

EMERALD CITY #114

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Introduction

Oh my, why do I do this? People keep telling me that I have a glamorous, jet-setting lifestyle. Yeah, sure. I'm in San Francisco. I have just got off a flight from Korea. I haven't been home yet, because there's a convention on. So I am typing this in the con suite at Corflu. I have book reviews to write. Which, of course, I should have done in Korea except that I was too busy and/or too tired while I was there.

The Koreans were very friendly and listened politely to all of the seminars that my colleague and I gave. As usual with business trips, I didn't have much chance to look around, but hopefully I'll get to go back again soon.

But not right now. I need to have my body in the same time zone for more than a week at a time. I think I have 2.5 weeks in San Francisco before having to head off to Florida for ICFA and Hinckley for Eastercon.

Anyway, here is an issue, finished off in something approaching haste. If one or two of the reviews here are a little short, I apologize. But there are a lot of books covered here, and many of them are very good indeed. We've also got another contribution to the (rather foundering) series about European fandom, and the usual small press interview. So I should shut up and let you get on with reading.

In This Issue

It's Nominating Time - Cheryl discusses her Hugo picks

War of the Worlds - Karen Traviss finds mankind all too willing to cross the line

Return to the Dark - Ian R. MacLeod plunges the world of The Light Ages into civil war

Awake and Dangerous - a new Takeshi Kovacs novel from Richard Morgan

Dogs of War - Steven Erikson unleashes yet more mayhem on the Malazan Empire

End Game - John Meaney provides a resolution to his Nulapeiron trilogy

Loving through Time - Audrey Niffenegger finds a new way to keep a happy couple apart

Killer Robots - Maxine McArthur goes chasing homicidal machines in near-future Japan

Fantasy Islands - Glenda Larke welcomes us to the Isles of Glory

That Old Black Magic - Trudi Canavan wraps up the Black Magician trilogy

Real Fairies - Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling present the best of Faerie lore

Dark Cities - the fourth incarnation of Leviathan has a theme

Interview - Cheryl talks to Roger Robinson of Becon Publications

Aliens Among Us - Bryan Appleyard investigates the UFO phenomenon

The State of Fandom in Latvia - Toms Kreicbergs gives an overview of SF in his native country

Preserving Rotsler - A brief report from Corflu

Short Stuff - A brief look at online stories

Out of Synch - More US releases of UK books I reviewed ages ago

Miscellany - News and stuff

Footnote - The end

It's Nominating Time

OK folks, it is time to make up our minds. Nominations for the 2005 Hugo Awards close on March 11th, so we all need to get on and cast our ballots.

Best Novel

And this is where it gets hard. Particularly in Best Novel, which is the toughest choice I have had to make in years. Of course the situation is not helped by having two of my all time favorite books eligible. I have to vote for M. John Harrison's *Light* and *The Course of the Heart*. I don't expect the latter to get anywhere, because it hasn't had the same level of exposure, but I very much want to see *Light* on the ballot. It is a wonderful book.

Then it gets harder. As you may have seen from the Recommendation List, I have already chosen *Iron Council*. It is a really good book. But of course so are many others. The Send a Hugo to China Campaign came very close to shooting

itself in the foot this year. But China is China, and very wonderful, so he's in my five.

The other book I chose in advance is Elizabeth Hand's *Mortal Love*. Once again this pick was driven by the fact that the author is someone whose work I very much enjoy. I think this is Liz's best book since *Waking the Moon*, and I really want to see it do well.

But what about #5? There are just so many candidates. Do I go for Ian McDonald's wonderful tale of Khyberpunk, *River of Gods*? Or how about David Mitchell's exceptionally clever *Cloud Atlas*? Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is a hot favorite with many people and a very fine book. Geoff Ryman's *Air*, Steph Swainston's *The Year of Our War*, Sean Stewart's *Perfect Circle*, Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Stamping Butterflies*, Gene Wolfe's *The Wizard Knight*, and Peter Straub's *in the night room* all got serious consideration. So, rather belatedly, did Karen Traviss's *Crossing the Line*. But in the end I decided to go for a book that meant something to me. Guy Gavriel Kay, you are #5, and Wales says, "Thank you." The final slot on my Best Novel nominees has been filled by *The Last Light of the Sun*.

Short Fiction

My problem with short fiction is that I just don't read enough of it. There are too many wonderful novels vying for my attention. Novellas are easier, because they tend to get published in book form, so Steven Erikson gets a nod for the hilarious *The Healthy Dead*. Sadly three books which I really liked from this year: *The Labyrinth* by Catherynne M. Valente; *Viator* by Lucius Shepard; and *Not Before Sundown* by Johanna Sinisalo are all just too long to be considered as

novellas, even using the stretching rules. I would have voted for all of them.

With other short fiction all I can do is vote for some stories that I really liked in the few magazines, collections and anthologies that I have read from last year. I have no idea whether they will get nominated (though I have high hopes of Jeffrey Ford's "The Annals of Eelin-Ok"). I promise to read all of the nominees when the lists come out.

Related Book

I guess this will be dominated by art books as usual, but I'm voting for Farah Mendlesohn's two excellent books of criticism that got eligibility extensions from last year: *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* (edited with Andrew M. Butler) and *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (edited with Edward James). I'm also nominating D.M. Mitchell's magnificent history of Savoy Press, *A Serious Life*. And if I manage to get to see a copy in time I suspect I may well end up picking Neil Gaiman's graphic novel, *Marvel 1602*. The idea of Stephen Strange and Nick Fury as secret agents working for Queen Elizabeth I is just too wonderfully silly for words. Of course the stories are still fiction, so I'd rather like to see the book in a fiction category, but given how recent Hugo Administrators have classified Gaiman's work as Related Book even if it just has a few color plates in it I don't hold out much hope for that.

The fifth book I wanted to nominate is the re-issue of Michael Moorcock's *Wizardry and Wild Romance*, but sadly most of the new material is not really new, it has all been published elsewhere, so the book isn't eligible. Which leaves me with an empty slot. I'm still thinking. There are two books about Gene Wolfe's New Sun series. Dave Langford tells me

that Peter Weston has a book out from NESFA Press.

Dramatic Presentations

How would I know? I only go to about one movie a year, and I only watch sport and the news on TV. As far as the longer stuff goes, I think that *The Incredibles* has to be the hot favorite. But I'm impressed by the number of recommendations for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. *Spiderman 2* and *Shaun of the Dead* are also likely nominees. I've only seen clips of them, but I am hoping that *Sky Captain & the World of Tomorrow*, and *Team America: World Police*, are very quickly forgotten.

I've not seen any of the short form recommendations, and am unlikely to, but people seem to be saying a lot of good things about *Wonderfalls* so it might produce a surprise nominee. Roll on next year when I can nominate *Samurai Champloo*.

Of course there is one short dramatic presentation I saw last year: Conablanca, the Wiscon opening ceremony. It was very funny. I think I might just nominate it.

Pro and Semi-Pro

As usual I am going to plead with you to choose some book editors in the Best Professional Editor category. David Hartwell is top of my list, but Juliet Ulman deserves credit for picking up some wonderful British books (as does Lou Anders but his are only just starting to come out next month). As far as magazines go, Ellen Datlow's *Sci Fiction* is the only one I read regularly. I've listed Nalo Hopkinson as she's done some great anthologies recently. And Peter Crowther deserves a little more recognition (this time outside of the

World Fantasy Awards) for the marvelous job he's doing with PS Publishing.

Artists? Well, I vote for what I like, and I like John Picacio's work very much indeed. I also want to put in a plea for John Coultart who did a magnificent job on the *Lambshead Guide* and continues to produce fabulously disturbing artwork. I do hope that Cthulhu movie gets made.

Semiprozine is, of course, the domain of *Locus*, and Charles will win again this year. But who else will get nominated? I'd like to see *The Internet Review of Science Fiction* get a nod, and not just because they've published a couple of my articles. *The New York Review of Science Fiction* will doubtless add to its long list of bridesmaid positions. Goodness only knows about the rest.

Fan Awards

Much as I would like another rocket, I would be really happy if *Plokta* won. Those guys do really good work. I'm sure they put more effort into one issue that I put into five of mine. But then again there are seven of them, which helps. It will be interesting to see if *SFRevu* gets on the ballot this year.

What I would really like to do is beat Langford for Best Fanwriter, but of course Dave is a far better writer than I will ever be. Someone has to beat him sometime. I suspect that person will be Matt Cheney, but perhaps not this year. I'm also putting in nominations for Rick Kleffel and Bob Devney.

Best Fanartist will probably be less of a Frank Wu walkover this year because nearly all of the Brits (and many Americans) will be voting for Sue Mason. I suspect that Frank will still win. I'm not sure that there's any point in thinking about anyone else as a winner, but I'm sure three very

deserving people will get nominations. I don't see enough fanzines to make up my mind.

Web Site

I'm pleased to see a whole heap of diverse recommendations in this category. I think *Locus Online*, *Strange Horizons*, *SF Site* and *Sci Fiction* will all be strong contenders. I'm surprised that no Brits have come forward to recommend *The Alien Online* or *SF Crowsnest*. If *Emerald City* gets a nomination I shall be deeply embarrassed. The content might be good, but the artistic and technical sides of the site are way below par.

The Campbell

The Campbell. Ah yes, the Campbell. Well, to my mind K.J. Bishop ought to be a certainty for the award. But given that the mass market edition of *The Etched City* only came out at the tail end of last year, I suspect that someone else will win. Probably someone well known in America and with a lot of published short fiction to his or her name.

Of the other likely candidates, Steph Swainston would be next on my list. However, as I mentioned a couple of issues ago, it is unclear whether a UK publication, even from a publisher as big as Gollancz, qualifies as a "professional publication" under the rules of the award. It ought to, and I'm going to nominate Swainston anyway, but I'm not 100% certain that the nomination will be accepted.

As for other likely candidates, Mark Budz has produced one good novel, and I'm looking forward to reading Chris Roberson's debut novel, which is due for review next issue.

War of the Worlds

Those of you who are regular readers of *Emerald City* will know that the first book reviewed in each issue is generally something major. Typically it is a new release by an important author. In this issue I have new books by Ian R., MacLeod, Richard Morgan and Steven Erikson, but the headline review has gone to *Crossing the Line* by Karen Traviss. That should send you a message.

As you may have guessed, *Crossing the Line* is the sequel to *City of Pearl*, which was on my Best of 2004 list. It was on the *Locus* Best First Novel list as well. Indeed I have to thank Charles Brown for insisting that I read the book. *Crossing the Line* is also a 2004 release, and while some reviewers have been less enthusiastic about it, I think it is a better book than *City of Pearl*. It certainly has a harder edge.

Not as if *City of Pearl* was soft. As first contact novels go, it was pretty brutal, featuring the savage murder of an alien baby by an Earth scientist who claimed that she was just dissecting a specimen. It also introduced us to the wess'har, a race of aliens whose moral code is rather different to ours.

Shan tried to conceive of a society where the entire defense industry could be halted by the desire not to embarrass an ally. The challenge with wess'har was to understand that they had just two settings – completely benign and psychotic – with nothing in between. "It's not how we handle things back home."

At the end of *City of Pearl* three important things had happened. Firstly

it had become clear to the Earthlings of Shan Frankland's largely scientific mission that the wess'har were in possession of a powerful piece of biotech, *c'naatat*, which is capable of turning their troops into indestructible super-soldiers. The second is the arrival of a new military ship from Earth, benefiting from a much more powerful engine, making it much less out of touch with current Earth politics. And thirdly, contact with the isenj, another alien species, has given the new ship, the *Actaeon*, real time communication with Earth.

All of this allows Traviss to up the ante. The story is no longer about finding out what has happened to Constantine colony and learning about the alien species. It is now about incipient war. The European government back on Earth is desperate to get hold of *c'naatat*, seduced by dreams of military glory. Biotech companies want its secrets to sell to the highest bidder. The isenj, having been victims of wess'har justice, don't want anyone else to have *c'naatat*, but at the same time are desperate for new colony worlds to accommodate their burgeoning population. The wess'har are primarily concerned with protecting the Bezer'ej, the intelligent squid species who have already been victims of isenj and human ignorance and arrogance. And then there are the ussissi, of whom more later.

In the middle of all this is the character who I suspect is the real hero of the series, reporter Eddie Michallat. In many ways he is in an ideal situation. Eddie is the only journalist on site on the alien planet, and he has not one but four species of aliens to talk about. But at the same time he is Earth's only interpreter of what is happening out in space. One wrong word, and he could cause a war. How can he possibly explain the subtle

nuances of cultural difference to his audience back home?

"Humans lie even to themselves. They promote the idea that all intelligent beings – intelligent by their narrow definition – are all the same within and will behave the same if exposed to the same environment."

I really like the way that Traviss has used her aliens. The wess'har look quite comical, but are clearly very dangerous. The ussissi look like meerkats. Jeff Vandermeer fans will suspect just how dangerous that makes them. But to most humans they look seriously cute. The isenj, on the other hand, are anything but cute. They look like giant spiders with the faces of piranhas. And they live in massively overcrowded cities that would give the average insect colony a sense of serious claustrophobia. They are deliberately designed by the author to be repulsive to humans. But, as Eddie discovers, once you get to talk to them, they are very like humans indeed. While the wess'har have only two modes of behavior, passive and ultra-violent, the isenj are dealmakers just like us. They understand human politics, and their politicians have a sense of humor.

"We understand your natural fear of overcrowding," said Ual. Now that was for the bee-cam, for sure. "I wish your people would be reassured that what we want is your help to learn your technologies, so we can address our own problems. Your planet is not our target. I do believe you should stop people reading those books by Mr. Wells."

All of this is, no doubt, designed to make the reader think of current world politics and how we misunderstand the nations that we war upon. I suspect that the ussissi will eventually prove to be much

more dangerous than any other species. They are generally an easy-going lot: they work as translators for both the isenj and the wess'har. But they also have a very strong collectivist ethic.

"We fear they plan to harm us, whether by neglect or active violence. Shall we tell the matriarchs? And if they cannot deal with the humans, shall we ask The World Before for their aid? The humans must learn that if you harm one ussissi, you harm us all, and we will fight."

It is lack of understanding that is at the heart of the book. We humans can't even understand each other, let alone alien species. We arrogantly assume that everyone can and should think like us. *Star Trek's Enterprise* goes merrily around the galaxy imposing the ethics of the Federation on every species it encounters. But what happens if those people don't approve of human (read WASP) ethics? Hasn't trying to establish multi-racial societies here on Earth taught us anything? Traviss (or at least Aras, the wess'har super-soldier) thinks not. Nor does he approve of the casual assumption of the superiority of human ethics that comes through in shows like *Star Trek*.

"Do you know what I despise most about you?" [...] "Your unshakable belief that you're special, that somehow all the callousness and careless violence that your kind hand out to each other and to other beings can be forgiven because you have this... this great human spirit. I have viewed your dramas and your literature. I have lost count of the time that I have seen humans spared by aliens because, despite humanity's flaws, the alien admires their plucky spirit and ability to strive. Well I am that alien, and I don't admire your spirit, and your capacity to strive is no more than greed. And

unlike your god, I don't love you despite your sins."

Reading *Crossing the Line* I was reminded of two of my favorite SF books: Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, and Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Effendi*. Indeed, what Traviss has done with *Crossing the Line* is rather like if Haldeman has explained the origins of the Forever War in slow motion, pointing out how each participant felt that they were acting for the best, and often for the common good. Except that there are far more factions than Haldeman had, each with their own unique and potentially disastrous take upon the mess. In the end, of course, it all goes pear-shaped.

The legal niceties of declaration had gone by the board, even on BBChan bulletins. If your loved ones had died, you needed to hear that it was a war. Nobody wanted to hear that they had been killed in a diplomatic misunderstanding.

Except that it isn't the end. Because this is the point at which Eddie discovers what the ussissi mean by The World Before. It turns out that those nicely psychotic wess'har that we have met are, in fact, viewed as namby-pamby left-wingers by the rest of wess'har society. They are the wess'har equivalent of a dreamy little hippy colony with way too many soft ideas. So there will be a third book in the series, which will doubtless begin with people back on Earth uttering that time-honored phrase reserved for moments of complete and utter balls-up: "oh shit!"

There is a line in the stars, and humanity has just crossed it.

And all this because an Earth government suffered from what one might call Entebbe Syndrome: the belief

that a sufficiently fast and ruthless military strike can solve any political problem, and no one will dare strike back. It is the mistake that General Galtieri made when he assumed that Britain would not challenge an Argentinean invasion of the Falklands, and that Saddam Hussein made when he invaded Kuwait. It is, in fact, just what many people are worried the US is planning to do in Iran. What was that phrase again?

Crossing the Line - Karen Traviss - Eos - publisher's proof

Return to the Dark

In his latest novel, *The House of Storms*, Ian MacLeod returns to the world of *The Light Ages*, only about 100 years later. Aether technology has, of course, moved on: there are cars and telephones. But other aspects of the world are little changed. The great guilds still dominate British society, and the Changed, those whose bodies have been polluted by Aether, are still social outcasts.

The book centers around Ralph Meynell, heir to the Greatgrandmastership of the Guild of Telegraphers. Ralph is consumptive, but his mother, Alice, an ambitious and beautiful social climber, will not give up on him. She has tried everything that the best doctors in Europe can offer to cure her son. Eventually, in desperation, she takes him on a rest cure in Invercombe, a mansion on the banks of the Severn Estuary. Not far away is the one place where a cure might yet be found: the famous sanctuary for the Changed known as Einfell.

MacLeod's West Country doesn't quite ring true to me – it seems something of a mix-up between Somerset, Devon and

Cornwall. But I can't fault him for that. After all, it is his world he is writing about, not ours. He's also widened his world out a bit. There are mentions of the Continent of Thule away across the ocean to the West, of the Fortunate Isles where sugar is grown for Britain by black slaves, and of Mexico, whose native rulers fought off the Conquistadors thanks to their mastery of Aether. But MacLeod is not really into world building. These are mainly throwaway comments. His primary interest, as ever, is his characters, and their role in this history of his world.

At first it seems that the story might be social change once more. Ralph is a keen amateur naturalist and shows every sign of being the Darwin of his world. But, as you will remember from *The Light Ages*, those who seek to change society come off rather badly in MacLeod's books.

"What I'm telling you, Master Turner, is that our study of how the natural world functions must reflect the real needs of human society. A hothead, for example, might use your theory to argue that we humans are descended from apes. And where would that leave the unique concept of the sacred human soul, and our beloved church, and people's dearly held beliefs?"

All too soon, however, Ralph's dreams of a quiet, happy life with his West Country girlfriend, Marion Price, are shattered. You will remember that I mentioned the sugar crops in the Fortunate Isles. These are making the merchant families of Bristol very rich. The great guilds of London are not happy. Slavery becomes a hot political issue. And before long, MacLeod has re-created the American Civil War on British soil: East against West.

MacLeod's descriptions of the war are some of the best parts of the book.

Ralph, having been extracted from the West by his mother and trained to take over the Telegraphers, becomes a famous general. Marion, left behind, becomes Florence Nightingale and Lily Marlene rolled into one. Southern England is laid waste. And Ralph still has a debt to pay to Einfell.

The war was death. The war was a song – a savage drumbeat. The war came and went like the pulse of some capricious tide. The war took things in, flesh and wood and metal, and spat them out again in mangled bits. In the festering camps of the wounded, the unprepared and disorganized guildsmen and women of the healing guilds were presented with the hacked and blistered meat of battle. The minds of many were soon secondary casualties, whilst the rest retreated into dithering or sleepless cynicism, and learned to wear facemasks, and to weep and vomit quietly at the end of their shifts.

The net result, of course, is the end of another Age. When the country emerges from the war, some things may have been changed. Other things remain the same. Slavery may have been ended, but the condition of blacks is hardly improved.

And what are we to take from all this? I suspect it is the same MacLeod message: Change is Bad. In *The Light Ages* the focus was on political revolutionaries, and we were shown how in MacLeod's world revolution causes much death and destruction, but the only significant change it produces is to put the revolutionary leaders in charge of the government. *The House of Storms* focuses more on popular misconceptions of the reasons for change. The people of the East think that they are fighting to stop slavery, but they have been maneuvered into the war by powerful Londoners jealous of the wealth and contemptuous

of the lack of social graces of the West. The people of the West think that they are fighting to liberate their homeland from Eastern tyranny, but they are actually fighting to defend the slavery-based fortunes of their leaders.

Sometimes I think that Ian MacLeod is a far worse cynic than I am. Still, his fans will be happy with another example of his fine measured and elegant prose. I'm sure the book will do well, although some Americans may be offended if they think too much about his use of 9/11 imagery.

The House of Storms - Ian R. MacLeod - Simon & Schuster - hardcover

Awake and Dangerous

Richard Morgan is back home, and so is Takeshi Kovacs. For Morgan, home means back with science fiction as opposed to the techno thriller territory of *Market Forces*. And of course home means a new Kovacs novel, *Woken Furies*. For Tak, home is Harlan's world, the planet where he grew up before being drafted in the Envoy Corps. Tak is no longer an envoy, so he has retired, gone home and taken up a hobby. These days Tak no longer kills people because he's been ordered to do so; he kills them because he wants to.

There are of course jobs for capable mercenaries on Harlan's world, though none so lucrative that they could actually afford someone of Tak's caliber. Then again, when you have offended a powerful Yakuza boss and there is a price on your head, a short vacation into the badlands can have its attractions.

The badlands are bad because they are full of gear left over from the Quellist revolution, the Unsettlement War. There are mimints: Military Machine

Intelligences, with nanotech assembler capability and no masters. Someone has to clean them out. Which is why DeCom exists, and why Harlan's World needs mercenaries. But also out in the badlands, running through the parallel universe of data networks, there are ghosts. One of those ghosts claims to be Quellcrist Falconer herself.

And if a backup of Falconer really does exist, if she has found her way back into flesh again; and if she happens to have hooked up with a very dangerous ex-Envoy... Well, then the First Families have a right to be worried. They might even feel that they have the right to get a very special weapon out of storage. A weapon called Takeshi Kovacs.

It's the itch we all live with, the price of the modern age. What if? What if, at some nameless point in your life, they copy you. What if you're stored somewhere in the belly of some machine, living out who knows what parallel virtual existence or simply asleep, waiting to be released into the real world.

Morgan spends much of *Woken Furies* talking about the changes brought on by the technology that allows people to "re-sleeve" themselves in new bodies when the old ones wear out. There are a range of political, economic and social consequences, many of which he explores. After several hundred years of existence, and several different bodies, people get to think differently about life, in all sorts of different ways. They think differently about death too. For someone like Kovacs, who has seen death at first hand in overwhelming quantities, including his own, Real Death, not being able to come back, becomes much more terrifying than it is to us mere mortals.

Then again, there are always people prepared to reject the benefits of technology and demand a simpler way

of living. The people whom Tak is merrily slaughtering as a way of passing the time are the priests of the New Revelation, a patriarchal fundamentalist religion that takes the worst parts of such things here on Earth and melds them together into a loathsome whole. Morgan manages a level of vitriol about such people that has previously only been achieved by Sheri Tepper. Tak just kills them, for a very simple reason.

To a mind sunk in the psychosis of faith, the corollary was inescapable. Re-sleeving was an evil spawned in the black heart of human science, a derailing of the path to the afterlife and the presence of the godhead. An abomination.

Which is not to say that *Woken Furies* is a total rant. Morgan makes the point that a retreat into religious fundamentalism is often a natural reaction to encroaching poverty. When people no longer believe in the ability of their leaders, of science, or of a healthy economy to bring them the prosperous future that they desire, they often retreat into reliance on promises of a better life in the afterworld instead.

