

EMERALD CITY #83

Issue 83

July 2002

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Introduction

Phew, another rush issue. Safely back from London, off to Westercon, and suddenly I have only two weekends to get this done before I leave for Australia. Oh well, no panic, I can do this.

While I am here I'd just like to take this opportunity to remind you folks that the Amazon links on the site are not just for show. Firstly, I want you to buy books, and that is the easiest way to encourage you to do so. But also it earns me a small amount of money whenever someone buys a book from Amazon after clicking through from *Emerald City*.

This magazine is free, and I intend it to remain so. It is also free of annoying banner ads and other such nuisances. I have a job right now, so continuing to subsidize the site is not as big a problem as it was a year ago. But it would still be nice if it didn't cost me quite so much. If you are going to buy a book from Amazon anyway, please click through from *Emerald City*. It costs you nothing, and it helps keep the site going. Thank you.

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Airport Living

This year's Westercon was held in a Radisson hotel at Los Angeles airport, affectionately known by its international designator, LAX. Here's how it was.

The hotel

On my last but one business trip to Europe I had the misfortune to stay in two different Radisson hotels: one in Amsterdam and one in London. As a result of this I was distinctly nervous about the prospect of staying in another one. It did not take the LAX Radisson long to prove my fears well founded.

One of the better things about Radissons is that they are quite stylish. In some cases, particularly the London hotel I stayed in, this is taken to extremes and style is given way more preference than guest comfort and convenience. The LAX Radisson, however, is a nice-looking, spacious building. It looks just the sort of place that you would want to stay in. But then you discover how badly run Radisson hotels are.

Kevin had booked us a room. One room, and he had a printout from the reservations web site to prove it. But when we arrived at the front desk the chap there assured us that we had booked two separate rooms. If we had not had that piece of paper they would have charged us for two rooms for the first night.

So we booked the room on Kevin's credit card, and as I had an early panel the next day we ordered room service breakfast. When the food arrived, we were told that we could not charge it to our room because our account had been marked cash only. After some debate the hotel finally agreed that a credit card is a credit card and we were allowed to charge things to it.

So we sat down to enjoy our breakfast. We had ordered tea, and on the tray was a large, insulated carafe; a large, empty insulated carafe.

The guy who brought us the food was very apologetic and got us the hot water fairly quickly. And the following day he checked the order before knocking on our door, apologized to us that we'd been sent coffee rather than tea, and got us the hot water again. On our final day at the hotel room service finally got our order right.

LA in July is of course not one of the most human-friendly environments. Most southern US hotels have the air conditioning cranked up to the max because they expect all of their clients to be wearing business suits. Westercon attendees prefer other styles of dress, and consequently by the end of Thursday everyone except Kevin (who has a very efficient internal furnace) was in danger of expiring from hypothermia. Things got a little better on the second day, but as is usual in such matters there was a definite case of pendulum swing.

The hotel had a large amount of usable function space, but it was rather poorly laid out. Getting to some of the panels involved a long trek through hotel corridors, and the fan lounge was in a separate building by the pool. The green room, on the other hand, was fabulously spacious, accessible and comfortable. I suspect that the con committee had done the best they could with difficult material.

One thing that the hotel did get right was to offer a buffet in the restaurant. For \$14 you could get a pretty good meal. Given how picky some fans are about food, and how complex bill settling gets when large groups of fans eat together, this is an ideal arrangement. Kevin and I had the buffet on Thursday and were so impressed with the pasta dish that we went back for more. Sadly the restaurant staff were in the usual bungling Radisson mould, but at least

with a buffet we didn't have to interact with them much.

And so it came to time to check out. We went through the bill on the room TV and it seemed OK, but we were not allowed to use express checkout. We wondered why they bothered having the option if they didn't trust guests to use it, but we found out when we got home. Kevin hadn't paid much attention to the paper bill when he got it, and later discovered with horror that we'd been charged \$89.56 for our first room service breakfast. Thankfully they had not charged us at all for the other two breakfasts, or the one dinner we had, so I think we came out slightly ahead. But there is a clear lesson from this. If you have to stay in a hotel, avoid Radissons at all costs.

Panels

I got allocated three panels, all of which were over by Friday lunchtime. The first one was on reviewing SF, which is something I know a fair amount about. It was fairly uneventful and no great insights were offered. The only thing I remember about it is when Rick Foss commented that the only time you ever get any feedback for your writing is when you make a mistake. Larry Niven, sitting in the audience, suddenly took on a very pained expression.

Panel two was ostensibly about the growth in interest in non-US writers of SF&F. I say ostensibly because I'm not sure that even many of the small number of people we had in the audience were terribly interested in learning about foreign writers. There was some interest in talking about the economics of publishing in other countries, but not a lot else.

The situation wasn't helped by the fact that one of the panelists, Mark Olson, held the view that the recent explosion of British SF was a result of British writers finally having thrown off the baleful influence of the New Wave, represented by what Mark held to be terrible writers such as Michael Moorcock and M. John Harrison. Hey, everyone has a right to their opinion, but sometimes people have really strange ideas.

Anyway, several people did come and take away copies of *Emerald City* after the panel, and one of them even came and thanked me for them later in the con. So hopefully the good word is continuing to be spread.

My final panel was on the public perception of SF, an issue that we had pretty much covered to death at Wiscon. Once again, although I felt that there were some really interesting points to discuss, most of the audience didn't seem very interested. Neither, for that matter, were some of the panelists. Barbara Hambly wasn't in the best of moods to start with as she had had great difficulty getting parked and consequently was late (thanks to Genny Dazzo for pointing her at the hotel's valet parking, otherwise Barbara might not have made it at all). After the panel she said that she had no interest in the subject and had no idea why she'd been put on the panel.

Still, we managed to fill in the time, although once again nothing new was raised. We did, however, all seem to be on the same page with regard to SF films. At one point one of the audience commented that James Cameron had bought an option on Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy, but had been unable to get a studio to back the project. The panel all agreed that films are much better if made from short

stories (and would be even better if the film makers wrote their own scripts). Larry Niven commented to the effect that a good movie of the Mars Trilogy could be made, and if he was immortal he might even have time to sit through it.

Kevin's first panel was similarly ineffective. Ostensibly it was about how to run a successful SF club, and what to do if yours seemed to be dying. A very similar panel had gone very well at the last Eastercon. This one, however, seemed to comprise of little but people telling anecdotes about funny things that their clubs did.

A rather better session was Kevin's Sunday morning session on "How to buy a Hugo". That too was rather heavy on the anecdotes, but at least it was supposed to be, and there were many good stories to be told. I was pleased to note that all of the panelists felt that Hugo recommendation sites such as the one that *Emerald City* runs were a very good idea.

Kevin missed his final panel because of a ConJosé emergency. Genny Dazzo was also mysteriously absent, and Christian McGuire turned up half way through, leaving Priscilla Olson to bravely run the whole thing herself. The panel was about setting convention membership prices, and was the most lively item I went to all weekend. However, I was sad to hear how many local conventions, especially in California, guarantee free memberships to all program participants in advance. This encourages a freebie culture and makes it very hard for new cons, or one-offs like Worldcon, to operate successfully.

I went to one other panel in which a variety of people, including Roz Kaveney, discussed the work of Tim Powers. I learned quite a lot about Powers' work in the process. But once again the panel was

very poorly attended, and when given the chance to comment most of the audience had absolutely nothing to say.

Mike Glycer, who was head of programming, tells me that he was not too disappointed about panel attendance, even though most of the panels I had attended had less than a dozen people in the audience. Mike says he has a rule of thumb, handed down from other conventions, that only about 15% of the convention membership is in panel items at any one time. Clearly this rule does not apply to Wiscon, and Priscilla Olson told me that Boskone gets similar panel attendance. Equally clearly, Wiscon-style programming would not have been a solution here because the sort of panels I was on would have drawn much bigger crowds at Wiscon even though the con attendance is much lower. California convention goers, it seems (outside of Potlatch) are simply not interested in panel discussions.

Continuing Skullduggery

On Thursday Dave Gallaher, one of Tom Whitmore's supporters on the ConJosé committee, was busily going round looking for people to bring a motion before the Westercon business meeting. The idea was to amend the bylaws to ensure that only non-profit organizations may run a Westercon. On the face of it, this sounds like a laudable objective, but in fact it was another salvo in the spiteful revenge campaign being waged against everyone who opposed Whitmore's incompetent management of ConJosé.

One of the bids for the 2005 Westercon is for San José. This bid is led by Michael Siladi, one of the group of people who were brave enough to speak out against

Whitmore. Siladi is the primary stockholder in Artistic Solutions Inc, the corporation that puts on the annual BayCon convention, and ASI is technically a for-profit company.

I have no idea whether Siladi and his friends make any money out of BayCon, but from what I know of con finances, not to mention the number of free memberships Baycon gives out, I suspect it won't be a lot. It isn't an ideal situation, but then nothing had been said about Westercons having to be non-profit until Siladi tried to bid for one. There was much nonsense talked about moral high ground, but this was coming from people who believe that threatening spurious law suits with the intent of depriving people of their home and livelihood is a fair way of conducting fannish politics. In short, by people who would not recognize a moral argument if it punched them in the face.

The motion was duly brought, although Gallaher carefully avoided the meeting and later had the cheek to try to pretend that it was nothing to do with him. The Stop Siladi faction had not submitted a motion in advance so as not to alert too many people to their actions. (In this they succeeded as Siladi and his friends had no idea what was going on until it was too late.) Consequently much time was wasted trying to find suitable wording. All of the people with legal training in the meeting advised against the amendment because, if the intent was to stop people making a profit from Westercons, the wording was woefully inadequate. But of course this was not the objective; the objective was to make life difficult for Siladi, and there were sufficient people at the meeting with that objective to win any vote. There was even concern amongst the anti-Siladi faction about the fact that constitutional amendments do not take

place until the end of the current convention, so they forced through a motion to have their charge apply retroactively just in case Michael managed to file a bid during the con. So much for due process.

Siladi, to his credit, took the whole thing very calmly. He says he'll just set up a non-profit organization and win the bid anyway. Good luck to him. I feel very sorry for the rival bid from Calgary, which will now presumably find itself the unintended beneficiary of "support" from a particularly unpleasant group of people in what may become a very ugly race. I feel sorry too for Ed Green, the chair of the business meeting. It was his first time in the job and he was quite unaware of the import and ugliness of the strange behavior at the meeting. Thankfully Siladi has made it clear that he does not blame Ed or the LA Westercon committee for what happened.

Most of all, however, I feel sorry that a fannish business meeting has once again been hijacked by a small group of people determined to force their own spiteful and selfish agenda on the rest of fandom through cunning manipulation of a supposedly democratic procedure. Whether or not Michael Siladi should be allowed to hold a Westercon should be a matter for the participants in a site selection vote, not for a small cabal of people who study and exploit the rules. This is the sort of thing that gives con runners in general, and business meetings in particular, a bad name.

Fireworks

Those of you who follow the news may be aware that there was considerable excitement at LAX on the Thursday of the

convention. Shootings are of course fairly commonplace in certain parts of Los Angeles, but the International Terminal at LAX is not one of them. I'm pleased to report that none of the convention attendees came to any harm as a result of the goings on, although some of the later arrivals were delayed somewhat while the police and airport security sorted things out. Thankfully no one panicked and we were not evacuated.

Of course it now remains to be seen what new "security" measures will be brought in to prevent a repeat of this occurrence. Given the way the US media has been whipping the country up into a frenzy of fear about a terrorist attack on July 4th, someone in Congress is bound to demand that "something be done". A possible solution suggests itself from history. Given that travel by air seems so dangerous, perhaps Congress could pass a law that no plane be allowed to fly unless a man with a red flag walks in front of it. I think that would put an effective end to airline safety problems.

Parties

With bids for various Westercons and Worldcons all present there was a lively party circuit most nights. This was somewhat hindered by the hotel structure. The parties were conveniently arranged on floors 11 and 12, immediately below the con suite, which was in the penthouse. However, the doors from the stairs to floor 12 were all locked, forcing us to use the elevators to move between 11 and 12. Naturally this resulted in serious elevator melt down. By Saturday evening all sorts of ingenious devices had been implemented to wedge the floor 12 stair doors open.

The prize for best alcohol clearly went to the UK05 Worldcon bid party which had the usual array of fine malt whiskies on display. Not content with that, the parties were co-hosted by the Japan in '07 bid, which brought along some unfiltered sake and plum wine. Full marks to Andrew Adams for doing most of the work on this by himself (his local US agent, Christian McGuire, was a senior member of the con committee and thus was unable to do anything beyond buy supplies).

The UK05 party also did very well for food, being possessed of some very fine cheeses. However, the prize for best food goes to the Arizona in 2004 Westercon bid for the burrito bar that they ran on Saturday night.

Best silliness, should there be such a prize, would go to the LA in '06 Worldcon bid with their space cadet theme. They have clearly got into the whole idea and have put a lot of work into building props and coming up with daft ideas to spice up their parties.

Other stuff

The dealers' room was a reasonable mix of books, jewelry, clothing, ornaments and filk. Most of the book dealers were selling second hand material, and I managed to pick up a couple of things I had been looking for.

The art show was also well stocked. I was particularly pleased to see a lot of jewelry, engraved glass and other such stuff made by well-known female SMOFs.

The con did have a masquerade, but I was told beforehand that they were only expecting 12 or so entries. I'm afraid I took a nap prior to the Saturday parties rather than bother to go.

The Site Selection vote resulted in Arizona being chosen for the 2004 Westercon. The actual site is somewhat outside Phoenix and there has been some grumbling about the distance involved, but as far as I can see it is considerably less distance than getting into downtown Houston from the local airport. It will be hot, of course. Phoenix is always hot.

In any case, if people wanted a Westercon elsewhere they should have put up an opposing bid. The only semi-serious opposition was a write-in campaign for Cobber Pedy in Australia. (Yes, of course it was a joke, though hopefully Terry Frost will be pleased to see his amendment to the Westercon constitution tested.) Vows of silence prevent me from revealing what lunatics were responsible for such silliness, but I was pleased to see that someone actually ate some of the Vegemite I walked half way around Berkeley trying to find. Any similarity between this bid and the Roswell in 2002 Worldcon bid is entirely coincidental.

The con newsletter offered the innovative service of direct delivery to hotel rooms. Kevin and I tried this out, and sure enough, two issues of the newsletter each day turned up under our door. Karl Lembke, I am seriously impressed with the dedication of your delivery team.

And finally, the "best t-shirt" award. I did like the "Hairy Potto and the Stoned Sorcerer" shirt that Scott and Jane Dennis were selling. However, the prize this convention goes to the "Green Eggs and Hamlet" shirt I spied in an elevator. "I would not, could not kill the King. I could not poison anything."

Conclusions

Westercon attendance has been very disappointing of late, at least in part because recent conventions have been held in out of the way places such as Spokane, El Paso and Honolulu. It was hoped that a return to Los Angeles would result in renewed interest in the convention. In fact, however, the numbers were lower than those for LosCon, the annual LA convention, despite the presence of large numbers of fans from out of town.

Whatever the reason for this, it cannot be laid at the door of the con committee. The LA folks ran an almost flawless convention, despite the unfortunate death of con chair, Bruce Pelz, only a month or so before the convention. I can't think of a single thing that went wrong organizationally on the actual weekend.

Various reasons for the poor attendance suggest themselves. Firstly people may be saving up for Worldcon and can't afford another con over the summer. Second, given the amount of press hysteria, people may have been afraid to venture out over July 4th weekend. Parking will have been a major issue for local fans because the hotel had very little of it and the airport has lots but it is very expensive. The con was clearly designed to be convenient for out of town visitors and indifferent to locals.

From a business point of view, the con seems to have gone OK. There were no obvious signs of panic budget cutting, although Christian McGuire tells me that there are unlikely to be program participant refunds. Those dealers I spoke to (Dave Clark and Scott Dennis) both professed themselves happy with takings.

But for all the flawless organization and reasonable performance, I found the con

very flat. No one seemed interested in the program, and the constant undercurrent of unpleasantness over ConJosé made the weekend far from comfortable. I spent most of the weekend wondering why I had bothered to go.

Write for me a Trilogy

It is rare enough for the cover of a book to blow the author's pseudonym. It is even more rare for it to not only do so on the author's first novel under that pseudonym, but to also blow her other pseudonym as well. This smacks a little of desperation on behalf of the publishers, and having read the book I suspect it is something to do with an attempt to establish literary credibility for what is one of the most nakedly commercial books I've read in a long time.

Anyway, thanks to the cover blurb, the world now knows that Jude Fisher (of whom we knew very little before this novel) is in fact Jane Johnson, who is also half of Gabriel King. Ms. Fisher's only previous claim to fame that I can discover is authoring a companion book to the recent *Lord of the Rings* film, which is kind of appropriate because in her alter ego she works in the publishing industry and for the past 17 years has been responsible for managing the output of one J.R.R. Tolkien. Ms. Johnson also has two literature degrees, in Anglo-Saxon and ancient Icelandic, which ideally suits her to looking after Mr. Tolkien's work, but is sadly little in evidence in the work of Ms. Fisher.

The novel, *Sorcery Rising*, part 1 of the *Fool's Gold* series, a multi-volume "trilogy",

is an artifact. It is an attempt by someone well versed in the fantasy publishing industry to produce "ideal product", and as such it succeeds quite well. As literature, however, it is deeply disappointing.

The book starts well enough. Deep in his icy retreat (Goddess help me, I almost wrote "Fortress of Solitude"), the sorcerer Rahe appears to be going mad. He is, it seems, destroying all of his grimoires and magical artifacts. His apprentice, Virelai, is deeply disturbed by this development, as he had hoped to learn the master's secrets. Bound by geas not to harm his master, Virelai contrives instead to put him into an enchanted sleep and escapes into the world with what he can salvage of the old man's works, as well as the mysterious and beautiful woman whom Rahe had apparently been keeping hidden in his rooms. Virelai hopes to find some suitably stupid and greedy adventurers who can be persuaded to seek the magical fortress and kill Rahe for him. Knowing what we do of fantasy societies, that should not prove too hard.

So far so good, especially the fey and alluring Rosa Mundi who seems to trail sorcery in her wake. She, of course, is the power that the Sorcerer's Apprentice has unwittingly let loose, and by the end of the book the terrible effects of her presence in the world begin to become obvious. But of course you will already have worked that out because the elements of this story are well known, even to Mickey Mouse.

The rest of the book, I'm sorry to say, is even more formulaic and predictable. The good guys are Aryan barbarians and the bad guys are Arabic and civilized (except for the odd maverick character or there would hardly be any plot at all). The older characters are dumb and hidebound, and

the younger ones dashing and heroic and idealistic. Almost everyone seems to have 21st Century views on social issues. And there is more teenage angst than in a whole year of *Neighbours* episodes.

I would not be so disappointed if Fisher/Johnson wasn't clearly competent. The Gabriel King books are a lot more interesting, even though the heroes are cats, and I'm sure Mike Harrison would not want to claim all of the credit for that. *Sorcery Rising* is well constructed, has some excellent humor and good pacing. But it is vacuous: unimaginative, unchallenging comfort reading. And I'm certain it was done like that deliberately because "that is what sells". I'm sure that Jane Johnson can write things much better than a Jude Fisher book. I guess this will make her money, but I hope she'll feel the need to show us what she can do at some time in the future.

Sorcery Rising - Jude Fisher - Earthlight - hardcover

Dark Angels

An image came to me, which incorporates certain elements from the beginning of the story. It is like standing alone, on a high balcony, above a night-time city, which flickers with lights. You drink cold dry wine and lean against a balustrade, staring up at the stars. Everything is so perfect - the stars, the warm night, the glittering streets below - but in that moment you feel a oneness with creation that stimulates awareness of the great tragedy of the world, how all that beauty is ephemeral. Nothing could be more perfect than this moment, but all too soon it is gone, burning out among the stars.

Storm Constantine

That quote was from Storm Constantine's introduction to the new Meisha Merlin publication of *Burying the Shadow*. However, if I had left the name off you might have been forgiven for thinking that the writer was talking about Viriconium. And of course the text contains that classic theme of British fantasy, the Empire on which the Sun has Set.

It is not often that you will find me comparing Constantine to Mike Harrison. But *Burying the Shadow* is, I think, the best thing that she has done. It was her first attempt at a Fallen Angels story, first published back in 1992 well before the Grigori Trilogy. Unlike the Grigori books, however, it was not published in the US, and Stephen Pagel and his team have taken the opportunity to off this fine novel to the US market.

The book does take a little getting into. Storm spends quite a few chapters setting the scene with rather too much exposition. She handles that sort of thing better now, but if you persevere through it you soon get into the story and things start to rattle along. The other thing that you have to accept is that this is a Storm Constantine novel and that therefore all of the major characters will be tall, slim, stunningly attractive in an androgynous sort of way, and possessed of enormous sexual appetites that sometimes get the better of their common sense. If you can take that, you have a treat in store.

Unlike the Grigori books, *Burying the Shadow* does not take place in our world, and I think it is the better for it. Instead Constantine creates her own fantasy world in which the Fallen Angel myth fits more neatly and "magic" is able to work

without things seeming forced. It also allows Constantine to jettison the whole of Judaeo-Christian mythology and theology, except for the story she wants and the one bit of theology that is important.

In the world of the novel, Lucifer and his followers are living more or less peaceably amongst humankind in the city of Sacramente, using various sorts of tricks to disguise their immortality and their need to feed upon human blood (vampire novels were just starting to become the rage when Storm first wrote the book). However, things are starting to go bad; some of the Host (or Eloim as they call themselves) have begun to commit suicide – an unthinkable action for an immortal. Strange things are also happening in remote parts of the human kingdoms.

Two young Eloim, Gimel and Beth Metatronim, take it upon themselves to try to solve the problem, and they turn to humans for help. One community of humans, the Taps, have developed the skill of Soulscaping. This is effectively practical Jungian psychology. The Soulscapers are able to enter the Soulscape of other humans, confront the mythic figures that represent their fears and neuroses, and banish them. Gimel and Beth decide that what they need is a Soulscaper who can diagnose the mental sickness afflicting the Eloim. But they quickly discover that Eloim minds are a far more terrifying place than those of humans. The Soulscapers that they recruit go mad and have to be killed and disposed of. So, taking a typically immortal long view, they decide to subvert a young Soulscaper as a child and covertly direct her education so that she develops stronger than normal powers. Much of the book is given over to the life of this Rayojini as she grows up, develops her talents, and is slowly lured into

discovering the truth about the mysterious “artisans” of Sacramente.

Along the way, however, Rayojini learns rather more about Eloim history than Gimel and Beth knew themselves. The true reasons for the sickness are far more complex than the young Eloim have realized, and there is a direct connection to their expulsion from the “other world”.

We walked past a broken tower, whose dark entrance was guarded by the crumbled and dismembered statue of a huge, stern god, who had undoubtedly once perched atop the tower. Later we walked between three pairs of lichened stone lions, whose broad ancient backs were saddled in bright fallen leaves. The lions pulled snarling and argumentative faces at one another across the road. It was a dispute that had been maintained for centuries.

As suggested by the quote from the introduction, Constantine’s starting theme for the book is the impermanence of youth and beauty. She begins with the simple sorrow that things much change, moves on to the young person’s fear of age and infirmity, and finally tackles the theological themes that underpin the story of Eden and Lucifer’s revolt against God. As someone who takes a keen interest in such things, I have to say that it is a very fine exposition of those theological themes. And it is a great story too. Constantine is still producing good books, but I wish she would stop producing bloated trilogies full of sex and angst and get back to producing tight, focused books like *Burying the Shadow*. Huge thanks, however, are due to Meisha Merlin for bringing this fine novel to a US audience. Go buy it and see what Constantine is capable of when she is on top form.

Flames of War

The law has failed us, we realize now, because it made us gentle. It relied upon a decency at the heart of every community, the willingness of each person in Shaftal to treat the next with generosity and understanding. When strangers came who were estranged from that decency, our kindness became our weakness.

Laurie Marks, I am delighted to say, writes nothing like formula fantasy. *Fire Logic* is distinctive in at least three ways. Firstly Marks has actually thought a bit about the magic system she uses in the book. She's done some research, she's worked hard on producing something that sounds believable, and it works. There are areas where one might quibble about interpretation, but it is clear that she has set out to produce a consistent magical system and she has succeeded. This is a breath of fresh air after so many books in which magic just does what it is convenient to the plot for it to do.

Secondly, *Fire Logic* is set in a society where same-sex relationships are normal and in no way unusual. There is no invoking special biology to justify this, as in Liz William's *The Ghost Sister*. It simply happens. Nor is gay sex in any way important to the plot. People do it because it is quite ordinary. I've been waiting a long time for a book like this, and I'm sure it will be on the Tiptree short list next year.

Finally, and most importantly, however, the book has a lot to say to the reader. It is not there just to entertain; it is there to make you think. In particular, you are asked to think about the nature of war.

The basic plot of *Fire Logic* concerns the invasion of the small, peaceful society of Shaftal by the warlike and disciplined Sainnites. The government of Shaftal is destroyed, and the sole survivor, Councilor Mabin, takes to the hills to begin a guerilla resistance movement. The quote at the head of this review is from Mabin's book, *Warfare*, which becomes the bible of the resistance movement.

The primary heroine of the novel, Zanja, is a foreign diplomat who was working as an ambassador to Shaftal at the time of the conquest. Her people, the small mountain tribe of Ashawala'i, are wiped out by the Sainnites a few years after the invasion of Shaftal when a Sainnite seer predicts that an Ashawala'i will be responsible for the downfall of the Sainnite kingdom. As is the way with prophecies, Zanja survives the massacre, and becomes determined to make it come true.

As the book develops, however, we come to see the reality of a world torn apart by guerilla warfare. Crops are pillaged or destroyed by passing soldiers, villages full of farmers are massacred to punish them for helping the resistance, trade becomes difficult because caravans are liable to be attacked, seasoned warriors die off and are replaced by children. The words and actions of Councilor Mabin and her opponents sound more and more like those of Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon, and just as futile. Zanja becomes a highly competent killer, but it gets her nowhere, except into more danger and more opportunities to kill. And along the way, personal ambition, greed and love of

violence soon take the place of the original high ideals of the resistance fighters.

"A glorious cast of powerful, compelling and appealingly vulnerable characters struggling to do the right thing in a world gone horribly wrong."

Nalo Hopkinson

It is rare that I find a cover blurb comment that sums up a book so well, but Hopkinson has got it absolutely right there. *Fire Logic* is a fine book. As I've already said, I expect it to be short-listed for the Tiptree. A nomination for the World Fantasy Award is also a distinct possibility, and I have it on my "thinking about it" list for the Hugos. A fantasy novel that speaks so directly and pertinently about present day issues is a rare thing indeed, and should be encouraged.

Fire Logic – Laurie Marks – Tor – hardcover

In the Wild Wood

There has been quite a boom in fantasy fiction in Australia in the wake of the extraordinary success of Sara Douglass. I'll look at this in a bit more detail next issue, but for now here is one of the authors whose work has been taken up most enthusiastically by American publishers.

At first sight Cecilia Dart-Thornton's first novel is standard fantasy fare. *The Ill-Made Mute*, we are told, is the first part of *The Bitterbynde*. Thankfully the other two

volumes are listed so we can presumably be assured that this trilogy will indeed only be three volumes long. The back cover contains the usual words of praise from other female writers of fantasy fiction. And there, in amongst them, is a rave review from Elizabeth Hand.

Suddenly I am interested. And this feeling is accentuated by the inside front cover which comments, "*set in a world as brimming with wonders and terrors as any canvas of Hieronymous Bosch or Brian Froud*". Yes indeed, Cecilia Dart-Thornton has found the real Faerie and has brought it to life.

The plot of *The Ill-Made Mute* is fairly classic stuff. Our heroine is poor, alone, mute, and thanks to a fall into some nasty plants, hideously disfigured. But she is also brave, resourceful, intelligent, and possessed of considerably more ambition than the servants amongst whom she finds a home. We can be sure that over the course of the book she will prove to be someone important, and doubtless will acquire stunning beauty as well.

What makes the book stand out, however, is the world through which our girl travels. Escaping from the kitchens of a great fortress, she stows away on a wind ship, is attacked and captured by pirates, is rescued by a friendly adventurer, and travels through the wild wood. And wild it most certainly is. There is a reason why the rich and powerful of Dart-Thornton's world prefer to travel by wind ship and flying horse. The woods are filled with every nightmare that folklore has imagined. It is indeed like leafing your way through some Brian Froud encyclopaedia of goblins and seeing them leap to life off the pages.

Other parts of the book are not quite so encouraging, or at least are less consistent.

The anti-gravity metal that allows the wind ships and flying horses to work brings an unwelcome air of scientific explanation into a gloriously weird landscape. Also there is some jumbled and inconsistent use of Mummerset by some of the characters. This probably won't be noticed in Australia or the US, but it grates on us Brits.

These, however, are relatively minor complaints. You read this book for the descriptions of the wildwood, and for the faithful evocation of faerie mischief and mayhem. Dart-Thornton's work is perhaps a little long on description and short on plot for me, but many people like that sort of thing and I can't deny her talent at it. Furthermore, the end of the first book suggests that the next volume might be spent more in the city than in the forest, so it will have to take on a different nature. I'm looking forward to it (and I note that one person has already put it on next year's Hugo recommendation list, even though I haven't officially opened the list for business yet). This is a very promising start from a new writer, and a feather in the cap for Australia.

The Ill-Made Mute - Cecilia Dart-Thornton - Warner - hardcover

Good Fortune

It has taken me quite a while to get round to this one, but as I was doing female fantasy writers for this issue I felt it was a good opportunity to catch up on Juliet McKenna's Einarinn series. The fourth and final book is now out, but here I'm reviewing the third in the series, *The Gambler's Fortune*.

McKenna is a writer whom, I am pleased to say, is showing every sign of maturing with time. I have said in reviews of the previous books in the series that she is a fine natural storyteller. All she has to do now is refine her craft, and that she is doing. The latest book in the series sounds far less like a Dungeons & Dragons adventure written up as a novel and much more like a proper story. Furthermore, Juliet takes the bold step of telling much of the story from the point of view of the erstwhile bad guys. She does a fine job of showing how a smattering of greed, ambition and stupidity can make villains out of people who mostly think that they are only doing what is right by their community. Of course the really bad guys are still there in the background stirring things up, but the whole story has much more of an air of believability than the standard black-and-white fantasy plot.

As well as developing her writing skills, McKenna is also working on fleshing out the mysterious second magic system that is forming much of the basis of the plot of the series. This type of magic was apparently well known in the ancient past, but knowledge of it has been lost except perhaps amongst more isolated communities deep in the wildwood or in far, inaccessible mountain ranges. It is amusing to watch McKenna's characters turning themselves into anthropologists and bemoaning the corruption of ancient legends that are passed down only through oral tradition. There is a certain tongue in cheek aspect to this, in that the book is mirroring what Western folklorists keep hoping to find, but never do.

Finally I want to praise the down-to-Earth, practical, no-nonsense approach that McKenna brings to her fantasy fiction. Her characters do need to cook and wash their clothes. They do occasionally come up

with a perfectly practical solution to a problem that most fantasy writers would solve with magic. They do remember to wrap their valuable books up in oilskin in case of being caught in a downpour. McKenna has two young sons, and sometimes you can hear Mom talking through the prose. It really is a breath of fresh air.

As I have said before, McKenna's work is not the greatest literature in the world, but her story telling is excellent and she is getting better all the time. She is someone well worth following.

The Gambler's Fortune - Juliet E. McKenna - Orbit - softcover

Amazon Queen

When I'm in London I always make a point of visiting the remaindered book stores. You never know what you might pick up. And this time I was really lucky; I found a book that fits perfectly with this issue's theme of female fantasy writers.

Mary Renault is an unusual fantasy writer in two ways. Firstly, she wrote pre-Tolkien, in that wonderful dreamtime when fantasy novels could be reviewed positively by the Sunday Telegraph and quirky old curmudgeons such as Auberon Waugh felt no shame in praising their work. Indeed, Ms. Renault was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, something no modern day fantasy writer is likely to dream of. In addition, Renault was writing lesbian fiction at a time when the likes of Severna Park and Laurie Marks were but a twinkle in their mothers' eyes, or at least way too young to know what "lesbian" meant. Mary Renault is someone who would probably have been

right at home at Wiscon, but instead trod her own lonely path and achieved tremendous success. Next time the Tiptree Mother Board decides to give out a retro award, I want to see Ms. Renault on the short list.

The book I found, *The Bull from the Sea*, is the second part of Renault's re-telling of the life of Theseus. Part 1, *The King Must Die*, tells of the hero's early life, his time amongst the bull dancers of Knossos, and his defeat of the minotaur and subsequent destruction of the empire of Minos. Part 2 takes up where the first part left off, with Theseus's arrival home in Athens. It tells of his successful founding of an Athenian empire, of the various adventures he had in later life, and his tragic final years. (This is Greek myth, after all, there has to be a tragedy somewhere.) Above all, it tells of Theseus's doomed love for Hippolyta, the Amazon queen.

So where is the lesbian content, I hear you ask. Well this is a book 1962, so it has to be a bit circumspect. However, Renault makes it clear that the Amazons are an independent, all-female society, some of whom clearly have a deep emotional attachment to each other. She also takes every opportunity to remind readers that many Greek men of the period (including one of Theseus's sons) preferred the company of their own sex to that of women.

Hippolyta herself is a complex character. Because she leaves the Amazons for Theseus, and later fights alongside him against them, it could be claimed that she turns her back on female society. On the other hand, Renault portrays her life in Athens as that of an icon of feminism. She dresses like a man, spends much of her time out hunting with her lover, and has no time for the petty gossip and intrigue

of the court women. Truly Hippolyta is a woman who expects to be treated as an equal by men (and is liable to punch them out if she doesn't get the respect she deserves). All this in 1962, somewhat before Germaine Greer became famous.

As a re-telling of Greek myth, *The Bull from the Sea* is excellent. Renault has thoroughly researched both the extant versions of the Theseus myths and what was known of Bronze Age Greece at the time of writing. Her book does have strong echoes of the invasion-based histories popular in the first half of the 20th Century, but she was only working with the academic views that were to hand at the time. I particularly like the way in which she finds plausible explanations for all of the fantastical elements of the myth, and yet still managed to maintain an aura of divine presence throughout the book. Her Theseus clearly believes in his gods, and they have a nasty habit of interfering in his life when they are least wanted, just like all good mythological gods should.

I find books based on Greek myths quite hard to read. This is because you are always expecting some awful tragedy to take place, so you never want to start the next chapter for fear of what is going to happen next. Renault captures this atmosphere perfectly. You might just as well be reading Homer himself, except all of the magical stuff is interpreted for the modern reader. In the end, you come away thinking that those old Greeks weren't quite so daft, just a little confused, and very seriously close to their frighteningly real gods.

Another neat feature of the book is the name-dropping. Of course Renault expects all of the readers of her book to be intimately familiar with the Greek myths (as any well-educated Brit of the time

would have been). So we hear in passing about the gallant warrior who braved the Hellespont and the dangers of the Euxine Sea with only one ship full of heroes. Theseus wisely took an entire navy with him, and consequently came back with several golden fleece and Hippolyta with rather less trouble than the previous party had had. Or there is the young prince whom the aged Theseus encounters on the isle of Skyros where the boy is being hidden away on account of a prophecy of his early death. Strangely Renault missed the fact that the young man should have been disguised as a girl. Perhaps transvestism was a bit much for 1962, but I can't complain. Mary Renault is a too-often-ignored star of fantasy fiction, and deserves all of the praise I can heap on her.

The Bull from the Sea – Mary Renault – Penguin – softcover

Miscellany

Cheryl's Guide to San José

I had planned to produce a Guide to San José in the Worldcon edition of *Emerald City*, much like Terry Frost and I did for Melbourne three years ago. However, a few people have asked me to get it published well before the convention, and I have realized that it could get quite big. I am therefore intending to produce a special issue of *Emerald City* just to carry it. Right now it is still in production, but I hope to get it online soon after I get back from Australia. If you are interested, keep an eye on the home page of the web site.

Hopefully it will appear there by mid-August.

Locus Awards

This year's Locus Awards were announced at a banquet at Westercon. The results are as follows:

Best SF Novel: *Passage* - Connie Willis (Bantam);

Best Fantasy Novel: *American Gods* - Neil Gaiman (Morrow);

Best First Novel: *Kushiel's Dart* - Jacqueline Carey (Tor);

Best Novella: "The Finder" - Ursula K. Le Guin (*Tales from Earthsea*, Harcourt);

Best Novelette: "Hell is the Absence of God" - Ted Chiang (*Starlight 3*, Tor);

Best Collection: *Tales from Earthsea* - Ursula Le Guin (Harcourt);

Best Anthology: *The Year's Best Science Fiction 18* - Gardner Dozois Ed. (St. Martins);

Best Non-Fiction: *Being Gardner Dozois* - Michael Swanwick (Old Earth Books);

Best Art Book: *Spectrum 8* - Cathy & Arnie Fenner Eds. (Underwood Books);

Best Editor: Gardner Dozois;

Best Magazine: *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*;

Best Publisher: Tor;

Best Artist: Michael Whelan.

ConJosé News

The budget crisis (and Kevin's blood pressure crisis) has been substantially relieved by the arrival of passalong funds

from The Millennium Philcon. Passalong funds are a WSFS tradition whereby each Worldcon gives about half of any excess it makes to its three successors. This is actually quite a neat system as traditional Worldcon budgeting aims not to make a loss, which inevitably results in a surplus because some people always turn up at the last minute. You can't spend on the basis of at-the-door memberships because you cannot guarantee they will turn up, but some always do and giving some of the money to future Worldcons is an excellent way of patching up the budget.

The main problem with the system is just when the following Worldcons get the money. Generally Worldcon committees are pretty lethargic once their convention is over. So huge kudos are due to Todd and Joni Dashoff for not only coming up with a check in good time, but a much larger check than had been expected. A rather smaller and somewhat embarrassed check arrived from Chicago a few days later.

Heinlein Award

Various news services have announced the creation by the Heinlein Society of a special Heinlein Award for hard SF. However, the Heinlein Society web site has no mention of the award, and although you can still find mention of it on Google, all of the pages indexed no longer mention the award. It would be nice to build some elaborate conspiracy theory around this, but in practice I suspect that a combination of inefficiency and frequent cycling of news is responsible. I'll keep an ear open to see if the thing actually gets awarded.

Potter Myths and Facts

Until recently I'd been fairly happy to go along with the general consensus that the Harry Potter phenomenon was a Good Thing because it was encouraging kids to read a lot more. However, I have always been worried that Potter was rather more popular with adults than with kids, and now I have the proof. The latest issue of *Mslaxia* has some alarming statistics.

Fact 1: between 2000 and 2001 the total number of children's books purchased fell from 109 million to 104 million. Spending on children's books has been virtually flat through the Potter years, and sales of children's books are now 13% lower than they were in 1997.

Fact 2: whereas in 1999 some 71% of all Rowling titles were bought for children between the ages of 8 and 14, by 2001 that percentage had fallen to only 36%.

This data comes from reputable market research within the publishing industry in Britain. They probably apply only to the UK, but I'd be surprised if the same pattern were not repeated throughout the world. Kids are not buying more books than usual, and almost two thirds of the Potter books now sold are bought by adults.

So who is buying these books? Probably the same people who will buy Jude Fisher books and glory in the lack of complexity or unwelcome and challenging ideas. I wish it was otherwise, but it looks like the great book in kids reading has proved to be just another fad. Anyone remember Pokemon?

It takes all sorts

Because my email addresses are on my various web sites I get a lot of spam. Much of it is the usual stuff. Various pyramid selling schemes, promises to improve my sex life, links to pornography sites and promises of riches from Nigerian widows in unfortunate circumstances. Every so often, however, I get a little gem. Recently a plea for help arrived with the following opening:

"If you are a time traveler or alien and in possession of government or alien technology I need your help! My entire life and health has been messed with by evil beings! If you have access to the carbon copy replica model #50 3000 series, the dimensional warp, temporal reversion or something similar please reply!"

It is good to know that a little healthy eccentricity is still possible in this world.

Footnote

Next issue should celebrate my trip to Australia. I already have books by Maxine McArthur, Fiona McIntosh and Juliet Marillier lined up, and I hope to pick up some Australian publication only books while I am out there.

More urgently than that, however, I came back from the UK clutching new novels from Al Reynolds and Gwyneth Jones, both of which I have been very much looking forward to. I'm reading the Reynolds at the moment. Unlike *Chasm City*, it is a genuine sequel to *Revelation Space*, and I am already thinking Hugo nominee.

And if that wasn't enough to deal with, I was planning to have the ConJosé issue of *Emerald City* feature a collection of books set in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have quite a few books lined up, including *Vanishing Point* by Michaela Roessner which, as far as I know, is the only SF&F novel actually set in San José.

Issue #84 should be online by August 26th, because after that Kevin and I will be heavily involved in Worldcon and won't have time to think about anything else. If you know the way to ConJosé and plan on making the trip, I look forward to seeing you there.

Just how big #84 will be is another matter. There may just be two issues. We'll just see how things go while I am on the road.

And talking of the Worldcon, I hope to be running the blogger again. Unfortunately the Chairmen's suite has been allocated to the old tower of the Fairmont, which is the area without high speed Internet connectivity, but I'll do my best to produce regular updates.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl