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In This Issue

And Thanks for All the Fish

By Cheryl Morgan

As you will have probably seen on the blog, *Emerald City* will be ceasing publication over the next couple of months.

This is actually a decision I took back in early June, well before the most recent attack on the integrity of reviewers. I haven't been able to announce it until now because announcing a fold just before the voting deadline might have been perceived to affect the Hugos and that would never do. (I will, of course, decline any nominations I might receive next year.) If I've been a little cranky over the past few weeks, now you know

why. I've just wanted to get the whole thing over with.

The reasons for this decision are many and varied. One of the least obvious is that I have a major logistical problem. It simply isn't possible to run an operation like this when you don't have a permanent home. In addition, over the past year or so I have become very disillusioned about both the quality of my own work and the general usefulness of online book reviews. The bottom line is that if you don't think what you are doing is worthwhile then it is very difficult to maintain the level of commitment necessary to produce something like *Emerald City*.

There will be a September issue. There may even be an October issue, because you make commitments about reviews months in advance and I don't want to back down on any promises I have made.

Another issue is subscriptions. I'm going to try to cancel all repeating payments myself, but I'm not sure that PayPal will let me do that, so if you have signed up for a subscription you should cancel it yourself. You can do so here <http://www.emcit.com/subscribe.php >. In addition it seems likely that someone in fandom is going to complain that I have taken in vast sums of money and am now cutting and running with the profits. Therefore I am offering to pay back any money donated to *Emerald City* over the past year. As you can guess, the sums are not that huge. Even if everyone asks for their money back, my bank account can stand it. If you want a refund, just email me <cheryl@emcit.com> and ask.

Finally I should thank everyone who has helped make this magazine possible over the years. I would certainly have succumbed to the pressure of producing it long ago had it not been for the support given by Kevin. People would have had much less respect for me had I not had Anne to fix all of my spelling and grammatical errors. Very many people have contributed reviews and articles over the years. And many readers have kindly thanked me for what I have done. Although it may not sound like it from the above, I have mostly enjoyed producing this magazine, and I'm very sad to have to give it up.

Big Yellow Spaceship

By Cheryl Morgan

Here we are at book four. Karen Traviss is still holding out on the promised invasion of Earth, but *Matriarch* is by no means marking time. As she promised in an interview with me earlier this year, Traviss has a lot to write about. Most of it involves turning readers' expectations upside down. If you thought you knew who were the good guys in the wess'har series, think again. Traviss doesn't do good guys, she does real people.

Those of you who have not yet read the earlier books in the series (and why not?) please look away now. You can't easily review a book in the middle of a series without spoilers.

On Bezer'ej, Lindsay Neville and Mohan Rayat have been sentenced to a lifetime of community service as punishment for their devastation of the planet and almost total genocide of the squid-like bezeri. Of course the only way they could serve the surviving bezeri would be if they could live underwater. A small dose of *c'naatat* soon fixed that. The clever parasite ensured they would adapt to breathe water rather than

drown. It will fight any other threats to their wellbeing as well, so a "life" sentence means forever.

(It also allows Traviss to have lots of scenes featuring talking squid.)

Right now, however, Neville and Rayat are busy helping their jailers rescue the remains of bezeri culture. The book's cover shows Lindsay swimming through a bezeri city. What? You didn't know they had any cities? That was long ago, before the coming of the isenj, when there were millions of bezeri rather than the sorry thousands that Neville and Rayat killed. There's a lot we didn't know about the bezeri, and our two mass murderers are ideally placed to find it all out — much of it rather too late.

How did that song go again?

"Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone"

Meanwhile on Umeh, the Eqbas Vorhi are embarking on their environmental restoration project. The Trantor-like artificial skin of the planet has been pierced for the first time in centuries. Eddie Michallat is able to be present at the inaugural tree-planting ceremony.

The isenj were fascinated by [the soil]*, and some had scraped it with their footpads or lowered themselves to reach down and crumble it between their hands. Food plants grew in nutrient-laden water; the thousand different fungi that isenj cultivated grew in vats and on barklike medium. Earth was a novelty and they seemed to relish getting their hands dirty.*

The hole in the planet's surface is, of course, a bomb crater. Most of the isenj object violently to having their environment forcibly restored by a bunch of do-gooding aliens. They are happy to put aside any local differences and unite against the invaders, no matter how out-gunned they might be. The Eqbas response is to find those few isenj who support the restoration project and enlist their help. Eddie is not impressed.

"It's interesting to see that you get in over your heads sometimes," he said, and began walking away. "You might want to read some Earth history about what happens when you start a war between two factions and then leave them to slug it out."

"There are many deaths," said Esganikan. "I know."

"And that's part of your population reduction policy?"

Unlike Earth governments, however, the Eqbas don't believe in exit strategies. After all, their purpose is not to effect regime change on Umeh, but to effect environmental change. If the isenj insist on opposing that strategy, well then they'll just have to be exterminated. Because there is no part of Umeh that isn't inhabited, fighting a war without massive collateral damage is impossible. It makes the job of pest extermination easier.

As someone might have sung…

"Late last night I heard the bombs go bang
And a big yellow spaceship blew away my old man"

All of this, however, is simply a rehearsal for the invasion of Earth. It is, of course, decades away yet. The realities of inter-stellar travel cannot be denied, even by the Eqbas. That doesn't mean that they are not coming. It just means that it gives the people of Earth plenty of time to engage in denial. Here's Eddie

again, taking to one of his colleagues at BBChan:

"Jan, they erase cities. You have no idea. I showed you the pictures. What part of blown off the map *does the government not understand?"*

"Probably the bit that says it won't happen on their watch."

To paraphrase slightly:

"Don't it always seem to go
That you won't know what you've got
'til it's gone"

And there's more. Let's not forget that Shan, Aras and Ade have to make their inter-species, polygamous marriage work. That isn't easy with a bunch of people who keep making moral judgments on each other's behalf. There are a whole bunch of surprises in store for Shan, most of them unpleasant.

You might think that one good thing would be that little Vijissi, the young ussissi aide who got spaced along with Shad, managed to survive. But then you'll work out how he did and know why it isn't. I've always had a feeling that the ussissi would turn out to have some particularly nasty habits. I was right.

If you remember my review of *The World Before* you may remember me describing it as "a little flat." It didn't quite have the same punch as *City of Pearl* and *Crossing the Line*. *Matriarch*, on the other hand, could happily go fifteen rounds with Mike Tyson. When's the next book due?

With apologies to Joni Mitchell.

Matriarch – Karen Traviss – Eos – publisher's proof

Return to Reality

By Cheryl Morgan

Do I really need to review the new Paul Park book? *A Princess of Roumania* has been lauded by many of the great and the good of the community: Michael Dirda, Ursula Le Guin, Elizabeth Hand, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Karen Joy Fowler, Gene Wolfe, John Crowley, to name but some of the people whose blurbs adorn the cover of the sequel. The original book has also recently been announced as a nominee (and quite possibly hot favorite) for the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel. But then again, it is just possible that the sequel will fail to live up to the promise of the original. It does, after all, have to be a rather different book. Let's see.

There were many delightful conceits in *A Princess of Roumania*. My favorite by far was the idea that our world is merely an artificial construct created by a sorceress in the real world. Many fantasy novels, of course, are grounded in our world. Of those many in turn cast doubt upon the reality of the world into which the book's heroes travel. Paul Park engagingly turns this idea upside down.

When, to protect her niece, Aegypta Schenck had placed her in an artificial world, had invented the United States of America and the Romanian republic, and had written the book of their history, she'd worried that a seven-year-old child would not be easily adopted from the Constanta orphanage. Rachel and Stanley, the Americans she'd had in mind, were looking for a younger child, a girl no older than three. Thinking also that Miranda would be happier without her childhood memories, she'd tried hard to accommodate them.

You know, I suspect that one of the reasons all of those top name authors

loved *A Princess of Roumania* is that it portrayed Aegypta Schenck as an author herself, a creator of vivid imaginary worlds. But that now is by-the-by. One of the things about writing a series of fantasy or SF novels is that the shock of the new tends to last only for the first volume. You have to work hard to maintain the invention over several books. In general, subsequent volumes are more about plot and character development than about setting the scene. This is very much true of *The Tourmaline*.

Of course there is new stuff to be learned. A good fantasy author always keeps bits of information back for later volumes so that it can be dribbled out piecemeal to keep the reader interested. For example, we knew from *A Princess of Roumania* that the Roumanians worship the ancient Greek gods, but what about the rest of the world?

At the same time she told the story of Jesus of Nazareth, how he had led the slaves to revolution on the banks of the Nile. Afterward he led his armies into Italy. He crucified the captured generals before the walls of Rome.

And, of course, the Roumanian royal family is said by some to be directly descended from this Jesus and his queen, Mary Magdalene. What was I saying about delightful conceits?

The bulk of the book, however, is given over to developing things. This happens on at three different levels. Firstly our three American teenagers have to get used to the fact that the world they came from was not real, and that the one that they are now in, the one in which Roumania exists, is both real and potentially deadly to them. Miranda is, after all, a pretender to the throne of Roumania, and Roumania has long since been conquered by the Germans.

Next the characters have to get used to being grown up. As noted in the first quote, Aegypta Schenck shaved five years off Miranda's life when she hid her in "America". That all came flooding back when Schenck's artificial world was destroyed. In *A Princess of Roumania* Miranda was a teenage girl; now she is a young woman.

But most importantly of all the characters have to get used to who they really are. For Miranda all this means is that she starts to recover memories of her life before she was sent into hiding. Her two friends, on the other hand, have a much greater adjustment to make. Peter Gross, the crippled American boy with a passion for epic poetry, turns out to actually be the Chevalier Pieter de Gratz, a soldier whose strength and skill in combat are so legendary that I'm surprised Park has not mentioned the name Heracles in connection with him. As for Andromeda, the sassy confident girl who traveled with them, she is actually Lt. Sasha Prochenko, a raffish handsome officer who can talk his way out of any situation, and his way into any woman's bed. Little Miranda once had a massive crush on him.

Well, Andromeda is Sasha Prochenko some of the time. The rest of the time she is still a dog. Park spends rather more time on de Gratz than on her, which is possibly just as well because she's going to be a really complex character to deal with. But I hope he doesn't shirk the job entirely.

So, we have character development aplenty. We have plot development too. Armed with the titular Tourmaline, the magical gem found in the dead brain of the great sorcerer, Johannes Kepler, Nicola Ceausescu has managed to install herself as the puppet ruler of Roumania.

The Elector of Ratisbon has been less fortunate — he has been sent home to Germany in disgrace. But he still has Miranda's mother, Clara Brancoveanu, and young Felix Ceausescu as hostages, so all is far from lost. Both of the villainous sorcerers are, of course, desperate to regain control of Miranda.

The other great delight of Park's writing is the quality of his prose. It reminds me of drinking Guinness in Dublin — it is so smooth you hardly notice it going down. This can be a problem, because the liquid, lyrical writing can carry you quickly through sentences that require more attention. As with Gene Wolfe, you have to read Park's every word or you are likely to miss some vital clue.

For the most part, Park's writing also has a realist sheen to it. He manages to describe the weird stuff in such a matter-of-fact way that you feel it is the real world he is talking about, which of course, from his point of view, it is. Characters from "civilized" countries such as Germany and Egypt tend to insist that the supernatural doesn't exist. Only rarely does the magical world underpinning Roumania break through, as here where Miranda is attacked by thugs working for the vampire, Zelea Codreanu.

Their faces were inhuman, distorted not just by thuggishness and fear, but by a new kind of nature. In each of them she could see a spirit animal scratching and struggling to get out, as if caught in a transparent human bag. In some cases the membrane had already peeled away, revealing the stalklike eyes and active mandibles of insects and shellfish or the unformed faces of baby animals, as if seen through a splitting caul.

Needless to say, only Miranda's eyes see this transformation.

What conclusions can we draw from all this? *The Tourmaline* will, I think, seem like more of the same to most people. Those who are disappointed will be readers for whom the freshness and originality of the setting were the primary delights of *A Princess of Roumania*. For such people sequels are almost always a let-down.

The real squeals of anguish, however, will come from people expecting an ending. I noted in my review of *A Princess of Roumania* that it seems like a book that had been cut in two. I was wrong. It was the first part of a series, each of which has a cliffhanger ending. The conclusion of *The Tourmaline* is even less satisfying than that of the first book. And I'm sorry to report that when I met Park at a reading in Berkeley last year he told me that he thought there would be at least four books, maybe more. I do hope he gets on and writes them. I want to know what happens next.

The Tourmaline - Paul, Park – Tor - hardcover

Strange Because They Are Alien

By Cheryl Morgan

Nina Kiriki Hoffman is one of those writers whom I have seen a lot of at conventions but have never managed to read any of her work. She has always struck me as very thoughtful, so I was pleased when Tachyon sent me a proof of her latest book (and indeed her first ever SF book – the others all being fantasy). *Catalyst* is, as the subtitle clearly points out, "A Novel of Alien Contact". It is also a rather odd, often intriguing, book.

Let's start with the word "novel". *Catalyst* is around 170 pages long, with

large print. I'm guessing that in Hugo terms it is actually a novella. The large print, and the fact that the central characters are teenagers, suggests that it is a YA book. Certainly Hoffman has written a lot of YA material. But if *Catalyst* is YA, why does it have so much sex in it? Well OK, modern teenagers don't need to be protected from sex scenes, although the book doubtless risks being banned from school libraries in Texas. The book also reads very simply – no flowery style here – which also suggests a YA target, but Tachyon is apparently selling it to an adult market and it certainly has enough in it to make readers think.

So, what about the plot? Our hero, Kaslin, and his family are amongst the poorer inhabitants of a frontier planet. They apparently ended up there because Kaslin's father has too many convictions for petty crimes. At school Kaslin is tormented by Histly, a pretty rich girl with sadistic tendencies. Fleeing from her one day, he falls into a cave complex and discovers that the planet is home to another species of intelligent life.

This is not one of those first contact novels that examines the process carefully and tries to work out how two alien species might come to communicate with each other. Rather it is one of those books in which the aliens are impenetrably strange and we, as readers, struggle along with the characters to work out what is happening. Apart from the sex, of course. One thing that is very clear is that the aliens find human sexual responses fascinating. The aliens also seem to like Kaslin, perhaps as much because he's naïve and pliable as because he is friendly. They don't like Histly, with good reason: where Kaslin sees interesting aliens, she sees commercial opportunity.

Things move on a bit. Adults get involved and behave in typically greedy and/or hysterical human fashion. The aliens prove well capable of dealing with them, and then the book stops.

I'm not sure why. It doesn't feel like Hoffman got bored. But at the same time there are some interesting subplots that she has set up that she never bothers to exploit. Thankfully the book was interesting enough as far as it went to make it worth reading. It is also a pleasure to have a short book to read every now and then. But *Catalyst* promised much, and for the most part didn't deliver because it didn't follow through. Like I said, odd.

Catalyst: A Novel of Alien Contact - Nina Kiriki Hoffman – Tachyon Publications – publisher's proof

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The Magic Goes Away

By Cheryl Morgan

One of the best things about publishing *Emerald City* has been to be able to watch new writers gradually improving, book-by-book. Glenda Larke is an excellent example of this. Reading through her Isles of Glory series (*The Aware*, *Gilfeather* and now *The Tainted*) has led to my becoming more and more impressed with Larke's ability. She's not top flight yet, but is she keeps on getting better who knows what she'll produce.

So what do I look for in trilogies that, from their covers, seem to be aimed at the formula fantasy market? One thing I do like is to see the author have the courage to abandon the comfort reading market. Too much modern fantasy is predictable and safe. I know there are lots of people who like that sort of thing, but I don't see much point in reading a book when you know exactly what is

going to happen, unless perhaps the prose is brilliant.

Larke has no compunctions about torturing her characters. As those of you who have read *Gilfeather* know, that book had a very nasty surprise in store for its lead character. It centers on Kelwyn Gilfeather, an unassuming healer whose only special powers are his medical skills and a strong streak of stubbornness. Except that Gilfeather is unaffected by magic, and therefore becomes an ideal candidate to help dispose of the evil sorcerer, Morthred.

A healer by profession, Gilfeather is initially reluctant to murder someone, but he is eventually persuaded that Morthred is so evil that his death is a necessity. Unfortunately there is a complication. One of Morthred's more spectacular works of villainy was to sink the entire Dustel Isles beneath the waves, turning the inhabitants into birds in the process. When Morthred dies the curse is lifted and the Dustel islanders become human again — many of them while in mid flight. So while some fete Gilfeather for saving their world from evil, others regard him as a mass murderer.

Even those Dustels who were not in the air when they changed don't have things easy. Here's Larke's Dustel viewpoint character, Ruarth.

An easy thought, difficult to execute. I was unable to tell my arms what to do, let alone my hands or fingers. They flapped and flung themselves this way and that. The digits of a bird's forearm flex the flight feathers, they don't curl themselves up and hold things, such as the ropes of the rigging.

In a formula fantasy book the Dustels would have turned back into people without any problems at all. It would have been a happy ending.

I'd also like to talk a bit about the narrative structure employed by Larke. Almost the entire trilogy takes the form of first person narratives told by the viewpoint characters some fifty years after the events being described. The clever thing about this is that it allows the author to tell us what the characters are thinking and feeling, rather than having to show us, without it seeming nearly so clunky as this sort of writing does in a third person narrative. On the other hand, it can complicate characterization. Elarn Jaydon, a new character introduced in *The Tainted*, is an old, wise and successful politician when making his narration, but he is talking about a time when he was young, carefree, and also largely free of common sense and conscience. This is a tough ask, and for me doesn't quite come off.

Meanwhile, back with the book. The plot centers on the plan concocted by Gilfeather and the priest, Tor Ryder, to put an end to magic once and for all. This too is not the sort of thing that you would find in a formula fantasy book. Traditional fantasy assumes that magic is a good thing, a romantic thing, even if it is occasionally wielded by bad guys. Larke takes the view that, just like any other form of power, magic will be abused. And if only a small fraction of the population have that power then they will impose their will on everyone else. Interestingly the magic practiced in Larke's books is primarily illusion, which brings us to interesting political comments such as this:

"Ordinary people like illusion," I said. "They feel safe with handsome, strong, confident people in charge. Now they will see them as they are — just like the rest of us. Just like them. *And ordinary people will think that if our rulers aren't special, then maybe anyone*

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can rule… a, um, fishmonger from Milkby, perhaps…"

Or a grocer's daughter from Grantham, but let's not think about that.

But you see the point. This is not the stuff of formula fantasy. Larke is not just telling a light and fluffy story of heroism, she is telling us things that she thinks are important. My spies in Australia tell me that her new series continues the trend of improvement. I'm looking forward to it.

The Tainted - Glenda Larke – Ace – mass market paperback

The Trickster's Queen

By Cheryl Morgan

A while back I reviewed Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth*, a book that was intended to set the scene for Canongate's The Myths series. The first few pieces of fiction in that series are now available, and one of the most interesting is *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood.

I note from the back cover blurb that a reviewer in *The Spectator* described Penelope as "a perfect Atwood heroine." I'm not convinced about that. I think you could write a version of Penelope that Atwood would despise. But if you are looking for a character from Greek myth that would make a good feminist heroine, Penelope is a very good starting point. She is, after all, held up as a shining example of what feminism isn't.

And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with. Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been? That was the line they took, the singers, the yarn-spinners. Don't follow my example, *I want to scream in your ears — yes, yours! But when I try to scream I sound like an owl.*

Atwood's Penelope is a long-dead shade, a grumpy old matron who has spend thousands of years in Hades gloomy realm, brooding over the fact that she spent twenty years loyally managing the kingdom and defending her virtue from all-comers while Odysseus toured around Troy and the Mediterranean bedding every princess, nymph and Goddess that he came across. Naturally she blames everything on her cousin, Helen.

Helen the beautiful, Helen the devious, Helen the malicious, Helen the vain; Helen who cannot ever be satisfied with what she has got, because if ever something marginally better than what she already has should cross her path then surely she, of all people, deserves to have it.

Helen who ruined Penelope's life by running off with Paris, precipitating the Trojan War, and causing Odysseus to leave home for twenty years.

Fortunately for Penelope, the dead are not entirely cut off from the living. In the good old days mortal heroes used to visit them. Now they have to seek out contact themselves.

More recently, some of us have been able to infiltrate the new ethereal-wave system that now encircles the globe, and to travel around that way, looking out at the world through the flat, illuminated surfaces that serve as domestic shrines.

My, do you think that Atwood has been reading Gene Wolfe? Probably not — the

idea isn't hard to come up with — but I would like to think she has.

Anyway, Penelope gets the opportunity to tell her story, and to demonstrate along the way her continuing loyalty to the devious old fox that she married. But she doesn't get it all her own way. There are twelve other voices in the book. They belong to the maids that Odysseus executed on his return home for the crime of fraternizing with the Suitors. Penelope claims that it was all a mistake — that she was using the girls to spy on her enemies. The maids have an entirely different story. We, as readers, are asked to decide who we believe: a bunch of lowly serving girls, or a woman so skilled at dissembling that crafty Odysseus made her his life partner.

Along the way we discover that Atwood has been reading Robert Graves and thinking about the moon. Fortunately I don't have to warn you that many readers will deem the results of this to be "unfounded feminist claptrap" because Atwood took the trouble to mention that for me.

That is one of the joys of the book. It is full of knowing asides: by Penelope, by the maids, by Atwood. I laughed a lot reading it. And it handles the whole mythic background well enough, although I think it would be a stretch to describe it as fantasy. One of Atwood's versions of the Odyssey has it that Odysseus and his men spent ten years carousing and whoring their way around the Mediterranean because they didn't want to have to go home to their wives. Cyclops? Lotus Eaters? Sirens? Just inventive excuses made up by men who could no longer claim to be having to work late at the war.

Of course, like all Greek myths, the story ends badly. It is almost as predictable as a Disney movie, if a mirror image thereof. Unlike Disney, Atwood does not bother to re-write the ending so cater for modern sensibilities. She, at least, doesn't want to be safe, and neither should be. We can, however, have a darn good giggle along the way.

Here's a recommendation, ladies. Buy this book. Read it once (it is less than 200 pages, with quite a bit of poetry, it won't take long), and then put it somewhere safe. Then, the next time your man has been a complete pig about something, run yourself a hot bath, dig out a box of chocolates, and take *The Penelopiad* with you to read. You'll be feeling better in no time. (And unlike reading Sheri Tepper or Suzy McKee Charnas it won't inspire you to violence, just giggles.)

The Penelopiad – Margaret Atwood – Canongate – mass market paperback

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Begetting Violence

By Victoria Hoyle

I don't like trade paperbacks. They're unwieldy, like hardbacks but without any of the expensive-feeling durability, and they're even more prone to broken spines and bent corners than mass markets because of their size. Really, they're the worst of both worlds. (NB: Not that I'm adverse to people giving them to me for free.) And so it's a measure of quality that, despite my having Joe Abercrombie's debut *The Blade Itself* in trade paperback, I didn't hold its material handicap against it. I carried it around with me; I took it on the bus; I read it in the bath. It was funny and witty, in a self-deprecating sort of way. It was heroic fantasy, with any number of stock characters — mages, barbarians, vain nobles, torturers and sexy but deadly slave girls — but it was also ironical and self-aware. It took stereotypes, paid tribute to them, and

then moved beyond them, and all this without negating the traditional strengths of the form. It was a serious book that didn't take itself too seriously, and it was really rather good.

The book is set in the Union, a sprawling confederacy of disparate countries and cities united under a King and a parliament of hereditary nobles. Angland, in the North, is harsh, mountainous and riven by old tribal loyalties; Midderland, the Union's heartland, is lush, fertile and ruled over by the very oldest of noble families; Styria, the land of the Free Cities, is the centre of its trade; and Dagoska is its furthest colony, sitting vulnerably on an outcropping of the hostile Gurkhish Empire. Such a geography should sound familiar, the Union being largely analogous with Europe (Angland=England and so on) and the Gurkhish being something akin to the Ottoman Turks; there is even an "Old Empire" to parallel China. The Union, however, is anything but united, and as Joe Abercrombie's novel opens, it is clear that it faces threats on at least two fronts. In the far North, Bethod, a tribal chieftain of bloody renown, has been subsuming his rivals into a single Kingdom and has subsequently set his eyes on Angland and its wealth of resources. Meanwhile, in the East, the young Emperor Uthman al-Dosht has been consolidating his own territorial holdings and means to take back Dagoska.

Inextricably bound up in the brewing of these troubles are Sand dan Glokta, a crippled and increasingly bitter torturer with the Union's Inquisition; Jezal dan Luthar, vain, noble, feckless and a Captain in the King's Own guard; and Logan Ninefingers, the "Bloody-Nine", Bethod's one-time champion and now his sworn enemy. All three are drawn into orbit around the mysterious Bayaz, a balding old man who may or may not be the legendary First of the Magi and who may or not be set upon saving the Union from destruction by its enemies.

The novel has little in the way of active plot — no major movements, no set-piece battles, and no resolutions. It is that most necessary and difficult of things: the "gathering" segment of a trilogy, the part in which everything is made ready to happen in Books 2 and 3. Thus the imminent clashes with Bethod and the Gurkhish Emperor are held in abeyance while Abercrombie focuses on world building and casting his net out for his characters. That isn't to say that *The Blade Itself* doesn't have tensions or pace: there are numerous bloody skirmishes and clandestine meetings, as well as a striking chase scene and enough politicking and torturing to satisfy most. But Abercrombie is much more interested in the drama of individual characters than in the wider narrative of his first book, structuring it quite similarly to George R. R. Martin with alternating point-of-view chapters (although he is by no means as strict as Martin in keeping to those points-of-view; increasingly toward the end he mixes and mingles them in-chapter). Glokta, Logan and Jezal dominate, and consequently their idiosyncratic voices build nicely: each has his catchphrases and patter as well his unique way of seeing the world. Glokta's sections are characterized by particularly dry, self-deprecating interior monologues and his bitter intelligence is pleasantly reminiscent of Tyrion Lannister. When the three men finally come together in the Union's capital, Adua, their views of each other prove as illuminating, if not more so, than their conceptualizations of themselves.

Not that there aren't female characters too: both Ardee West, a commoner snubbed at court because of her less than

illustrious family connections, and Ferro Maljinn, an escaped Gurkhish slave, have vibrant, independent lives of their own. Thankfully Abercrombie has steered carefully clear of writing them purely as passive or romantic interest and, although it's true that they don't get enough to do in this first novel, both promise to be integral to the machinations of the next.

For once nobody has tried to make a comparison with George R. R. Martin; instead the publisher promises something more akin to Tad Williams. But this seems wrong-headed, almost a missed opportunity. Abercrombie is by no means as po-faced as Williams — he loves to laugh at his own conceits — or indeed as willfully dark and complex as Martin, but his style is closer to the latter than the former. Like Martin he has an ear for constructing dialogue patterns, as well as the beginnings of an epic self-confidence; certainly, his prose is fluent and shows great promise. There are none of the peaks and lows that are often common to debut novels, and none of the jarring constructions I met with in *Elantris* last month. *The Blade Itself* is an incredibly accomplished first novel.

For the most part the real strength is in character (again, similar to Martin), but Abercrombie also sets about foregrounding some interesting thematic premises for his trilogy. The epigraph he chooses for Part One — "The blade itself incites to acts of violence" (Homer) — sets the scene for what I imagine will be the series' ethical inquiry: the inevitability of violence vs. the desirability of peace. Logan Ninefingers, for example, has a gory reputation as a mindless killer, but it becomes increasingly clear that he is not an essentially violent man. On the contrary, fear, guilt and a longing for a cessation of bloodshed plague him. It was circumstance that forced the blade upon him, and the blade itself that has consequently incited others to violence against him. The cycle is a preternaturally destructive one and, as is evident in our own world, almost impossible to break. There are parallels with Inquisitor Glokta: a victim of torture at the hands of the Gurkhish, he returns home only to become a torturer himself. Violence breeds violence.

Loosely related to this is the issue of the "civilization" of the Union compared with the "barbarity" of its enemies. The Union, of course, perceives itself as a paragon of nobility and of superior refinement in an otherwise cruel world, and Abercrombie's decision to focus his narrative there might suggest that he agrees. But far from it, he reveals the Union to be corrupt, cruel and unjust in every way — the majority of its population are little better than serfs; its justice system is predicated on torture and its penal system on the need for slave labor; its all-powerful nobles are selfish, greedy and politically irrelevant. On the surface Bethod's hard tribesmen and Uthman al-Dosht's slave economy are even more despicable, but Abercrombie reveals that they're essentially no worse or no better. Rather all three powers are motivated by the same world-view, the same "law" as one of Bethod's envoys puts it. Laying down his master's demand for Angland to the Union's Open Council he explains:

"Ancient law? Angland is part of the North. Two hundred years ago there were Northmen there, living free. You wanted iron, so you crossed the sea, and slaughtered them and stole their land! It must be then that most ancient of laws: that the strong take what they wish from the weak?…We have that law also!"

Abercrombie's trilogy is called The First Law, and although there is also the first law of the Magi to consider ("*It is forbidden to touch the Other Side and to speak with spirits*"), I'm inclined to see this "ancient law", the one that rules the actions of Bethod, the Union and the Gurkhish, as the first and most central of the book.

The second installment, *Before They Are Hanged*, is due in March 2007, and the third, *The Last Argument of Kings*, hopefully, in 2008. I very much look forward to reading them, and to watching the development of Joe Abercrombie's voice, as well as the fulfillment of his thematic ethos.

The Blade Itself – Joe Abercrombie – Gollancz – trade paperback

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The Boy Who Would Be Queen

By Juliet E. McKenna

I've been looking forward to *The Oracle's Queen*, the third volume in the Tamir Triad, with eager anticipation and it doesn't disappoint. Central characters remain true to the previous volumes, and at the same time we see new facets to their personalities. The inexorable flow of events drives the narrative forcefully onward while unexpected twists keep us guessing. Some of those twists are woven around new characters who add an intriguing freshness as Flewelling brings her story to a convincing conclusion.

The first of these newcomers is Mahti, a hill man and a witch. Mystical destiny brings him down from the mountains in search of the girl who was once a boy. We learn a good deal more about the strange magic of his people and are reminded of the grim enchantment woven around the twin children, Tamir and her brother, back in the very first volume. The boy was sacrificed so that the girl could grow up disguised with his form. If she had been discovered, she would have been killed by her uncle Erius, driven to slaughtering his female relatives by the madness of his mother, queen or not. He was determined to negate the prophecy declaring Skala could only thrive with a queen on the throne.

Only Skala has not thrived under kings. Erius's son, Korin, has only succeeded in fathering monstrously deformed children, causing the death in childbed of his own beloved wife. The savage Plenimarans have invaded. Erius was killed in battle while Korin's inadequacies as a leader were cruelly exposed. It fell to Tamir to save the day, with the skills she had learned as a supposed prince which she would never have learned as a princess.

A lesser writer might have ended the story there, with some swift version of 'and they all lived happily ever after.' Flewelling doesn't duck the challenge of working through what must happen as the dust settles. And, handily, as friends and enemies regroup after the fighting, discovering who is alive and who has perished, the necessary recapping of the story so far is deftly woven into the opening chapters. I'm looking forward to enjoying the trilogy from start to finish some time but I don't feel I should have read the first two books before starting this one, for which I'm thankful.

Tamir must deal with the divided kingdom, as the nobles pledge allegiance either to her or to Korin, who cannot believe in her transformation. There are plenty who can't, writing her off as a 'mad boy in a dress'. Which is understandable, after all. Then she must deal with the reactions of those around

her. Those faithful friends who saw her revealed with their own eyes are still struggling with her changed status and new responsibilities. So is she. She must come to terms with wearing those dresses on the one hand and handling her authority as ruler on the other. She must learn when to delegate her authority and when to impose her will. She must find a way to change the loyal friendship she shared with Ki, when they were both youthful squires together, into the love of a man and a woman who now happens to be queen. She must come to terms with the fact that if Korin won't yield, she must defeat him through force of arms.

The quality of Flewelling's writing comes through here, because if any of this rang even a little false, the whole trilogy would be fatally undermined. But Tamir's confusion and determination as she handles all of this is wholly convincing. More, it enables the modern reader to really empathize with her. We will all face instances when promotion or some other change of circumstance puts a distance between once close friends. Any contemporary woman called back to the Middle Ages would struggle to adjust to the restrictions on her life and choices. But we don't find abrupt modern attitudes jarring against the quasi-historical background. All of this is believably developed, grounded in Tamir's experiences, with acute sensitivity to the realities of the feudal background. It's the life she's led that convinces her of the necessity of challenging established wisdom, looking for merit above lineage.

Tamir's situation contrasts most forcefully with that of Nalia. She has been hidden away too, as a distant female of the royal blood. Now she has been married off to Korin, who beds her without love, merely desperate to continue his dynasty. Nalia has none of the choices open to Tamir. She can't even kill herself, thanks to cruel magic woven around her by Niryn. He's Korin's wizard, a vile man who won't shrink even from murder to achieve his ends. On the one hand, he's working to preserve the prophecy too, on the other, he's dedicated to his own aggrandizement. Though there's far more to him than motiveless malignity. In this book, we learn far more about how his character was formed and deformed by his upbringing.

This is another strength of Flewelling's writing. While the prophecy runs through all these events, the action, the fulfillment or otherwise of that prophecy depends on these very real, very believable people. This tension runs through the whole story. Is Korin incapable of being king because of the prophecy, because of his character flaws or because of the way he was brought up, indulged and unguided? Will Tamir succeed because of the prophecy, because of her essential strength, or because the bizarre life she has led has ultimately equipped her to deal with these unprecedented challenges?

It was wizards who imposed that distorted life on Tamir, by robbing her twin of his own destiny. Duality runs through this final installment of the story even more strongly than in the previous volumes. As Korin and Tamir both try to secure their rule over Skala, we see the very different ways they deal with those whose loyalties are torn between them. His relationship with Nalia contrasts with that between Tamir and Ki. The magical machinations of Iya and Arkoniel are set against those of Niryn, and there we see unwelcome similarities. As events come to their inevitable conclusion, the wizards are all called to account by those they have manipulated, and not merely by the living.

Brother, the demon spirit, is an ominous presence throughout this book. The ghost of Tamir's mother broods, unquiet, in her locked tower room. Lhel, the witch woman who shared her people's sorcery with Iya, still travels with Mahti the witch man even though she is long dead. The mystical is another potent thread in the story, adding an eerie extra dimension. These people believe in their gods. Tamir must visit the Oracle to truly become queen, proving herself by confronting the visions she is granted. All of this plays a vital role in the final resolution, when Korin and Tamir must join battle. But this remains a story about real people, where the ultimate tragedy of civil war, the reality of friends fighting friends balances the high heroics of fantasy fiction.

I'm glad to have been able to review this final book of the trilogy, so I can recommend it and indeed the whole series to lovers of intelligent contemporary fantasy that nevertheless keeps faith with all the strongest traditions of the genre.

The Bone Doll's Twin - Lynn Flewelling – Voyager – mass market paperback

Hidden Warrior - Lynn Flewelling – Voyager – mass market paperback

The Oracle's Queen - Lynn Flewelling – Voyager – mass market paperback

Short Fiction

By Nic Clarke

If there is a theme underlying (most of) this month's selection, it is how environment and its flow of power constrict and shape the individual: the means by which power is exercised, the structures that direct it, and the social and mental frameworks that enforce it.

The long-awaited new issue of *Alchemy* <http://www.clarkesworldbooks.com/alch_mag.html> is full of wonderful stories; it was tough to narrow down my choice. Sarah Monette's "The Séance at Chisholm End" is my pick of the month: a compelling, well-rounded and neatly self-contained story that is both a supernatural mystery and a quiet journey of liberation for its central character, Harriet. The date is unspecified, but the feel is late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The setting is a great house belonging to the sort of well-to-do family that employs (and abuses) a host of servants. Harriet's station in life is reminiscent of that of the heroine of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: she is a paid companion of "old Mrs. Latham", a wealthy lady with a nasty temper, who seems to keep Harriet around largely for the purposes of belittling her, so as to bolster her own sense of superiority.

Enter one Dr Venefidezzi, to conduct the titular séance — an enthusiasm of the various Latham ladies, although it proves rather more tangible experience than they are accustomed to, and dark secrets are duly revealed. Monette expertly captures the oppressive atmosphere of the setting, and the constrictions Harriet's social and financial position. She also shows where her priorities lie in her choice to focus the ending on Harriet's nervous escape, rather than dealing with the potentially more dramatic — but less interesting, in terms of characterization — matter of the fall-out from the séance. Excellent.

It's always a pleasure to read a new piece by Theodora Goss, and "Letters to Budapest" proves as lovely and sorrowful as ever. Set in Communist Hungary, it is structured as a series of letters that János Pál receives from his younger brother, István. It soon becomes apparent that István, an art student, has

landed himself in trouble by creating paintings that do not conform to the Party's preferred forms: uncontroversially bucolic works with "social value", depicting farm girls picking apples and other such wholesome subjects. But István longs to paint something more modern, more imaginative. He is fascinated by forbidden styles, such as he discovers in an art magazine buried amid his roommate's pornography:

The paintings in Les Fantaisistes meant nothing. They existed only for the pleasure of the artist. They were like riddles without answers.

Yet the painting that emerges from this journey into iconoclasm — *Leda* — attracts the attention of more than just the Party's hypocritical censors. Nor is it all unfavorable, such as that of the mysterious Támora von Graff. Goss makes excellent use of the Communist-era setting to explore issues of artistic freedom, individual expression, and the value of non-realist art, with István facing repressive censors on the one hand and, in the figure of von Graff, the opposite, equally harmful extreme: individualism taken to utter selfishness, with a fantastical twist. Goss' prose, meanwhile, is as unshowily, luminously beautiful as we've come to expect.

In "Like The Stars and The Sand", Sonya Taafe plays off the story of Thomas the Rhymer to present a break-up with a difference. It is told from the perspective of a loquacious, self-satisfied (but not unsympathetic) salesman, whose love of the sound of his own voice puts more than his relationship in jeopardy. The conceit is an interesting one, but I found I shared some of the protagonist's frustrated incomprehension of the distant love interest — a little too much, perhaps, since in the end his perception of her as cold due to her taciturnity is never entirely diffused.

Timothy Williams' "The Hollows" takes us to another very different environment: this time, to rural Kentucky, specifically to a backwater small town and its adjoining slums (the hollows). The former local sheriff is our narrator, looking back on the events of fifty years ago, when Mary Tasker fled to the town from the hollows, bringing her children and quickly attracting the disgust and ostracism of the pious townsfolk. As the river swells to flood proportions and the inexplicable deaths mount up, the sheriff finds himself entangled in an increasingly murky clash between small-town conservatism and the harsh reality of life on its margins.

"You don't know anything about the hollows, John. Nothing at all."

"Listen," I said.

"No. You listen. There are things out there like you or no one else in this town has ever seen. Life's thinner out there. (...) People in the hollows have to make accommodations to survive. They have to make compromises, sacrifices."

The parallels with immigration issues are obvious, but do not overpower the story. Mary's unrepentant adherence to her old way of life contrasts with the long struggle of the sheriff's wife to abandon, and even conceal, her own hollows background. There is tragedy in the past and in the present, and no heroes to be found — only conflicting worldviews, intransigence, and other, less quantifiable, forces at work. Williams effectively crafts a suspenseful atmosphere, so much so that the narrator's occasional interjections of

hindsight are not necessary, if not exactly intrusive. Wonderfully creepy, and uncompromising.

This month's *Strange Horizons* <http://www.strangehorizons.com/> features a pair of stories that play with gender paradigms. The first — and most successful — is Michael Hulme's "Minty Bags a Squidboy" (24th July), an excellent example of what can be achieved with a thoroughly amoral protagonist. Minty and her friends are in constant competition with each other to see who can land the most shocking, objectionable boyfriend — and, just as importantly, to brag and/or complain about their conquests. Minty finally finds what she considers the loser to end all losers — Kevin the squidboy, from the despised half-human, half-tentacled minority community — and she takes great delight in showing him off as the prize of her daring. Minty possesses barely a hint of self-awareness, by our standards, but she nevertheless tells us everything we need to know to pass damning judgment upon her and her society. Her point-of-view also makes what could have been an earnest, dull tale of ghettoization into something both lighter and more affecting. The casual, unthinking way that Minty uses Kevin as an exotic accessory, and for the thrill of breaking taboos, underlines the callous attitude of society as a whole. This is only made more pointed by the reversal of conventional gender roles in the relationship; Kevin's naivety and romanticism regarding Minty provides a painful counterpoint to Minty's uncaring exploitation. Minty does not merely misunderstand — she lacks the will even to try. Only her narrative matters, and in that she is depressingly closer to the everyperson in her approach to Other than we might like to admit.

"The Women of Our Occupation" by Kameron Hurley likewise turns gender roles on their head via an invading army composed entirely of women. The women browbeat the populace into submission with a mixture of brute force and selective torture, and abuse their dominant position in all the traditional ways of male soldiers — sexually abusing civilians, shooting insurgents, billeting themselves upon occupied homes. They also remake society after their own model, giving the menial jobs to the men and the higher-paying, more prestigious roles to the women. It is about power: who wields it and who endures it. The parable is rather unsubtle, but biting nonetheless — particularly when witnessed by a teenage boy with more traditional notions of gender — and Hurley even finds some poetry among the brutality:

When my father did come back, red dust filled the seams of his face. His hair had gone white. The spaces under his eyes were smeared in sooty footprints, a dark wash against his sallow skin.

Strange Horizons – Susan Marie Groppi (ed.) – Strange Horizons – web site

Alchemy #3 – Steve Pasechnik (ed.) - Edgewood Press – A5 magazine

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Bright Lights and Deep Darkness

By Mario Guslandi

After the award-winning *The Two Sams*, here it comes: the second short story collection by Glen Hirshberg, one of the most respected new authors of dark fiction.

Truth to tell, I found *The Two Sams* a mixed bag of accomplished, excellent

stories and of ambitious, disappointing failures. The present collection further confirms my previous impression. Take, for instance, the outstanding title story, "American Morons", where a couple travelling in Italy has to face the breakdown of their rented car as well as their own paranoia. The tale is brilliant and unsettling, conveying a sense of dread throughout the whole narrative and long after you close the book. (It also made me realize how some Italian mannerisms can look menacing to the uncomprehending foreigner who doesn't speak the language.)

Another excellent piece is "Like a Lily in the Flood", telling how the diary of an unhappy girl from the last century, revealing the evil deeds of a sect of fanatics, triggers a vengeance carried out through the years. Hirshberg's dry, precise storytelling discloses the truth little by little with masterly craft.

By contrast, "Flowers on Their Bridles, Hooves in the Air", revolving around an amusement park on the Long Beach pier, is a misfire. The characters are hazy and uninteresting, the plot exceedingly diluted in too many pages. As the narrative proceeds a sense of boredom invades the reader.

"Safety Clowns", first published in the anthology, *Acquainted with the Night*, didn't appeal to me then, and still doesn't. Depicting the activities of an organization which, under the pretence of selling ice cream, actually deals with drugs, the story ultimately lacks heart and even Hirshberg's usually vivid narrative style appears opaque and slightly disjointed.

Likewise "Transitway", where two recently retired teachers trying to kill time experience the nightmarish atmosphere of the L.A. Transitway, never really takes off due to lack of proper characterization and the vagueness of the actual threat.

On the other hand, "Devil's Smile" provides a superb, powerful report of a sea tragedy and its hidden truths through the words of a woman trapped for too long in a dilapidated lighthouse. Great storytelling, imparting a deep feeling of mystery and anguish. Another outstanding story is "The Muldoon". Showing the writer at his best, it is endowed with incomparable narrative skill and uncanny ability to chill and scare. Family secrets are gradually disclosed in a complex, effective plot where true horror lies concealed within the human heart.

Thus it appears that Hirshberg doesn't take half measures: either he totally succeeds in creating veritable masterpieces or he miserably flops. Talent, ladies and gentleman, it's like that. The bottom line, anyway, is: buy this book. The four outstanding stories are so great to be well worth the price of the volume.

American Morons - Glen Hirshberg - Earthling Publications - hardcover

Hex Communicated

By Peter Wong

BBC America's marketing people need to be seriously rapped on their knuckles for calling the TV series *Hex* England's version of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. The only similarity between *Hex* and *Buffy* is the general theme of high school girls encountering the supernatural while dealing with maturity issues. The English series' treatment of the theme, unfortunately, turns out to be far less quirky than the American original.

The story begins at Medenham Hall more than 200 years ago. Lady of the house Rachel McBain enjoys her version of an evening snack by visiting the slaves' quarters. While enjoying the sexual favors of a handsome slave, the young woman witnesses an odd ceremony involving a blood sacrifice and a peculiar vase.

Flash forward to the present day. The 18th century manor house has now become a private co-educational school. The slave quarters are now the school's storerooms.

Cassie Hughes (Christina Cole) is a shy but talented art student who longs to be part of the school's attractive in-crowd, especially since one member of that crowd is crush-object soccer jock Troy. However, the only times the in-crowd notice her are when they feel like publicly humiliating someone. Cassie's only relief from personal heartache is Thelma Bates (the wonderfully named Jemima Rooper), her roommate. This proudly out lesbian in turn has an unrequited crush on Cassie.

While on a secret storeroom smoke break, Cassie accidentally discovers the vase used in the ceremony witnessed by Rachel. During the girl's examination of the vase, a drop of her blood ominously lands inside it. Cassie takes the vase back to her room.

Touching the vase awakens previously unknown abilities in Cassie. She has enigmatic visions of Rachel's past and has momentary sights of a mysterious brooding stranger. A talent for telekinesis appears during moments of high emotional stress. Over time, Cassie gains control over her new abilities, and even becomes a provisional member of the in-crowd. These changes seriously fray her relationship with Thelma, who objects to Cassie using her talents to commit malicious pranks.

But Cassie's biggest danger comes from the enigmatic being of her sightings, Azazeal (Michael Fassbender). He may look human, but he's actually the leader of the Nephelim. This band of fallen angels was ejected from Heaven for obtaining the wrong sort of biblical knowledge about mortal women. Thelma attempts to intervene when the fallen angel threatens to sacrifice Cassie to further his plans. For her troubles, the young lesbian gets stabbed to death.

Death does not remove Thelma from Cassie's life, as she re-appears at her funeral as a ghost audible and visible only to her former roommate. However, the two girls do not turn into a distaff version of *Randall And Hopkirk (Deceased)*, despite the hovering menace of Azazeal and an occasional forced supernatural confrontation. Cassie's energies seem more focused on winning Troy's affections. Thelma winds up investigating the mysterious history of Rachel McBain and her family. During this investigation, the ghost discovers an unexpected link between Cassie and Rachel.

The above synopsis covers roughly the first half of the series. Yet despite having nearly three hours to play with, *Hex's* first two episodes fail to fully entice this viewer to eagerly follow its story to the end. Its familiar "average girl discovers previously unsuspected abilities" plot follows the predictable checklist associated with such stories, such as "girl is initially frightened of new abilities but learns to accept them." Had sufficient visually atmospheric moments of dread been provided, *Hex's* look could have provided the continual sense of menace noticeably missing from the script. That doesn't happen. Medenham Hall and its surrounding lands do not look shadowed by hints of a terrible secret history. For the most part, the

faded elegance of *Hex's* setting remains emotionally static.

For a mystery supposedly steeped in the supernatural, *Hex* takes a generally cavalier attitude towards its genre roots. Odd occurrences are neither totally enigmatic nor logically explained. Instead, strange things happen because the script calls for their occurrence. Thelma's ghost can enjoy junk food but she can't entertain the possibility of enjoying the pleasures of Cassie's flesh. Azazeal's ability to cover up both his disappearance while in angel form and Thelma's fatal stabbing feels born out of the need to tie up loose ends for that episode.

A mass of half-baked ideas best describes the treatment so far of the lesbian student's encounters with the world of the living. For an alleged ghost, Thelma seems unable to pass through walls or other solid objects. If the plump lesbian shade wants junk food to snack on, she needs to drop some coins into a vending machine instead of pulling a spectral five-finger discount. She also seems able to carry on public conversations with her former roommate without other people noticing or even commenting. Could Thelma's "ghost" actually be an unconscious creation of Cassie's, born out of her guilt at breaking her roommate's heart? The dead student's independent investigation of a school office indicates otherwise.

Hex's dialogue works best when it offers subtle double entendres. Cassie's dubbing Thelma her "dyke in shining armor" conveys a high level of trust and affection. Yet could it also be the charming come-on that Thelma sees? When the scriptwriters attempt humorous riffs on culturally specific references, the quips generally sink before completing their transatlantic crossing. Thelma's "wax on, wax off" reference to a beauty salon thus fell flat to this American viewer.

What anchors *Hex* in the somewhat watchable category are the one-and-a-half actors' performances at its core. Azazeal should project an enticing yet palpably dangerous sexual allure. Yet Michael Fassbender, who plays the fallen angel, can only produce a small wisp of smoke as his version of sexual heat. Perhaps he needs to take a cue from the films of similarly named German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder?

Christina Cole provides a memorable half-performance as the secretly talented Cassie. She catches the student's concern for others' welfare. Her comforting a member of the in-crowd who mocked her feels genuine and not calculated. Yet her small delight in dropping a flaming sculpture on an obnoxious student also feels plausible. The big problem comes in Cole's failure to tie these two character strands together to make Cassie's personality as a whole more complex. After Cassie has her big argument with Thelma, her character should be tormented regarding the truth of her roommate's accusations. Is Cassie too afraid to acknowledge her own lesbianism? Or has she deliberately strung Thelma along because she's afraid of suffering complete social isolation? Cole doesn't take her character in those deeper emotional waters, and thus leaves her telekinetic student only partly memorable.

The truly memorable character in *Hex* is Jemima Rooper's Thelma. Her forthright character is part and parcel of a personality flexible enough to rise above the most negative circumstances. The lesbian ghost generally does not moan about being sundered from the living. Instead, she realizes that her ghostly state allows her to pig out on unhealthy snacks without worrying about gaining

weight. Yet Rooper manages to make Thelma's occasional displays of vulnerability be plausible parts of her character as well. One remembers the look on Thelma's face when she realizes that the room she's searching happens to be the one where she was murdered. Her scenes with Cassie are affectionate and loving, yet tinged by a heart-breaking fear that she may be mistaken about the nature of her roommate's affections for her.

Rooper's playful performance as Thelma may be enough for some viewers to watch *Hex* to the end. Other viewers may require more than just a strong lesbian character to keep watching.

Hex - Brian Grant and Andy Goddard - BBC America - television broadcast

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Who's That Girl?

By Cheryl Morgan

Here we have something different. I'm not sure that I have ever read a biography before, let alone reviewed one. What is one supposed to say? How does one judge the quality of a biography? On the basis of the research? How would I know if it was good or not? On the understanding of the subject? As I never met her, again I wouldn't know. One thing I can say, however, is that the choice of subject is absolutely vital. And in Alice Bradley Sheldon, a.k.a. Major Davey, a.k.a. Racoona Sheldon, a.k.a. James Tiptree, Jr., Julie Phillips has one of the most fascinating subjects a biographer could wish for. The back cover of my ARC (thanks to Gordon Van Gelder for working hard to get me one) says that the book took Phillips ten years to write. I can believe it. And it is worth every minute of that work.

The book is titled *James Tiptree, Jr., the Double life of Alice B. Sheldon*, but while Tiptree is by far the most famous of the roles that Sheldon played throughout her life, we have to begin with a girl called Alice (a name she reportedly disliked, preferring the more androgynous nickname, Alli).

Alli's parents were amongst the top tier of Chicago society. Herbert was a successful property owner, Mary an equally successful journalist and novelist. Their big love in life was Africa. Little Alice Bradley went on her first safari at the age of six. Her mother used her as the central character of a children's book, *Alice in Jungleland*. Reading what actually happened to Alli in Africa can only make you more impressed with Karen Joy Fowler's story, "What I Didn't See".

As the spoiled daughter of very rich parents, who had anything but a normal childhood, Alli did what might be expected of her. She rebelled; she eloped and ran off to California; she took drugs and had affairs. Her 20's sound a bit like she was living out an Oliver Stone movie. Fortunately for her, celebrity magazines were not nearly so prevalent in the 1930's. Judging by the picture on the cover of the book, she was a lot prettier than Paris Hilton.

Just when it seemed like Alli's life had become a total disaster, there was a war. Enter Major Davey, an expert in the new discipline of photointelligence. You know, the sort of people who can show you a photo of light woods, point to some tell-tale marks and say, "see, squadron of Stukas, plain as day." The war also introduced her to her second husband, Colonel Huntington "Ting" Sheldon.

After the war, Alli shuttled quickly through careers. She worked for the CIA for a while (again in photointelligence,

not as a covert operations operative); she and Ting owned a chicken farm for a few years; Alli got herself a PhD in experimental psychology. And eventually, around the age of 50, she became Tiptree, an award-winning science fiction author.

Up until this point the reader is always a little unsure. Phillips doesn't have a lot in the way of sources of information about Alli's earlier life. Much of her data comes from Alli herself, with the odd comment from equally suspect sources such as her first husband, William Davey. You wonder how much of the woman whose pen portrait is being painted is herself, and how much is made up by the author. Once Tiptree enters the scene, however, the story enters The Fields We Know. Phillips has the whole of the science fiction community to call upon. "Tip", as Alli called himself, was a prolific letter writer. There is correspondence with Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, Harry Harrison and Joanna Russ. There are comments from people such as John Clute, whom Phillips must have known would one day review the book (highly favorably, as it turns out <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/books/column/sfw13348.html>. Tiptree's life is full of concepts (conventions, fanzines) and people (Clute, David Hartwell) who are very familiar to me. It is like reading a family album.

Before we get to Tip, however, we need to look at some of the things that made him the man he was. Alli always had something of a feminist streak, but it was the end of the war that really brought things home to her. She, of course, had a successful military career, albeit mainly behind a desk. But there was no heroine's welcome awaiting her. Meanwhile Rosie the Riveter had gone from being an essential part of the war effort to a covert agent of the enemy. Phillips explains:

Psychology books now pronounced working women "neurotic", unmarried women "unnatural," and educated women "sexually unfulfilled". When Alli read the popular 1947 book Modern Woman: The Lost Sex, *she learned that women who worked outside the home were "masculinized," a condition which endangered their marriage, children and sex life. If women were unhappy in the home, it was the fault of feminism, which ranked with Communism, anti-Semitism, nihilism and archo-syndicalism as one of the "organized movements of the modern world gathered around the principle of hatred, hostility and violence."*

For many American women it was a severe shock to the system; something that these days is probably only experienced by male-to-female transsexuals after they have completed their transitions and have starting living as ordinary women.

Alli was smart enough to understand that this was all about power, about men coming back from the war and wanting to regain the economic and political dominance they had enjoyed before it became necessary to ask women for help in order to defeat a common enemy. Here's how Tiptree described the situation:

Incredible how the top dog always announces with such an air of discovery that the underdog is childish, stupid, emotional, irresponsible, uninterested in serious matters, incapable of learning — but for god's sake don't teach him anything! — and both cowardly and *ferocious […] The oppressed is also treacherous, incapable of fighting fair, full of dark magics, prone to do nasty things like fighting back when*

attacked, and contented with his place in life unless stirred up by outside agitators. […] Once I learned the tune I stopped believing the words — about anybody.

All of this anger, however, was not sufficient in itself to produce James Tiptree, Jr. Writing as a woman, the best Alli could have aspired to would have been to be a shadow of Joanna Russ. But writing as a woman was something she seemed incapable of doing. Part of this may have been fear of having to live up to her mother's reputation. Part of it was undoubtedly an understanding of the power relationships within society — relationships that were just as important within the science fiction community as outside of it. However, part of it also seems to have stemmed from the whole Tiptree charade having been cooked up by an incredibly complex woman with very mixed views about her own gender.

As we learn from Phillips, Alli often had strong sexual feelings for other women, but always lacked the courage to follow up on them. She reveled in being Captain Davey, later Major Davey, in the army, her ex-husband's obviously masculine surname lending her an air of androgyny. She developed a successful writing career as a confident, flirtatious man at the same time as she was living the life of an aging suburban housewife. She strongly defended women's rights, but at times claimed that she hated being a woman.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of Alli's life was the way in which Tiptree's career nosedived after his pseudonymonous nature was revealed. Even though the majority of the science fiction community rallied round her — encouraged and ever begged her to keep writing — Alli herself was convinced that Tiptree would now be seen differently by his readers. Having been revealed as a "fraud", and indeed as a mere woman, she was afraid he would never be taken seriously again. It is a very understandable fear.

In addition, however, Tiptree's inability to write with the same intensity after having to go back to being Alli tells us a lot about the creative process. It is perhaps this aspect of the story that prompted Clute to say that Phillips's book "may be the finest literary biography I've ever encountered." You see, writing a literary biography requires that the author understand not only the subject whose life is being described, but her writing as well. Phillips shows us how Alli's creativity was held in check my her dominant mother, given confidence by her getting a PhD, but freed from its shackles by the opportunity to write, not as Alice Sheldon, but as James Tiptree, Jr.

To write as intensely as Tiptree did, and in particular to do so at a time when classic works of feminist SF such as Joanna's Russ' *The Female Man*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World*, were only just being published, must have been enormously difficult for a woman who grew up in polite society during the early 20th Century. Brought up to believe that her only hope of happiness lay in accepting the chains that society placed upon intelligent women, Alice Sheldon was unable to stand up and declaim her own freedom, even when friends like Le Guin and Russ and Vonda McIntyre had showed her that she was free. As Tiptree, however, she was able to raise her voice against the injustice of it all, even though even she was never able to believe that freedom was attainable. We should perhaps leave the last word to Ruth Parsons, the female lead character of "The Women Men Don't See", who eventually decides to abandon Earth in

the company of aliens rather than have to put up with men any more.

Women have no rights, Don, except what men allow us. Men are more aggressive and powerful, and they run the world. When the next real crisis upsets them, our so-called rights will vanish – like that smoke. We'll be back where we always were: property. And whatever has gone wrong will be blamed on our freedom, like the fall of Rome was. You'll see.

Ah, Alli, so fortunate for you that you were born into different times. Had you been a generation or two younger you would have lived to start to see Ruth's words come true. You would have found that the disgust you and Ting felt for the idiots in the Agency who caused the Bay of Pigs disaster was as nothing to your feelings about what went on prior to the Iraq war. You would probably have known Valerie Plame socially. And had you or Ting dared to raise a voice in protest you would have found that Karl Rove had leaked choice details about your youthful indiscretions to the tabloid media.

Then again, you might have summoned up to courage to attend WisCon 30, which could well have been a good thing. I, for one, am deeply sorry that I never had the chance to meet you.

Fortunately, thanks to the hard work of Julie Phillips, I have at least got to know you by proxy. You are, of course, an ideal biography subject, but it still takes a writer of great skill and dedication to bring a character as complex as you to life so vividly. Phillips, I hope, is saving hard for her plane ticket to Yokohama, where she might just walk away with one of those chrome rocket things that brought both of us such pride and fear. Wherever your smoke has drifted, sleep well, sister.

James Tiptree, Jr: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon - Julie Phillips – St. Martin's Press – publisher's proof

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Fake Literature

By Cheryl Morgan

Attempts by mainstream writers and critics to express their admiration for some aspect of the less stuffy art forms are often entertaining to read. The writer tends to approach the subject with the sort of embarrassed diffidence that you might associate with an admission that he has a passion for child pornography, or that he nurses a secret love for George W. Bush. Woe betide him, after all, if any of his respectable pals should think that he actually likes, you know, That Stuff.

So it is with Tom McCarthy in *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*. Despite endless proofs of the sophistication of Hergé's story-telling, McCarthy cannot bring himself to utter heresy. "To confuse comics with literature would be a mistake," he opines, self-righteously. He's not going to commit some heinous crime against good taste that would have him forever barred from the literary salons of London. And yet, and yet, Hergé does all of this really cool stuff.

The message, therefore, needs to be encoded. One cannot openly say that comics are literature, and therefore one must instead demonstrate that they are whilst insisting loyally that they are not. McCarthy achieves this sleight of hand by describing all of the many ways in which Hergé's works are full of the most sophisticated literary tricks, without ever drawing the obvious conclusion. And the tricks that he focuses upon are mainly those of that favorite literary game, meta-narrative. The end result is

that he sounds rather like Robert Borski exploring the darkest corners of minor plot points in Gene Wolfe's novels. Obscure references that the reader is probably in no position to check are held up as proof positive of hidden connections and mysterious messages. Are those messages really there? We can't tell without doing as much research as McCarthy, but it sure sounds impressive when he reveals them.

The process begins on a fairly firm footing. McCarthy talks about the political shift in Hergé's writing, from the pro-Nazi magazine in which Tintin first appeared, through the embarrassment of actually living under German occupation, to a much more liberal approach in later stories. This is both convincing and, in places, fascinating. I had no idea that Tintin's Chinese friend, Tchang, was based on a real Chinese artist who had been introduced to Hergé in the hope that meeting an actual exotic foreigner might cure him of his tendency to draw and write racist stereotypes.

From there we move out into more speculative territory. McCarthy does a reasonable job of persuading us that Sir Francis Haddock (Le Chevalier Francois de Hadoque in the original French) was the illegitimate son of Louis XIV. But he then goes on to look into Hergé's own family background, explaining that the cartoonist's grandmother, a maid in a stately home, was made pregnant by a visitor to the house who refused to acknowledge his paternity. Hergé's family apparently clung to the idea that they were of noble, possibly royal birth. Hence not only the backstory of Captain Haddock's family, but also a myriad references to illegitimacy, counterfeit, abandonment and so on throughout the entire Tintin oeuvre.

The story gets progressively more strange, and McCarthy enlists Freudian analysis to further elucidate apparent dark corners of the Tintin stories. Hergé's father had a twin brother, hence the Thompsons. Hence numerous "doublings up" in the stories. And so on and so forth. I guess that if you really want to believe that Bianca Castafiore's famous emerald is actually symbolic of her clitoris then you are not doing anyone (except possibly the Milanese Nightingale herself) any harm. The casual reader, however, while perhaps coming to be persuaded that Hergé did, after all, have a very dirty mind, will also conclude that McCarthy's grey matter had to be similarly sewer-like in order to work this all out.

Interestingly all of this analysis proceeds with almost no reference to Hergé's artwork at all. Those of us familiar with traditional critical analysis of graphic novels will be expecting McCarthy to launch into discussion of panel structures or the way that movement is used consecutive panels to give a sense of plot. Yet, despite the fact that the cover blurb says that McCarthy is an artist as well as a writer, there is almost no discussion of the actual art. Possibly this was deliberate. There are no examples of Hergé's work at all in the book, and this is probably because permission to do so was not forthcoming. Hergé's estate is apparently very protective of his legacy. Without the pictures, discussion of the art is hard. But it is sad all the same, because Hergé was one of the great pioneers of graphic storytelling and a book devoted to his work ought to have focused more on the pictures as well as the words.

Also missing until the penultimate chapter is any serious acknowledgement that the Tintin stories are primarily comedies. McCarthy does eventually note similarities between the slapstick humor of the cartoons and that of silent

movies. He also admits that repetition is a basic tool of comedy, but only after many pages exploring its psychological significance.

So, nothing much about the pictures, very little about the comedy, what do we have? Why, literary theory of course. What better way to convince skeptical mainstream readers that you are conducting a serious literary analysis than to fill your book with references to the ideas of leading critics. Some of this is actually very interesting. McCarthy's discussion of Jacques Derrida's book, *Counterfeit Money*, has made me more interested to read Derrida's SF criticism because it seems to me that there are a bunch of interesting ideas in the former that might be applied to the latter. Reality, and estrangement from it, are, after all, critical to SF.

We also find an obsession with reality at the core of McCarthy's ideas about Tintin. The entire discussion is woven around a short story by Balzac called *Sarrasine* and, more importantly, an analysis of that story by Roland Barthes (*S/Z*). In the story, Sarrasine is a sculptor who falls madly in love with an opera singer, la Zambinella, unaware that "she" is actually a castrato. Naturally the story ends badly, with Sarrasine suffering a fatal bout of homophobic panic when he discovers the truth. McCarthy uses this story as a device to frame his discussions of issues of unreality and fakery in the Tintin stories, but it is never quite clear why. Whatever you might want to believe about Castafiore's emerald, I don't think anyone is going to fall for the idea that the fearsome diva is transgendered, or indeed that anyone (in their right mind) is madly in love with her. I'm therefore going to engage in a little of the hypothesizing that McCarthy undertakes so well in his book.

The important point about la Zambinella is that, while (s)he apparently embodies all of the attributes of the perfect woman, (s)he is not "real". In discovering that his devotion was not to someone "authentic" but to a "fake", Sarrasine is ruined. The same is true of Hergé's writing. It has all the appearance of a woman, it sounds like a woman, it has the sexual allure of a woman, and yet McCarthy knows deep in his heart that it cannot be a "real" woman, and that he will be a laughing stock if he admires it too openly. The references to Balzac's story, therefore, are a coded message to McCarthy's peers. "I know it looks exactly like the real thing," he is saying, "but I know it isn't really, and unlike poor Sarrasine I'm not going to be taken in."

Thankfully, despite McCarthy's hidden neuroses, his admiration for Hergé's work nevertheless shines through. I suspect that la Zambinella was admirable too.

Tintin and the Secret of Literature - Tom McCarthy – Granta - hardcover

Out of Synch

By Cheryl Morgan

There are three very splendid UK-authored books coming out in the US in September. From Bantam we are getting Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Stamping Butterflies*. And from Pyr we have John Meaney's *To Hold Infinity* and Justina Robson's *Mappa Mundi*. These are all well worth seeking out.

I note that Bantam is also producing a US edition of Tony Ballantyne's *Recursion*. This is one of those UK books that never quite made it off the "to read" pile, but it got some pretty good reviews when it came out.

Stamping Butterflies – Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Bantam Spectra – trade paperback

To Hold Infinity – John Meaney – Pyr – hardcover

Mappa Mundi – Justina Robson – Pyr – trade paperback

Recursion – Tony Ballantyne – Bantam Spectra – mass market paperback

Miscellany

By Cheryl Morgan

World Fantasy Award Nominees

Novel: *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami (Harvill; Knopf); *The Limits of Enchantment*, Graham Joyce (Gollancz; Atria); *Lunar Park*, Bret Easton Ellis (Knopf; Macmillan); *Od Magic*, Patricia A. McKillip (Ace); *A Princess of Roumania*, Paul Park (Tor); *Vellum*, Hal Duncan (Macmillan; Del Rey).

Novella: *Another War*, Simon Morden (Telos Publishing); "The Imago Sequence", Laird Barron (*F&SF* May 2005); "In the Machine", Michael Cunningham (Speciman Days, Farrar, Straus and Giroux); "Magic for Beginners", Kelly Link (*Magic for Beginners*, Small Beer Press; *F&SF* Sep 2005); "UOUS", Tanith Lee (*The Fair Folk*, SFBC); *Voluntary Committal*, Joe Hill (Subterranean Press).

Short Fiction: "Best New Horror", Joe Hill (*Postscripts* #3, Spr 2005); "CommComm", George Saunders (*The New Yorker* 1 Aug 2005); "The Other Grace", Holly Phillips (*In the Palace of Repose*, Prime Books); "La Peau Verte", Caitlin R. Kiernan (*To Charles Fort, With Love*, Subterranean Press); "Two Hearts", Peter S. Beagle (*F&SF* Oct/Nov 2005).

Anthology: *Adventure Vol. 1*, Chris Roberson, ed. (MonkeyBrain Books); *The Fair Folk*, Marvin Kaye, ed. (SFBC); *Nova Scotia: New Scottish Speculative Fiction*, Neil Williamson & Andrew J. Wilson, eds. (Crescent Books); *Polyphony 5*, Deborah Layne & Jay Lake, eds. (Wheatland Press); *Weird Shadows Over Innsmouth*, Stephen Jones, ed. (Fedogan & Bremer).

Collection: *20th Century Ghosts*, Joe Hill (PS Publishing); *In the Palace of Repose*, Holly Phillips (Prime Books); *The Keyhole Opera*, Bruce Holland Rogers (Wheatland Press); *Magic for Beginners*, Kelly Link (Small Beer Press); *To Charles Fort, with Love*, Caitlin R. Kiernan (Subterranean Press).

Artist: Kinuko Y. Craft; James Jean; Dave McKean; Edward Miller (Les Edwards); John Jude Palencar.

Special Award, Professional: Susan Allison & Ginjer Buchanan (for Ace Books); Lou Anders (for editing at Pyr); Peter Lavery (for Pan MacMillan UK/Tor UK); Chris Roberson & Allison Baker (for MonkeyBrain Books); Sean Wallace (for Prime Books); S. T. Joshi & Stefan Dziemanowicz, eds. (for Supernatural Literature of the World: An Encyclopedia, Greenwood Press).

Special Award, Non-Professional: David Howe & Stephen Walker (for Telos Books); The Friends of Arthur Machen (for Faunus, Machenalia, and The Life of Arthur Machen) (http://www.machensoc.demon.co.uk/) ; Rodger Turner, Neil Walsh & Wayne MacLaurin (for *SF Site*) (http://www.sfsite.com/); Leo Grin (for *The Cimmerian*) (http://www.thecimmerian.com/); Jess Nevins (for *The Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana*, MonkeyBrain Books).

A fascinating collection of nominees. I've been meaning to try Murakami for ages (Clute recommended him to me) and

now I have a good excuse. I even own the book; it is just sat on the vast "unread" pile that I hope to make a start on soon. I know that *The Limits of Enchantment* and *A Princess of Roumania* are very good books. I'm also very pleased for Hal Duncan given the pasting *Vellum* has got in some quarters.

I'm not in the least bit surprised to see Kelly Link and Joe Hill in the short fiction categories, but I'm very pleased for Holly Phillips. Special Award, Professional is a cornucopia of some of my favorite people. And while I am at a loss to explain why a commercially produced book qualifies for a "non-professional" award, I very much hope that Jess Nevins gets a Howie.

Mythopoeic Awards

The winners are:

Adult Novel: *Anansi Boys*, Neil Gaiman (Morrow).

Children's Novel: The Bartimaeus Trilogy, Jonathan Stroud (Hyperion).

Inkling Studies: *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (Houghton Mifflin).

General Scholarship: *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England*, Jennifer Schacker (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Up for Debate

There will be at least two motions affecting the Hugos up for debate at this year's WSFS Business Meeting. The first is the change to the Best Professional Editor category, which passed in Glasgow and is up for ratification in L.A. This will effectively split the category in two: one Hugo for people who edit novels, and another for people who edit magazines, anthologies and collections (although as ever with the Hugos it is a little more complicated than that). This change will, I think be a good thing, because it will focus attention on the generally under-appreciated work of editing novels. If it leads to David Hartwell getting a Hugo at last it will be a very good thing indeed.

The other proposed change is new this year and a lot more problematic. The general idea is good. People have been complaining for some time that pretty much the same people get on the Best Professional Artist ballot year after year, even though they haven't always produced anything much new in the year in question. The view is that too many people are voting on the basis of name recognition, and of what the artists have done in the past, rather than the state of the field at the time. There is a definite air of believability to this accusation.

The proposal, then (and please note that this is all being actively debated as I write so the exact details may change before the motion is presented to the Business Meeting), is that any nomination for Best Professional Artist must be accompanied by a reference to a work produced in or published in the year of eligibility, thereby proving that the artist in question is still active in the field. A nomination that does not include such a reference, or that includes an invalid reference such as a work published years ago, will be **declared invalid** and not counted.

Many people have already noticed that the problem of voting by name recognition applies not just to Best Professional Artist, but to all of the "body of work" categories, including Best Fan Writer, a category in which I have been nominated several times. I've seen people complain that I only get

nominated because people know my name, not because my work is any good.

While I am very much in favor of improving the quality of nominations for Best Professional Artist (and potentially other "body of work" categories), I am opposed to this specific change for a number of reasons.

Firstly I think it is wrong to place too much onus on Hugo Administrators to decide the validity of nominations, especially on grounds that are not easy to define clearly. Administrators do have to disqualify nominations because honest mistakes are made: someone may, for example, nominate a novel published in a previous year, or one that was first published in another country years ago. Those are easy decisions to make. Also those decisions generally have no effect on the outcome of the nominating process. The same is not true of the proposed change.

Consider this example (with apologies to those whose names I have used to illustrate it). Suppose that Bob Eggleton and Michael Whelan have 51 and 52 nominations respectively. Whelan is fifth in the nominations list and Eggleton sixth. One final ballot comes in. It nominates Eggleton, but lists as a reference, not one of the many book covers that Bob produced in the year, but instead the cover that he did for Guy Lillian's fanzine, *Challenger*. The rules say that works used as references must be professionally published, and *Challenger* is a fanzine. Eggleton is clearly a professional artist, he has 51 other valid nominations to support that fact, but because this nomination does not list a valid reference work it must be disqualified. The result of that disqualification is that Eggleton finishes 6th and off the ballot rather than equal 5th and on the ballot.

Of course there are other ways in which a careless nominator might mess up a ballot and get it disqualified. Failing to list your name and membership number/PIN is an obvious one. But I don't think we should be adding new hurdles to the process.

I also feel very sorry for the people who are going to have to check the eligibility of these works, especially as these days, with electronic voting, most of the ballots come in the day or two before the deadline. It doesn't matter if you check the eligibility of a novel that has only one nomination, but you may well have to check the eligibility of a reference work used by one person on an artist nomination because, as with the above example, it could mean the difference between getting a nomination and not doing so.

I'm also very dubious about the whole idea of enforcing voter responsibility with legislation. I mean what next? Will people nominating novels be required to prove that they have read the book in question? Will people making nominations in the fan categories need a personal recommendation from Ted White to prove that they are proper fans?

Besides, I don't think it will work that well. If the change is passed, people who vote on name recognition will find a way around that. Even if the only new work that Fred Bignoise produced in the year was a small cartoon in Asimov's, his fans will know about it. They'll mention it on web sites and remind people to quote it on their ballots. And because so many people love Fred he will still get a nomination. The people who get their nominations disqualified will be those who make honest mistakes, not those who are knowingly voting on name recognition.

That's the trouble with the Hugos, you see. They are a popular vote award. People with lots of fans get nominated, even if their current work isn't always quite up to scratch. If you don't want that to happen, the correct thing to do is suggest a change to a juried award.

To recap, I'm very sympathetic to the general aims of the people proposing this motion (who are Donato Giancola and Irene Gallo, the art editor at Tor). But I think legislation is the wrong way to achieve the aims. The right way to get top quality young artists on the ballot is for people to talk about them and draw attention to them. It worked for John Picacio. It worked for Stephan Martiniere. I firmly believe that it can work for Jon Foster.

If people don't like the results that the Hugos produce, the thing to do is for them to get off theirs arses and vote, and to persuade everyone that they know to do the same. The level of participation in the Hugos even amongst Worldcon members, let alone the thousands of fans out there who could buy supporting memberships so that they could vote, is still shamefully low. And of you don't vote, you can't complain about the results.

Editorial Matters

By Cheryl Morgan

This issue is a little shorter than we've had of late, but given my schedule that is probably a good thing. I just hope I manage to get it online in reasonable time. It would be embarrassing to be late for the first time immediately after announcing the fold. But I have no idea what Internet access I'll have in Helsinki.

A huge thank you is due to all of the kind people who have written to say how much they appreciated *Emerald City* and (in some cases) beg me not to stop. I'm sorry, I didn't want to stop either, but sometimes circumstances get the better of you. I think I have managed to reply personally to every email I have received, but if you just posted a note on your blog then I may not have seen it. My apologies if I haven't responded.

A number of people have also been asking about what happens next. Here are a few things I do know.

The *Emerald City* web site will not be disappearing in the foreseeable future. If it does turn out that I can't afford to maintain it, I have at least three offers of people prepared to host the archives, so they won't be lost.

Given that the web site will stay there, I will continue to write a blog of some sort, but it will be much more intermittent. The blog was always a means to an end — that is, attracting traffic to the site — and it is far too much work to keep up at the same level when I have much less reason to do it.

I asked on the blog whether the Hugo Recommendation List should continue, and while I got very little feedback all of it has been very positive, so I guess that will continue. I do, however, need to find ways of increasing participation. The more people who make recommendations, the more legitimacy the list has. While I very much understand the reluctance of people to state their Hugo preferences publicly, it is necessary to show that the recommendations are from real people. One suggestion I have had is to list the recommendations and the names of participants, but not connect them. I'd still show how many recommendations each work/person got, but not who made them. If you think this would

make you more likely to participate, please let me know.

I do have a few other things in mind to do with the copious free time I will have soon. However, I need to talk to various people at Worldcon first. Don't expect any announcements for a while.

Definite up for next issue are *Winterbirth* by Brian Ruckley and *Elemental: The Tsunami Relief Anthology*, edited by Steven Savile and Alethea Kontis. I am hoping to pick up *Idolon* by Mark Budz at Worldcon. I've also made firm promises to Jay Lake and John Shirley about their new novels. If I don't get them in time there may have to be an October issue. Not that I'm short of reading material. I picked up novels by Umberto Eco and Jan Morris recently, and of course I have a vast pile of unread books. We shall see.

Oh, and I will be attending a couple of conventions over the next few weeks. Should the last issue have a Worldcon report in it? It seems kind of appropriate that a magazine that was born at a Worldcon should die at one.

Best wishes,

Cheryl

Emerald City is no longer accepting books for review or advertising. If you have any enquiries about the magazine please contact Cheryl Morgan:

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