked at Steph Swainston yet?

**JEREMY:** Yes, and it is interesting that with British books it really depends on who owns the rights. If the British publisher owns the rights the chances are Night Shade won't get a chance at it. Their rights people will sit on a book for a very long time before they give up on New York and sell it to a small press publisher. [Jeremy adds: of course having just said this over breakfast, Jo Fletcher of Victor Gollancz stopped by the Night Shade table and gave me a rights catalog in the afternoon. Things change quickly in this business.] If the rights remain with the author then their agents might be more willing to do business with a smaller publisher like us because we have demonstrated that we can get the publicity, get the trade reviews, and sometimes get NY publishers to bring out paperback editions of our hardcovers.

**CHERYL:** So to a certain extent if a writer is too successful in the UK then it can make it harder for them to sell to you over here?

**JEREMY:** No, it just depends on how willing the UK publisher is to work with a smaller independent publisher. And

sometimes even the most aggressive of agents will sell those world-wide rights to a U.K. Publisher if they can get the right kind of a deal. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, because it means the UK publisher has a large incentive to promote and sell the book to a US publisher. In the case of *The Year of Our War* I believe that it is coming out in the States from Eos very soon.

**JEREMY:** *Natural History* by Justina Robson was another one we were very keen on, and then Juliet at Bantam sent me an email saying, "Look, I've got *Natural History!*" But this is exactly the kind of thing I like to see. There are so many good books that aren't being taken care of in the U.S. And we can't publish them all!

**CHERYL:** There was a certain amount of bragging rights going on in the bar on Thursday night between Jason, Juliet and Lou Anders, all of them wanting to be able to say that they had the hottest new Brit writers. It was heartwarming, it really was!

**JEREMY:** <laughter> Everybody else can claim that they have the hottest new British writers, but obviously it is Night Shade that *really* does.

**CHERYL:** Even if they big publishing houses do end up with them all, if it hadn't been for people like you picking them up in the first place none of this would have ever happened.

**JEREMY:** I think that good writers and good books will eventually find their way into the marketplace. I happened to be lucky enough to help shepherd some of them along. I'm just really happy to be part of it.

**CHERYL:** Jeremy Lassen, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

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## Found in Translation

Leena Krohn is a successful mainstream writer from Finland with a long track record of novel publication stretching back to 1970. Like many European writers, having not grown up in an Anglo culture that suffers from an obsessive desire to distinguish between "good" mimetic fiction and "crap" fantastical works, she is comfortable writing weird stuff. Finally we English speakers are able to sample some of her work, and very interesting it is too.

The book we have on offer is *Tainaron: Mail from Another City*. It is a short book made up of letters sent by an un-named narrator from the fabled City of Insects. It is very odd, and it reminds me of something that Italo Calvino might have written.

Each letter tells of some encounter between the letter writer and some inhabitant of Tainaron. To begin with these are fairly straightforward, if very strange. Thankfully our guide to Tainaron has the benefit of her long-suffering friend, Longhorn Beetle, to put right her foolish, humanocentric views before she can cause too much offense. As time goes on, however, Tainaron becomes more and more terrifying. The buildings in which the ants live are for the most part merely alien, but the beach of the ant lions are another matter entirely.

I confess that I am at something of a loss to understand what I am supposed to take away from this book. I don't think that it is supposed to be merely a tale of creeping horror. But neither is the sort of intricate social satire that you can see in Capek's play, *The Life of the Insects*. It isn't even clear whether we are supposed to view Tainaron as a real place, because our heroine complains constantly that her friend back in the human world never replies to the letters.

Possibly Krohn is simply trying to get us to question some of our cultural norms. Or possibly she is simply playing with an interesting idea for creative writing. All I can say for certain is that this doesn't appear to be in any way the fault of the translation, which reads very smoothly despite the weirdness of the content. Whatever, *Tainaron* is a fascinating little book and a welcome introduction to a fine writer whose works have thus far been unavailable to anyone who does not read Finnish.

*Tainaron: Mail from Another City* - Leena Krohn (translated by Hildi Hawkins) - Prime Books - trade paperback

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## Peering Down Wells

Beyond reading a few books, I don't know a lot about H.G. Wells. This is doubtless a dreadful hole in my literary education (one of many). W. Warren Wagar, on the other hand, knows about as much as it is possible to know about Wells. He wrote his PhD on Wells in 1959, and has been churning out Wellsian scholarship ever since. His latest offering, *H.G. Wells: Traversing Time*, has just been published by Wesleyan University Press.

Those expecting an intimate dissection of such classics as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The War of the Worlds* will be sadly disappointed. Wagar devotes but a single chapter to what we SF folks think of as the Wells classics. But I take no issue with this because those books were produced in a very short period at the start of Wells' career and, as Wagar shows, he produced a vast amount of additional writing after that, much of it mainstream fiction and non-fiction.

Nor will you find much in the way of literary criticism in Wagar's book. He is not a literature professor (and indeed seems to have very little time for such persons), he is an historian of ideas. And that makes him the right sort of person to review the work of that rare type of science fiction writer who does what he does with a view to actually shaping the future.

Reading Wagar's book, I was struck by the parallels between Wells and Robert A. Heinlein. Both men had very strong views about the future of mankind. And both of them in their latter years appear to have taken to writing books in which their obsession with the message has occasionally swamped their good sense as novelists. Wells, however, belongs to a different time and a different country.

Wells, for most of his life, regarded himself as a revolutionary although, despite a brief flirtation with The Fabian Society, his views are far from orthodox Socialism. In particular he often displays a touchingly naïve faith in the good nature of captains of industry. Wells never seemed to quite grasp the fact that human beings are fundamentally greedy and, given power, tend to use it for their own benefit.

In this way Wells was very much a man of his time. He believed strongly that men properly educated in the sciences could not but act sensibly and honorably, and govern wisely. He was forever looking forward to a world in which humanity was ruled by "capable men" - sensible engineers of technology and economics. And he was forever let down by the venality and selfishness of people in power. Doubtless he would have approved of the idea of the World Trade Organization. But he would have despaired of its operation.

Wagar's book provides an excellent overview of Wells' life, but there are

areas where I would have liked to see more from it. There are points where Wagar highlights the context of Wells' beliefs. For example, although Wells frequently espoused views that would today be regarded as hopelessly and offensively chauvinist, he nevertheless wrote a novel (*Ann Veronica*) that was regarded as outrageously feminist in its time. More context of this type, and more information about how Wells was influenced by the likes of Marx, Hegel and Nietzsche, would have made the book a better examination of Wells' ideas.

At the same time, from a science-fictional point of view, it is always desirable to understand an author within the context of the general debate. Wagar mentions that Aldous Huxley, who knew Wells well, wrote *Brave New World* as a furious rebuttal of the Wells novel, *Men Like Gods*. There is mention of an acrimonious dinner party at which Wells and Orwell set at each other. More material like this, in particular about how Wells influenced later utopian writers, would have been interesting.

[Note to David Brin - Wells seems to have had a fondness for killing large numbers of people off through wars and plagues in order that his ideal societies could be started. I suspect this is a common trait of all utopian writers, not just feminists.]

Anyway, I am probably being unfair to Wagar. It took him some 300 pages to simply chronicle Wells' vast output and put it all in the context of the seemingly ever-changing Wellsian philosophy. To produce all of the other things I have asked for would doubtless have doubled the size of the book. But then again, Professor Wagar may have covered these things in his other books on Wells, or he may have further volumes in mind. Hopefully one day I will have the time to find out.

Where perhaps the book did not work for me (and here I am getting seriously nitpicky) is in its attitude towards authorial intent. A literary professor, writing about the same books, would probably not have been much concerned with what Wells actually meant. An historian of ideas, on the other hand, writing a literary biography, is very much concerned with the ideas of his subject and how they changed over time. Wagar spends a lot of time pondering over just what Wells intended, and often gently attempting to excuse his more outrageous and ill-considered ideas. Thankfully he is quite happy to let fly at his subject when Wells exhibits grossly stupid or racist theories.

But in the end I am not so much interested in what Wells thought but in the debate. I am happy to be persuaded, as Wagar knows Wells so well, that the writer was a strongly opinionated fellow much convinced of his own genius. But I still think that a good science fiction writer should not lay down the message in words the size of the Hollywood sign.

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*I see no evidence that the last chapters of When the Sleeper Wakes are any less anti-utopian, in this sense, than the rest. The debate about what is the "really" good and what is the "really" bad society is not resolved in the skies over England as Graham and Ostrog whirl about in their aircraft. Wells simply did not choose to declare, in his own voice, who was right and who was wrong, leaving that determination instead to his readers.*

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Now that is what Wells should have been doing. And having read Wagar talking about *The War of the Worlds* I suspect that Wells may have done it rather more than Wagar gives him credit for.



Regardless of niggles, however, this is a very interesting book. I was fascinated to learn, for example, that Wells drew a sharp distinction between his serious fiction and what he called his "scientific romances". And he got very short with people who tried to persuade him to write more of the latter when he was trying to establish himself as a proper writer. In addition it would appear that the famous quarrel between Wells and Henry James was nothing to do with science fiction at all. Wells maintained (along with Trollope and others) that a good novel should cover all aspects of life, including discussion of society and politics, whereas James insisted that the sole purpose of the novel should be the examination of the human character.

Of course now I want to go back and read a whole pile of Wells books. Which I suspect is something that Professor Wagar will count as a success on his part.

*H.G. Wells: Traversing Time* - W. Warren Wagar - Wesleyan University Press - hardcover

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## Teeth and Applause

I'm not a great fan of vampire stories. But a vampire story by Suzy McKee Charnas is another matter entirely. I can guarantee that will be something interesting. Besides, it is a Nebula winning vampire story, and it is part of a book with a lot of other good stuff in it as well.

Charnas's vampire, Edward Weyland, is most certainly not human. He is a vicious predator, much at the mercy of his appetites, and with a great deal of contempt for his prey. But he is also an intelligent creature who has to survive alone, hidden amongst the very livestock

that he despises. He needs a cover identity, a home, a job. If his secret is discovered, all is lost and he has to flee for his life. Too many times in his long life, he has been chased by angry villagers or townsfolk armed with crucifixes, garlic, and rather more importantly sharpened stakes. He has no romantic illusions about the world.

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*"Many creatures are dying in ways too dreadful to imagine. I am part of the world; I listen to the pain. You people claim to be above all that. You deafen yourselves with your own noise and pretend there's nothing else to hear. Then these screams enter your dreams, and you have to seek therapy because you have lost the nerve to listen."*

From "Unicorn Tapestry"

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We first meet Weyland in the story "Unicorn Tapestry", a title consciously taken from the famous series of mediaeval tapestries featuring a woman luring a unicorn to her side. In our case the woman is Floria, a psychotherapist asked to treat one Professor Weyland after he suffered some sort of breakdown, became convinced he was a vampire, and tried to drink the blood of a female colleague. Floria soon finds out that Weyland is anything but deluded, and simply wants her to pronounce him cured and sane so that he can get on with his life. The consequences of failing to do what Weyland wants are all too obvious.

The name "Floria" comes from the title character of Puccini's opera, *Tosca*. She too is stalked by an evil male, although in the opera the villain is merely human, and Charnas riffs off the connection in "A Musical Interlude", in which Weyland goes to the opera in order to humor work colleagues and is unexpectedly moved by the foolish artistic posturings of his prey. Unlike

Puccini's villain, Scarpia, Weyland does not make mistakes.

But the book is called *Stagestruck Vampires and Other Phantasms*, which means that we are not just dealing with vampires. My favorite story from the book, "Beauty and the Opéra", features that classic feminist trick of re-imagining a classic fable: in this case *The Phantom of the Opera*. Charnas creates an entirely believable background for Erik, the Phantom, and does an excellent job of explaining why the kidnapped singer, Christine, agrees to marry him. Here there are very clear reflections upon the mundane world, outside of fairy tales.

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*Does it seem incredible, to have gone from such a bizarre, outlaw existence to a placid one indistinguishable from millions of others? Yet many people walk through the world hiding shocking memories. I glance sometimes at a man or woman in a shop or café, at a friend or a student sitting over a coffee with me, and I wonder what towering joys and howling depths lie concealed behind the mask of ordinary life that each one wears.*

From "Beauty and the Opéra"

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Then again there is the Hugo-winning short story, "Boobs", which features a teenage werewolf. There is "Advocates", a story written with Chelsea Quinn Yarboro, in which Weyland gets to meet Saint Germain. That story sticks out a bit, because Yarboro's style of vampire story is very different from that of Charnas, but in the end it turns out very much a Weyland story. There is "Listening to Brahms", in which a group of spacefarers in suspended animation are woken by aliens to be told that Earth has been destroyed. The aliens take the distraught humans home and look after them, but their culture ends up being corrupted by human ideas. It struck me that it was really a story about the

corrosive influence of Western culture on other human societies.

The book ends with two essays. The first, "The Stagestruck Vampire", is all about how "Unicorn Tapestry" came to be made into a play. Anyone who still rails against how movies are never faithful adaptations of the original book or story should read this essay and ponder how much more complex things would be when the budget is vast rather than miniscule.

The other essay, "They're Right, Art is Long", tells the story of the writing of the *Holdfast Chronicles*. That should be required reading for anyone interested in innovative and provocative SF. I note that I should give a huge cheer here to David Hartwell for having the courage to purchase *Motherlines* when no one else in the industry would. Yet another reason to give him a Best Editor Hugo.

All in all this is a fine collection by one of the most intelligent and incisive SF writers around. I guess it mainly classes as horror, but there is no blood spattering to it. The stories use horror tropes cleverly rather than obsess over them. There is very little market in mainstream publishing for collections. Thank goodness that there are good small press companies around to fill in the gap.

*Stagestruck Vampires and Other Phantasms* - Suzy McKee Charnas - Tachyon Publications - trade paperback

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## Flying with Style

What is it about Zeppelins that makes us love them so much? Distance, I suspect. A Zeppelin is, after all, nothing but a small, flying cruise liner, and I view the thought of having to go on a cruise with absolute horror. But there are no

Zeppelins any more. We don't have a reality to recoil from. All we have left is a view of the past seen through the rose-colored spectacles of the professional storyteller. Or at least that seems to have been the cunning plan put into operation by David Moles and Jay Lake when they conceived *All Star Zeppelin Adventure Stories*. As Moles put it:

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*...they invoke for us a vision of a time (so it seems to us, now) when travel was more civilized, when journeys were measured not in hours spent in a holding pattern over Cleveland but in days spent dancing to the music of the ship's band, when men wore hats and women wore dresses, when in flight meals were haute cuisine served on bone china, when one might find half the cast of an Agatha Christie novel as one's chance-met table companions.*

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There were certainly times reading this book when I thought it should have been called *Amazing All Star Thrilling Zeppelin Adventure Stories for Boys*. Several of the contributors have left all seriousness behind them at the doors. Jed Hartman's story, "The Last of the Zeppelins", features American secret agent Hugh Betcha, his boss, General Garrulous Bore, and their British contact, Captain Stephen Upperlip. In "Why a Duck" Leslie What treats us to a pair of unhappily married ghosts haunting a hot air balloon. And Dick Lupoff's tale of the heroic Crimson Wizard, "The Jewels of Lemuria" seems to deliberately invoke the spirit of the Batman TV series while simultaneously warning us of the cunning ways in which the local tentacle worshippers might disguise their nefarious plans.

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*They wear vainglorious costumes and titles like 'Lord High Octopus' and 'Mistress of the Mystic Seabed.' They exchange secret*

*passwords and practice mock-religious rituals, like a group of schoolchildren playing at grown-up ceremonials.*

From "The Jewels of Lemuria"

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Hmm, Cthulhu cultists as Freemasons. I wonder what Dan Brown could do with that?

But there are serious issues at stake here as well. David Brin has delivered what I take to be his 9/11 story. Ostensibly it is about a nefarious plan to turn a Zeppelin into a flying bomb and crash it into an important international scientific conference. In keeping with the spirit of the book it has wonderful imagery of immense trains of giant airships being tugged across the American continent by monstrous railway locomotives. (Presumably all road bridges have long since been demolished, though one can hardly credit this as Americans find it easier to believe in fairies than in not having cars.) But the real point of the Brin story, "Sky Light", is to demonstrate how the total surveillance environment that Brin described in his non-fiction book, *The Transparent Society*, would enable nefarious plots to be foiled by "smart mob" posses of concerned citizens operating over the Internet. I still have serious doubts about the workability of Brin's ideas. They seem to depend overmuch on the goodness of human nature. But I'm pleased to see him still examining the idea.

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*Dr Octavio assembled this new fortress on a very tight budget. We have no automated machine-gun turrets, or shock troops. We do not even have rabid Yetis to protect the compound. There is only me and my flamethrower attachment against whatever is out there. The death ray broke down from the cold.*

From "Instead of a Loving Heart"

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In between there is a range of other stories of varying levels of seriousness. In "Instead of a Loving Heart" Jeremiah Tolbert tells a sad tale about the difficulties of being the artificial minion of a cantankerous old evil genius fallen on hard times. Tobias S. Buckell sets his Zeppelins on a gas giant planet. David Levine invents an entire airship-based civilization. And Paul Berger imagines Zeppelins as vast animals roaming the American prairie that one hunts as one might hunt whales.

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*The Denver shipyards can put anything into the air, from your aunt's bathtub to the ironclad dreadnoughts that bombarded Richmond. To hunt zeppelins though, to match their speed and move in the wind as they do – and to come within striking range – nothing beats another zeppelin. That's why a Kansas clipper is the corpse of a bull zep.*

From "Voice of the Hurricane"

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What really impressed me about the anthology was the consistent quality of all the stories. Only half of the authors were known to me before reading the book, but all of the contributions are good. There are time travel tales. In "The Eckener Alternative" James L. Cambias tells how a young man loves Zeppelins so much he is prepared to change history significantly to bring them back. Jim van Pelt, on the other hand, in "Where and When", explains why time travelers are unable to affect the past. Lawrence M. Schoen, in "The Sky's The Limit", produces a magnificent pastiche of the American gangster story, complete with a poker game on board a luxurious airship. And there is a fine Howard Waldrop alternate history tale, "You Could Go Home Again," which is the only reprint in the book.

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*All this would have been enough to recognize the craft as a pirate – but it displayed the universal device of pirates as well, that parody of the Yin-Yang: all Yang, declaring allegiance to imbalance. In a yellow circle, two round dots stared like unblinking demonic eyes; beneath, a black semicircle leered with empty, ravenous bonhomie.*

From "Biographical Notes..."

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Every anthology, however, has a stand-out story. For me, this time, it is Ben Rosebaum's eccentrically titled "Biographical Notes to 'A Discourse on the Nature of Causality, With Air-Planes' By Benjamin Rosenbaum". Anyone can write an alternate history story, but Rosebaum has written one in which the civilizations of the East have triumphed and America is fought over by various oriental nations. The anthology has all sorts of fabulous re-imaginings of the airship, but there is nothing else to match Rosebaum's magnificent Hindu war-city.

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*I have never seen any work of man so vast. Fully twelve great dirigible hulls, each dwarfing the Shaw, were bound together in a constellation of outbuildings and propeller assemblies. Near the center, a great plume of white steam rose from a pillar; a Heart-of-the-Sun reactor, where the dull yellow ore called Yama's-flesh is driven to realize enlightenment through the ministrations of Wisdom-Sadhus.*

And later...

*Every cubit of its surface was bedecked with a façade of cytoceramic statuary – couples coupling in five thousand erotic poses; theromorphic gods gesturing to soothe or menace; Rama in his chariot; heroes riddled with arrows and fighting on; saints undergoing martyrdom. In one corner I spotted the Israelite avatar of Vishnu,*

hanging on his cross between Shiva and Ganesh.

From "Biographical Notes..."

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Eat your heart out, Kim Stanley Robinson. Yeah, I know it is tongue in cheek. But this is what *Years of Rice and Salt* could have had, rather than just having the East ape everything that the West did in our world.

And there we have it. Quite literally, a feast for the imagination. And a worthy salute to that most glorious of flying machines, the Zeppelin.

*All Star Zeppelin Adventure Stories* - David Moles & Jay Lake (Eds.) - Wheatland Press - trade paperback

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## Changing the World

There are a lot of small presses experimenting with Print-on-Demand publishing, but some of them are also looking at ebooks as an alternative. *Fundamentally Challenged*, a new anthology edited by Jeffrey Turner, takes that experimentation a step further. The book comes as a CD with a nice Frank Wu cover. Wu has actually done summer and winter views of the same scene. The former is on the slip case insert, the latter printed on the CD itself. That's cute. But the real piece of innovation is that in addition to the PDF of the book each story is supplied as an audio file. You can listen to the stories as well as read them.

I'm not quite sure what to make of this. I'm a reader, not a listener. When I'm reading a story I like to be able to think about the author's use of words. That means I need to be able to flick back and fore through the text. I can't do that if the story is coming at me in a continuous

stream of audio. Also, from a reviewer's point of view, an audio book has to be understood of a combination of the work of the author and that of the voice actor hired to read it. That can be a good thing. Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* is way better as the Richard Burton radio play than as a book (though it is a very good book too). But I'm not sure that all fiction should go that way. And as I want to review the stories unencumbered by thinking about the quality of the reading I've chosen not to listen to the book.

My other reservation about the book is the theme. The title, *Fundamentally Challenged*, is a mistake. It immediately brings to mind fundamentalist religion, which not what the book is about at all. What Turner actually wanted his writers to do was write stories in which the nature of the world is changed in some fundamental way. That, I fear, was something of a big ask.

Having an awful lot of material to cover this month, I have by no means managed to read all of the stories. But those I have read just haven't worked. And that's not just because most of the contributors are unknowns. There is a story by the indefatigable Jay Lake, and that doesn't work either. In fact it just stops, as if Lake got bored with it. I think what has happened here is that in asking his writers to make truly fundamental changes to the nature of the world he has got them thinking of ideas that are just too big to be properly covered in a short story.

It is a shame, because there are some interesting people in the anthology. One is Edd Vick, who happens to be the husband of Amy Thomson. Another is Alison McBain, who is the wife of Frank Wu. I'm not sure about Edd, but this anthology contains Alison's first published story. She's a very talented

girl, so one day this anthology may become a collectable.

I could not find *Fundamentally Challenged* on Amazon, but you can buy the book online from Jeff Turner's web site: <http://www.jeffturnerfiction.com/antho.html>

*Fundamentally Challenged* - Jeffrey Turner - Pi in the Sky Publishing - CD

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## Short Stuff

### Mere Millennia

I've said it before and I'm going to have to say it again. Robert Reed does not do things by halves. I mean, anyone can write a story about a young girl who is the only survivor of a spaceship accident and crash lands on an alien planet. Only Robert Reed would have the girl be the product of a massively advanced civilization, making her virtually immortal, and therefore a genuine case for being worshipped as a goddess. And only Robert Reed would have the story last for many millennia in the space of a novelette.

But let us start at the beginning. *Mere* is a story set in the Marrow universe. Indeed, *Mere's* parents were on their way to board the Great Ship when they died. Early next year there will be a new Marrow novel from Tor, probably titled *The Well of Stars*. *Mere* will be a major character in that story. But for some reason that we probably don't want to go into, the details of *Mere's* origins will not be included in that book. So here they are, in a little chapbook from Golden Gryphon, together with a short essay from Reed on the origins and development of the Marrow universe. At \$16 for only 50 pages it is probably aimed at Reed completists rather than a

more general market. But then again, it does have an absolutely fabulous Bob Eggleton cover (and it is a wraparound, not just what you can see on the cover art on the *Emerald City* web site). Nice little book.

*Mere* - Robert Reed - Golden Gryphon Press - chapbook

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### A new Aeon

One of the things being launched at World Fantasy Con this year was a new SF&F magazine called *Aeon* (<http://www.aeonmagazine.com>). It is the product of Marti and Bridget McKenna, and it is digital. The magazine is available from various online stores as a Microsoft Reader file. I confess that I was a little unhappy to have to install yet more Microsoft software on my PC, but the Reader program works quite well and the *Aeon* folks have been careful not to use any of the features that require you to sign up with Microsoft in order to read their magazine. That was very thoughtful of them.

There are definite advantages to a magazine in going digital. The display technology is continuing to improve, though I would have dearly loved to have been able to read *Aeon* on something the size and weight of a paperback book rather than on a 3kg laptop (I think there is a gap in the market somewhere between a laptop and a Palm). Neither length nor color is an issue for a digital publication. This has enabled the *Aeon* editors to have full-page color illustrations at the start of each story. They also have a section at the end where they devote a page to each of the contributing authors with live links to their web sites. I can envisage reading the magazine on a wi-fi equipped handheld and being able to click on through to those sites, or to references listed in non-fiction material.

But what of the content? Well, there is a novella by Walter John Williams, two novelettes (John Meaney and Lori Ann White), five short stories (the ubiquitous Jay Lake, Holly Wade Matter, Steven R. Boyett, Gordon Gross and Gene Wolfe), and two non-fiction pieces.

The magazine opens with what will be a regular opinion column by Kristine Kathryn Rusch. It contains a heartwarming plea to authors to take risks in their writing. As Rusch says, "artists who have accepted failure as part of the process are the ones who are going to succeed." Hear, hear! The other non-fiction article is a science piece by Pat MacEwan that talks about animals that change sex naturally. I like the idea of having articles that highlight real science that may be of use to SF writers.

The Wolfe and Boyett stories are both reprints, but are excellent choices. Wolfe's "Talk of Mandrakes" is as much a horror story as SF and features an eager scientist who discovers that applying for a job in a prestigious xenobiology institute is a dangerous business. Boyett's story, "Emerald City Blues", is a fabulous tale about how the inhabitants of Oz accidentally get mixed up in a nuclear war between the US and Russia.

Of the new fiction, everything I have read thus far has been really good. I very much liked Jay Lake's "A Mythic Fear of the Sea", which is a clever allegory about getting away from the restrictions of small hometowns. But the standout story is John Meaney's novelette, "Blood and Verse", which is all about a Blood Poet; a young man trained from birth to find beauty in the art of assassination. Meaney pours into it all of the joy of physical perfection that he gets from his martial arts training. And some of his poetry is actually quite good (generally I find that novelists make really bad poets).

I've been very impressed with issue #1 of *Aeon*. It has good material and the electronic format works much better than I had expected. I guess there is some regret that a collection of little CDs won't look as good on the shelf as paper magazines, but my bookshelves are way too crowded anyway. Doubtless there are economic advantages to the publishers as well. I suspect that *Aeon* may represent a first sight of the future of SF magazines.

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### Songs of Praise

There was a decidedly creepy and nervous feeling in the air at World Fantasy Con. An election was in the offing, and the Forces of Evil were gathering, threatening to take over the world. It was therefore perhaps appropriate that Darrell Schweitzer should thrust into my sweaty paws a small pamphlet of a sickly green coloration. Reading it, I felt the load lift from my mind. Joy filled my heart. I was saved! George W. Bush was not the greatest evil in the universe after all. There were things far, far worse. And they wanted us to worship them.

The book was called *The Innsmouth Tabernacle Choir Hymnal*.

Rejoice, brothers! For the Gods are great, yea, and slimy too! Covered in tentacles are they. And mighty Cthulhu is their leader. When the stars are right, He shall rise once more.

In the meantime we loyal minions have to get on with preparing the way. That means working hard on His Tentacled Lordship's behalf. And singing hymns in His praise. Which is why we all need this splendid little book. It is full of the most uplifting tunes: "What a Friend We Have In Dagon", "Crawling Chaos Come For Me", and so on. My favorite is "Cthulhu Loves His Loyal Minions",

partly because it has such a jolly tune, but mainly because you can't but help like a song with lines like this:

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*As he stirs us in the broth  
that is known as Azathoth,  
Crawling Chaos will transfigure you and  
me!*

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I should warn those of the faithful who are planning a visit to the United States that, as with most other religions, worship of the Great Old Ones in these parts has suffered a considerable degree of schism. Brother Schweitzer's hymnal, being of genuine Innsmouth ancestry, represents the core original New England version of the faith, as chronicled all those years ago by the Very Reverend Bishop Lovecraft. However, in Texas believers have substantially re-written the Bishop's holy texts and have even gone so far as to replace the worship of Dragon with that of a slimy, gibbering idiot called Dubya. Out here on the West Coast things are somewhat more traditional, but Californians have tried to update their hymnals by adding new and catchier tunes, some of which have been written for them by prominent songsmiths. A particular favorite of mine is this little ditty (which I recommend to filk singers everywhere), rumored to have been penned by Lennon and McCartney themselves.

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*We worship Great Cthulhu from R'lyeh.  
He's gonna come back to rule some day.  
And when He rises oh what mayhem there  
will be.  
We'll slay and slay, every day!*

Chorus:  
*All you need is blood!  
All you need is blood!*

*All you need is blood, blood,  
Blood is all you need.*

*The power of the Great Ones from the stars  
Is better than your videos and cars  
The thrill of ancient magic and the taste of  
human heart,  
That's our art, come take part!*

Repeat chorus.

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Iä, Iä, Shub Niggurath!

All praise to Brother Schweitzer for producing such a useful little book. Soon may his brains be eaten!

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Amazon.com does not carry this book. If you happen to see wet, webbed footprints on some of their web pages you will know why.

But if you want a copy, Cold Tonnage has it in their catalog (<http://www.coldtonnage.com/acatalog/14284.html>). Andy Richards is a loyal minion and will be suitably rewarded.

*The Innsmouth Tabernacle Choir Hymnal -  
Brother Darrell Schweitzer - Zadok Allen -  
chapbook*

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## Miscellany

### World Fantasy Awards

Just in case you missed my live webcast from Tempe, here are the World Fantasy winners:

**Lifetime Achievement:** Stephen King & Gahan Wilson;

**Novel:** *Tooth and Claw*, Jo Walton (Tor);

**Novella:** "A Crowd of Bone", Greer Gilman (*Trampoline: An Anthology* Small Beer Press);



**Short Fiction:** "Don Ysidro", Bruce Holland Rogers (*Polyphony* #3 Wheatland);

**Anthology:** *Strange Tales*, Rosalie Parker, ed. (Tartarus Press);

**Collection:** *Bibliomancy*, Elizabeth Hand (PS Publishing);

**Artist:** (tie) Donato Giancola & Jason Van Hollander;

**Special Award, Professional:** Peter Crowther (for PS Publishing);

**Special Award, Non-Professional:** Ray Russell & Rosalie Parker (for Tartarus Press).

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### Aurora Awards

Canadian fandom has spoken. Here are the results.

**Best Long-Form Work in English:** *Blind Lake* by Robert Charles Wilson

**Best Long-Form Work in French:** *Phaos* by Alain Bergeron;

**Best Short-Form Work in English:** "Scream Angel" by Douglas Smith;

**Best Short-Form Work in French:** "La Course de Kathryn" by Élisabeth Vonarburg;

**Best Work in English (Other):** *Space Inc.*, Julie E. Czerneda, ed.;

**Best Work in French (Other):** *Solaris*, Joël Champetier, ed.;

**Artistic Achievement:** Jean-Pierre Normand;

**Fan Achievement (Publication):** *Made in Canada* newsletter, Don Bassie, ed.;

**Fan Achievement (Organizational):** Martin Miller;

**Fan Achievement (Other):** Eric Layman

Next year's Auroras will be announced at Due North, the 2005 Westercon, which

is being held in Calgary. More details at: <http://www.calgaryin2005.org/>. The convention will also host the Locus Awards.

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### Camp Doom

Bad news, science fiction fans: President Bush has discovered that most of you voted for John Kerry. According to a recent announcement from the White House, specially trained squads of elite secret police will be trawling America's cities, arresting fans, and sending them to concentration camps.

The first such camp is to be built in Atlanta, Georgia. It will be called Dragon\*Camp. The Commandant, Eric Raymond, will lead members every morning in compulsory rifle range practice. Afternoons will be filled with compulsory Klingon lessons. In the evenings the Camp Guests of Honor, Orson Scott Card and John Norman, will read morally uplifting bedtime stories to the members.

Asked if he anticipated any difficulty in rounding up fandom, Secretary of Truth Karl Rove replied, "Piece of cake, those Bay Area folks will go for anything camp."

(Yes folks, I am getting very tired of listening to left-wing American fans talking about how they now live in a totalitarian dictatorship.)

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### Guardian First Book Prize

Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* has been listed as one of the five finalists for the £10,000 Guardian First Book Prize. How the judges are expected to choose between that and, for example, a collection of poems or a book about walking through Afghanistan, is quite beyond me. But hey, Susanna and Colin

will doubtless get to go to a totally swank award dinner in London. Should be a good night out; enjoy folks!

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### Concussion Guest List

The full Guest of Honor list for Concussion, the 2006 Eastercon, was announced at Novacon. M. John Harrison is joined by Brian Froud, Elizabeth Hand, Justina Robson and Ian Sorensen. We also have a number of special guests who may not be there for the whole con but will be turning up. The current list is: Dan Abnett, Marc Gascoigne, Mat Irvine and Johanna Sinisalo. You can find details here: <http://www.eastercon2006.org/>.

And while you are at the site, don't forget to check out the merchandise, some of which you will see me modeling at various fannish events.

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### Whitbread Prize

No sign of any genre stuff in the Best Novel category. The favorites are Louis de Bernières for *Birds Without Wings* and Alan Hollinghurst for his Booker-winning *The Line of Beauty*. There's a big snub for David Mitchell with *Cloud Atlas* not being on the shortlist, but the Whitbread has tended to be more populist than the Booker and I think the book was rejected for being too complex, not for being SF.

The good news is that Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is short-listed in the Best First Novel category. Another swank dinner for Susanna and Colin to go to.

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## Footnote

Next issue will include a report from Wardrobe, the British costume convention. Fiction coverage will include Gwyneth Jones, Peter Straub, Storm Constantine and Catherine M. Valente. There will be an interview with Chris Roberson of MonkeyBrain books and a book of essays and con reports by Jeff Vandermeer. All of which should happen sometime around Christmas.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl