

# EMERALD CITY #123

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A monthly science fiction and fantasy review magazine edited by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at [cheryl@emcit.com](mailto:cheryl@emcit.com) or online at <http://www.emcit.com>

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*Emerald City* is a non-profit venture supported by the kind donations of our subscribers. For information on supporting the magazine please see: <http://www.emcit.com/subscribe.shtml>

One of the benefits of being a subscriber is that you might get free books. The hardcover of Courtenay Grimwood's *9Tail Fox* that was last month's main prize has gone to a reader in Nashville. The books from PS Publishing haven't arrived yet, but when I got to the States I found some books from the folks at Pyr waiting for me. I was able to add one of those to the draw, and a hardcover copy of the US edition of John Meaney's *Context* is going to a reader in Washington DC.

This month we have another Pyr hardcover in the draw. A copy of *Silverheart*, the collaboration between

Storm Constantine and Michael Moorcock, will go to one lucky subscriber. There is also a copy of Maurice G. Dantec's *Babylon Babies* (reviewed in this issue) on offer. And maybe more books depending on what turns up when. The draw will take place on December 18<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to Pyr and Semiotext(e) for their generosity.

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## Seriously B.D.O.

By Cheryl Morgan

Those of you who are regular readers of *Emerald City* will know that I am a fan of L.E. Modesitt's science fiction novels. If you haven't taken up my recommendation yet, you might want to do so with *The Eternity Artifact*, because it is a book that is longer on science and shorter on politics than the other works I have reviewed. At its core, *The Eternity Artifact* is a classic Big Dumb Object novel, and what an object it is.

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*"Our target is a renegade world that is crossing the void by itself. It has no sun, no satellites. [...big snip...] Estimates are that the world was abandoned more than six billion years ago. Rough topographical scans and one landing have revealed that one section of the planet was heavily urbanized – and abandoned in good order. We don't know how to preserve something for that long, but the Dannanians did. That alone is a good indication of their technology."*

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Given this basic premise, different SF writers will go different ways. Some will major in working out the alien technology. Others will reveal that the aliens haven't really left, and yet others will have the expeditionary force fighting amongst themselves. Modesitt's

angle is primarily to have competition for access to the planet.

The expeditionary force is put together by an inter-stellar society known as The Comity, which appears to be based largely on European and North American ancestry. Other societies, based on China and Japan, are also interested in the technological bonanza that may result from investigating the planet called Dannan. They would like to get there first, but they don't know how to find a rogue planet in the intergalactic void. More worryingly there are also societies with origins in Christian and Muslim fundamentalism. These are theocracies whose governments have made it an article of faith that mankind is the only form of intelligent life in the universe. If a six billion year old civilization existed then it can only have been created by The Evil One, and its discovery is cause for great concern. That may sound crazy to us, but it isn't to them.

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*"...political and military history has been determined as much by what people believe to be the truth as what has been accurately verified as such. Facts and established principles have been ignored throughout history in favor of comforting and scientifically impossible beliefs. Recorded history is filled with cultures that have believed what we have determined to be scientifically improbable, if not impossible. On ancient Earth, people were burned alive for asserting basic astronomical facts."*

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Modesitt's basic political point should be fairly clear from that. It is entirely possible for two different cultures to see the same event in completely different ways. Indeed, one culture may find the other's beliefs to be totally irrational. That doesn't mean that the inhabitants of

that crazy culture won't hold dearly to their beliefs, and fight to maintain them.

To further illustrate the point, Modesitt tells the story from the point of view of four different characters. One of them, John Paul Goodman, is an assassin. His function is fairly similar to that of the medieval Muslim sect that first gave rise to that concept, but he works for the fundamentalist-Christian-derived Covenanter society (people that Sheri Tepper might easily have used as bad guys). Modesitt does a fine job of making us sympathize with this professional killer as he infiltrates the expedition and does his best to prevent Satanic powers being unleashed on the universe, though his general contempt for women never allows us to forget the type of society he comes from.

Next in the cast list is Liam Fitzhugh, a former commando who now has a career as an historian. Despite his time in the Comity military, he is now every inch the academic whose passion for the dark corners of the dictionary and preference for polysyllabic discourse is rivaled by few except for John Clute.

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*"That would appear to be the initial and obvious conclusion, and one borne out by our own experience, but I would question the validity of an assumptive determination based on unconscious application of anthropic principles."*

*"An explanation might help, Professor."*

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In direct contrast, the shuttle pilot, Lt. Jiendra Chang, is a woman of very few words indeed. She is used to having to communicate quickly and precisely by radio, and if a word isn't necessary to the understanding of a sentence she won't use it. However, both Fitzhugh and Chang have honest, direct personalities and are not afraid to expose

humbug when they find it. Neither has any patience for bureaucracy or corruption, so it is perhaps not surprising that the two develop an attachment to each other, much to the astonishment of Chang's boss, Commander Morgan.

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*"You like him? You never use a word when a syllable will do, and he never uses a word when a paragraph will do."*

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Of course these two very different characters allow Modesitt to describe the same major events as seen by the expedition's science team and by their military escort. You don't have to be part of another culture to see things very differently.

I found Fitzhugh and Chang a very likeable pair of characters. I can imagine that some readers may find Fitzhugh's verbal gymnastics tiring, but he knows what he's talking about and most of the time he's right.

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*I also couldn't help but be annoyed by the choice of the name [of the planet], because properly it was a possessive form of the name of an ancient goddess. If they were going to name the place after ancient deities, it should have been Danu, but no one had consulted me.*

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Well, that's government for you, I guess. They can't get anything right.

Modesitt, however, gets a lot right. He has thought a lot about what sort of technology a six billion year old civilization might have, and he has clearly been reading up on cutting edge theories such as programmable matter. SF fans who are dubious about what sort of mess a famous fantasy writer might make of this sort of book will be relieved

to see that he can happily bandy about terms like regression analysis and Mohs Number and know what they mean. The book isn't a technofest, but it is very clearly the work of someone who respects the science he is working with rather than someone who makes use of Clarke's Third Law to avoid having to explain anything. If you need any further recommendation, David Hartwell edited the book, and he doesn't allow his authors to get away with sloppiness.

Not that Modesitt is champion of the "scientist as hero" school of SF. As in Karen Traviss's *City of Pearl*, the expedition scientists are often shown as selfish, blinkered and naïve. Some of them know nothing other than their own specialties, and are blithely unconcerned about risking the safety of others in search of more data or getting their names on important research papers. In addition, Modesitt's fourth viewpoint character, mission artist Chendor Barna, is often shown as more effective than the scientists. His basic understanding of people, human or otherwise, is a big help when trying to unravel the mysteries of an abandoned alien city.

Given the setting, the book also spends a fair amount of time talking about space battles. Unlike Al Reynolds, who has his starships flinging energy beams at each other over unimaginable distances, Modesitt uses a model of engagement rooted more in the Pacific Theatre of WWII, with the addition of energy shields as protection against torpedoes. I'm not an expert on the science of space warfare, but the battle scenes certainly worked for me.

That is about all there is to say, except that there is a really nasty sting in the tail because, after all, politics is politics, no matter whose side you are on or what your beliefs may be. I'm firmly of the belief that Modesitt's SF is under-rated,

and that more of you should buy this book. And if you would like to learn more about Modesitt's political views, check out the interview I have done with him for *Strange Horizons* (<http://www.strangehorizons.com>). It is currently scheduled to go online on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

*The Eternity Artifact* - L.E. Modesitt - Tor - hardcover

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## Holding a Grudge

By Cheryl Morgan

On getting to the end of *Deadhouse Gates* one of my first thoughts was, "how can Steven Erikson top that?" Of course it is theoretically possible to up the body count, and indeed the horror, and he has done so. But he knows only too well that if he only does that he is going to lose his readers. It would turn the books into a simple splatter-fest, which is not going to win him friends and admirers. So in addition he has gone for a significant increase in the level of humor. And this being Erikson, it works very well.

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*Peace is the time of waiting for war. A time of preparation, or a time of willful ignorance, blind, blinkered and prattling behind secure walls.*

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The latest novel to be released in the US (and yes, I know UK readers are still way ahead of this) is *Memories of Ice*. The book takes us back to the continent of Genabackis and the renegade Malazan army led by Dujek Onearm and Whiskyjack. Having been abandoned by the Empress, Dujek finds his position rather precarious, but he is persuaded into an alliance with his former foe, Caladan Brood. He is concerned about a

mysterious religious cult, the Pannion Domin, whose armies have invaded southern parts of the continent. Several cities have already been overrun, and Prince Jelarkan of Capustan is desperate for help. Brood's backers in Darujhistan are prepared to pay him to join the fray, so off the combined armies go.

But of course this is a Steven Erikson novel, so nothing is anywhere near as simple as it seems. Millennia ago, in the time of the glaciers, Genabackis was ruled by inhuman creatures known as the Jaghut. They delighted in enslaving the local human tribesmen, the Imass. War was incessant, and the Jaghut were mighty sorcerers. In desperation the Imass shamen ("bonecasters") persuade their people to swear a dreadful oath. They will forego life, condemning themselves forever to undeath, until such time as the last Jaghut is killed. Unsurprisingly, a lot of these fearsome zombie warriors, the T'lann Imass, are still hanging around. It has not escaped their notice that Pannion is a Jaghut name, and it only takes one Jaghut sorcerer to plunge the world into war.

That said, regardless of anything else, the Pannion Domin are a seriously loopy bunch. Unlike the Malazan, they have no idea of how to run an empire. Far from properly subjugating the people that they conquer, they give their victims a simple choice: join our army, or become its food. When the current pile of corpses runs out, the army must move on to conquer another city. The mere fact of their hunger gives them plenty of incentive to succeed. I did warn you that Erikson had upped the body count yet again, didn't I?

Until Dujek and Brood can arrive, Capustan has only one small but competent group of defenders, the mercenary company known as the Grey Swords. Devotees of the war god, Fener, they are amongst the most professional

and effective soldiers around. We, however, have read *Deadhouse Gates*, so we know that Fener is in serious trouble. If events in the two novels take place in a similar time frame (and both start off where *Gardens of the Moon* finished) then the Grey Swords are going to find that their god is way too busy to help them at around just the time they need him most.

And that isn't the only way in which divine politics influences the plot. The creature known as the Crippled God, long ago imprisoned by gods whose names are all but forgotten, has been plotting revenge. The "warrens" through which human and inhuman sorcerers ply their trade have become infected and corrupt. Even a mighty mage like Quick Ben of the Bridgeburners is having trouble casting spells. And those forgotten beings who once bound the Crippled God have been forced to take an interest once more in mortal affairs.

None of this, of course, has any meaning to the T'lann Imass. They think they may have found the last of the Jaghut, and they have an oath to fulfill. If they can kill him, their millennia-long existences can be brought to an end at last. That is one heck of a long time to bear a grudge, and the zombie army is not about to let anyone or anything stand in their way.

Put baldly like that *Memories of Ice* sounds very silly indeed. It is the genius of Steven Erikson that he can not only make all of this work, he can actually make us care about these bizarre gods and supernatural beings. It isn't simply a matter of calling people "Tiste Andii" rather than "dark elf were-dragons" so as to get away from the traditional fantasy stereotypes (though that certainly helps). Erikson has sufficient skill to make you forget, for most of the time, that the dark-skinned beauty amongst Brood's officers is actually an immortal being who can turn into a

dragon when the going gets tough. She's also an ordinary woman who can fall for the honest charms of a hard-bitten veteran like Whiskyjack. And no, there's none of the sugary nonsense and hopeless longing of Arwen and Aragorn here. Erikson doesn't do romance. In addition, Erikson somehow manages to make you believe in people who have been pursuing a vendetta for thousands of years and no longer know how to stop.

Besides, there is the comedy. As we are once more in Genabackis, *Memories of Ice* sees the return of the inestimable Kruppe.

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*"Has your master specific suggestions? Brood asked.*

*"Innumerable suggestions of a specific nature, sir Warlord. So many that, when combined, they can only be seen or understood in the most general terms!" He then lowered his tone. "Vague and seemingly vacuous generalities are proof of Master Baruk's all-embracing endeavours, Kruppe sagely points out." He offered everyone a broad, crumb-flecked smile. "But please, let us get under way lest this meeting stretch on, forcing the delivery of a sumptuous supper replete with the driest of wines to whet the gullet and such a selection of sweets as to leave Kruppe groaning in fullest pleasure!"*

*"Gods forbid," Coll muttered.*

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Furthermore, *Memories of Ice* also features Bauchelain and Korbal Broach, the two sorcerers with extremely unpleasant habits who star in the novellas, *Blood Follows* and *The Healthy Dead*. Not many writers have the ability to make a comedy duo out of a demon summoner and a necromancer who are every bit as nasty as their professions suggest.

Given that it fills almost 800 pages, there is more to *Memories of Ice* than I have thus far described. Much more, in fact. Thus far I haven't said a word about Ganoes Paran, the young Malazan commander who any reader of *Gardens of the Moon* might suspect would become the hero of the series. Given that Dujek has made Whiskyjack his second, Paran finds himself in command of the Bridgeburners, who are just the sort of soldiers not to give a monkey's arse for the orders of a young nobleman scarce out of nappies. Nor have I said anything about his lover, the mage, Tattersail, whom we last saw being reborn into the body of a young girl who is growing up at an unnatural rate. Both of them, of course, have big parts to play in the story. Then again, our heroes are now fighting on the same side as the Tiste Andii and their terrifying lord, Anomander Rake. This has its benefits.

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*Dujek asked, "You are offering to set your Tiste Andii against the Tenescowri, Lord?"*

*"Hardly," Rake replied. "I mean to scare them witless. In person."*

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Brood and Rake, of course, are both ascendants, demi-gods in the making. That probably puts them one step down from Lady Envy, daughter of the elder god, Draconus, who is imprisoned in Rake's black sword. She is waging her own war against the Pannion Domin, helped only by a dog, a large wolf, and three ensorcelled warriors. Her main priorities seem to be that while on campaign she should get a hot bath, a good meal and a bottle of fine wine every evening, and that she should never be seen in public looking anything other than drop dead gorgeous. Nevertheless she and her small band are at least as effective as Brood and Dujek's army.

I'm sorry, I'm waffling. Erikson's books are just so full of good stuff, and there are major characters I haven't even started on yet. It is, however, time to stop. Anyone who has liked the first two books in the series will enjoy *Memories of Ice* as well. An awful lot of readers will cry at the end, which is not at all what you might expect given the horrors that have gone before. And I should, perhaps, leave the final word to Whiskyjack.

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*"War has its necessities, Korlat, and I have always understood that. Always known the cost... But, this day, by my own hand, I have realized something else. War is not a natural state. It is an imposition, and a damned unhealthy one. With its rules, we willingly yield our humanity. Speak not of just causes, worthy goals. We are takers of life. Servants of Hood, one and all."*

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Unfortunately for Erikson's characters, there are several more books to come yet, and a lot of plot points to be resolved. It will be some time yet before they can lay down their swords.

*Memories of Ice* - Steven Erikson - Tor - trade paperback

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## Found in Translation

By Cheryl Morgan

One of the limitations of our science fiction community is that it is still, by and large, an English language community. David Brin pointed out in last month's issue that a lot of SF is being written in Asia, and I hope to bring you a lot more information about Japanese SF in the run-up to the Yokohama Worldcon. In this issue I report on the some of the results of the French Grand

Prix de l'Imaginaire. But just who are the winners in the French language category? Are they any good? Are they, perhaps, like Andreas Esbach, a German writer recently picked up by Tor, superstars throughout Europe but practically unknown in the English-speaking world? Every so often we get a fine book such as *Cosmos Latinos* that gives us a sample of the quality SF that is being written in other languages, and I know from a mis-spent youth reading the likes of Druillet and Moebius in translations of *Metal Hurlant* that the French have lost none of their edge since the days of Jules Verne. Which is why, when Semiotext(e) offered me a review copy of a classic French cyberpunk novel, that I jumped at the chance.

Like *Venusia*, the other book Semiotext(e) sent me, *Babylon Babies* is a real SF novel, not something by a mainstream author slumming it. The author, Maurice G. Dantec, includes in his acknowledgements thanks to Norman Spinrad, Philip K. Dick and Donna Haraway. The book also contains quotes from Karl Popper, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sun Tsu. M. Dantec, it would appear, is a very well read fellow. He also won the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire in 1996 for his novel, *Les Racines du Mal* (*The Roots of Evil*). It all sounded very promising, and so it proved.

Cyberpunk? Well, sort of. *Babylon Babies* certainly starts out sounding rather like a mid-period Jon Courtenay Grimwood novel. Something around the time of *redRobe*. It quickly takes on more of the flavor of *Signs of Life*, M. John Harrison's biotech thriller. And towards the end it develops a strong aftertaste of *Illuminatus!* That's the overview. Here's the detail.

The hero of our story, Hugo Cornelius Toorop, is a French-Dutch mercenary. He started out in the business in Bosnia in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Discovering that

he had a liking for soldiering, he moved on from the Balkans to Central Asia where for the past decade or so he has been embroiled with various factions in what has become known as the Chinese Civil War. When the group of tribal freedom fighters who are currently paying him gets badly betrayed and massacred he is forced to flee to one of his few friends in the region, Colonel Romanenko, the Russian Secret Service chief in Kazakhstan who has been his principal arms supplier of late.

Toorop is an interesting character, as much given to reading about war as fighting, and determined to make sure his men get properly trained so that they have a chance of living more than a few months. He likes to sing and recite poetry to the corpses of men he has killed, and he is prone to philosophical thoughts such as this:

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*War was probably the easiest thing to do, but it was the most difficult to succeed in.*

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Romanenko, meanwhile, has his own problems. With his primary munitions customer at least temporarily out of the game, he needs to find a new faction to keep Moscow happy. More to the point, he has lost his immediate source of revenue. Russian Secret Service operatives are expected to supplement their income. This drives him into the arms of Anton Gorsky, one of the more ambitious bosses in the Siberian mafia. Gorsky has a job he needs doing, for which Toorop might be the ideal agent. He has a piece of merchandise that he needs transported to Canada and kept safe for a few months. Naturally Gorsky won't say much about the merchandise. All that Romanenko and Toorop are to be told is that it comes in the form of a Canadian girl called Marie Zorn. Romanenko, on the other hand, is well

aware that the chances of himself and Toorop coming out of this job with a profit depend heavily on their knowing a little more about what they have got themselves into.

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*Give a horse to whomever speaks the truth, says the Afghan proverb, he will need it to flee.*

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The truth, of course, has a way of coming out. It isn't long before Romanenko discovers that Gorsky has links with an illicit biotech clinic in the Chingiz Mountains. Then Toorop, now safely in Montreal, discovers that Marie is pregnant. It doesn't take too many brain cells to work out that whatever is in her womb is not exactly human, perhaps not even remotely so. What is worse, a couple of odd religious sects, each with their own heavily-armed gang of biker thugs, have taken an interest in affairs. Soon things take a distinct turn for the worse.

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*All that Shadow understood was that a genuine civil war had just pitted some rival gangs against each other on the Plateau Mont-Royal. They'd found bodies of Hell's Angels, Rock-Machines, Russian-American gangsters, Ontarian thugs, Chinese, Jamaican and Colombian hit men.*

*The police were at a loss as to how to put all the pieces together, both literally and figuratively.*

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From then on Gorsky and Romanenko are scrambling desperately to get back in control of the situation. Marie is on her own, with only the voices in her head (or perhaps her womb) for guidance. And Toorop, last seen with a messy red stump where his right hand used to be, is missing in action. In fact he has fallen

in with a loose confederation of transhumanists. These are people whose interests include artificial intelligence, cyborgization, extreme neurosurgery, psychotropic drugs and shamanic magic. They are people who think it a fascinating intellectual challenge to try to program their robots to take on some of the more interesting human characteristics such as transvestism. They might just be useful allies, which is just as well because Toorop is fast coming to the conclusion that he, and the rest of humanity, might have far more to fear from Marie Zorn than from any bunch of criminal thugs.

At over 500 pages, the book is a little slow for cyberpunk, especially as rather too much of the plot is revealed in the back-cover blurb. Grimwood would have wrapped it up in 200 pages less, or would have made two equally pulse-pounding books of the story. Dantec is a little more interested in the philosophical aspects of his novel, in particular in expounding some of the theories of the anthropologist, Jeremy Narby. It gives the latter half of the book much more of a 1970s feel.

One potential flaw of *Babylon Babies* is that Dantec himself clearly isn't a scientist. Consequently he is prone to comments such as this:

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*It was as unconcerned by the human constraints of time and space, of biological and physical limits, as the acrobat or the astronaut is unconcerned by the laws of gravity.*

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Any SF reader will know that both acrobats and astronauts have a strong and healthy interest in the laws of gravity. They are technologists fighting their environment, not magicians free from the laws of nature. And anyone with high school chemistry will know

that Avogadro's number is not the number of atoms in the universe. They might even remember that it is (approximately) 6 times 10 to the power 23; not 10 to the 25 or 26 as Dantec's characters variously claim.

I'm also slightly worried about the translation. The actual English is perfectly competent, but Dantec spends a lot of time describing hallucinations and I suspect that the original French may be a little more lyrical than the translation. It has to be a hard thing to get right, given that the original language is likely to be highly imaginative.

Those minor gripes aside, *Babylon Babies* is a very interesting book. Besides, how can I not love a writer who begins a chapter with, "The Wallabies were roughing up the Springboks on her screen"? Can we have some more of M. Dantec, Semiotext(e), s'il vous plait?

*Babylon Babies* - Maurice G. Dantec (tr. Noura Wedell) - Semiotext(e) - Trade paperback

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## Blast from the Past

By Cheryl Morgan

One of the things I have always intended to do with *Emerald City* was take advantage of the fabulous Gollancz Masterworks re-issues to highlight classic works of the past. Of course there is always a huge pile of new releases clamoring for my attention, and I've always tended to think that new books need coverage more than famous old ones, so I've never managed to get this thing done. But one advantage that the Masterworks books have is that they are all mass-market paperbacks. This makes them ideal to pack for "spare" reading on a plane journey, just in case the books

I planned to read zip by really quickly, or I don't sleep much. On my last trip across the Atlantic I packed Tim Powers' *The Anubis Gates* as my reserve book. I am so glad that I did.

It is always a bit scary coming back to a book that you have been telling people is one of your favorite novels, just in case you don't like it on re-reading it. It is over 20 years since I read *The Anubis Gates*. The book is pre-*Neuromancer*. The world has changed since it came out, hasn't it? Well, not as much as you might think. Because while *The Anubis Gates* still stands up well as a fantastical adventure, I had completely forgotten what a fine piece of genre bending it is. New Weird? Ha! Tim Powers was doing that in 1983.

The book begins in 1802. Four years before a group of Yorkshire Magicians in another book decided to revive English magic, a very different sort of spell was being cast near London. At the direction of his master back in Egypt, Amenophis Fikee was attempting to restore the influence of Anubis on the world. His intention was to gain enough power to destroy Britain, and thereby free Egypt from that country's yoke.

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*Like most modern magics, he thought bitterly, while it probably did something, it didn't accomplish what it was supposed to.*

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Oh, it did something all right. Unbeknownst to him, Amenophis Fikee had punched holes in the river of time. Almost two hundred years later, the reclusive billionaire, J. Cochran Darrow, described it to Brendan Doyle something like this. Suppose time is a frozen river. The fish within the river can only swim along with the strong current. But there are holes in the ice, and those who know how to spot them can jump out, skate

back along the ice, and re-enter the river at some point in the past.

Darrow, of course, is planning to make such a jump. He is going back to 1810 to hear a lecture given by the poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in London, and he is taking a small number of very rich tourists along with him. Doyle, being a leading academic expert on Coleridge, has been hired as a guide. Thanks to the inevitable mix-up, Doyle manages to miss the trip back and is stranded in 1810. Ah well, at least he can use the time to do research for his planned book on the reclusive American poet, William Ashbless, who is due to arrive in London any day now. There will be another gate in a few years time; he can go back then.

But is it the real 1810, or another timeline entirely? Why is Byron in London when Doyle knows he should be in Greece? More to the point, where the heck is Ashbless? He hasn't turned up at any of the places history says he did, though Doyle made sure he was there at the right times. And, for that matter, who are the mysterious thugs who are trying to kill Doyle, and why do they communicate with each other by whistling Beatles tunes?

So there you have it: sorcery, time travel, and something that is either an alternate history or a secret history. What is more it has Coleridge, Byron and the inimitable yet mysterious William Ashbless, of whom so much has been written since. I'm not surprised that the book won the Philip K. Dick Award in 1984 (something that must have been a particular pleasure to Powers as he knew Dick well). Why it didn't get on the Hugo or World Fantasy short lists is a mystery to me.

Of course it isn't just the imaginative plot and adventurous genre bending that makes *The Anubis Gates* such a good book. Powers is a fabulous fantasy

writer, and his descriptions of magical goings on in the London of 1810, while by no means “English” in the way of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, are no less successful.

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*For a moment he just hung stunned in the water, for the lights had followed him and now surrounded him, and staring at the nearest couple he saw that they were eggshell halves, equipped with tiny torches, straw masts and folded paper sails, and – and it didn't even occur to him to ascribe it to fever delirium – a tiny man, no bigger than his little finger, crouched in each one, twisting the toy mast deftly in the breeze to hold his diminutive craft in position.*

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Powers’ historical research probably isn’t perfect. The one mistake I did notice is that at one point Doyle speculates as to whether Coleridge’s experiences in his company might have inspired “Kubla Kahn”, but in fact that poem was started (and left unfinished) in 1797 when Coleridge was living in Somerset. But it could have happened. Because in *The Anubis Gates* Tim Powers has so successfully mixed fantasy and history that you come away thinking that it quite likely did happen.

*The Anubis Gates* - Tim Powers - Gollancz Fantasy Masterpieces - mass market paperback

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## Medical Ethics

By Cheryl Morgan

I’ve been making a lot of mention recently about the fine job that Pyr, the new major US SF publisher, is doing to bring good UK writers to the attention of the American public. But in order to establish themselves Pyr also needs to

find new writers, presumably Americans. They picked up Fiona Avery from the comics business, but who else is out there? San Francisco-based writer Michael Blumlein had got a number of award nominations for his short fiction and has won a Readercon Award for his collection, *The Brains of Rats*. He has also had a horror novel made into a movie. Pyr has opted to publish his new SF novel, *The Healer*.

Blumlein is not a full time writer. He also teaches medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that his novel is about medical ethics. His SF setting postulates a planet on which humans live alongside a related species, the Grotesques. As you might guess, they are not pretty to look at but some of them have an almost magical ability to draw sickness out of a patient, sometimes excreting it as an angry lump through a special organ in their chests. Most Grotesques live poor and unremarkable lives in a ghetto city, but those tested at puberty and found to have the healing skill are forcibly drafted to serve their human masters for the good of all society.

Our hero, the rather obviously named Payne, is of course a superb healer. We first meet him at his first job out of college, working in a remote mining town. He soon learns a few valuable lessons in life, including that some guys would rather stay sick than have to be hugged by a doctor, that if you are poor enough you might be prepared to trade your health for money, and that no matter how good you are at healing you can still screw up through overconfidence.

From there Payne moves to a major city, where he learns a whole new set of lessons, most of them to do with the position of grotesques in society. He briefly becomes a member of a

revolutionary cadre. But in the end, as we might have predicted, he ends up at Rampart, the healer HQ, where he learns far more than he probably wanted to know about politics and about his own species' place in the world.

You may have guessed from this that *The Healer* is a very deliberate book. It has a point to make (well, lots of points actually) and pretty much everything that happens to Payne in his life is designed to illustrate one or other of those points. It feels very much like he is a puppet being moved this way and that by the dictates of the book's argument. The book is also quite slow. You won't find anything in the way of exciting fight scenes, torrid sex, or indeed much at all to get the blood pumping, because *The Healer* is not that type of book.

What it is instead is a very thoughtful book, and I am not in the least bit surprised that it comes with glowing recommendations from authors such as Kim Stanley Robinson and Ursula Le Guin. It also has good characterization, so although the plot can seem a little artificial at times you still think you are reading about real people. If you like your SF to major on social issues then I can warmly recommend this book to you. If, on the other hand, you are looking for hard science, or for pulsating action, then *The Healer* is probably not for you.

*The Healer* - Michael Blumlein - Pyr - hardcover

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## Sex or Mystery

By Juliet E. McKenna

You pay your money and take your choice.

Inevitably, any review of the twelfth book in a series will mainly address established readers. It's certainly not the point for a newcomer to start, but if you're one of those, do stick with me to the end of this piece. For established readers, I suspect this is the point in the series where you are going to find yourselves dividing.

For those who haven't read these books, Anita Blake is a vampire hunter, a licensed executioner and latterly a federal marshal, dealing with preternatural cases. Along the way, she has acquired friends and foes in law enforcement, an increasing array of lovers among the undead and lycanthropic communities, and a kind of sexual vampirism of her own. There has always been a tension in the books between the whodunit/thriller plots with their supernatural and monstrous elements, and the on-going complications of Anita's personal life, exploring the nature of desire, the power balances within relationships and issues of honesty with oneself and one's partners. These aspects play off each other throughout the series, with both the horrific and the erotic graphically illustrated.

However, in recent volumes, the relationship elements have come to predominate. This is even more the case in *Incubus Dreams*. While the story opens with a dead girl outside a strip joint, apparently murdered by vampires, Anita's domestic complexities rapidly thrust themselves to the fore, to the exclusion of pretty much all else for several hundred pages. An interlude revisits Anita's day job reanimating the dead to settle legal disputes and then explains why asking the zombies of murder victims who killed them is a bad idea. After that though, the relationship issues take up where they left off. After another few hundred pages, the initial

murder is swiftly resolved in dramatic fashion that shows how the path to a legally sanctioned undeath can be as lethally paved with good intentions as the fabled road to hell. Anita is left with new clarity in her love affairs as well as the prospect of pursuing the vamps that got away in some subsequent book.

This is a skillfully written book, not merely as regards the accomplished prose. The pain caused by deaths natural and untimely is powerfully evoked, as are the reactions of all those concerned. Abuses of power and abrogation of responsibilities within non-romantic relationships are examined with uncompromising clarity. The erotica is woven around an astute examination of lust versus love and the problems of unbalanced needs within any partnership. Anita is called to the initial murder scene from a wedding, where she has opted to wear a tuxedo rather than a pumpkin orange bridesmaid's dress. This is apt given so much of the subsequent discussion centers on just who wears the trousers in her highly unconventional household.

However, the psychosexual aspect is not what drew me to these books in the first place. I would rather still be following a supernatural murder case in step-by-step detail. I enjoyed the practicalities of a society where were-creatures face prejudice that makes panic over AIDS look like a minor fuss. I find the eerie implications of actually being able to raise the dead for benign and mundane matters fascinating. Now these things are only touched on in passing, and I feel rather let down. What has happened over the threatened extinction of the Smoky Mountain Trolls? When it comes to Anita's love life, frankly, there are only so many possible combinations of two, three or more people and their various appendages and orifices in a bed or anywhere else. Once you rule out

those that have already been tried, it's no great challenge to anticipate the next couplings. It's a measure of the extent to which this book just wasn't gripping me that I could do this.

This is a personal response but I hope it will be of use. If this trend towards emotional discovery is one you've welcomed in the series, you should definitely enjoy this installment. If you prefer your supernatural adventure with more action and less sexual angst, you may decide to look elsewhere on the bookshelves. There's certainly no lack of talent in this burgeoning sub-genre, which indisputably owes much to Laurell K. Hamilton and Anita Blake. If you haven't read this series and are now wondering what to do, I would certainly advise you take a look at the first volume, *Guilty Pleasures*. I've found few people who could put it down once they started reading it. As the series develops and the emphasis shifts, you can make your own choices.

*Incubus Dreams* - Laurell K. Hamilton - Orbit  
- mass-market paperback

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## Horror is served...

By Mario Guslandi

Nowadays horror anthologies from mass-market publishers are infrequent events, so praise to Carroll & Graf for bringing us *Dark Delicacies*, a volume featuring nineteen "tales of terror and the macabre." The book is named after the famous American horror bookstore, whose founder is actually one of the two editors. Bar a few comparatively newcomers, the impressive line-up of authors includes many big names such as Richard Matheson, Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Gahan Wilson, and Nancy Holder.

Of course inviting a bunch of horror icons (some spent, others just uninspired), as contributors may not be a guarantee that the result will be up to the expectations. Unfortunately, in the case of the above writers, this is indeed true. But let's forget what's disappointing and move on to the good stories.

Ray Bradbury's "The Reincarnate" is an emotional tale about a dead man's burning desire to live again, while Whitley Strieber's "Kaddish" is a SF piece depicting a grim, future America dominated by Christian fundamentalism.

In F. Paul Wilson's "Part Of The Game", paying homage to old-time pulp fiction, a wicked Mandarin and a corrupted cop play a deadly game; and in David Schow's cute "The Pyre And Others" the time-honoured theme of the accursed book is convincingly revisited.

Veteran William Nolan provides an effective portrait of an actor obsessed with death and of his equally restless ex-wife ("De Pompa") while Lisa Morton contributes "Black Mill Cove", a tense tale of terror set in the wilderness with a load of poison in its tail.

Richard Laymon's "The Diving Girl" is a predictable but fully enjoyable story where any man's erotic dream comes true... for a little while. With "Bloody Mary Morning", set in the luxurious world of Manhattan's magnates, John Farris demonstrates that it is possible to successfully blend true horror and humour. Steve Niles' "All My Bloody Things", a delightfully horrific story of cannibalism, represents my first personal encounter with horror detective Cal McDonald. I hope to meet him again.

The only, real standout of the book, however, is Clive Barker's "Haeckel's Tale", a superb piece that marks the glorious return of this gifted writer to

the short horror story after so many digressions into the field of fantasy novels. The story, a ghoulish feast of horror and sex not for the squeamish, could have easily found room in one of Barker's legendary collections *Books of Blood*.

All in all, a reasonably good anthology with too many misfires by the genre's big names. I understand that a *Dark Delicacies Vol. 2* is already in the pipeline. That's good news, provided that the editors are more careful when choosing their contributions...

*Dark Delicacies* - Del Howison & Jeff Gelb (eds.) - Carroll & Graf - Trade Paperback

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## Anansi the Evolutionist

By Peter Wong

Based on first impressions, Intelligent Design strikes me as a highly publicized system of intellectual cowardice. Its so-called ideas are unworthy of breaking bread with real scientific practice; they sup too much from an emotional buffet rich in self-delusion and unquestioned belief in unknowable authority. Yet religious belief and scientific rigor need not be intellectual antagonists. Ernst Haeckel, the focus of David Lebrun's short documentary *Proteus: A Nineteenth Century Vision*, found a way to reconcile the two strands of thought.

Haeckel was a practicing Christian who grew up in Germany in what might be called the Darwin generation. Charles Darwin's *Origin Of Species* sparked an intellectual split between those who favored a methodical and clear-eyed examination of nature's bounty and those who wished to regard nature as a source of wonder and mysticism. It seemed impossible for intellectual

common ground to be established between both camps.

Haeckel's early career ping-ponged unsuccessfully between science and mysticism. His years as a medical doctor proved personally loathsome. His art career was typified by landscapes reflecting a visual sensibility derived from a view through badly oil-slicked glasses.

The German scientist's "aha" moment came from a stay in the oceanfront town of Messina. Some fishermen in that town gave him samples of unwanted undersea life caught in their fishing nets. Among those samples were tiny single-celled creatures known as radiolaria. Fascinated by the diversity of these creatures' skeletal structures, Haeckel decided to draw every unique skeleton. Creating those drawings required Haeckel to sit on a stool and balance a drawing pad on his knees while peering through a microscope illuminated by a candle. Despite these awkward conditions, the German scientist produced incredibly detailed drawings of 4,000 species of radiolaria.

Haeckel's life and work provides the organizing structure of Lebrun's documentary. However, the film's presentation is not shackled to a straightforward chronological recounting of Haeckel's life. It zooms back and forth in time, knitting together various points in Haeckel's career and relevant events in the scientific and philosophical communities. This hopscotch structure oddly keeps the viewer in suspense. What ties together *Proteus'* detailed description of the HMS *Challenger's* scientific voyage, the laying of the transatlantic telegraph cable, and Haeckel's own career? The process of learning that answer gives present-day viewers a context for understanding the impact of Haeckel's accomplishment. Rather than a dry documentary,

Lebrun's film thus becomes the visual equivalent of a well-written essay.

*Proteus'* look at classic works by Goethe and Samuel Taylor Coleridge may seem to be an irrelevant diversion. Yet the film illustrates how these masterpieces were allegories for the harmful consequences of allowing science to dominate over mysticism. Goethe's *Faust* was a cautionary fable that showed how a devotion to acquiring knowledge at all costs led one to make disastrous decisions. Haeckel counted Goethe as a major intellectual influence. Could Goethe's fictional Faustian bargain have subtly dissuaded the German scholar/artist from aligning himself with one intellectual camp over another? *Proteus* declines to speculate.

More screen time, though, is devoted to a fascinating re-interpretation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's epic poem "The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner." The Mariner's unprovoked slaying of the albatross acts as a metaphorical rejection of nature. His subsequent ordeals lead him to consider the spiritual consequences of that rejection. *Proteus* effectively uses Marian Seldes' narration and Gustave Dore's famous drawings of Coleridge's poem to lend credence to this unusual interpretation. Perhaps it is Seldes' assured tone of voice that allows a viewer to accept the film's assertion that the sea was to the 19<sup>th</sup> century what outer space was to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a place of secrets vast and unknowable bar the occasional fateful revelation. In such a strange and unknowable setting, the wonders of sea and sky revealed to the Ancient Mariner were limited solely by Dore's imagination. It is shocking then to notice that Richard Dysart's reading of excerpts from Coleridge's "Rime" feels astoundingly passionless. The Mariner's desire for redemption and his re-awakened sense of wonder are

noticeably missing from Dysart's interpretation.

A sense of incompleteness marked the scientific and mystic camps depicted in *Proteus*. The state of 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific knowledge is likened at one point to a well-organized museum. All known species are neatly catalogued. Yet that view carries a sense of self-satisfied stasis. With its belief that nature offered no new surprises, there was no drive to continue looking outward for new wonders in nature. By contrast, the mystical tradition exemplified by Goethe and Coleridge offered the allure of limitless possibility and things waiting to be discovered if one had eyes to see them. But this tradition lacked the detailed information that would allow non-believers to treat its assertions as more than wishful thinking.

Enter Haeckel's drawings of the radiolaria's 4,000 species. The astounding variety of eyes and whipping tails found in each geometric single-celled skeleton were rendered with formal scientific rigor. Yet the sheer volume of radiolaria depicted by Haeckel verified more mystical thinkers' intuition that nature was more diverse than previously thought.

Lebrun's limited animation of Haeckel's radiolaria drawings thus forms both the emotional and intellectual centerpiece of *Proteus*. Rather than animate each radiolaria species, he treats Haeckel's depictions as individual animation cels. By flashing the drawings at a speed that exploits the viewer's persistence of vision, the radiolaria species on screen appears to dance about. By not focusing on an individual radiolaria, the animation imbues the radiolaria as a whole with an astounding degree of life. Yuval Ron's semi-chamber music score appropriately captures this mix of discipline and vitality.

*Proteus* avoids being cheerful science eye candy by discussing the dark side of Haeckel's evolution studies. The German scientist believed that the white European was the current pinnacle of human evolution. The Nazis naturally adopted Haeckel's pronouncement. For this reviewer, even knowing that some of Haeckel's contemporaries held similar views did little to quell a strong feeling of personal offense.

*Proteus'* only minor shortcoming is its unsupported assertion that Haeckel's work influenced the surrealists and Sigmund Freud. No samples of surrealist art or Freudian thinking are provided to back this claim.

That defect aside, *Proteus* is a marvelous and entertaining introduction to Haeckel and his work. Had the German scientist not been discredited as a racist evolutionist, could his melding of the scientific and the aesthetic have stolen some of the emotional appeal of creationism and intelligent design? Like the sea and outer space, perhaps the answer is unknowable.

[Some of Haeckel's drawings can be seen on the film's web site: <http://www.frif.com/new2004/pro.htm> l - Cheryl]

*Proteus: A Nineteenth Century Vision* - David Lebrun - First Run/Icarus Films - theatre release

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## Fishy Story

By Cheryl Morgan

Another new name that Pyr has brought to its 2005 list is Scott Mackay. When I say "new", that's certainly new to me, and possibly to most SF readers, but Mackay already has eight novels under his belt and a couple of prestigious

awards for mystery novels. He has even, according to the blurb, written another SF novel. Having read *Tides*, his offering from Pyr, I think he has a little to learn about SF.

The basic setting of *Tides* is a world with two moons whose gravitational pull creates massive "tides" in parts of the oceans that make travel from one part of the world to another so dangerous that no one does it. It is a very long time since I studied physical oceanography so I was prepared to take this on trust and assume it would work. Much of the rest of the book, sadly, could not be granted the same clemency.

The most obvious thing about the book is that it has the feel of a setting for an Original *Star Trek* episode. In one part of the world we have a paradise in which everyone has what they need and is happy. In this country, crime is almost unknown. The worst thing that people can do is tell lies, and for that they are exiled to the Island of Liars. On the other side of the globe (or at least beyond the fearsome tides) is a barren, forbidding continent with little in the way of natural resources. The people who live here are nasty, brutal and thoroughly untrustworthy. For them, backstabbing is a way of life. And we can tell that they are Evil because they are big, lizard-like monsters with sharp teeth and a macho attitude. And of course they have black skin.

This sort of thing was interesting social satire when H.G. Wells did it in *The Time Machine*, but by the 1970s people were already seeing the flaws. In fact I have done *Star Trek* an injustice, because they did that story about a planet where half the people were black on the right side of their bodies and the other half black on the left side of their bodies. Mackay is not doing anything new, and he's not doing the old idea terribly well.

But what really ruined the book for me were the inconsistencies. For example, the paradise-living humans have everything they need and therefore no crime, right? Except we are told that metal is very rare and valuable. So why don't people steal it? Elsewhere we are told that the lizard-people are so macho that they refuse to use crossbows, even when they capture some. They only fight hand-to-hand. So why are they happy to use cannon from their ships? Then there is the point where the hero of the book, the first man to master the tides and discover the country of the lizard people, is returning home. He says he's been away for eight months. But in that time he has taught his lizard captors to plant wheat and gone through a harvest, and he didn't start until a fair way into his captivity.

This might all seem rather picky, but it is precisely the sort of picky that an SF reader will do almost as a reflex action. To do SF properly you have to get things right, because otherwise your readers have serious problems with their suspension of disbelief. There's no doubt that Mackay can write. That's not an issue. What he can't do (as yet) is write good SF. I hope he sticks with it, because this sort of thing is really just a question of solid application and getting other people (especially your editor) to cast a critical eye over your setting. Any obvious logic flaws have to be rooted out. Once you have that discipline you'll be able to keep your readers with you and good reviews will follow.

*Tides* - Scott Mackay - Pyr - publisher's proof

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## A Modern Grail

By Cheryl Morgan

Amanda Hemingway is not a name you'll find mentioned in previous issues of *Emerald City*, but that is because she has been in disguise. I've reviewed three of her novels, written under the pen name of Jan Siegel. *Prospero's Children?* Yes, now you remember. Quite what machinations of PR departments led to her abandoning the Siegel pseudonym and claiming those books for Hemingway I do not know. And perhaps, as with the making of sausages, it is better not to ask. Hemingway, however, she now is, and she has a new series under way.

The Sangreal Trilogy is something of an odd beast. It has nothing at all to do with King Arthur other than the appropriation of certain magical artifacts. Secondly the first book, *The Greenstone Grail*, reads much more like a Young Adult novel than the *Prospero's Children* series, though it is not marketed as such. As rather too many fantasy books do, it begins with a special young boy finding a mysterious artifact in a long-lost ruin, but I would rather start in that boy's past.

Imagine yourself in a hospital ward. A young woman sits weeping by the bed of her boyfriend who is dying from injuries sustained in a road accident. Suddenly she experiences strange visions. Weeks later she finds that she is pregnant, yet she has not had sex since her boyfriend died. Nine months from his death, a baby boy is born, and he is olive skinned, even though she and the dead man were pale and English. Her family and friends all jump to the obvious wrong conclusion, or don't want a baby around, or both, and she soon finds herself on the road. Whilst hitching a lift through southern England she feels a sudden compulsion to ask to be let out

in the middle of the countryside. Searching for shelter, she finds an isolated cottage where she seems to have been expected.

She is Annie Ward, and she survives her ordeal quite well. The owner of the cottage is Bartlemy Goodman, and he is several hundred years old. The baby, of course, is destined to save the world. His world, not ours.

Young Nathan, then, is a hero in the making. He has hidden powers. Specifically he travels to another world in his dreams. But despite what you might have expected from the book's title, it is not a fairy world. Indeed, from the first description it sounds much more science fantasy, something Michael Moorcock might have conceived.

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*A city. A city at the end of Time. Towers soared up a mile or more, multi-faceted, topped with glass minarets reflecting sky, and spires whose glitter caught the sun. Far below, the ground was unseen beneath bridges and archways studded with windows, flyovers, walkways, suspended gardens. Airborne vehicles cruised the spaces in between, leaving con-trails in their wake that shimmered for a little while and then vanished. And occasionally there were creatures like giant birds, with webbed pinions stretching to a vast span and bony beaks, their human-sized riders hidden behind masks and goggles.*

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The world of Eos is indeed at the end of time. Its few inhabitants are centuries old, they are infertile, and their universe is slowly being consumed by a deadly plague. Their only hope is, well, they don't really know, but we do, don't we?

So, what do we have so far? An ancient wizard, a boy with a destiny, a dying civilization at the end of time, and a borrowed Arthurian artifact. What do

we need now? Well, if it is a YA book we need a couple of eager sidekicks for our hero; a tomboyish girl and a fat, geeky boy. And why not add a country village murder mystery, complete with a bumbling police inspector who is never going to rattle the fact that the murderer is a supernatural monster. Oh, and a romantic interest for Nathan's poor mother who has suffered doing the Virgin Mary bit with such stoicism. That should keep the plot moving along quite nicely.

Is it too much? Possibly. I did end up feeling that the whole thing was just a little too silly. Maybe that was because some of the violence was heavily toned down. People died, but it all seemed somehow distant, as if Hemingway didn't want to cause the readers to have nightmares. Two things save the book.

The first is that, YA or no, this is not another re-hash of an Enid Blyton novel. Nathan and his pals are real, 21<sup>st</sup> Century kids with a sound knowledge of popular culture. Weird things happen to them, and naturally they interpret them in the light of books they have read and movies they have seen. Even the adults get in on the act. Nathan accidentally transports a man from Eos to our world and he has difficulty adjusting. One day he asks Nathan to tell him more about the great space-faring civilization of which Earth was once a part. Naturally Nathan is confused, but his friend is adamant, he saw it in the movies, "A long time ago in a galaxy far away." Look, if you've come from a great, space-faring civilization at the end of time, *Star Wars* doesn't seem that unlikely.

Later in the book Nathan travels to Eos and befriends a beautiful princess. He needs her help to complete his quest. Coming from a world where no child has been born for centuries, she is aghast that Earth has sent a youngster on such a dangerous mission. She asks if this is

happens a lot. Nathan thinks back to various books he has read – by C.S. Lewis, J.K Rowling and Philip Pullman. "All the time," he says. Hemingway knows exactly what tradition she is writing in, she expects her readers to do so also, and every so often she tips them a knowing wink.

The other really good thing about the book is the twist ending. I can't really say anything about that because it would be a dreadful spoiler. Suffice it to say that I didn't spot it coming, despite a really obvious clue that Hemingway put out there and then covered up beautifully. It isn't often that an author blindsides me that well these days.

There will, of course, be two more books. Indeed I'm rather hoping that the next one will be waiting for me when I get back to the UK. Del Rey has the US rights and their paperback edition of *The Greenstone Grail* should be out before the end of the year (the hardcover was out in March).

*The Greenstone Grail* – Amanda Hemingway  
– HarperCollins UK – mass-market paperback

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## Fantastic Pleasures

By Cheryl Morgan

American Fantasy is not a publisher that many of you will have heard of. They don't do a lot of books. But I have reviewed one of their works before. It is a little chapbook called *A Walking Tour of the Shambles*, by Neil Gaiman and Gene Wolfe. That should immediately give you the impression that these are discerning folks. And so when they offered me their first book in two years I figured I'd better take a look.

The company is run by Bob and Nancy Garcia, and many of you will be familiar with Bob's work because he is the resident book designer for Old Earth Books. That means he's responsible for, amongst others, the superb-looking edition of Chris Priest's *The Separation* that had people so impressed at World Fantasy. Bob has also been asked to design the new range of books from ISFIC Press (see the review of *The Cunning Blood* elsewhere in this issue). *A Walking Tour* was a little book with some nice cartoons that was certainly eye-catching, but *Invisible Pleasures* by Mary Frances Zambreno is much more traditional-looking. It has a very attractive cover by Douglas Klauba, and one you should look closely at before you buy it.

Why does she say that? Well, the back cover blurb talks about Ms. Zambreno writing young adult novels, and about her appearance in anthologies edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Jane Yolen. Yolen provides the introduction to *Invisible Pleasures*. And if you don't look too closely at Klauba's cover you might expect you are going to get a book full of fantasy stories aimed at women.

Of course that is partly true. Some of the stories in *Invisible Pleasures* — the ones about Jennet the Iberian — are very much sword & sorcery tales. One of them was published in *Dragon Magazine*. In addition Ms. Zambreno has a PhD in Medieval Literature. There are two stories set in Saxon England, and a Robin Hood tale. Most of the rest of the book, however, is horror. At which point you suddenly remember that in the bottom right of Klauba's cover, barely visible in the dark, are some very nasty-looking bats.

The good news is that all of the stories are eminently readable, and even the horror stories are actually aimed at women readers. I particularly liked "The

Ghost in the Summer Kitchen", which is about a teenage girl forced to care for her family after the death of her mother, who is visited by the ghost of a younger girl who wants to learn how to cook. It has a twist ending that I think Peter Straub or Joe Hill would be envious of.

Other stand-out stories include "Choices", which is about how a Saxon woman opts to put an end to a family feud, and "Last One Out", in which Zambreno plays a nasty trick on a vicious rapist. Some of the other stories are a little lightweight, but I read all of them all the way through, which regular readers will know is unusual for me with short fiction. If you are prepared to accept the mix of styles that Klauba's cover, properly viewed, suggests, then you should find this book entertaining.

*Invisible Pleasures* - Mary Frances Zambreno  
- American Fantasy - publisher's proof

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## Eye for the Irish

By Cheryl Morgan

Back during Worldcon I made a point of highlighting *Nova Scotia*, the anthology of work by Scottish writers. Neil Williamson and Andrew Wilson had made a point of talking to me about it, and given the location of the convention I could not ignore it. And it was certainly worth some attention. Little did I know, however, that an anthology of Irish fiction had also been published. No one told me until afterwards. I am making up for missing it now.

The big worry with such books, of course, is that they will contain a few reprints from big names, and a lot of material from budding writers who aren't quite good enough to get published yet. Looking at the contents list for *Emerald Eye*, I was rather worried.

There were reprint stories by Anne McCaffrey, Bob Shaw and James White (two of whom are dead). The other names were largely unfamiliar to me. As it turned out, this was not because they were unpublished. They just published mainly in venues I don't read.

Why? Well, if you look at the cover of the book you will probably conclude two things. Firstly that it is self-published (which it isn't, it just has a cover that doesn't do the book justice), and secondly that it is a collection of fantasy stories. It is predominantly green, and features a girl with a long braid that transforms into Celtic knot work. To be fair, the introduction does say the book doesn't contain any leprechauns. But it doesn't contain any fairy princesses or handsome, muscle-bound swordsmen either. Indeed, the stories by McCaffrey, Shaw and White seem very much out of place, because *Emerald Eye* is mainly a horror anthology.

Not that this is a bad thing, but it does come as something of a shock. The first tale, "Thomas Crumlesh 1960-1992: A Retrospective" by Mike McCormack is a particularly striking tale of an artist whose gimmick is to remove and display his own body parts. It is short, sharp, and darkly funny in its own odd way. It is also my favorite story in the book.

Two of the next three stories conform to a particularly unpleasant horror stereotype, being about men who abuse (and in one case kill) prostitutes for pleasure. I can see that this is an obvious setting for a horror story, but when I find this sort of thing I immediately wonder why people write this stuff, and why they read it. Do they find it erotic?

I did read Mike O'Driscoll's "Hello Darkness" all the way through because he made an honest attempt to explain why his "hero" was the way he was. With Robert Nielson's "Pleasing Mr.

Ross" I quickly skipped to the end to see if it was as predictable as I expected, and it was.

A much more interesting story is Dermot Ryan's "The Burnished Egg". It is about a teenage boy who reads so intensely that when he does so an egg-shaped space opens in the air beneath his head within which can be seen images of what he is reading. It is live 3D cinema, complete with authentic sound track. Naturally the boy becomes a popular entertainer, but as with many such people he has a strong interest in serious art. If you happen to develop this talent, please, don't read from *Paradise Lost*. I think the execution of the story could have been better, but the idea was top notch.

As for the rest of the book, well... In her book, *Storyteller* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), Kate Wilhelm talks about the "The Red Line of Death". This is a technique that she and Damon Knight used to use when teaching at Clarion. The line represented the point in the story at which the tutor felt an editor would stop reading and reject the story. A very similar red line, albeit metaphorical rather than physical, gets drawn in anthologies at the point at which Cheryl gets bored reading a story and either skips immediately to the next one, or checks that she guessed the ending correctly and then skips on. There were an awful lot of metaphorical red lines in *Emerald Eye*.

*Emerald Eye* - Frank Ludlow & Roelof Goudriann (eds.) - Aeon Press - trade paperback

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## Another One of Those

By Cheryl Morgan

It isn't often that I fail to finish a novel that I take for review. If I can spot beforehand that I'm not going to get on with a book I see no point in trying to read it. In this particular case, however, the book comes from a new small press that I'd like to help, and its author says he'd rather have a bad review than none at all, so I'm going to try to explain why I couldn't finish it. Let's start with the good stuff.

The book, *The Cunning Blood*, is one of the initial offerings from ISFIC Press, an offshoot of Illinois Science Fiction In Chicago, and therefore a fannish publisher. Given the success of NESFA Press, I want to see these guys do well. Besides, their book designer is Bob Garcia of American Fantasy, so I know the books are going to look great.

The basic plot is as follows. Earth has expanded a little way into the galaxy. Thus far it has only a few colony planets and one of those is the prison planet, ~~Australia~~ Hell. Felons sentenced to transportation are dropped out of orbit on a one-way trip. The atmosphere of Hell is seeded with a vicious nanovirus that eats anything that smacks of electronics, so the bad guys should never be able to get out. Of course the best of plans can often go awry, and the North American government has been hearing disturbing rumors about goings on in Hell. They decide to send an agent to investigate. To give him a much-needed edge against the bad guys he is expected to find there, author Jeff Duntemann equips him with a bloodstream full of the latest in biotech nano AIs, something that should be proof against Hell's defenses.

The attraction for hard SF fans should be obvious. The inhabitants of Hell might be wicked, but by no means are all of

them stupid. They have a whole planet to work with, and every possible incentive to invent technologies that don't require electronics. This gives Duntemann lots of opportunities to come up with smart technological solutions. A lot of SF fans are going to love this book. So why could I not finish it?

Well, the Earth of the book is a terribly authoritarian place. It is a society in which perfectly normal activities of Red Blooded American Males, things like carrying guns, beating up people you don't like, and driving vehicles much faster than is safe, are crimes! Indeed, if you happen to kill some guy just because he's an asshole who has been annoying you, or he got in the way of your car when you were in a hurry, then you are likely to be sentenced to transportation to Hell! Doubtless the same applies to poor guys who are driven to rape tarts who won't sleep with them. Heck, this is a society in which playground bullies are regarded as sociopaths rather than as national heroes in the making as ought to be the case. And why has this dreadful situation come to pass? Because thanks to the idiocies of democracy North America is now run by Women! And not just any Women either. Patriotic American Women generally approve of Red Blooded Males. No, North America is under the iron jackboot of Evil Canadian Women! (I was rather hoping they would turn out to be Evil Lesbian Canadian Women, but I guess you can't have people conform to every stereotype.)

So let's think about this for a minute. All of the good guys (Red Blooded American Males) are getting transported to Hell. And being good guys they are going to be smart and good fighters. So guess what one of our heroes gets told when he arrives on Hell? Back on Earth, Jamie Eigen was an actuary for an

insurance company. His welcoming committee from the Interstellar American Republic are not familiar with this word, so Jamie explains that his job was counting bodies. This delights his welcomers.

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*"Hey, that's good. You're gonna be busy."*

*"Why so?"*

*"Cause we're about to wipe goddam Canada off the face of the goddam Earth."*

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So what is the society on Hell like? I think you can guess. It is a place where, if the government is meaner and nastier than the criminals, crime is magically eliminated. This is especially so if justice is administered swiftly and brutally in public without any form of trial where some slimy lawyer might get the bad guy off. It is a place where business disputes are settled by fights or gambling rather than negotiation. It is a place where Real Men live.

I know that there are plenty of people out there who love this sort of book. It is also possible that it will get less childish as time goes on. But after 100 pages or so I had got to the throw it against the wall stage. By the time one of the characters started quoting the great 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher, Robert A. Heinlein, I was pretty sure what sort of review I was going to write. If it turns out that I am wrong then I apologize profusely to Mr. Duntemann. But in the meantime I am sure that there are a lot of people out there who are leaping with joy at finding other book that has got Cheryl mad and will be rushing out to buy it.

Just one word of warning. If you happen to be Canadian, don't buy this book. I don't want to be responsible for anyone dying from unrestrained fury.

Oh, and the really amusing thing is that the book ISFIC is bringing out to launch their line is *Relativity* by Canada's most famous SF writer, Robert J. Sawyer. Let's hope he doesn't have to do any joint signings with Duntemann.

*The Cunning Blood* – Jeff Duntemann – ISFIC Press – publisher's proof

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## Clarion Echoes

The Clarion writers' workshop has been much in the news of late, so this is perhaps an ideal time to learn more about what goes on at such events. And who better to tell that story than Kate Wilhelm. Along with her late husband, Damon Knight, Wilhelm can be counted one of the main founders of Clarion, and therefore one of the originators of the Clarion Method.

Her new book, *Storyteller*, published by Small Beer Press, sets out to do two things. Firstly it is a personal history of the workshops. In addition the book attempts to set out some of the advice that Wilhelm gave to her pupils. I suspect that the two strands of the book will have rather different audiences. Wilhelm's tales of life at Clarion did little for me besides convincing me that there is no way that I'd ever want to attend a workshop. Having your writing constructively torn to shreds is one thing. Mandatory water pistol fights and ball games is quite another. At times Wilhelm made it sound like Clarion was a definite *Lord of the Flies* experience. Still, she does provide the occasional amusing glimpse of well-known writers:

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*Lucius Shepard, a mobile disaster zone; in his presence, things broke, items fell down, drinks spilled. He needed Clarion the way a bulimia victim needs a girdle.*

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The material on writing techniques, however, I found very interesting. Not that I am planning to inflict my fiction on you. That would certainly class as cruel and unusual punishment. But I'm well aware that many people feel that I have no right to comment on fiction because I'm not a writer myself. Well, equally I can barely get a cricket ball from one end of the wicket to another, but I can still study what Shane Warne does, how he does it, and why he is a genius. So I want to learn more about how writers do what they do.

Some of Wilhelm's advice to students is pretty restrictive. For example, she insists that there should be no colorful language, even such common formulations as, "'Stop that', he growled". Apparently only dogs growl, men don't. Equally every element of the story should be spelled out clearly, you should never leave your readers wondering what is going on, or confused about the gender of one of your characters, and you should never start a story in the middle of the action.

Wilhelm's justification for this is that the students have to learn to write simple stories well before they can be allowed to break the rules. She's probably right. Remember also that the rules for short stories can be very different than those for novels where there is much more space in which to explain yourself, and Clarion is specifically about writing short fiction. It is also true that following Wilhelm's rules will help you sell to the bigger publishers who market to a larger and less sophisticated audience. Still, it must be frustrating for a young writer to be forbidden many of the classic tools of speculative fiction. And I can't help but imagine what would happen if Wilhelm found herself faced with a class composed of China Miéville, Gwyneth Jones and Gene Wolfe.

Judging from some of the anecdotes she told, some of the students clearly didn't have much of a clue (about grammar, let alone about telling a story). But others were much better and have since gone on to become famous. So Wilhelm was not above setting them interesting challenges at times. I particularly like this exercise:

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*Try writing a page or two of dialogue with your characters without any attributions. No he said or she said, no names given, only the dialog. Their speech patterns should vary enough to distinguish who is speaking, and speech should never sound like the narrative.*

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That's hard, and I can imagine many published writers struggling with it. Some are brilliant at it; L.E. Modesitt even makes a joke out of it in *The Eternity Artifact*. But in many books I have read all of the characters have the same speech patterns.

In addition, Wilhelm has many wise words of advice. I'd like to leave you with just two important lessons.

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*Don't expect to make a living writing for a long time, if ever. Many successful writers don't make a real living from it after many, many years. Some successful writers never make a living writing fiction.*

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And, of course...

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*Don't let a bad review get you down, or a good one go to your head. In the end, neither means a lot as long as they spell your name right.*

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If you are a budding writer, please spend \$16 on this book before raising the money needed to attend Clarion. You'll

get much more out of the workshop if you do.

*Storyteller* – Kate Wilhelm – Small Beer Press  
– trade paperback

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## Out of Synch

By Cheryl Morgan

December looks like being a pretty quiet month for book releases, which is just as well as I desperately need some time to catch up on the vast pile of books awaiting review. In terms of US releases of UK books, there are only two in the Locus lists, neither of which I have reviewed. The first is Del Rey's edition of *Transcendent*, the second book in Stephen Baxter's *Destiny's Children* series, which I didn't review because I was so disappointed by the first volume, *Coalescent*. The other is the Night Shade edition of Steven Erikson's *Blood Follows*, first issued by PS Publishing. I have a review copy of that and will be covering it next issue.

I have, however, been sent one reprint that is worth mentioning. Black Library has produced an omnibus edition of Kim Newman's Genevieve stories, published under the pen name of Jack Yeovil. *The Vampire Genevieve* contains all three Genevieve novels: *Drachenfels*, *Genevieve Undead* and *Beasts in Velvet*, plus the short story collection, *Silver Nails*. I know these are *Warhammer* tie-in novels, but when it comes to vampire stories Kim Newman is easily one of the best. If you like vampires, and you haven't read these books yet, then you really should get this omnibus edition. You won't be disappointed.

*The Vampire Genevieve* – Jack Yeovil (Kim Newman) – Black Library – mass-market paperback

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## Miscellany

By Cheryl Morgan

### World Fantasy Awards

Thanks to the excellent IT facilities at the Concourse hotel in Madison the live blogging of the World Fantasy Awards went ahead as planned. Here are the results.

**Special Award, Non-Professional:** Robert Morgan for Sarob Press.

**Special Award, Professional:** S.T. Joshi.

**Best Artist:** John Picacio.

**Best Collection:** Margo Lanagan for *Black Juice*.

**Best Anthology:** Two winners: *Acquainted with the Night* (Barbara and Christopher Roden) and *Dark Matter* (Sheree R. Thomas).

**Best Short Story:** Margo Lanagan, "Singing My Sister Down" from *Black Juice*.

**Best Novella:** Michael Shea, "The Growlimb" from *F&SF*.

**Best Novel:** Susanna Clarke for *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*.

**Life Achievement Awards:** Carol Emshwiller and Tom Doherty.

There are some very good choices there. Obviously I'm very pleased for Susanna. Winning both the Hugo and the Howie is a major achievement. There was much delight as well for Margo Lanagan, and it was great to see her delighted comments on the blog while the ceremony was going on.

I, of course, am particularly pleased for John Picacio. As and when I have money again, I am going to buy some prints.

Tom Doherty, by the way, was hobbling round the convention on crutches. I hope the leg is better now, Tom.

Commiserations as usual to all of those who did not win.

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### **International Horror Guild Awards**

These were also presented at World Fantasy Con, and may become a regular part of the event. The full results are available [here:](http://www.ihgonline.org/)  
<http://www.ihgonline.org/>.

Congratulations are due to Ramsey Campbell and PS Publishing for beating out some very strong contenders to win Best Novel with *The Overnight*. Also to John Harwood and *The Ghost Writer* for triumphing over *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* in Best First Novel.

I'm delighted to see Lucius Shepard win Best Novella with *Viator* (though commiserations to Leena Krohn and *Tainaron*).

Much bouncing up and down with excitement over Savoy's *A Serious Life* winning Best Non-Fiction. The Savoy folks thanked me for my support in their acceptance speech which is ever so sweet of them but I probably didn't influence the outcome much. It is a great book. It is apparently also the first award that Savoy has ever received - aside from the type of award that gets you raided by the police and slung in prison.

And finally congratulations to Andy Cox for beating some much better funded US publications to win Best Periodical with *The Third Alternative*.

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### **Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire**

France has proved its good taste in fiction by awarding its Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire for translated short fiction

to Jeffrey Ford. The winning story was "Exo-Skeleton Town". Jeff tells me that it is in his collection, *The Fantasy Writer's Assistant and Other Stories*, from Golden Gryphon.

In the exceptionally strong translated novel field, Christopher Priest emerged the victor with *The Separation*. That's another good reason for America to go out and buy the beautiful Old Earth edition of the book. Mary Gentle's *Ash* did not win, but Mary's translator, Patrick Marcel, did win an award for his work on the book.

Full details here:

<http://www.noosphere.org/gpi/nomines2006.asp>

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### **Endeavour Award**

Next on the awards trail, congratulations to Louise Marley for beating a very strong field, including Lucius Shepard and Patricia McKillip, to win the Endeavour Award with *The Child Goddess*. The award is for the best novel by a writer from the Pacific Northwest and was presented at Orycon.

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### **Amazon Top Ten**

And finally, Amazon.com has produced a list of the top ten US-published SF&F books of 2005, as chosen by their editorial staff. The winner is *The Algebraist* by Iain M. Banks (which of course means the Night Shade Books edition). Second was *Accelerando* by Charles Stross, and third *Looking for Jake* by China Miéville. Richard Morgan and Neil Gaiman also featured in the top ten, which just goes to show that the predominance of British writers in this year's Hugos was no fluke. The full list is available here:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/593300/103-6797489-7950257>

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## Sci Fiction, RIP

Undoubtedly the saddest news of the month is that SciFi.com has decided to close the *Sci Fiction* section of their web site, apparently to make room for more hi tech features. The news is particularly galling because *Sci Fiction* won a Hugo this year for being the Best Web Site. It just goes to show how little importance is placed on the Hugos by the SF industry these days.

The news does, of course, put paid to Ellen Datlow's day job, though I'm sure that an editor of her skill won't have any trouble finding new work. Ellen's farewell message can be found here:

<http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/message.html>

In the meantime various people are launching projects to commemorate the site and ensure that the stories it published are not lost when the site goes offline. The most significant is Dave Schwartz's ED SF Project, which can be found here:

<http://edsfproject.blogspot.com/>

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## New Magazines

There were two fiction magazines in the goody bag at World Fantasy Con. One was the first ever issue of *Fantasy Magazine* from Prime Books. The other was the second issue of *Subterranean* from Subterranean Press. There are a couple of interesting things about this. Firstly, both magazines are published by existing successful small presses. That almost certainly means they will both qualify as semiprozines in the Hugos, which might make life interesting for

*Locus*. In addition both of them are letter-sized rather than digest-sized; more like *Interzone* than *Asimov's*, which is an interesting change for the US market.

There are some broad similarities between the two magazines. Both are in the region of 100 pages, though *Fantasy Magazine* is a little bigger. Both are priced at \$6. Both, I think, are intended to be quarterly. In both cases the vast majority of the content is fiction, but with a small amount of non-fiction included. Sadly I haven't had time to read either of them yet (a quick glance at the reviews above should show why). If there is anyone out there who wants to review magazines for *Emerald City*, please let me know.

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## Editorial Matters

By Cheryl Morgan

World Fantasy Con was great fun, and it was a pleasure to see so many good friends again. Special thanks to Gigi for being such a good roommate.

The main point of the convention for me, however, was to do business. I commissioned a bunch of feature articles, and picked up a lot of review copies of books, but I'm now feeling much less confident about *Emerald City's* ability to attract advertising.

It turns out that sites like *Locus Online* and *SF Site* get their adverts through an agency called Gorilla Nation. The big publishers produce their ads, and Gorilla Nation sees to their distribution. Major publishers, at least in the US, are highly unlikely to deal direct with a web site.

The problem here is that you have to have a certain level of traffic before Gorilla Nation will place ads with you. It is not entirely clear what level of traffic

they want, but given that they haven't bothered to respond to my request for clarification I suspect that I have no chance of meeting their requirements unless my number of readers increases by at least an order of magnitude, possibly two.

Part of the problem is that Gorilla Nation measures traffic in terms of unique page views. Someone reading this issue of *Emerald City* as a single web page would generate one page view. If I put each review on a separate page that would miraculously up by traffic by an order of magnitude. I'll probably do that for the next issue, because I can see why advertisers like it, but it almost certainly won't be enough to make them take notice.

That leaves us with small press publishers. As you will have seen, some of them have tried sponsoring the site. As yet I don't know what, if any, results they have had. But for a small press the equation is even more stark. They generally can't afford to pay for things like visibility. They want sales. And if ads here don't pay for themselves (that is if you folks don't buy books as a result of the ads appearing) then the ads will not get bought.

Which brings me back to where I thought I would be when I started this. I need more traffic. A lot more traffic. Which is where, I hope, the feature articles will come in. Watch this space.

As to next month, I now have a copy Al Reynolds' *Pushing Ice*. I have novels by James Patrick Kelly, Louise Marley, Jack Yeovil and Conrad Williams. There's an anthology from Chris Roberson, a collection from Robert Reed, and a novella from Steven Erikson.

And (at last) I am getting to read *Temeraire*. Please don't bother me until I have finished.

Best wishes,

Cheryl

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