And, of course, not all believers are stupid. There is always an intellectual argument for rejecting scientific advances, or simply for rejecting change. Harlan's World is no different from our own in that respect.

Once you understand you've only got one life, you try so much harder to do things right. You forget about all that material stuff, all that decadence. You worry about this life, not what you might be able to do in your next body.

Not that this forms the core of the book. We are talking Richard Morgan here, after all. Long time fans will not be disappointed. *Woken Furies* charges along with the insane momentum of a starving vampire overdosed on speed. The body count quickly spirals impressively, and threatens to go stratospheric at any moment. It is no spoiler to say that just about every character whose name we are told ends up messily dead at some point or another during the book. Many of them are killed by Kovacs. Well, by one of him anyway.

The cause of most of this mayhem is Quellcris Falconer. Is the digital personality found by the DeCom data expert, Sylvie Oshima, really her, or is it just a construct programmed to mouth Quellist propaganda and stuffed with other people's memories? Does it matter? In the end, all a revolution really needs to get it going is a figurehead.

What we crave is revolutionary momentum. How we get it is almost irrelevant, and certainly not admitting of ethical debate – historical outcome will be the final moral arbiter.

Mao might have believed that political revolution grows out of the barrel of a gun. But it can leap fully formed from the brow of a software construct that can convincingly present itself as a re-born Quellcris Falconer. No wonder the First Families are worried.

I found *Woken Furies* to be crammed full of action and emotion, and no small amount of political and sociological speculation. Morgan is doing what he does best: blood, guts, sex, betrayal and fury at full speed, but sufficiently leavened with interesting questions to keep you thinking. The ending is splendidly science fictional, although

politically it is a terrible cop-opt and promises a far worse tyranny for Tak's homeworld than anything Konrad Harlan could dream up. But two things worry me about this book.

The first is all about publishing dynamics. *Market Forces* has been a hugely successful book. You can't go into any major bookstore in the UK without seeing huge piles of it lying around. It is what I believe is termed a "breakthrough book". Having broken through (to the mainstream market) however, can you go back? *Market Forces* will have appealed to two main groups of people. The first will be young males who get off on fantasies about being like its hero, Chris Faulkner: that is having sex with big-breasted media stars, doing Mad Max impressions on the streets of London, and being able to gun down members of the lower classes with impunity. The other group are left wingers who get the same sense of virtuous self-righteousness out of reading *Market Forces* that their right-wing equivalents get from Ann Coulter, and somehow manage to convince themselves that the book is a stunning and insightful critique of Capitalist society.

Neither of these groups will take kindly to *Woken Furies*. The car-driving crowd will not be able to follow all this talk about uploaded minds, needlecasting of personalities across the galaxy, tiny machines that can build tanks out of convenient piles of scrap, war satellites built by a long-lost Martian civilization and people who regard their bodies as merely convenient "sleeves" that they wear for a while. The opposing faction will not take kindly to their portrayal in *Woken Furies* as naive dreamers prepared to plunge their world into a holocaust for the sake of an unworkable and unwanted political idea. I will be

interested to see how *Woken Furies* sells, and what Morgan produces next.

The other interesting facet of the book is that Morgan spends much of it castigating political revolutionaries for selling out their well-meaning principles in search of an efficient, ruthless revolutionary movement and sufficient military strength to overthrow the current regime. Here he has a very good point. But there are people who try to bring about economic reform in a non-violent way. Some of them happen to be the very people that Morgan caricatures as greedy, bloodthirsty lunatics in *Market Forces*. I am reminded that having cake and eating it generally contravenes certain fundamental laws of physics.

Woken Furies - Richard Morgan - Gollancz - publisher's proof

Dogs of War

The problem with producing such a dark book as *Gardens of the Moon* is that you then have to top it. How is Steven Erikson going to do that? Why, by killing even more people, of course.

Duiker watched them stride westward, knowing that should he see them again, it would be from the ranks of the Malazan army. And somehow they would be less than human then. The game the mind must play to unleash destruction. He'd stood amidst the ranks more than once, sensing the soldiers alongside him seeking and finding that place in the mind, cold and silent, the place where husbands, fathers, wives and mothers became killers.

Technically *Deadhouse Gates* is a sequel to *Gardens of the Moon*. However, Erikson is working on such a huge canvass that he

is able to move a long way away from the story and characters of the first book. Paran's family is clearly key to the story because his sisters turn up in the new book. Tavore has become the new Imperial Adjunct, while Felisin has been sold into slavery. Felisin's story is one of the major plot threads of *Deadhouse Gates*.

Most of the Bridgeburners have stayed behind on the continent of Gernabackis, but Kamal and Fiddler have journeyed to another war-torn region: Seven Cities. Their main mission is humanitarian. Now that Apsalar (formerly Sorry) has been cured of possession by the assassin god, Cotillion, she wants to go home to her family. Crokus, the young thief from Darujhistan, has come with her. But Kamal has a few other ideas. Specifically he wants to try his assassin skills out on a new target: Empress Laseen.

Of course you can't go very far in the Malazan Empire without encountering a bloody war of some sort or another. Seven Cities has a lot of desert land populated by wild tribesmen much given to apocalyptic prophecies. The current story is that a priestess called Sha'ik will unite the tribes and drive the hated Malazans from their land. The continent is a tinderbox waiting for a spark.

As any good empire does, the Malazans firmly believe in setting a thief to catch a thief, or alternatively one group of mad barbarian tribesmen to kill other groups of mad barbarian tribesmen. Thus the forefront of the Malazan war effort will fall to Coltaine of the Wikan Black Crows. His men are very good at hit-and-run light cavalry actions. They don't have much experience of shepherding thousands of frightened refugees hundreds of miles across country, being harried by enemy armies all the way. As his enemies put it, Coltaine is trying to fight them with a chain of dogs leashed

to one arm. And rather badly behaved dogs at that. But the Wikans are proud. Given a job to do, they will do it or die trying.

One of the pleasures of reading Erikson is that he knows how to use light cavalry in battle. He also knows how to use his field engineers. Of course the typical Malazan sapper has all of the charm, good looks and friendly disposition of one of Sauron's orcs, which is why they make such effective soldiers. But Erikson has great fun making up entertaining traps with which to kill lots of the enemy and make very satisfying firework displays at the same time.

And because having only three main plot threads would be rather boring, Erikson introduces a fourth. For reasons I should not explain here, large numbers of shape-shifting demons – D'ivers and Soultaken – are converging on Seven Cities. There is something that they want there, and they are prepared to kill anything that gets in their way, especially each other.

Seven Cities was an ancient civilization, steeped in the power of antiquity, where Ascendants once walked on every trader track, every footpath, every lost road between forgotten places. It was said the sands hoarded power within their susurrating currents, that every stone had soaked up sorcery like blood, and that beneath every city lay the ruins of countless other cities, older cities, cities that went back to the First Empire itself.

The best aspect of Erikson's books, however, is his world building. You get a real sense of history from reading them. The books are very clearly set in a world that has seen many civilizations rise and fall, and whose current rulers have been around for some time. Plots arise out of history rather than being

free-floating. In addition the magic system continues to impress. It feels like it might actually be real, rather than something filched from *Dungeons & Dragons* rulebooks.

There will doubtless be some people who find the body count in Erikson's books troublesome. OK, so George Martin kills off lead characters at an alarming rate, but Erikson kills off everybody else at an alarming rate. Thankfully this doesn't bother me, and I'm fast becoming a fan of Erikson's work.

Deadhouse Gates - Steven Erikson - Tor publisher's proof

End Game

As you will see from the Out of Synch column, US readers will finally be able to get copies of John Meaney's *Paradox* in their local bookstores. The Pyr edition of the book has a blurb on the back by someone called Cheryl Morgan praising Meaney's writing. UK readers have, of course, already been able to buy *Context*, the second book in the Nulapeiron series. And now the final volume, *Resolution*, has hit the British bookstores.

American readers who have not been importing British books should probably stop here. Spoilers are inevitable, because *Paradox* doesn't really tell you what the story is about. *Paradox* is mainly an introduction to the world of Nulapeiron. It is one of those exploration of new and weird world novels that science fiction does so well. It is only really in *Context* that we finally find out who (or what) the bad guys really are. *Resolution*, of course, provides the final battle.

Structurally I'm not convinced that this was a wise idea. It seems to me that way

too much of the good stuff gets revealed in *Paradox*, leaving not enough mystery for the later two volumes. On the other hand, there is the whole question of the relationship between the Nulapeiron of the story and the Earth of The Pilots, whose tale is gradually told to the hero, Tom Corcorigan, as the books unfold. And there is a rather neat temporal paradox at the end.

As a third volume, *Resolution* does a perfectly fine job of tying together all of the loose ends created in the previous novels. Indeed I suspect it would work rather better if you read all three books in sequence, because I occasionally got a bit lost in the references back to Tom's childhood as described in *Paradox*. The sequences about The Pilots also do a good job of getting angry about the general stupidity of the human hive mind. But this is all that the book does. And when you have been socked on the jaw by something as imaginative as *Paradox* that might, rather unfairly, seem a bit of a letdown.

There is, of course, plenty of fine Meaney writing to keep you amused along the way. Indeed, being a "final conflict" novel, *Resolution* has a manic energy all of its own. It is genuine "save the world" stuff, with thousands of people dying along the way as Tom and his allies desperately look for a way to combat their enemy. But because I am a particularly hard to please sort of person, I am now looking forward eagerly to the next John Meaney novel because I know that will be something new and different that is going to make me go "wow!" all over again the way that *Paradox* did.

Resolution - John Meaney - Bantam - hardcover

Loving Through Time

Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* was a huge publishing sensation in the US when it first appeared a couple of years ago. Her love story about Henry and Clare, the former of whom flips uncontrollably back and forth through time apparently touched many hearts. It has been very well received in the UK as well, and now it is a nominee for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. So I had to read it. Or at least I had to try.

It is a long time since I found a book that I was unable to read. But after 10 pages of this book I was speed-reading, and after 20 pages I was certain that if I had to read another word about Henry and Clare I was going to throw up, which would make the nice flight attendants on my plane to San Francisco very unhappy with me. So I stopped.

I don't think that this is at all Audrey Niffenegger's fault. It was very clear from the few pages that I read that she is a very competent writer. She has just managed to write the sort of book that completely rubs me up the wrong way. Claude Lalumière, in his review of the book on *Infinity Plus*, says, "everything is just a tad too nice and naïve." Understatement of the year here. Reading *The Time Traveler's Wife* made me feel like I was being force-fed butter icing in vast quantities. Clearly I am in a minority here, and all of you readers who automatically rush out any buy any book that I dislike should be chasing after this one.

I'm annoyed about it too, because I really wanted to read this book and find out how it related to SF. Niffenegger was apparently a keen SF reader in her teens, but the book has been marketed as mainstream and seems to be associated with SF on the basis of the phrase "time traveler". Yet how much is it actually about time travel?

On the one hand, obviously very much so. It is clear from the little of the book I read, and the reviews I have consulted since, that Henry's traveling through time is central to the book. Niffenegger has written a love story in which the happy couple first meet when she is a child and he is an old man traveling back in time. At some point in the book they are of similar ages and get married, but living happily is difficult under the circumstances (and from the sound of some of the reviews seems to descend into bedroom farce at times, which makes me doubly glad I didn't read any further).

On the other hand, Niffenegger doesn't seem to make much attempt to justify what happens to Henry. There is some mumbling about a genetic ailment called chrono-displacement disorder, but no SF reader is going to take this seriously. It is about as believable as having Henry turn into a 6' tall invisible white rabbit at random intervals.

Long-time SF readers will know that there should now follow an "on the gripping hand," and it is this: I have a sneaking suspicion that *The Time Traveler's Wife* is a book that uses an SF trope but is not written like an SF book. I mean, let's be honest about this, it is a feel-good romance novel. It might use the idea of time travel as a prop, but I suspect it has far less in common with SF than, say, a Catherine Asaro novel. The book is not about science in any way, and the characters seem to be largely passive in response to Henry's temporal flightiness.

Now one of the interesting things about the Clarke judging panel is that they do deliberately involve people who are not from the SF industry. Does that explain how this book got on the shortlist? Who knows, the deliberations of judging panels can be hugely impenetrable. But for the sanity of the rest of the judges I

do hope that this isn't a case of one person holding out for a particular book.

The Time Traveler's Wife - Audrey Niffenegger - Vintage - mass market paperback

Killer Robots

The new Maxine McArthur novel, *Less than Human*, which has just been named best Australian SF novel of 2004 in the Aurealis Awards, abandons outer space for near-future Japan. The plot centers on robotics technician, Eleanor McGuire, and Assistant Inspector Ishihara, the police officer assigned to investigate apparent murders by factory robots.

The hard thing with any book like this is to portray Japanese culture convincingly. According to her biography, McArthur lived in Japan for 16 years, so she should know the country and its people quite well. But of course that is no guarantee. It is perfectly possible to live in an ex-pat community and never get to know the locals at all. My problem is that I don't know Japan well enough to know whether she got it right or not, and that worried me throughout the book. The family stuff seemed OK, but the Japanese police sounded suspiciously like they watched too many 1980s US TV cop shows. Then again, perhaps that is what Japanese cops do.

Aside from that the book chugs along well enough, and happily fails to follow the expected route. Initial problems with robots lead McGuire and Ishihara to the trail of a group of crazy cultists whose leader promises immortality by uploading their minds into computers. I think McArthur was trying to make a serious philosophical point about the relationship between humans and robots here – particularly the lectures about us

only building humanoid robots because we really wanted human-like slaves – but I never quite got what the point was.

My other concern about the book is the all too common one of heroes doing dumb things so that the author can get them into trouble, and villains doing dumb things so that the author can get her heroes out of trouble again. McArthur is by no means the only author guilty of this sort of thing. But I did think that the plots of her space opera novels hung together rather better than this attempt at cyberpunk. *Less than Human* isn't a bad book, but I think that McArthur has done better, and will do better again.

Less Than Human - Maxine McArthur - Aspect - mass market paperback

Fantasy Islands

One of the things I try to do when I go to Australia is seek out those books that have not yet made it outside of the continent. You never know what you might discover. If I am in Melbourne I make sure that I talk to Justin Ackroyd, but if I am only able to get to Sydney then the required stop is Galaxy Books. Last time I was there I came away with a few fantasy novels. *The Aware*, by Glenda Larke, is one of them. Thanks to Mark for the recommendation.

The bad news is that *The Aware* is the first volume of a trilogy called *The Isles of Glory*. The good news is that Larke has made a conscious effort not to write a formula fantasy novel. Admittedly Ace, for the US edition of the book due out next month, have managed to produce a cover with a scantily clad swordswoman riding My Little Sea-Pony. And yes, the central character is a woman, and there are sea ponies in the book (though I

don't think that they are so garishly colored). But if you have come to *The Aware* looking for comfort reading then you have come to the wrong place.

For reasons which I didn't quite understand, he said that he had to take the arm off just above the elbow, not at the joint. He made the first cut in her skin much lower down so he would have sufficient to fold over the stump later. Ransom fainted while he was explaining that bit.

Well, nothing like a little amputation to liven up the story. There's rape and torture too. *The Aware* isn't in the same league as, say, a Michael Cobley or Steven Erikson novel for gut-wrenching nastiness, but neither is it saccharine. It has a working plot (though with rather too much capturing and rescuing going on) and it has consequences for the characters.

Where I think the book falls down, and this is purely a matter of experience on the part of the writer, is that the emotional scenes are often not quite written well enough to bring the events home to the reader. Too often I felt myself observing what was going on rather than being involved in it. I hope this is something that Larke can fix in future novels, because she clearly has the ambition and courage to write interesting fantasy novels.

There is humor in the book as well. One of the somewhat different aspects of the book is that it is presented as the result of a series of interviews with the central character, Blaze Halfbreed. The author is a pompous twit called Shor Iso Fabold, who describes himself as a field anthropologist and claims to be investigating the culture of the Isles of Glory. Fabold doesn't believe any of Blaze's tales of sorcery. There is a prospect of an interesting third volume

here in which Fabold finally gets involved in his own story. That will be something of a wrench, given that he seems like the sort of fellow who would be much more at home in the drawing rooms of Georgian England.

Of course Larke may have had something very different in mind. Australians will know. The final volume of the trilogy, *The Tainted*, was a finalist for the recent Aurealis Awards (and it is absolutely no shame to get beaten by Sean Williams). Ace will presumably be bringing the other two volumes out over the next year or two, so US readers will not have to wait too long to find out what happens. And I won't have to rush off to Australia to get the other two books.

The Aware - Glenda Larke - Voyager - mass market paperback

That Old Black Magic

Still on the subject of Australian ladies, it is about time that I reviewed the final part of Trudi Canavan's *Black Magician* trilogy, so here it is. The earlier volumes: *The Magician's Guild* and *The Novice*, have told the story of how slum-kid Sonea get accepted to study magic and ends up as the personal student of the High Lord of the Magician's Guild. The final volume is, not unexpectedly, called *The High Lord*. Thankfully it gets away from the "unhappy schooldays" style of story that Canavan used in the earlier books. Even better, Canavan upsets expectations too.

The previous two books centered around the suspicion that High Lord Akkarin was a practitioner of black magic and might even have been responsible for a series of murders in the city. Towards the end of *The Novice* Canavan hinted that Akkarin had a good reason for what

he was doing. *The High Lord* takes that idea and runs with it. Before the reader quite knows what has happened, Sonea has not only accepted Akkarin's rationale, but is joining him in his campaign.

"Congratulations, Sonea," he said softly. "You are now a black magician."

She blinked in surprise. "That is all? It's that easy?"

He nodded. "Yes. The knowledge of how to kill in a moment, taught in a moment."

Well of course there is a good reason for all this. As you might guess, weapons themselves are not evil. It is the uses that they are put to that matter. Furthermore, if one side in a conflict adopts a particularly nasty weapon, the other side has to do the same if it wants to survive. The bulk of the book is spent resolving those issues.

The final volume of the series is much darker than the first two. But it is perhaps still too transparent. Canavan works very hard at setting up situations in which various characters misunderstand the motives of others and get angry with them. But because the reader has been told what the truth is, the reader is always remote from the emotional issues rather than involved with them. I'd like to see Canavan be a little less obvious in her story-telling in future.

On the other hand, Canavan is a natural storyteller. The plot chugs along happily throughout 600 pages without ever getting bogged down. Better still the ending is much less soppy than I'd expected. Of all of the crop of newer Australian writers, Canavan is the one who seems most likely to make it big. I am very much looking forward to seeing what she does next.

The High Lord – Trudi Canavan - Voyager – mass market paperback

Real Fairies

Last issue I took a quick look at one of the stories from *The Faery Reel*, an anthology from Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. Jeffrey Ford's "The Annals of Eelin-Ok" is a very strong contender for a Hugo nomination, but what about the rest of the book?

Well, it would be a miracle indeed if every single entry were as good as Ford's. But the book is still well worth checking out if you like fairy stories. The contributor list alone is enough to perk most people's interest. There is art by Charles Vess, poetry by Charles de Lint and Neil Gaiman, and stories by a veritable cornucopia of modern fantasists. OK, so the book is aimed at a Young Adult audience, but that doesn't mean that the stories are without edge. Indeed, younger people tend to be far less guilty of a love of comfort reading than their elders. Where Young Adult books are devoid of consequences that is generally because some adult decided that children ought to be protected, not because the kids asked for it.

The story opens with a teenage love story by Delia Sherman. Apparently the New York Public Library has an online catalog called CATNYP. In the faerie world it is, of course, a talking lion and full of wisdom about the world. Young love is also the subject of "Screaming for Faeries" by Ellen Steiber, a story that also explains some of the difficulties of being a babysitter in California.

"Do you want to get up for a bit? I bet there's some cookies or ice cream in the

fridge, and we could have them out on the deck."

"I'm not allowed to eat sugar."

"Well, then how about a glass of milk?"

"I'm lactose intolerant," she informed me. "And I'm allergic to soy. I can only have rice milk or sugar-free sorbet. And no peanuts. And my mother says nightshades give me mucus."

In Berkeley four-year-olds are very specific about their diets.

Other stories are more traditional fables. Gregory Frost and Hiromi Goto both draw on Japanese folklore. Frost tells a story of a young man betwixed by tengu, and Goto's heroine falls in with a bunch of kitsune, fox spirits. Holly Black uses Filipino folklore as the basis for her story, "The Night Market."

One of the other stories from the book that has been getting critical attention is "The Faery Handbag" by Kelly Link. It is a highly entertaining yarn about a young woman whose grandmother insists that her handbag has an entire fairy village inside it. Which is all very well until your boyfriend decides to see what fairyland is like and jumps inside it. Link has a lot of fun with the eccentric grandmother's habit of telling tall tales, apparently as an excuse for being able to cheat at Scrabble.

Environmental issues are generally a good bet with young women (and the book does seem to be pretty firmly aimed at young adult girls, not young adults in general). Patricia McKillip's "Undine" is a story of a water spirit who discovers that her river is drying up thanks to human interference.

But the best political story in the book, and a tale I like almost as much as Ford's, is Emma Bull's "De La Tierra". The hero of the story is a cyborg, a

human assassin turned into a super-powered killing machine by fairy magic. His employers are rich and powerful elves living in Southern California, and his job is to prevent spirits from South and Central America from sneaking across the border and muscling in on Los Angeles real estate. The story is a wonderful take on the whole North-South split in the Americas, and I'm adding it to my list of Hugo nominees.

The Faery Reel - Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (eds.) - Viking - hardcover

Dark Cities

There are times when it seems that people think the whole idea of an anthology is that it should be big. The more stories it has in it, the better reviews that it gets. *Leviathan*, you might have thought from its name, would be the very embodiment of this philosophy. But the fourth incarnation of the anthology would appear to break the mould. It contains only 10 stories, averaging around 25 pages each. And, unusually for the series, it has a theme.

Maybe this is something to do with the book having a new editor. Jeff Vandermeer has been busy making his name as a novelist, and *Leviathan* has been turned over, at least for this volume, to Forrest Aguirre. Whether it was his idea to go for a shorter, themed anthology or not, I don't know, but it seems to have worked.

The theme of *Leviathan* #4 is cities, and it contains a selection of stories from some masters of the surreal. It has Michael Cisco, Jay Lake, KJ Bishop and Stepan Chapman amongst the contributors. Most of the material is what might be called "dark fantasy", some of it verging on the decadent and other parts

unashamedly surreal (well, what would you expect from Chapman).

Talking of Chapman, just what can you say about someone who sets an entire story in a place called Plush City? For the benefit of non-Americans who may be unfamiliar with the term "plushie", this is a story inhabited entirely by toys; most of them stuffed animals of one type or another. And if you are thinking *Toy Story*, stop right now. Chapman is quite deliciously mad.

Much of the material is not easy to read. Things don't always make obvious sense in the stories, and indeed are not intended to. Stories may appear to have no meaning, or even no point to them. But they are always strange, and they are almost always interesting. It is very rare for me to find an anthology that I can just sit down and read through, cover to cover, but with *Leviathan #4* I was happy to do just that.

I don't think any of the stories in the book will make it onto my Hugo ballot. And indeed even if they did, most of them are so strange that I'd not expect them to gain a popular following. Nevertheless, *Leviathan #4* is a collection of good stories and well worth checking out if you are into weirdness.

Leviathan #4 - Forrest Aguirre (ed.) - Ministry of Whimsy Press - hardcover

Interview: Roger Robinson of Becon Publications

Becon Publications is a regular feature of British SF conventions, through its owner, Roger Robinson. The imprint is probably less well known outside the UK, but there is nothing like a Hugo nomination to raise your profile. Becon are the publishers of John Clute's recent

review collection, *Scores*. Other high profile releases may follow.

CHERYL: I guess the first thing that comes to mind, Roger, is that Becon is named after a science fiction convention, which I guess gives a clue to the origins of the company.

ROGER: Well, more a series of conventions that were run in the early 80's: 1981, 1983, 1985, and finishing with an Eastercon in 1987. It all really started when we decided to do a bibliography for our Guests of Honor, which I think all conventions should do.

CHERYL: Conventions do tend to publish books, so the company grew out of that, did it?

ROGER: It is hardly a company. It is the name I use for things that I publish, rather than a company.

CHERYL: Isn't that the nature of a lot of small presses?

ROGER: Oh yes, very much so. We all have small beginnings. Some of us don't get much further.

CHERYL: Well, you have published a lot of books.

ROGER: Over the years. I have been going at it for twenty years.

CHERYL: And indeed you have had at least one book Hugo-nominated.

ROGER: Just the one. That was *Scores*, the collection of reviews and essays by John Clute. But it could be the start of something.

CHERYL: So having grown out of conventions, obviously you have done a number of Guest of Honor books. I notice that there are a fair few fannish books in your catalogue as well.

ROGER: Oh yes. That's the stuff that doesn't get professionally printed. It gets photocopied, stapled, spiral-bound. Stuff

for conventions. It is not throwaway stuff, but it is less formal, shall we say.

CHERYL: You published a collection of articles from Ian Sorensen's *Conrunner* fanzine.

ROGER: Yes. Again that was something that came out of my involvement of running conventions. Ian wanted to do a *Best of Conrunner*. He chatted to me about how he should go about getting it done, and it finished up with me doing it.

CHERYL: Ian is going to be Fan Guest of Honor at next year's Eastercon. I wondered whether it might be worth re-issuing that one.

ROGER: Possibly not. I've not talked to Ian about it. But as with all of the stuff in *Conrunner* it will be dated somewhat. The book was published back in the mists of history in 1987. That is a long time ago in con-running terms. Conventions, and indeed Ian, have gone on since then.

CHERYL: In addition you have produced quite a few filk books: presumably lyrics, music and so on.

ROGER: Yes, the whole shebang. That again came out of people coming to me because they knew I had done some publishing and saying, "How should we go about doing this?" I'm not a filk performer myself: never have been, can't carry a tune in a bucket. But I have always been interested in listening to filk so I was happy to do the books.

CHERYL: You seem to have most of the big names in British filk there.

ROGER: Oh yes. Most of the books are what you might call anthologies rather than collections, so everyone is in them. From the very earliest days of Gytha North and Colin Fine, right up to Zander Nyron and beyond.

CHERYL: But Becon is by no means only fannish publications. There is a wide range of other things that you have been doing.

ROGER: Yes. One of the first ones, which came out of some research I was doing for myself, is the book of pseudonyms, *Who's Hugh?* It was the first major thing I had done. I published it in 1987 in time for the Brighton Worldcon. I got lots of nice comments back, including some additions. People like Charles Brown, Harlan Ellison and Forry Ackerman all sent suggestions. I've always been interested in research, and the warm reception that book got encouraged me to carry on. That's where the more serious side of Becon originated.

CHERYL: Presumably something like that needs to be updated on a fairly regular basis.

ROGER: Yes, sore point. I have been asked by lots of people whether I will do a second edition. And the answer is that with the advent of the Internet I don't think I will. There is a lot of work that has been done by other people. There is *Hawk's Pseudonyms* out. Etc., etc.

CHERYL: There's a list of pseudonyms in the back of the SFWA Handbook.

ROGER: Exactly. At the time, when I published *Who's Hugh?* before the Net came around I had twice as many entries than any other book, which was what was needed at the time. I was then overtaken by events.

CHERYL: Talking of names, you have a book by Bob Shaw. For the sake of clarity, which Bob Shaw?

ROGER: Bob Shaw the Northern Irish author, not Bob Shaw the Scottish fan.

CHERYL: So this is fiction, then?

ROGER: No, this is serious scientific talks that he gave at conventions. Well,

sort of serious. Anyone who knew Bob knew that "serious" was not his thing, and his scientific talks were very humorous. They were one of the few things at conventions that would empty the bar.

CHERYL: That's quite an achievement at a British convention.

ROGER: There had been several of these speeches collected in various fannish booklets to raise money for fan funds and get Bob over to Australia. John & Eve Harvey had published booklets of his talks. I collected all of the previous booklets, and a few unpublished speeches, and the book was published at the 1995 Eastercon, at which Bob was Guest of Honor. I was the Fan Guest of Honor, and the book was my tribute to the Pro Guest of Honor. Sadly that was Bob's last convention.

CHERYL: 1995 wasn't a very good year for British writers.

ROGER: No.

CHERYL: Let's hope that this year in Glasgow is a little happier.

ROGER: Yes.

CHERYL: Anyway, I mentioned earlier that you have published a collection of reviews by John Clute: *Scores*. How did you come to be doing that book?

ROGER: John had done two previous books: *Look at the Evidence* and *Strokes*. He wanted to do a third one, bringing his more recent reviews into book form. He talked to a number of academic presses, but they were taking an inordinate length of time, even for university presses. We were chatting over lunch one day and he said, "We could do this, couldn't we?" I looked at him and said, "Let's look into it, yeah."

ROGER: So I went away and got some figures: how much it would cost, how many copies we through we could sell.

The usual publishing stuff. And looking at the numbers we thought we could do it ourselves. Almost nine months to the day after that the book was on dealers' tables.

CHERYL: *Scores* is a book that created a lot of interest in the market, especially after the Hugo nomination. There were a lot of people in the US and other countries wanting copies. Did that bring new challenges?

ROGER: Oh yes. I had never had any distribution deal with anyone on any book I had published before. We did it ourselves through the mail. But for *Scores* I had already talked at the early planning stage with Mike Walsh of Old Earth Books, and also to the British dealer, Andy Richards of Cold Tonnage. As a result of that we got a very good US distribution deal through Old Earth. Andy Richards offered to take quite a few copies of a limited edition hardcover, so we did that too. This helped determine our print run and binding choices.

CHERYL: If we are talking about hardcovers presumably this means high quality printing, not Print-on-Demand.

ROGER: Oh yes. This book, and quite a few of the more serious books I have done, are properly printed, not Print-on-Demand. That, of course, means I have to put the money up front and wait for sales to get the money back, hopefully.

CHERYL: Is the Clute book selling well?

ROGER: Oh yes, we have gone into the black, at least as far as costs are concerned. Of course that means that neither John nor I have been paid for the work that we put into producing it. But we are now accruing money to have a drink at Christmas.

CHERYL: As I know only too well, there is not a lot of money to be made out of science fiction criticism. But at least there

is some satisfaction in knowing that people are buying copies of your book.

ROGER: Getting a Hugo nominations and being listed amongst the best books of the year is also very gratifying. It shows that there is a market out there. Albeit a rather small one, but there is a market.

CHERYL: Have you had any success with British bookstores? Or is it a case of them only dealing with big distribution chains?

ROGER: Well the big distribution chains haven't taken it at all. I do get orders from the book trade, but they don't come through any big deal I have done with anyone. I haven't got people like W.H. Smith interested, or indeed Waterstones or Borders.

CHERYL: I would be astonished if W.H. Smith were interested. You are not expecting to sell a million copies of the book, are you? But I'm also somewhat disappointed that the likes of Waterstones or Borders would not take a Hugo-nominated book.

ROGER: Ah, but when I was pitching it to them it wasn't yet Hugo-nominated, and it wasn't from a publisher that anyone in the bookstore chains had heard of before. They would have been buying a pig in a poke.

CHERYL: But you have another book of reviews coming up now. One by Gary K. Wolfe.

ROGER: That came out of the deal with John. He talked to Gary, who was again complaining about the length of time academic presses take to produce anything. So they hatched up a plan to persuade me to do a book by Gary. Given that Gary is one of the most respected book reviewers in the US – his column in *Locus* has been going for a long time now – I jumped at it.

CHERYL: Given the success that *Locus* has at winning Hugos, we might expect Gary's book not only to be nominated but perhaps even win. Then you could go back to Waterstones and Borders...

ROGER: Yes, I now have a track record.

CHERYL: We'll keep trying to get this sort of book on their shelves.

CHERYL: So Gary's book will be a collection of his reviews from *Locus*?

ROGER: Yes, spanning the years 1992 – 1996. It will be of similar length to the John Clute book: just over 200,000 words. It is a lot.

CHERYL: Gary's column tends to review several books in one go. Were there any problems in separating out reviews of individual books, or have you included columns as a whole?

ROGER: Gary did the editing down of the reviews he wished to include. He wanted to do five years, but there was more material in that period that we could include so he had to cull quite a bit. The editing I had to do afterwards was very minimal. There were a few places where references to other books had been left in by accident, but basically I had very little to do, for which I am very grateful.

CHERYL: And of course all of the material would have been copy-edited by *Locus* before you and Gary started work on it.

ROGER: Yes, the text came to be in an electronic form, but very clean. That helped immeasurably.

CHERYL: I notice that on your list of forthcoming books there is one by Elizabeth Hand. Is that a collection of her reviews from *The Washington Post*?

ROGER: No, this is going to be a novella. It is still only in the planning stage, but the idea is to do a limited edition hardback of one of her novellas. I

can't tell you much more right now, because we haven't decided all of the details. But, as usual, we looked at the project in its own right to see if we could do justice to the book as well as make financial sense. In this case we think we can, so we are doing the book. It is a new departure for me doing something like this.

CHERYL: Your first piece of big name fiction?

ROGER: I have published Bob Shaw, but that wasn't fiction. But I have published the great and the good before, in the *Book of Drabbles*. I did three of those books to raise money for charity.

CHERYL: For the benefit of readers, can you explain what a Drabble is?

ROGER: Stories of exactly 100 words. Not a penny more, not a penny less.

CHERYL: Do the authors quibble with hyphenated words?

ROGER: Oh yes. You have to read the rules, which are themselves 100 words long. The last sentence of the rules is, "Hyphenated words are argued about."

CHERYL: So how did all this come about?

ROGER: The thing was started by two guys at Birmingham University: Rob Meades and Dave Wake. They got the idea from somewhere, in a bar probably. They wanted to do a little fanzine with 10 or so of these stories in. They wrote to five authors hoping to get one story to include, and they got four out of the five. So they thought that the idea might catch on and they could get more authors, in which case they needed to do a book rather than a fanzine, and they came to me. Instead of being a fannish pamphlet of 10 stories it turned out to be 1,000 copies of 100 stories of 100 words, published on the 100th day of the year, and costing 100 Shillings. Translating for

the hard of memory or Americans, that's five pounds. Or at least was five pounds.

CHERYL: You've had a number of big names write these things for your books?

ROGER: The first book had Asimov, the second had Clarke. The third book, unfortunately, didn't have Heinlein as he had been long gone. But we also had Cherryh, Zelazny, Sterling, Brunner, etc.

CHERYL: And you have published three of these?

ROGER: Yes. The first two were general SF. Although in fact we never asked people to write SF stories. We asked SF writers to produce stories, and most of them wrote SF but some didn't. The third book was a *Doctor Who* special. Again we had 100 pieces. The contributors included two Doctors, two Companions, lots of the scriptwriters, backroom boys, and of course fans. It was published for the 30th anniversary of *Dr. Who* convention.

CHERYL: You said that these were charity projects.

ROGER: All three Drabble books, and some of the other books I have published, were done to raise money for Books for the Blind. Book #1 and book #3 are sold out. We still have a few of #2 left. And we have raised over £5,000 for the RNIB's talking books program.

CHERYL: Any chance of another one in the near future?

ROGER: This is another one of the regular questions I get: "Ah, Rog, when are you going to do another Drabble book?" To which I reply that I only publish them, I don't edit them. We have never said we won't.

CHERYL: Well I guess that if authors want to see another Drabble book they can always write to me and I'll pass their names on to you. When you have enough we'll have a project.

ROGER: It is something I think we will do eventually, but there are no specific plans at the moment.

CHERYL: Coming back to the SF Criticism, you have a book by Paul Kincaid, *A Very British Genre*.

ROGER: One of the things I do is that I have been involved in the British Science Fiction Association for a long time. Paul asked me about getting a book published, and it finished up that it was published under the Becon imprint. Basically I lent the BSFA an ISBN. But I was very happy to be publishing it because I know Paul's work. It is a very nice little booklet.

ROGER: As you were saying about other things, it probably needs updating now, but that is the way with all reference books.

CHERYL: Yes, it is subtitled, *A Short History of British Fantasy and Science Fiction*, but that history has moved on since 1995.

ROGER: It was written as an introductory work for the benefit of people who contacted the BSFA and wanted to know more about SF. From that point of view it is still quite useful.

CHERYL: Talking about reference books, you have published a book called *Recommended Science Fiction*. You are listed as the compiler so presumably these are your recommendations.

ROGER: No. Although I agree with lots of them, I do disagree heartily with some of them. This came out of another involvement I have, which is with the Science Fiction Foundation. I have been on the committee for some time. When the library moved up to Liverpool one of the things that we wanted to do was make sure that the library had all of the relevant major books. But what books were they? I offered to produce a listing. And in discussion it was agreed that

books that had been nominated for each of the major awards each year should be in a major library. We also wanted to include books that were listed in other major reference works such as *Anatomy of Wonder*. So I produced this wants list, basically for the internal consumption of the Foundation. And we ended up publishing it.

CHERYL: So is the book simply a list of titles, or is there some commentary associated with each book?

ROGER: There's no commentary, but the book does go beyond just award winners. It gives the listing of the nominees as well, which is very important because in any one year it isn't everyone's best book that wins and award. Sometimes it is everyone's second choice.

CHERYL: Or even worse. However...

CHERYL: Again that book was 1949 to 1997. Yet another book that needs updating?

ROGER: That one I am actually keeping the database that I used up to date. I've also added a few new awards that I had not included before. So I have the data to produce a new edition. I may well do that, as the book has made its money back and a small profit for the Foundation.

CHERYL: Aside from the Wolfe and the Hand, are there any projects that you are working on at the moment.

ROGER: Going back to the filk, there will be a filk book for this year's Worldcon in Glasgow.

CHERYL: Ah, I was wondering if you might be doing something for that.

ROGER: Also a British book dealer called Bob Wardzinski, who is also a school teacher, is producing a book in aid of his school and their twin school in South Africa. I'm helping him with that,

and the book is coming out in February this year. Bob has got the great and the good of the dark fantasy world to provide stories for it.

CHERYL: Are there any other books that you are particularly proud of?

ROGER: On the reference side there are a couple of books by other people that I'd like to mention. We have a bibliography of E.C. (Ted) Tubb, a British author from the 50's who is actually still writing even though he's in his 80's now. Sean Wallace (of Prime Books) and Phil Harbottle put together the book, which is called *The Tall Adventurer: The Works of E.C. Tubb*. I was very happy to publish it.

ROGER: Another book came out of some fanzine articles. *Once There Was a Magazine* is a series of articles written by Glasgow fan Fred Smith about *Unknown* magazine. He wrote a synopsis and criticism of each issue, originally in the Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer's fanzine, *Banana Wings*. We were very happy to collect them into a book. For the first time ever it includes a cross-reference between the British and American editions of the magazine. For various complicated reasons *Unknown* was actually published in the UK for six years after the US version folded. But we've got indexes done every which way: by letter writer, by cover artist, by internal artists, by whatever.

CHERYL: It sounds like a fabulous reference work.

ROGER: Yes, but it is a good read as well because the first half of the book is a very personal review of each issue of the magazine, including background information about how the stories came to be written and their relationship to the rest of the authors' works.

ROGER: I note also that the indexes were done, as all good bibliographies should be, from the original magazines

themselves, not from other listings. We corrected quite a few errors in previous works.

CHERYL: Do you take submissions at all? If someone out there had an idea for a similar reference work, could they approach you?

ROGER: They could approach me. I don't say that I'll do it. I don't say I'll even consider it that hard. So far I have always done books for people I have known, or people I have been introduced to by friends. Raw submissions might get short shrift.

ROGER: But then they might not. I don't have a plan that says I most only do X books a year or similar. It is very much on an "as and when" basis. I've always tried to cover my costs, but I'm not looking to make profits for myself. Becon is a hobby.

CHERYL: You have a dealer's tables at a number of conventions: Eastercons, Novacons and similar. Is this a profitable means of selling Becon books?

ROGER: Not necessarily, but I'm not always bearing the full cost of the table. I tend to help run the Foundation table, so we have a joint table between Foundation, myself as Becon, and the Liverpool University Press.

CHERYL: It helps to have other people to staff the table some of the time.

ROGER: Yes. I hope to sell quite a few books at Worldcon. But at smaller conventions it is a place to sit, and people can find you easily because they will always know where you are.

CHERYL: Well hopefully a few people reading this will come and seek you out in Glasgow.

ROGER: Indeed. Or they can contact me by email <beccon@dial.pipex.com>. I don't yet have a web site, but I'm hoping to put that right soon.

CHERYL: Roger Robinson, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

Aliens Among Us

"It is exceedingly undesirable to become associated with these 'sightings' or the person originating them... On no account should any indication be given to others that a discussion even remotely concerned with UFOs is taking place."

Newsletter from the Smithsonian
Astrophysical Observatory

There are grades of social undesirability in all forms of life. In fandom, lit fans look down on media fans, and media fans look down on furies. But just about everyone looks down on people who believe in UFOs. Except, it would appear, Bryan Appleyard.

Appleyard, for those of you who don't know, is a senior journalist on the *Sunday Times*. He is a science writer, and science fiction reviewer. He is very well respected in the UK for his writings on science and culture. But he is well aware that his latest venture might doom his career. It is hard to write about UFOs with any seriousness and not get granted honorary anorak-hood.

That, however, would be very unfair, for *Aliens: Why They Are Here* is a fine book. Appleyard does not, anywhere in the book, insist that UFOs are real in the same way that, say, tigers or aircraft are real. But he does ask us to stop and think about why, to thousands if not millions, of people around the world, UFOs are just as real as fairies and demons were to our forebears. Many people in Western society appear to have a desperate need to believe in UFOs. And many of them seem very sane and ordinary apart from

this fixation. There must be some reason for this. Besides, what happens if they are right?

"I understood this myself when I read your novel The Time Machine. All human conceptions are on the scale of our planet. They are based on the pretension that the technical potential, although it will develop, will never exceed 'terrestrial limit'."

"If we succeed in establishing interplanetary communications, all our philosophies, moral and social views will have to be revised."

V.I. Lenin in conversation with H.G.
Wells

The first half of Appleyard's book is given over to cataloguing the various types of UFO belief. From the (supposed but not actual) earliest sightings near Seattle, he moves forward to stories of contact, of abduction, of cattle mutilation, of Area 51, and on through Steiber, von Daniken, and the Heaven's Gate cult. Appleyard also defines three types of explanation for UFO beliefs: "nuts & bolts", which postulates that they are really here; "third realm", essentially a mystical explanation; and "psychosocial", which attempts to explain why people might imagine such things.

The second half of the book poses questions. It looks at the history of human views of our relationship with the cosmos from Ptolemy onwards, and gives some ideas as to how and why our minds might have developed their present day obsession with aliens.

Along the way, Appleyard illustrates his narrative with examples from science fiction. He quotes Greg Bear and *Star Trek*, and devotes entire chapters to Philip K. Dick and Stanislaw Lem. The reason he does this is because one of the primary roles of SF is to address

mankind's relationship to the cosmos, and our potential interactions with extraterrestrials, should they exist. Appleyard also acknowledges something that many SF writers have been saying for some time now: we live in a science-fictional world.

"There may have been a time in the morning of the world, before Sputnik, when the empires of our SF dreams were governed according to rules neatly written out in the pages of Astounding and we could all play the game of a future we all shared, readers, writers, fans... But something happened. The future began to come true."

John Clute

Obviously in a work of such breadth there will be the occasional glitch. The really obvious one that most fans reading the book will gag on is where Appleyard describes *Dungeons & Dragons* as "a board game." He also seems to have a very low opinion of the feasibility of quantum entanglement as a communications device, but that's probably because he only talked to one expert about it.

The main problem with the book, however, if indeed it is fair to call it a problem, is that it makes you think too much. Appleyard throws out lots of ideas, and the natural reaction of an SF reader is to go and run with them. My own meanderings centered on the inability of many humans to distinguish fact from fiction, or at least belief in fact from the examination of fiction.

As the quote that introduces this review makes clear, it is very dangerous to express any interest in UFOlogy, because most people will automatically assume that you are a believer and therefore a nutter. Appleyard only mentions science fiction conventions once in the book, and

he does so in the context of *Galaxy Quest*, trotting out the tired old cliché that SF fans not only believe in UFOs, but also believe that shows like *Star Trek* are real. And this despite the fact that Appleyard happily quotes numerous SF writers and critical works, and seems like just the sort of chap who would be very at home in the sort of conventions I go to.

There are wider issues here too. Why is it that the Heaven's Gate cult were nutters for believing that they would be taken up by aliens, but fundamentalist Christians are not crazy for believing in The Rapture? It isn't just because the Heaven's Gate folks all killed themselves. And why is it that millions of Britons who obsess over the behavior of characters on *Eastenders*, *Coronation Street* and *Neighbours* are deemed sane whereas people who obsess over *Star Trek* are mad?

Part of it seems to be the whole question of what one is prepared to accept as a proposition. It is in fact a question of suspension of disbelief. People who don't have the ability to process the idea of an imaginary world cannot accept the idea that other people can do so while simultaneously maintaining an understanding of its fictional nature. There is a commonly believed meme that it is impossible to watch and enjoy *Star Trek* unless you believe that it is real. And that meme may exist because most people who watch *Eastenders* only do so because it could be real (well, almost). The whole fuss over Bobby Ewing dreaming vast parts of *Dallas* happened precisely because it caused many viewers to lose their suspension of disbelief.

Appleyard himself is guilty of this sort of literalism occasionally. He chides SF TV shows for the anthropomorphic nature of their aliens, although of course the primary reason for this is budgetary. Those shows that did try to be more

imaginative in the past ended up with things like the most feared and aggressive species in the galaxy being apparently unable to climb stairs. With CGI, aliens will get a lot more interesting.

Appleyard then goes on to chide SF writers for not making aliens alien enough. (I note that he doesn't quote Gwyneth Jones anywhere, which perhaps means he needs to read her *Aleutian Trilogy*.) But again the objective of an SF writer is not always to produce a believable alien. Take the Karen Traviss novel reviewed in this issue, for example. It is quite true that the isenj, once you get past their appearance, are very much like humans. But that, I think, is the whole point. Traviss deliberately created an alien race that would be utterly repulsive to humans (spiders with piranha faces), and then dropped in the delicious irony that they are far more like us than the other, more cute alien species she uses.

I could go on like this for some time. Appleyard got my mind wandering all over the place. In particular I want to take issue with Agent Smith about the uniqueness of human destruction of the environment. But this review is quite long enough as it is and hopefully I have given you a good idea of just how much interesting stuff is in the book. I do hope that Appleyard can be persuaded to come to Worldcon. His knowledge of SF alone would make him a wonderful panelist. And given the number of times he quotes him, Appleyard is presumably an admirer of one of our Guests of Honour, Robert Sheckley. Doubtless the tabloid newspapers will make much of an SF convention having a talk about UFOs, but one might hope that the *Sunday Times* would give us more balanced coverage.

And finally, here is a thought from Appleyard for all of you conspiracy theorists out there.

Extraterrestrials were the first – and they remain the most vivid – expression of the postwar cover-up culture. This is a culture of discomfort, fear, uncertainty and loss of the apparent anchor of the self. It is the culture of alien abduction. The aliens emerged from the depths of a widening abyss between government and people, between those thought to be in the know and those fearful that they are not. And since, for the moment, there is no prospect of that abyss ever narrowing to its former proportions, the aliens are here to stay.

The truth is out there. Karl Rove and Alastair Campbell have found it.

Aliens: Why They Are Here – Bryan Appleyard
- Scribner – publisher's proof

The State of Fandom in Latvia

By Toms Kreicbergs

To gain a good idea of the state of speculative fiction fandom in Latvia, one should first understand the historical circumstances under which the country was formed. The three Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which sit on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea just west of Russia, were states of the Soviet Union for the best part of the 20th century after Stalin annexed them under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. They only regained their independence, first formed in the second decade of the 20th century, fourteen years ago. Therefore, for most of the years when speculative fiction was experiencing its greatest

growth and development in the US and elsewhere, the scene of such literature in Latvia was controlled strictly by what the USSR bureaus of literature and censorship thought would be good for the State.

It is, then, not highly surprising that the only work of science fiction written in the Latvian language in the 20th century was actually written before World War II. The work, *Sidrabota Saule Leca* (*Sun of Silver Rising*) by Skuju Fridis (real name Gotfrids Milbergs) was a product of its time and is somewhat similar in scope if nothing else to the works produced in the first Golden Age of American SF. The work appropriately included global wars and told the readers, who remembered well the previous Russian rule of the territory, of the annihilation of Russian troops by a satisfying array of invisible rays, incredibly powerful light beams (lasers) and other arcane devices. Perhaps Mr. Fridis, an officer in the Latvian army, was a visionary of a kind, but history demonstrated he was overly optimistic about Latvia's capabilities in the weapons and self-defense departments. Latvia was occupied without any resistance in 1939 and, under Soviet rule, Mr. Fridis was rewarded for his groundbreaking efforts by deportation to the easternmost ranges of the USSR, where he was shot in 1942.

While it is true that Mr. Fridis appears to have been the only Latvian to have so far published a novel in Latvian that was obviously and intentionally science fiction or fantasy (there have been more cross-genre works), that does not mean that science fiction and fantasy were and are not read in Latvia and that fandom is nonexistent. In fact, despite the censorship, science fiction, quite naturally with a good dose of communist propaganda added, was very popular in the Soviet era. Western readers will perhaps be familiar with the

works of such greats as the brothers Strugatski (*The Roadside Picnic*) and Stanislaw Lem (*Solaris*), but these were not the only quality science-fiction writers operating in the Soviet Union at the time. Particularly prominent writers include Alexander Belyaev (*Professor Dowell's Head*), Kir Bulychev (*The Girl From The Future*) and Vladimir Mikhailov (*My Brother's Keeper*; Mr. Mikhailov actually lived and worked in Latvia for quite some time). It is possible science fiction became so popular among Soviet authors because it allowed them more freedom of expression than censors would permit in mainstream fiction (though outright criticisms of communism were, of course, never allowed). Many US authors with worldviews more acceptable to the Soviet authorities (or at least not clearly libertarian) were published in translation, with Robert Sheckley, Phillip K. Dick, Ray Bradbury, Ursula K. le Guin and Isaac Asimov among them. That a generation of Soviet children grew up with such masterpieces as Asimov's *I, Robot* and Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* undoubtedly only spurred the development of SF within the Union.

Fantasy, on the other hand, was almost nonexistent, except in children's literature, where translations of the *Moomins* of Finn Tove Jansson¹, along with Astrid Lindgren's *Karlsson-on-the-Roof* and *Brothers Lionheart*, maintained a love of the fantastic in many. Also prominent was the interesting innovation of rewriting Western children's masterpieces to suit Soviet needs - the most famous example of that was Alexander Volkov's *Magician of the Emerald City*, an obvious (and

¹ If you don't know what I'm talking about, go to Amazon or somewhere else and get one of the original Moomin books right now - child or adult, you won't regret it

unacknowledged) reworking of Baum's yellow-brick-road classic. Not all Soviet children's fiction was fake, of course – there were also such impressive and interesting works as N. Nosov's *Dunno in the City of Sun* and *Dunno on the Moon*, which featured great kids' writing complete with Soviet ideology (for instance, the latter work depicted the degradation of a capitalistic society on the Moon, viewed from the safe and superior vantage point of a member of the collective society of Earth). As far as adult fantasy goes, however, there was none – it is probable that the freedom of thought offered by the fantasy genre was not acceptable to the State.

Despite the relative availability of science fiction, no organized fandom existed in Latvia during the Soviet era. Forward-looking science fiction which portrayed the world as it would be when Lenin's truth had been brought to all the workers of the world was all fine and well, but it is unlikely the authorities would have approved of organizations that dealt solely with discussing what were, in the end, considered flights of fancy. There were such great organizations as the Communistic Youth to join for the young, after all, and the adults – well, the adults had to work for the betterment of the State; they certainly couldn't spend time on such trivialities.

That is a bit of an exaggeration, since fandoms did start in some other Soviet Republics (for instance, Lithuania's fandom started in the eighties and is now the biggest in the Baltics). Such sentiments were, however, more prominent even than the scorn of Western academics and mainstream writers/readers express for "genre" literature, and had significant detrimental effects on the development of organized fandom. Also, it is possible that the thought of organizing fandom didn't occur to many people, since the

USSR was isolated from the outside world, and Soviet fans hardly knew about the activities of their foreign counterparts.

Things changed after the collapse of the USSR, but not immediately for the better. For the first few years of transition to a market economy, Latvians were just too busy providing for themselves and trying to figure out the new capitalist system to worry much about such luxuries as reading SF. An occasional work was published in translation (Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, an unlikely pair, are most prominent in my memories of 10-year-oldness) but quickly slid into obscurity. Even the science fiction of the Soviet era was forgotten and, for some years, science fiction and fantasy didn't exist at all as far as the vast majority of the Latvian public was concerned. Only a very quiet minority of fans existed that even made two attempts at organized fandom in 1990 and 1994, but in both cases lack of motivation and manpower doomed the efforts to failure.

A note must be made here that science fiction and fantasy were not dead at all among the Russian public (since the Soviet era, some 30% of Latvia's inhabitants are ethnic Russians), and large numbers of cheap original works and translations were available in bookstores across Riga in the Russian language. Since society in Latvia was at the time (and still is) quite divided, this enthusiasm about the genre did not spill over to the Latvian public very much (even though the already-existent fans read mostly in Russian due to the sheer quantity of books available).

With time, some new Latvian translations did appear in bookstores. The main source of those for much of the nineties was publisher Imants Belogrivs, a figure well-known in some circles of

European fandom and owner of publishing house Hekate. Hekate was, and to this date remains, the only speculative-fiction-only publisher in Latvia. In the middle of the nineties it published Ursula le Guin's magnificent *Earthsea* series; later publications have included Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer* and Robert Silverberg's *Downward to the Earth*. The main accomplishment of these books was to introduce young readers such as myself to the genre. The small number of real fans scattered throughout Latvia still read mostly in Russian and, some cases, English. Towards the end of the decade, a group of such enthusiasts met regularly in Riga, in private apartments and cafes, and started discussing the formation of organized fandom. Imants Belogrivs was again a big motivational figure in this group.

The Latvian Society of Science Fiction and Fantasy (referred to informally as LFFB, which stands for Latvijas Fantastikas un Fantazijas Biedriba) was finally formed in the winter of 2000, with Aivars Liepa as its president. At this time, public recognition of the genre was still almost nonexistent, and the Society attracted only some thirty members in Riga. The members of LFFB met (and still do meet) every Thursday in cafes and bars (the actual locale would change from time to time as the owners of one café after the other decided they didn't want people who talked about books and played cards, but never ordered much, around). Some forty odd books in English and Russian were donated to start a Society library, which quickly grew to a significantly larger collection as more books in Russian were donated.

The first Latcon was held in 2001 and attracted most of the members of the Society but few others. In the meantime, ties were being built with the fandoms of Scandinavian countries with the help of

the Cross Baltic Fandom List (cbfl at dang.se) and such enthusiastic, well-known and omnipresent leaders of Scandinavian fandom as Swede Ahrvid Engholm. The Latcon of 2002, which took place in September of the year, was also the Baltcon and attracted some ten to fifteen foreign visitors, including Lars-Olov Strandberg (Fan GoH for the upcoming Glasgow Worldcon), the aforementioned Ahrvid Engholm and also Irma Hirsjarvi (the well-loved Finnish "grandmother of science fiction" mentioned by Cheryl in her Finncon report). Local attendance was still unimpressive, unfortunately, with some forty to fifty Latvian attendees over the whole weekend estimated, but the event helped significantly in forming ties between the fandoms of Latvia, Finland and Sweden. The con featured lectures on various issues of the fantastic and a reading by the Latvian translator of Tolkien's (as-of-then still unpublished in Latvia) *Lord of the Rings*. Most of the foreign guests also went on a memorable trip to the Ventspils Radio Observatory and the surrounding military town, a haunting ghost city right out of post-apocalyptic SF.

Collaboration with Scandinavian fandom continued on the CBFL, with several Latvian fans visiting Swecons and Finncons (I've had the latter pleasure twice so far, and I plan to keep going back - the Finns know how to run their cons). The first Baltic short story competition, Baltastica, was run by the CBFL in 2003. For an international first-time competition with limited prizes, Baltastica attracted a good 60 submissions with some very nice writing, but, though being open to all the countries around the Baltic Sea and with judges from many countries, received entries only from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland and Denmark. This demonstrated that, with the exception of some activists such as yours truly, fans

in countries with younger fandoms were caught up in internal fandom issues and not yet that eager on international exchanges. The fact that entries had to be submitted in English was also a factor, since most adult Scandinavians' level of English is higher than that of, say, most Latvians.

The most dramatic developments in Latvian fandom have occurred literally within the past two, three years, spurred in the most direct fashion by the release of such mass entertainment products as the new *Star Wars* episodes, the *Lord of the Rings* films and the *Matrix* saga, along with the huge popularity of the *Harry Potter* books. *The Lord of the Rings* in particular brought with it a sudden realization of the fantasy genre's existence to large numbers of the public, and the trilogy in book form, published for the first time concurrently with the films, has been a bestseller. This has so far resulted in little "serious" science fiction and fantasy being published, but there has been a sharp rise in children's and young adult's fantasy publication². More importantly, large numbers of young fans have appeared all across the country, some of those in their teens joining the Society, others posting actively on popular sites and message boards as www.lffb.lv (webpage of the Latvian Society of Science Fiction and Fantasy) and www.kurbijkurne.lv (a Harry Potter discussion forum that has a section on *The Lord of the Rings* as well). The effect of this boom on LFFB meetings has been quite obvious, with large monthly gatherings now held during the wintertime that include lectures and presentations. These monthly meetings draw larger audiences

² Including hackneyed and disgustingly obvious Potter clones such as "Tanya Grotter and The Magic Double Bass"

than the full member count of the Baltcon of just a few years ago.

Reading and discussing genre literature is just a small part of what the fandom is about these days, however. Cinema, Japanese animation, Live-Action Role Playing, tabletop RPGs, card games such as *Magic the Gathering* (popular for years with a significant adult player base), games for younger audiences based on popular anime series, and other related activities are often bigger with fans than appreciation of the original literature itself. Many, including myself, consider this somewhat alarming as far as the future of the fandom is concerned. A number of members who did not enjoy the inevitable RPG discussions that would inevitably take over weekly meetings have become alienated from the organized fandom.

Overall, however, the future of Latvian fandom seems promising, with the member count of the Society still growing and more genre publications appearing likely in the near future. It is somewhat disconcerting that almost no original Latvian science fiction and fantasy is being published (the exceptions are some stories in the popular science magazine *Terra*), but, with the increase in numbers, this will hopefully change. Not too far in the future SF and fantasy should enjoy at least the same level of grudging public recognition as in the US, and we shall probably see larger conventions and more international collaboration. I suggest all readers check convention schedules over the coming years to see if there's something good to attend in sunny (or snowy, as the case may on occasion be) Riga.

On a closing note, I am, at this point, as good as an LFFB apostate. As I now live mostly in the US, this is as much a look from the outside as an insider's view from the time I did spend with the

Latvian Science Fiction and Fantasy Society from 2001 to 2003. Thanks go to Aivars Liepa for some of the information used in this article, but any factual errors are my own.

Preserving Rotsler

Kevin and I managed to pop into Corflu for a few hours before I needed to get home, get this issue finished and get some sleep. There may be a more extensive report next month, but here are some brief highlights. The most substantive rumors to come out of the convention are that Tracy Benton has taken up Theosophy (and makes it sound a lot more sensible than Madame Blavatsky ever did) and that US fandom is convinced that "Geneva Melzack" is one of Claire Brialey's pseudonyms. The most important part of Saturday's program, however, was the Business Meeting of the World Society of Fanzine Subscribers (WSFS), the governing body of fanzine fandom.

There were two main items of business before the Business Meeting this year. The first, requiring that all Corflus hold a ceremonial burning of e-fanzines (and their editors) failed because the proposer, rich brown, failed to attend the convention. The other item was the ratification of the so-called Hecto Treaty, first passed at last year's Corflu, and designed to preserve fandom's dwindling stocks of Rotsler Art.

As you will doubtless be aware, Rotsler Art has been a major input to fanzines for many decades now. Indeed, the invention of Rotsler Art has been credited with spawning the vast growth in fanzine activity during the latter part of the Twentieth Century. It is now widely believed that the fanzine

economy cannot continue without ample supplies of Rotsler Art to keep it going.

But, as Prof. Marty Cantor, an expert in Rotsler Art exploration, explained, existing stocks of Rotsler Art are limited. Although vast quantities of it were laid down fannish aeons ago, no new Rotsler Art is being created, nor is it likely to be in the foreseeable future. Fandom must subsist on its existing and dwindling supplies of this vital commodity. The Hecto Treaty is an international agreement designed to encourage conservation of Rotsler Art stocks by fanzine editors around the world.

The debate began with yet another round of discussion concerning the need for conservation measures. The UK delegation stressed the need to concentrate on new technology. They pointed to the development of fanzines that can be run on a substance called Mason Art, which can still be produced in large quantities from a natural supply in Manchester. Technologically ~~superfluous~~ sophisticated new zines such as the famous *Plokta* model are capable of running entirely on Mason Art.

However, many US fanzine editors are still very conservative and unwilling to try new technologies. A delegate from Texas stated that no red-blooded American fanzine editor would ever use art by a foreigner, and a woman to boot. The delegation from Alabama said that if Rotsler Art had been good enough for God when he pubbed the Bible then it should be good enough for fanzine editors today. At this point the delegation from Berkeley proposed an amendment that would legalize the use of same-sex art in fanzines. The chairman, Mr. Roscoe, ruled this out of order on the grounds that it was dilatory. A second amendment, from the Australian delegation, that the meeting adjourn for beer (or coffee for the wussy

Americans if they must) was passed unanimously.

After a considerable amount of beer and coffee had been consumed, the delegates were ready to reach a consensus. I was pleased to see that some of my suggestions had been taken on board and that a market-based mechanism for Rotsler Art preservation will be adopted. The basis of the system will be as follows:

In future all fanzines wishing to use a piece of Rotsler Art for illustration must purchase a Consent to Reproduce (ConRep).

The number of ConReps made available each year will be set by the WSFS Business Meeting at that year's Corflu.

ConReps will be traded at auction on the Fanzine Ocular Stimulation & Fine Art eXchange (FOSFAX).

Only fanzines that have been granted an official NESFA Fanzine Control Number may possess ConReps.

Bilateral trading of ConReps between qualified fanzines outside of FOSFAX is permitted provided that both parties to the transaction notify FOSFAX of the transaction.

Daily reports of ConRep prices will be broadcast on PNN's *Fanac Report* program.

Fanzine editors wishing to trade in ConReps must complete a Form 770 and file it with the Registrar, Mike Glycer, as soon as possible. In return they will be issued with a License to Own ConReps (LOC). It will be illegal for a fanzine to have a ConRep without a LOC.

Fanzine editors who fail to abide by the rules of the Hecto Treaty and publish Rotsler Art without an associated ConRep and LOC will be publicly humiliated in the pages of *Ansible*.

(With thanks to Bill Humphries for the idea.)

Short Stuff

With the Hugo Nomination deadline fast approaching I have been trying to read some of the online short fiction that people have been recommending. Sadly I haven't got very far, but here are a couple of comments.

My first instinct was to go for Suzette Hayden Elgin's novelette, "We Have Always Spoken Panglish" <http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/elgin/index.html>, primarily because Elgin on language is normally very interesting. To begin with I got quite interested in the tale, but as it went on it became clear that it was just another complaint about suppression and exploitation of native cultures. Not that there is anything wrong with the message, but I felt that the story wasn't saying anything new or different. A shame.

In contrast James Patrick Kelly's short story, "The Best Christmas Ever" <http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/kelly/>, is (if you will pardon the pun) a cracker. Sure it is a bit sentimental towards the end, but it is sentimental for a reason. This one might get a nomination from me.

Meanwhile I guess I need to keep reading...

Out of Synch

Once again there are several good British books due out for the first time in the US in the coming month. Pride of place goes

to Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Pashazade* (Emcit #70), the first in his award-winning *Arabesk* trilogy. Also previously reviewed here are *Paradox* by John Meaney (Emcit #64) and *Market Forces* by Richard Morgan (Emcit #102). *Paradox* is a very interesting book, and I'm pleased to see that Pyr have kept the wonderful Jim Burns cover. *Market Forces* still makes my blood boil every time I think about it.

Pashazade - Jon Courtenay Grimwood - Bantam Spectra - paperback

Paradox - John Meaney - Pyr - hardcover

Market Forces - Richard K. Morgan - Ballantine - paperback

Miscellany

Iron Council Update

Following comments by Gabriel Strange in the Immanion Press interview in *Emerald City* #113 there was a flurry of email back and fore between me, Gabriel, China Miéville and Pan Macmillan. Gabriel bought a copy of *Iron Council* for £3.99 in a remainder store in Wolverhampton. But Pan Macmillan have not remaindered the book and have no idea how it got there. All very odd. Still, good news that the book is not officially remaindered.

Not her again

There's an article by me in the February edition of *The Internet Review of Science Fiction* (<http://www.irosf.com/>). Due to my trip to Korea distorting my schedule the March issue will probably be online by the time you get this *Emerald City*, but you should still be able to find the February issue in the archives.

Aurealis Awards

The Winner's of the Aurealis Awards for 2004 have been announced. The novel winners are: *Less Than Human*, Maxine McArthur (Science Fiction); *The Crooked Letter*, Sean Williams (Fantasy); *The Black Crusade*, Richard Harland (Horror); *Midnighters*, Scott Westerfeld (YA); *How to Live Forever*, Colin Thompson (Children). For full details see (<http://www.clarionsouth.org/aurealisawards/Frame.html>). You can find a review of the Maxine McArthur book in this issue.

Clarke Award Shortlist

The shortlist for this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award was announced on Saturday. The nominees are: *River of Gods*, Ian McDonald (Simon & Schuster); *Iron Council*, China Miéville (Macmillan); *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell (Sceptre); *Market Forces*, Richard Morgan (Gollancz); *The Time Traveler's Wife*, Audrey Niffenegger (Cape); *The System of the World*, Neal Stephenson (Heinemann).

It is an odd list. Obviously I'm very pleased to see *River of Gods*, *Iron Council* and *Cloud Atlas* up there. All three featured in my Best of 2004 list. I guess I'm not entirely surprised about the Stephenson, but I do think that the *Baroque Cycle* seriously failed to live up to the promise of *Quicksilver*. *The Time Traveler's Wife* is reviewed in this issue.

As for *Market Forces*, I'm boggled. On the one hand it is a fairly ordinary thriller that will appear to a certain type of man who fantasizes about women with big tits and being able to murder people with impunity. On the other it is a left wing equivalent of Creationism. Just as Dubya and his cronies make it an article

of faith that Evolution is a lie, the Left makes it an article of faith that Economics is a lie. Hence, I guess, the popularity of a book that makes out that all economists are greedy, murderous and dishonest. What such a book is doing on the Clarke shortlist is a mystery to me. The UK is getting more and more like America every day.

Nebula Final Ballot

The final ballot for this year's Nebula Awards has been released. The nominees are:

Novel: *Paladin of Souls*, Lois McMaster Bujold (Eos); *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*, Cory Doctorow (Tor); *Omega*, Jack McDevitt (Ace); *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell (Sceptre); *Perfect Circle*, Sean Stewart (Small Beer); *The Knight*, Gene Wolfe (Tor).

Novella: "Walk in Silence," Catherine Asaro, (*Analog*, Apr 2003); "The Tangled Strings of the Marionettes," Adam-Troy Castro (*F&SF*, Jul 2003); "The Cookie Monster," Vernor Vinge (*Analog*, Oct 2003); "The Green Leopard Plague," Walter Jon Williams (*Asimov's*, Oct/Nov 2003); "Just Like the Ones We Used to Know," Connie Willis (*Asimov's*, Dec 2003).

Novelette: "Zora and the Zombie", Andy Duncan (*Sci Fiction*, February 4, 2004); "Basement Magic," Ellen Klages (*F&SF*, May 2003); "The Voluntary State," Christopher Rowe (*Sci Fiction*, May 2004); "Dry Bones," William Sanders (*Asimov's*, May 2003); "The Gladiator's War: A Dialogue," by Lois Tilton (*Asimov's*, Jun 2004).

Short Story: "Coming to Terms," Eileen Gunn (*Stable Strategies and Others*, Tachyon Publications); "The Strange Redemption of Sister Mary Anne," Mike Moscoe; (*Analog*, Nov 2004); "Travels With my Cats," Mike Resnick (*Asimov's*,

Feb 2004); "Embracing-The-New," Benjamin Rosenbaum (*Asimov's*, Jan 2004); "In the Late December," Greg van Eekhout (*Strange Horizons*, Dec. 22, 2003); "Aloha," Ken Wharton (*Analog*, Jun 2003).

Script: *The Incredibles*, Brad Bird (Pixar, Nov 2004); *The Butterfly Effect*, J. Mackye Gruber and Eric Bress (New Line Cinema, Jan 2004); *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Charlie Kaufman & Michel Gondry (Anonymous Content/Focus Features, Mar 2004); *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Fran Walsh & Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson, based on the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien (New Line Cinema, Dec 2003) .

As usual with the Nebulas, it is a bizarre mix. I'm rather hoping that Sean Stewart wins Best Novel. *Perfect Circle* is a brilliant book, and if it wins a few more people might sit up and take notice of the good things that small presses are doing.

FAAN Awards

As presented at this year's Corflu:

Best Letter Writer: Lloyd Penney;

Best Fanzine Layout: Carl Juarez for *Chunga*;

Best Fan Art: Steve Stiles;

Best Fan Writer: Claire Brialey;

Fan Fanzine: *Chunga* (Andy Hooper, Randy Byers & Carl Juarez, eds.)

Footnote

If you thought my schedule this month was crazy, next month is even worse. There are four weekends in this coming March, and on three of them I need to be

at conventions. The plan is to have the zine available, at least as a PDF, at Eastercon, and to put it online when I get home. But that is only a plan.

As to content, I've got novels from Robert Charles Wilson, Chris Roberson and Tamar Yellin. There is short fiction from Iain Banks, and a classic re-issue from Samuel R. Delaney. There will be con reports from Potlatch and ICFA, and maybe bits from Corflu and Eastercon. And there should be the Hugo nominee listings.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl