

# EMERALD CITY

Issue 76

December 2001

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## Introduction

As another year grinds to a close it is time to wish a happy Solstice, Saturnalia, Yule, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year or whatever you happen to be celebrating right now, to all readers. All in all, this has been a pretty good one. I have at last got a proper job again, and after 4 years of traipsing around the world I again have a home I can call my own. All I need now is to spend less time commuting and have a bit of spare time in which to work on this magazine.

This issue is filled with the fruits of my trip to the UK, and I'm pleased to say that once again the Brits have come up trumps. Just why Britain is producing such good books right now isn't clear, but let's not spend time worrying about it, let's just read.

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## Street Fighting Man

Hooray, a new Ken MacLeod novel! What a fine way to start an issue. *Dark Light* is the second volume in Ken's *Engines of Light* series, and before I get to the meat of the book, a brief recap of the background is on order. Let's face it, you wouldn't believe it otherwise.

When I first reviewed *Cosmonaut Keep* I surmised that the background to the novel had arisen from discussions between Ken and Iain Banks after a very drunken evening in the pub. Ken tells me that this is not far from the truth. Welcome, then, to a world in which starships really are piloted by vast tentacled beings (well, squid). Welcome to a world in which little grey men really do flit about in flying saucers and Earthlings really are kidnapped for

obscure purposes. This allows Ken to have a lot of fun.

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*"We should send the Bright Star back where it came from, to the goddamned pagan heresiarchs of Mingulay, and tell them to stick right there where they belong. If the powers above had meant human beings to navigate ships they'd have given us, they have given us..."*

*"Tentacles?" somebody called out.*

*"They'd have given us some better evidence of it than some story told by these there godless Cosmonauts, whose ship has brought this world nothing but heresy and sedition these past two hundred years. I remember when I were a lad..."*

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*Dark Light* takes place in the so-called Second Sphere, the part of the galaxy where all of the kidnapped humans have been settled, along with their little grey captors (the Saur's). Some interstellar trade takes place, but only at the whim of the squid (Kraken) who are the only beings who can navigate through hyperspace. All of this takes place under the watchful eye of the comet-dwelling superbeings (The Gods) who appear to rule the universe. It is all good conspiracy theory stuff.

But wait, isn't MacLeod a Trotskyist? Or perhaps an Anarchist, or even a Libertarian? When you are that far out on the political spectrum it is sometimes hard to tell. And isn't that set-up we have just described just a little, well, authoritarian? Possibly authors are supposed to be authoritarian, but it seems more likely that there will be a political message here somewhere. Maybe that is why the central characters of the book are a bunch of ex-cosmonauts.

I am forced to let slip that at the end of *Cosmonaut Keep* Gregor Cairns did indeed

succeed in mastering the secrets of hyperspace navigation. Sorry about the spoiler, but it is about as obvious as telling you that a romance novel ends with a wedding. So here we are, light years from Mingulay, on the planet of Croatan. Gregor and his cosmonaut ancestor, Matt, are now in a position to compete in the trading business, without being tied to Kraken flight plans. The great human trading families such as the de Tenebres are intrigued by this, not sure whether to regard the rather ramshackle-looking Cairns starship, *Bright Star*, as a competitor or as a potential alternative means of transport. But that is currently a minor side story. A much bigger one is Croatan itself.

The planet has two groups of transplanted human settlers. The Sky People have been around for thousands of years and still cling to a fairly early form of cultural organisation. They are essentially tribal, and interestingly they delineate gender purely on occupational lines. Those who do men's work are men and must dress and behave accordingly; those who do women's work likewise. One of the heroes of the book is Stone, a person of male sex who works, and therefore lives, in a female gender role, much to the consternation of one or two travelling Scots. I'd like to say there's a potential Tiptree nomination here, and I guess there might be just because it is different, but MacLeod uses the situation as much as a source of humour as an opportunity to discuss gender politics, and he hardly touches on how Stone feels about the situation.

The other main human grouping is the city of Rawliston whose inhabitants are approximately late 19<sup>th</sup> century European in culture and who are moving painfully through the transition from monarchy to democracy. This is hard enough for any culture, without the added distraction of having trading starships packed with

advanced technology and subversive literature drop in every so often. Worse still, the de Tenebre ship brought with it another of those Mingulay cosmonauts, Grigory "first man on Venus" Volkov, who is an unreconstructed Russian Communist and an incorrigible political agitator. Add to this Volkov's old shipmate, Trotskyist Matt Cairns, and you have a recipe for revolution.

Now *Dark Light* itself might be about cultural clashes, managing accelerated cultural development, and the art of managing a popular uprising. However, the plot of the series itself is now becoming clear, and it has a much broader canvas. Just why did The Gods give Cairns, Volkov and their colleagues the secret of hyperspace navigation anyway? Why did they apparently trick Matt into setting course from Earth to Mingulay rather than the short in-system test jump he had intended? Why have the Saur's set up the Second Sphere anyway? And how come the Kraken and Saur's have this religious devotion to following the commands of The Gods? Here is an area where Matt and Volkov might just be on the same side.

Overall I felt that there was rather too much going on in *Dark Star*, and consequently much of it was treated in a fairly cursory manner. There are too many interesting threads. This may be just middle-book-of-series syndrome, or simply a case of too many good ideas. Still, don't let that put you off reading the book. As always, MacLeod is hugely entertaining and gives you plenty to think about.

*Dark Light* - Ken MacLeod - Orbit - hardcover

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## New Minds for Old

It is the last great frontier for medical science. After the human genome has been unravelled, only one great secret remains: the map of the human mind. When this is complete, all sorts of beneficial technology will become available. It will be possible to cure schizophrenia, depression, even anorexia. The benefits to mankind will be immense.

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New technology promises an end to conflict. The ability of scientists to map and edit the human mind brings with it the opportunity to rid the world forever of those divisive and violent memes that cause warfare. Racism, religion, political fanaticism, all can be wiped from the surface of our consciousness. An age of peace and love is at last possible.

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"CIA reports show that the Chinese are only a few months behind our team in developing so-called mindware. We also have evidence that criminal elements funded by the Russian mafia have been attempting to bribe and blackmail scientists from our project team in order to obtain details of the technology. Whether they are doing this on their own initiative, or with the promise of Iraqi money, is currently not clear. Mr. President, there has never been an arms race like this. It is our belief that we dare not slacken our effort, and that the United States must be prepared to launch a first strike."

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*"So", he mused, "you would take their families hostage, you would impound their assets. You, the American government, would use basic emotional router programmes and your inept, undereducated NervePath programmers to re-sculpt their personalities? All these tactics your*

*culture stands against, first and foremost among all nations, and you will not hesitate. There is nothing so low that you will not stoop to it, to crush freedom's life out, without mercy?"*

*"[She] felt her own smile go bitter cold now. "You can rely on that".*

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Mindware illuminates path to future. For all of evolution to date, human beings have been limited by the capabilities of their own minds. We have built tools that do better what we do with our legs, our hands, our eyes and ears. We have built computers to help us with the drudgery of calculation and memory. But we have been unable to make ourselves better, until now. With the ability to re-program our own minds, what frontiers of evolution will we not dare?

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Meanwhile, in the Special Sciences division of the FBI, Jude Westhorpe is having another frustrating day. In theory his job is to uphold the country's laws against biological weapons, cloning, baby farming and genetic perfection technology. In practice it seems that every time he gets a good lead on some illegal lab the perps get wind of his investigation and disappear. Jude has a horrible suspicion that much of this illegal activity is actually being funded by other, more secret agencies within the government. Normally he wouldn't endanger his career by poking his nose into such matters, but seeing as one of these illegal experiments almost cost his sister her life, a little additional effort seems to be in order.

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And so it goes on. Justina Robson's new novel, *Mappa Mundi*, is a fast-paced science fiction thriller set in a world on the brink of triumph or disaster. On the one hand philanthropic scientists such as Natalie

Armstrong labour to find cures for mental illness. On the other secret government agencies plot to control a technology that promises world domination without war, or even the ability of the conquered to resist. Have I said recently that the best new SF is currently all coming out of the UK? Here's the proof. I have been looking all year for a new SF book that I felt worthy of a Hugo nomination. At last I have found one.

Ken MacLeod might be the leading light when it comes to writing SF about politics, but no one deals with the political impact of science better than Justina Robson. As with any good cyberpunk writer, she is also adept at coining all the necessary marketing terms and slogans that make her near-future world utterly believable. *Mappa Mundi* is tough, uncompromising, ruthless, and cunning. It is also deeply cynical about human nature in general, and governments in particular, without ever losing sight of the possibility that we can be better than we are.

It has been said that science fiction is a failing genre because mankind has lost faith in science as a dream of the future. It has been said that we must either retreat into fantasy, or return to writing fanciful space operas that no one would ever mistake for being predictive. But Justina Robson takes this world of disillusionment and suspicion and writes books that directly address those fears. This is what science fiction should be doing. Other writers please take note.

*Mappa Mundi* - Justina Robson - Macmillan - softcover

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## Journey's End

And so, dear reader, we return for a final time to the fabled world of The Orokon. Prince Jemany and his young friends have acquired four of the five sacred crystals and are on their way back to Agondon in search of the fifth. Meanwhile Nirry and Wiggler have opened a tavern in the city that conveniently serves as a base for Bob Scarlet, Cata and the rest of the Redjacket rebels. As the end of the Time of Atonement approaches it seems certain that the blighted rule of Edjard Blue will come to an end.

But wait, the evil wizard, Toth Vexrah, is by no means finished yet. Is he not powerful enough to defy even the force of prophecy? Will he not stoop to any depths of villainy to impose his will upon the world? And we should not forget his henchman, Polty. Having been deprived of his beloved Penge in an unfortunate accident in foreign parts, and needing either a miracle or the help of a powerful wizard to become reunited with his favourite organ, Jem's childhood nemesis too will stop at nothing to achieve Toth's victory.

Of course with Mr. Arden in charge of plotting events, you can be sure that Polty is also pursuing other avenues to make certain that no one knows he has been deprived of his mighty member, and that these attempts will result in farcical goings on and extreme embarrassment for Polty's unfortunate sidekick, Bean. We should also not forget that those famously reluctant and incompetent soldiers, Morven and Crum, will be stationed in Agondon and doubtless tasked with hunting down the rebels; unaware that one of their prime targets is their old comrade, Wiggler. And there is always the possibility that all this plotting and planning will come to naught if the odious Aunt Umbecca manages to eat

the entire world, something that is almost certainly not beyond her rapacious appetite.

No, dear reader, we must never assume that something ordinary will happen, that the Orokon saga will conclude in the time-hallowed fashion of block-buster fantasy sagas, when it is also possible that everything will go badly wrong and very silly things will happen. And whilst much silliness does indeed take place, we should not forget that there is some serious commentary on fantasy here. If there is a lesson that Jem learns from his quest, it is that scripture is not always reliable and prophecies don't always come true, at least not in the way that you expect.

For many of us (and I hope most *Emerald City* readers), this should come as a breath of fresh air. Sadly it probably won't please the vast mass of blockbuster fantasy readers. The same people who claimed that *Perdido Street Station* was a bad book because it didn't have a happy ending will be just as unhappy with *Empress of the Endless Dream*, in fact probably more so as they will have already waded through four previous volumes in the sure expectation that the Orokon prophecy will be fulfilled. And so it is, more or less, but not in a way that any comfort reader will find satisfactory.

Oh well, who cares anyway? As long as Tom Arden keeps on writing books that alternately entertain, poke fun at fantasy novels, and deconstruct the genre, I'll be happy. Hopefully you will too.

*Empress of the Endless Dream* - Tom Arden - Gollancz - hardcover

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## Wild Life

I have good news for Sheri Tepper fans. OK, so Sheri herself has become bitter and twisted and every bit as intolerant and inflexible as those patriarchal religions she rails against. But her approach to SF is not unique to her, and others can write the same sort of stuff.

I've known Liz Williams for some time as she is a regular at the *Interzone* pub meets in Brighton. She has had a number of good short stories in various magazines, but she has now had her first novel published. Unusually, given the current boom in British SF, she was unable to sell it at home, but had it picked up by an American publisher, Bantam. So here's the good news for US readers. Here's one of those hot new Brit writers that you can find in your local stores in paperback. And the good news for Tepper fans is that *The Ghost Sister* is very much a Tepper-style book.

What do I mean by that? Well, a standard feature of a Tepper novel is that it is set on an alien world and that some strange biological quirk of that world results in unusual social patterns amongst the intelligent species of that world. Tepper novels are also deeply concerned with environmental issues, and they are avowedly feminist. All of these things are true of *The Ghost Sister* as well.

Let's start with the world. Monde D'Isle (Island World to us non-French) is a lost colony. Many years ago the colonists sent out a distress signal claiming that the world was cursed, but until recently no one has been to investigate. Now at last a mission ship has been sent: its crew ready to rescue the colony and return them to the bosom of true Gaian faith.

Sorry, what faith? Yes, I did say Gaian. Two of the four crew of the ship are fundamentalist vegan Gaians. They believe

in non-violence and living in peace and harmony with all other beings. They are quite prepared to terraform a world to the level of a luxury gated community in order to ensure that living in harmony is possible and that all nastiness is eliminated.

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*"I believe that Gaianism is self-evident," Dia said stubbornly. "Look at Irie St Syre. Don't you think it's as close to a utopia as we're capable of achieving? Don't you think it is a perfect world?"*

*"I think it is very tidy", Shu Gho said.*

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Our voice of scepticism here comes from the heroine of the book, Shu Gho, a Japanese grandmother and practitioner in the science of quantum anthropology, a discipline that recognises that studying fundamental particles and studying human societies have a lot in common: in both cases the act of observing changes the nature of what you observe.

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*During her doctoral years and her studies of ancient Earth, Shu Gho had examined Second Elizabethan conceptions of objectivity, one of the central myths of the postindustrial era. The realm of fact, the reification of conceptual strata, had fascinated her: such a strange idea, as alien as Renaissance notions of the divine. [...] It still struck Sho Ghu as extraordinary that the idea of an interpretation of culture independent of the observer's own filters had been seriously entertained.*

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Did I mention that Liz has a degree in philosophy? As she says, there are not many careers that you can follow with one of those, and science fiction writer is one of the most obvious.

But I was telling you about the people of Monde D'Isle. They were once human, and doubtless their DNA still bears more than 95% resemblance to ours. But they are not human any more. Monde D'Isle is a barren, unwelcoming place. You have to be tough to survive. Tough like being hunters, carnivores, red in tooth and claw, both of which are rather longer than is typical for mere humans.

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*I have learned since that when a ghost says, "It was as though I were a child again," they mean a state of innocence and purity, wonder, security. Our children walk and kill at a year old. But I wonder if we don't refer to the same thing: a state where life is simply lived, spontaneously, without reflection.*

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So, there we have it: interesting biology, environment, and with the heroine being a grandmother it certainly counts as a feminist novel. Not to mention the fact that the people on Monde D'Isle are all enthusiastically and unashamedly bisexual. To them it is perfectly normal. I see a Tiptree nomination in the offing here.

The reason I haven't added the book to my Hugo list is that the plot is weak in places. Liz admits that plotting is not her strongest suit, and there were a number of areas where I felt that things happened purely because it was convenient for the plot for them to do so. I'm sure that Liz will get better at this, and I'm very much looking forward to her next book.

*The Ghost Sister* - Liz Williams - Bantam - softcover

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## Queen of Faerie

This book is the odd one out in this issue. The writer is not British, or even British-based, and it is not a new book. Rather it is a re-issue of a fantasy classic. And when I say classic I mean classic. Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* bears roughly the same relation to urban fantasy that *Neuromancer* does to cyberpunk.

The basic set-up is very simple. Eddi McCandry is stuck in a going-nowhere band led by her hopeless boyfriend, Stewart, when all of a sudden she is recruited for a very strange war. It appears that certain unsavoury elements amongst the faerie, the Unseelie Court, as they are known, have decided that it is about time that they took Minneapolis for their own. The forces of the Seelie Court have leapt to the defence of the city. And when faeries war, they need a human to make the whole thing serious. Without a mortal magically bound to the conflict, none of the combatants can die and the whole thing would be pointless. Needless to say, the full import of her involvement is not explained to Eddi when she is recruited.

Oh, and did I forget to mention that if the Unseelie crowd (who are a bunch of liars and cheats anyway) manage to kill the other side's human then they win automatically? This means that the Seelie lot (who simply distort the truth occasionally when it amuses them to do so) need to fit Eddi up with a bodyguard. Enter Robin Good (not really his name, he borrowed it from someone else, but he is a phouka), who has the convenient ability to transform himself into a large Doberman. His man-like form is much more interesting, if not downright dishy, and he needs to stay with Eddi at all times. End of relationship with useless Stewart in one very messy scene.

So, Eddi and her best friend, Carla, quit the band and set up their own group. Carla brings in a great keyboard player that she's close to, and much to everyone's surprise their ads for lead and base guitarists turn up two absolutely brilliant players. Guess where they come from. And so the story goes.

There are two things that make the book a stand-out (other than urban fantasy being a fairly new idea as it was back in 1987 when the book first came out) are Bull's portrayal of faerie and her knowledge of music. Not many people do the fey folk as well as Bull. Only Neil Gaiman and Ellen Kushner spring to mind. Emma is at pains to point out that she wrote the book before she achieved fame as half of the Flash Girls, but she obviously worked hard at understanding the music scene. She knows the music too. All of the chapter titles are quotes from songs, so there is a bit of music geek fun just working out where they all come from.

All in all, it is an excellent book, and I don't quite understand why it didn't garner a heap of awards first time round (all it got was the Locus Award for Best First Novel). If, like me, you missed it first time, go get it now, as it is available again. Recommended.

*War for the Oaks* - Emma Bull - Orb - softcover

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## Hubbard Mystery

Earlier this month a web site called Revolution SF (<http://www.revolutionsf.com/>) published a news report about how The Millennium Philcon had given the coveted Hubbard Award (for converting science fiction into science fact) to Mr. Whitley

Streiber. According to the article, the award is to be presented at ConJosé. Since the article went online, we at ConJosé have been deluged with requests from Mr. Streiber's fans who wish to attend the presentation. We don't mind this, of course. The more members we have the better. Although our Hugo Award Ceremony Director, Randy Smith, says he wishes that they would not call in the middle of the night, or if they must then at least could they turn their landing lights down? No, what concerned us was that this was the first we had heard about the whole thing. We thought we had better check it out. After all, we would not want to be taken in by a hoax, would we?

First port of call was The Millennium Philcon itself. Chairman Todd Dashoff confirmed that Ms. Susan Tankersley, the MilPhil spokesperson quoted in the article, was indeed on his staff. "She was one of our PR people", he said. "Joni and I never saw much of her. In fact she generally only spoke to our son, Jared, but we always knew when she had been about because of the damp, webbed footprints that she left behind. We didn't bother investigating any further. After all, she came up with such wonderful cow puns. Maybe we should have worried a bit more about where she got all those hides for our costumes. I guess we know now."

For ConJosé, Chairman Tom Whitmore said that Mr. Streiber's fans were all very welcome. "We intend to run an open, diverse convention and are happy to accept members from any part of the universe. Why, I myself have often served aliens at my bookshop in Berkeley. It is sometimes hard to tell the difference between them and the Cal students, as both groups have a blank, unfocussed look in their eyes. However, the aliens always have a distinct grey tinge to their skin. I haven't seen that colour on humans since Intersection in 1995



when Dave Langford and Martin Hoare drank Glasgow dry.”

Unsurprisingly the matter has engendered fierce debate on the SMOFs mailing list. Leah Zeldes Smith was against admitting Streiber fans to the Worldcon saying, “they are not part of our community”. However, Patrick Nielsen Hayden countered, “if they allow the people who regularly attend the WSFS business meeting into the convention, I don’t see how we can bar anyone on the grounds that they are not human.”

A particular matter for debate has been the phrase “natural person” in the WSFS Constitution. Does it, or does it not, include aliens? How would we know? A constitutional amendment has been submitted to the ConJosé business meeting by Seth Breidbart and Sharon Sbarsky. This would add that, “the definition of natural person shall not be limited on the grounds of race, sex, gender, religious beliefs, cultural practices or planet of origin”. A further amendment on behalf of Mr. Breidbart that prospective WSFS members should be required to prove that they are intelligent, self-aware beings by demonstrating their facility with Unix Shell commands is currently awaiting a second.

The matter has also raised interest elsewhere in fandom. In the *Daily Frefanzine*, Sam Conklin praised the award. “Mr. Streiber has a long and distinguished record of proving himself free to write whatever he wishes, regardless of any tyrannical Statist restrictions such as requiring facts to be correct”, he said. “Indeed, he has been a constant inspiration to me in my own writing. I regard this award a great victory for Libertarians everywhere.”

L. Ron Hubbard, speaking through a medium, also expressed his delight at the award. He was especially pleased because

“Whitley Streiber” is in fact one of his pen names. Mr. Hubbard has also written books under the names of “Isaac Asimov”, “Robert A. Heinlein”, “David Brin”, “David Langford”, “William Shakespeare”, “Saint Thomas Aquinas”, “Aristotle”, “Homer” and “YHVH”. Mr. Hubbard’s books are published by the Scientology Press and should not be mistaken for those by lesser authors who have used the same pen names in order to take advantage of Mr. Hubbard’s popularity.

ConJosé is pleased to announce that the 2002 Hubbard Award will be presented to Ken MacLeod for services in turning Whitley Streiber’s work into science fiction.

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OK, hands up all those who believed all that.

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## Miscellany

### Locus Online

Charles Brown writes to point out that should Locus Online win the Best Web Site Hugo, it won’t be added to his burgeoning collection. The online version of the magazine is produced independently by Mark Kelly, and it is therefore Mark who would get the rocket should Locus Online win.

While we are on the subject, some of you may have noticed that Locus is fast approaching issue #500. In fact that landmark issue is due in September 2002, and will therefore be on sale at ConJosé. Have we noticed this notable anniversary? Yes, of course. Stand by for further announcements.

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## Hugo Ballot available

Talking of the Hugos, the eligibility period is now just about over and voting can start. ConJosé's Hugo Nomination ballot has been published, and you can find a copy online either at the ConJosé web site ([http://www.conjose.org/wsfs/wsfs\\_hugo.html](http://www.conjose.org/wsfs/wsfs_hugo.html)), or here at *Emerald City* ([http://www.emcit.com/hugo\\_rec.shtml](http://www.emcit.com/hugo_rec.shtml)).

Just as a reminder, you are eligible to nominate if you have bought at least a supporting membership of ConJosé by January 31, 2002, or if you were a member of The Millennium Philcon. A ConJosé supporting membership costs a mere \$35, and you can find membership forms where you find the ballots.

The *Emerald City* recommended nominees list is looking a bit thin, but I figure that's because most of you have been waiting for the year to end before making your minds up. Now is the time to start sending me recommendations. BASFA will be having its annual nomination brainstorming meeting early in the new year and that will fill out the lists as well. I suggest you hold off actually voting until February when you will have a whole lot more ideas to consider.

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## Science Fiction 5-Yearly

Some people (mainly Kevin) keep telling me that I am quite mad because I insist on producing this 'zine on a monthly basis. Well, that's the way I work. If I didn't have a regular deadline I would find other things to fill my life and I'd lose interest in the 'zine. But not everyone works that way. To my mind, committing to a production schedule that involves producing an issue once every five years is quite bizarre. If I had that sort of schedule I'd never produce a second issue. And yet *Science Fiction Five-*

*Yearly* has just produced its eleventh issue. That's 51 years of publishing. Wow!

Of course having such a long production schedule means that some sadness is inevitable. The current issue comes with an insert announcing that one of the editors, Terry Hughes, passed away shortly after the issue was produced. It is to be hoped that in whatever SFnal afterlife he has gone to, Terry can find James White and tell him that his letter did make it into issue #11.

Other stellar luminaries amongst the contributors include a mock serious Greg Benford, the unspeakably hilarious Dave Langford, and the "weirdly excitable" pseudonym, Nalrah Nosille. Even if it wasn't full of some very funny material, *Science Fiction Five-Yearly* would be worth having simply as a piece of fannish history. It is, of course, obtainable for "the usual" and you should write to Geri Sullivan at 3444 Blaisdell Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55408-4315, USA (SFFY@toad-hall.com).

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## Arden's Who

Kevin and I are still eagerly awaiting the arrival of Kim Newan's *Dr. Who* novella from Telos Publishing. While we wait, however, comes news that the third story in the series has been written by Tom Arden. Tom assures me that the whole story has been ruthlessly scrutinised by the BBC and that consequently there is not a trace of silliness or gay sex in the entire book. Were we not talking about the BBC here I would say that this was highly implausible, but sadly I have to take Tom at his word. They even left him play with the Jon Pertwee Doctor too, the one who is the most camp incarnation. What a story it could have been. Oh well.

## Only in America

It may not be obvious to outsiders, but America has a thriving agriculture industry. There is, after all, a lot of space here, and a lot of mouths to feed. Over time certain areas have come to specialise in particular crops. The small city of Gilroy, just south of San José, proclaims itself to be the “garlic capital of the world” (“world” here being the usual American euphemism for “USA”) and holds an annual garlic festival to prove it. This sounds a lot of fun and I hope to go see it one day.

Other places in America are equally specialised but perhaps not so glamorous. The city where Kevin’s sister lives is the “prune capital of the world”. That is not something everyone would want to boast about but they have a prune festival anyway. The city doesn’t have a lot going for it, so it celebrates what it can.

All of which brings me to the point of the piece. Garlic is good, even prunes have their place in life, and neither city title sounds totally absurd. However, the small town of Claxton, Georgia has recently proclaimed itself, without any apparent trace of irony, to be the “fruitcake capital of the world”. The rest of the country has nodded sagely and muttered, “yep, that’s about what we’d expect from them Southerners”.

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## Footnote

OK, I’ve seen it. It is brilliant, which is pretty much what I expected from the trailers. As I have a fairly full issue already I’ll give you all a chance to see it for yourselves before doing a review.

Eh? The *Lord of the Rings* movie, of course.

January is going to be a busy month as Kevin and I are moving. The new apartment is much closer to both our work places and we are looking forward to spending two hours less a day on the road. The bad news is that the apartment complex in which we are living is gated. I promise you that there are no guards with machine guns at the gates, and no killer Dobermans patrolling the grounds. The neighbourhood isn’t really even that bad. But far too many people in California live in fear and way too many of the decent places to live are behind bars. At least the rest of the community will be safe from us.

Next issue I’m planning to look at some contenders for the Best Dramatic Presentation Hugo: *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Monsters Inc*. We’ll also have books from Vernor Vinge, Stephen Dedman and Jo Walton. See you in 2002.

Ciao,

Love ‘n’ hugs,

Cheryl