

EMERALD CITY #95

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An occasionally Hugo-nominated 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at cheryl@emcit.com or online at <http://www.emcit.com>

Introduction

Oh my, what a month! Since getting the last issue out I have been in Seattle, Cardiff, London and now Somerset. At that, of course, came on the back of the unexpected trip to Sydney. Hopefully the coming month will be quieter, because I need to get the next issue out before Worldcon.

Talking of which, the deadline for voting on the final Hugo ballot is the end of this month. If you haven't voted yet, don't worry, there is an online ballot available at long last. You can find it here: <http://www.torcon3.on.ca/ballots/hugoballot.html>.

And now for an issue stuffed full of Australian books, plus a few items held over from last issue. Enjoy!

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Westercon Limp On

This year's Westercon proved to be something of a statistical anomaly: I was in Seattle for four and a half days and didn't see a single drop of rain. Sadly the convention itself was rather more in keeping with expectations, being somewhat lackluster.

One thing that we did not get, much to everyone's relief, was the expected black tide. The convention was held in the same hotel as the annual Norwescon event. I've never been to it, but I'm told by people who have that it is populated largely by people who like to dress only in black and play very loud music. We did get a performance by a band called BloodHag one afternoon, which made conversation difficult around the exhibit halls for a couple of hours, but other than that the con seemed quite normal.

The hotel, a Doubletree at SeaTac airport, did tolerably well. The function space layout resulted in most of the programming being upstairs, but no one seemed to mind. Importantly, although it is an airport hotel, there were plenty of places to eat within easy walking distances. They were not always good places to eat, but most of them were cheap and that seemed to keep people happy too.

The dealer's room was a good mixture of different types of vendor. Dave Clark tells me that his book sales went quite well, but Scott Dennis was disappointed with t-shirt sales. Score one for the people of Seattle for being more interested in books than clothes. The art show was large and of good quality. Goodness, I nearly bought some stuff, which is quite unusual.

While the exhibits were very good, the program was distinctly uninspired. The

con's science GoH, Dr. Michio Kaku, was very popular, but apart from that there wasn't much on. I found only two items that I wanted to see. One was a panel on e-zines and e-publishing, but the e-zine part of it turned out to be mainly about selling stories online. The panel concluded that it is very hard to make any money out of the Internet. I think I could have told them that. The other was a session on Paul Allen's proposed SF museum, of which more later.

More importantly the organization of the programming was awful. The panels were scheduled in one-hour slots, but there was no length control so most panels ran their full 60 minutes or more. The popular ones over-ran considerably. For example, the SF museum panel cut 5 to 10 minutes into Bruce Sterling's GoH speech. And of course there is always a temptation to over-run if you can't start until 10 minutes after your scheduled time because people are still drifting from other panels that finished late. Proper time control of panels isn't hard. I don't understand why people don't bother to do it. Also someone should have told the programming folks not to put everyone on a panel who asks to be on it. There were several panels with seven or more members, and one that listed 22 on the room schedule, although thankfully it looked like only 8 or so turned up.

The big event of any Westercon is the Locus Awards banquet. As usual with such things, the food isn't great, but at least it only cost \$25 which was, for example, less than a meal in the hotel restaurant. More importantly, it was an opportunity for various industry people to clown around and have fun, and to give out some awards. Having expert comedienne, Connie Willis, as toastmaster helps enormously. If you hear anyone telling amusing stories about

Connie's male hula doll, they all started here.

One of the nice things about the Locus Awards is that as well as giving a plaque to the winning author they also give a certificate to the winning publisher. As token Brit at the banquet I was asked to accept one of these certificates on behalf of Pan Macmillan, the UK publishers of *The Scar*. Wow. Yes, I was horribly nervous, but also deeply honored. Hopefully I didn't stumble too badly over reading Peter Lavery's excellent acceptance speech.

It was a good night for China. Not only did he win Best Fantasy Novel for *The Scar*, but also Best Novella for *The Tain*. Of course that doesn't mean that he beat out *Coraline*: the Locus Awards have a special category for Best Young Adult Novel, which of course Neil won. He also got Best Short Story for "October in the Chair". Neither China nor Neil were there, though Neil did manage a superbly funny acceptance speech in which his acceptor, Artist GoH Lisa Snellings, was required to read out a long screed on what a wonderful person Neil is and why she admires him so much. I'm sure it was all pre-planned, but Lisa's mock outrage was perfectly delivered. The Best SF Novel award went to *The Years of Rice and Salt* as I expected. Kim Stanley Robinson wasn't there either, though he had least distance to travel. The award was accepted by Kathleen Ann Goonan. Three cheers to Alex Irvine for actually turning up to collect for Best First Novel for *A Scattering of Jades*. Bob Eggleton was also there to get an art award and do the hair thing, which of course was cool. Full details of the award winners, including a few silly special awards, are in the Miscellany section.

Meanwhile, back to the SF museum. Greg Bear, the chair of the Advisory Panel, turned up to introduce this, but he left most of the presentation to the professional museum staff who came along with him. Clearly this thing has a lot of momentum behind it already. The web site is up, lots of exhibits have been or are being acquired, and plans for the layout are very well developed. You can learn more from the museum's web site: <http://www.sciencefictionexperience.com/>. It sounded like a lot of thought had been put into how visitors should experience the museum and I suspect it will be great fun. How long their determination to focus on books as well as media SF will survive commercial pressures I'm not sure. What I suspect will happen is that the museum will concentrate on movies and TV but will use that to lead people into books where possible.

By the way, the museum will probably not end up being called Science Fiction Experience. The museum staff has discovered that another commercial organization in the field is using the term SFX. Darn those Brits anyway.

One rather bizarre piece of information that came out of the session was that, according to the museum staff, there is much confusion amongst the general public as to what "science fiction" actually is. Focus groups had revealed that young people in Seattle do not associate films like *The Matrix* or *Star Wars* with the term "science fiction". That's worrying for the museum because it means that people who liked those films would not automatically expect to find stuff about them in an SF museum. We did not get to learn what those kids thought "science fiction" meant, but I have a horrible feeling that it was "believing in UFOs". (Kevin adds a comment that our

local cable TV company has a program category calls "sci-fi & paranormal", presumably on the assumption that they are very similar things.)

And finally we come to that other traditional piece of Westercon excitement, the Site Selection vote. This year we were choosing between a location near San José (a bid led by some of the folks who run BayCon) and Calgary (led by John Mansfield, the chair of the Winnipeg Worldcon). Much to everyone's surprise, it was a resounding victory for Calgary by 136 votes to 59. It will be great to get to visit somewhere new, but the result immediately prompted more discussion of Westercon's future.

Why? Well consider this. Last year's Westercon was in LA but drew less than 1000 people, much fewer than the annual Loscon. This year attendance got up to over 1400, but this is much less than a normal Norwescon. BayCon this year had an attendance of 2300, but only 59 of them could be bothered to back a BayCon-led bid for a Westercon. What is the point in having a travelling convention that consistently attracts fewer people than the regular local conventions in the places it visits? Does anyone care anymore, and if not, should we perhaps put Westercon out of its misery?

Sunday afternoon came around eventually and it was time for Kevin and I to try to get home, or to another convention. It is slowly dawning on me that if you are reasonably flexible in your travel schedule then you can fly an awful long way in America. All of the American airlines habitually overbook their flights because they know that disorganized business travelers often don't turn up on time (they are not paying for their tickets so they don't care about the cost of re-booking). But the airlines are not

very good at guessing exactly how much margin they can leave, and they nearly always end up with too many passengers for peak time flights. Thus, if you have a flight booked for Sunday evening, you can generally rely on being offered a bribe of a free flight to travel on Monday afternoon instead.

Kevin and I got "bumped", as they call it, on the way back from Wiscon. Consequently we got vouchers from Northwest and our flights to Toronto for Worldcon cost us a whopping \$12 each. We got bumped by Alaska coming back from Westercon, and had a connecting flight on Monday not been late we would have got bumped again. I'm planning to use the free flight they gave me to go to Foolsap in Seattle in September, and Kevin is looking at going to a con in Calgary. I could have got bumped on the way back from ICFA and got a voucher for Continental, but I was still employed at the time and could not change my schedule. Now that I'm self-employed again I intend to be very flexible and make a lot of use of this fabulous source of free airline tickets. All I need to do is remember to pack some clean clothes and toiletries in my carry-on bag, and take lots of books because you spend a lot of time stood in line. Hey, it is even tax free!

Interacting in Cardiff

The weekend following Westercon saw a staff weekend for the 2005 Glasgow Worldcon, Interaction. This took place in Cardiff, thousands of miles from Seattle. Ben Yalow and I made both events.

There being not a lot of actual work to do on a Worldcon more than 2 years out from the event, much of the weekend was given over to planning and team building. There were sessions on things like effective communication and avoiding burnout. I found this very encouraging, it being evidence that the Interaction hierarchy knows a bit about management theory and intends to take a very professional approach to their event. Some fans were not very comfortable with this. Claire Briarley had a good excuse – she had just come from a 3-day management training course at work. However, if the weekend managed to deter some of the people who think that putting on a Worldcon is “just like a big Eastercon”, or that “fannish” means not having to care about the quality of the event then that will have been a good thing.

The most detailed training exercise of the weekend was that old convention favorite, “dealing with an utterly incompetent hotel”. I’m pleased to say that I passed the “sorry, we have no record of your reservation” test with flying colors. Others who opted for the “trying to find the hotel using the highly inaccurate directions on the web site” spent up to two hours lost in Cardiff on Friday afternoon. The less said about the hotel food the better, although Jonjo did apparently manage to get a decent lunch service out of them on Sunday. (I failed the “have faith in your facilities liaison” test here, of which more later.) In case you are wondering, the hotel was a Hannover International – part of the same chain that owns the Hinckley Horror, so I guess we should not have been surprised about the food.

As it turned out, however, most of the attendees had a good time and felt that they had learned a lot. And of course we did not spend all of our time in conference sessions.

Cardiff has had a tremendous face lift since I used to go there to see my grandparents when I was a kid, and the place is full of interesting restaurants. On Saturday night a large group of us headed down to the elegantly redeveloped Tiger Bay, formerly the slum home of Jamaican, Ethiopian and Somali sailors, to sample an excellent Japanese restaurant. The food was very good, and much Kirin beer, plum wine and sake were consumed (see the photos on the *Emerald City* web site for proof). The star dish of the evening was the raw squid; the eating of which must have done much to stave off any imminent invasion by Great Old Ones. Sparks insisted that it tasted like placenta, and that this was a good thing. Having never eaten placenta I can’t comment on his culinary wisdom, but the squid did taste good.

After the meal the older and more staid of us, such as Vince Docherty and I, went back to the hotel and to bed, whilst the young, adventurous and/or seriously inebriated headed off for a gay nightclub and danced until dawn. Due to the amounts of alcohol involved, the exact details of that part of the evening are somewhat hazy. Therefore we shall probably never know the truth about what went on regarding the young man in the leather thong, or whether this occurred before or after Pat McMurray fell asleep. It did, however, provide endless entertainment on Sunday morning and doubtless several fannish urban legends have been created.

In addition to our convention, Cardiff was also hosting two other major international events that weekend. The first was the World 9-Ball Pool Championships. I decided that it would be best to steer clear of the hotel’s snooker room over the weekend in order to avoid extreme embarrassment. The other was a food and

drink festival at Tiger Bay. Being utter reprobates, Sparks and I skipped lunch and the afternoon session on budgets and went to see what goodies we could find.

There was, of course, laverbread, and the very wonderful Llanboidy cheese. I was also delighted to see a stall selling Oggies – the traditional beef and leek pastie that was just as much a staple diet of coal miners as the more famous Cornish variety was of tin miners. We also discovered a stall advertising the opening of a Welsh whisky distillery after an absence of over 100 years. Sadly the first batch of the single malt had not yet finished maturing so we could not taste it. They did have a bottle on show, but the woman behind the stall confessed that it was full of cold tea, thereby giving Sparks an excuse to make rude jokes about the taste of Welsh whisky. Still, the whisky cream liqueur was very nice. So were the venison casserole that we found, and the Turkish food. We were rather full by the time we found the Spanish stuffed tomatoes but they looked good too.

So, all in all a very successful weekend involving copious quantities of good food, good alcohol and good company. Plus a lot of very good vibes about a forthcoming Worldcon. It is wonderfully refreshing to find a Worldcon committee that wants to learn from past experience, wants to attract lots of people to their event, and wants to put on a spectacular show. Hopefully this attitude will survive as additional staff are recruited.

Wraeththu Grows Up

“You can never go back” is a common piece of advice to people who talk to you of idyllic former times, and it is generally good advice. Time changes everything, and the remembered world of your youth goes away. The same advice should probably apply to authors and the books that made them famous. But fans nag you, commercial pressures push you, and sometimes you just want to do it. For whatever reason, Storm Constantine has returned to the world of the Wraeththu. Thankfully she knew that things had to change.

I still have not got round to reading the first Wraeththu trilogy, but Constantine does an excellent job of providing sufficient background in the new volume to avoid any disorientation. It is quite clear what the Wraeththu are, and if you have read some of Constantine’s more recent work you can make good guesses as to what they are like. It is equally clear that there were issues that needed to be addressed. Some Wraeththu fans will, I suspect, be upset by what Constantine is doing here, but I think that it is something that had to be done.

The first word that comes to mind when I think of Constantine is “Goth”. And sure enough, the first quote that Tor put on the back of *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* is that one from Neil Gaiman describing Storm as a “Gothic queen.” In addition, we know that the Wraeththu are tall, slender, long-haired, androgynous and moody. But they don’t all dress in black and listen to depressing music. There is a lot more to the Wraeththu than their Goth ancestry.

To start with there is the sex. The Wraeththu are perhaps the ideal slash heroes, given that they look like pretty gay boys and are androgynous allowing them to play either sex role easily. Also

Constantine saw to it that they were created hypersexed and uninhibited, ensuring that they would want lots of sex lots and get on and do it at every opportunity. I can think of a lot of words to describe Goths, but uninhibited is not one of them.

And yes, I did say "created" back there. For the Wraeththu stories are also post-apocalyptic SF. Here my lack of knowledge of the background is going to show, but as far as I can gather from the new book the Wraeththu were created through genetic manipulation in a time of massive social breakdown. They were intended to be the new human race, and ended up rapidly precipitating the end of the old one. And here we come to perhaps the most important thing about the Wraeththu: they are a bunch of adolescent boys.

Most, if not all of the Wraeththu books are set at the beginning of Wraeththu society. Their original makers are either dead or in hiding, but the Wraeththu have found that they can make more of themselves from human boys through a process called inception (which conveniently involves lots of blood and sex). This provides a useful tribal initiation routine, and once converted the new Wraeththu can join his mates in a life of wild abandon, partying, killing and sex. For some of the wilder Wraeththu tribes, this is all that there is. But some more farsighted folks realize that there is a need to build a society, and that *The Lord of the Flies* is not a suitable Bible for their race. Then again, being androgynes, there is something that can put a stop to this life of teenage fantasy. Wraeththu can get pregnant. And given that they are all boys in mind, if not in body, this causes considerable consternation.

Some of the most interesting parts of *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* are where

Constantine gets to examine the reaction of the Wraeththu to their gender roles. For example, one of the main characters in the book, Ulaume, enters the story as a ruthless, power-hungry flirt but ends up for a while as "mother" to an abandoned Wraeththu child. Then there is Flick, who seems to have the nest-building instincts of a human female and who spends so much of the book getting into situations that are traditional for female characters that it is hard for the reader to think of him as a "him."

Yet perhaps the most glaring flaw in the whole Wraeththu edifice is that they are all men. Constantine set out to create a race of androgynes, but she appears to have realized that what she has done is create a race of men that can reproduce. Therefore, the most important thing for her to do in the new book is to produce Wraeththu from women and see what happens.

The heroines of our story, if we can use such a word, are Lileem and Mima. Lileem is a natural-born female Wraeththu, or Kamagrian, and Mima is a human female whom she accidentally manages to incept. Once they discover that they are not unique freaks, they start to notice differences between themselves and the Wraeththu.

After inception, for a woman, gone are the things that made up her identity. She has male organs, developed to a greater or lesser degree, but far more shocking than the discreet soume-lam. She loses her cycles of menstruation, and for many this feels as if they have been unwomaned. They lose their female shape somewhat: the breasts wither, the hips become narrower, fatty tissue is redistributed around the body. In the old world, a boyish shape might have been desirable for a woman, but the reality of actually having a boy's body is something else

entirely. It feels as if something terrible has been imposed upon them, that they have mutated into monsters.

Of course there is an unstated assumption here that all of the guys are wildly happy to discover that they now have vaginas and a decided interest in using them. Perhaps Constantine thinks that if this somehow gives them a new means of dominating other guys they won't be too upset about it. Perhaps she's right. But clearly for the girls waking up to discover that you have become Barbie with a penis is not exactly ideal.

Constantine does have a little bit of fun with this, and you can't help but think that she's having a quiet dig at feminist separatists.

Mima especially was contemptuous of the emphasis on the female side of their being. It was a subject that obsessed her and she'd come to the conclusion that all hara and parazha simply continued to identify with the gender they'd once been and that was the main difference between them. When Mima learned that some Kamagrian, who considered themselves among the most spiritual of their kind, had actually had their ouana-lim surgically removed, she was incensed.

Oops. So much for creating a perfect, androgynous society. Constantine is correctly recognizing that there is more to being male and female than one's sexual organs, and she has begun to work this out. There is, of course, a whole minefield of beliefs and attitudes to explore here: from the straight to the gay to the transvestite, transsexual, transgendered and goodness only knows what other distinctions have

been invented. Probably wisely, Constantine steers clear of getting bogged down in such categorizations, and instead concentrates on people.

One of the best things about *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* is that at long last Constantine is writing about ordinary folks. OK, so one of the major characters might be the King of All Wraeththu, but he's still an ordinary guy with ordinary concerns. It has been almost a trademark of Constantine's books that they are full of amoral, power-hungry characters who spend much of their time hurting each other, either through sex-related violence or sexual jealousy. I get the impression that the Wraeththu were originally intended to be above all that, in that they were sufficiently animal that violence was a normal part of life, and sufficiently uninhibited that sexual jealousy did not exist. In the new book, both Wraeththu and Kamagrian are all too human.

Mima realized that the worst pain in the world was having to watch someone you wanted desire someone else.

Being human, and not just wild boys, the Wraeththu have to do one other thing: they have to grow up. And that means more than just creating kingdoms. It means learning to live with one another on some basis other than dominance games. It means forging relationships based on affection rather than fear. Above all it means learning and changing as time goes on. The characters in *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* do that in a way that I suspect the original Wraeththu would not have done. We all get older, authors included, and what we might have written in our youth may seem naïve or irresponsible now. In this new book, the

people and world of the Wraeththu have grown up in many different ways, and Storm Constantine has demonstrated a splendid maturity as an author.

There are, apparently, two more books planned. Constantine tends to work in trilogies, though she does have the good grace to keep them to three volumes each. I'm not sure whether I am pleased about this or not. *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* achieved a pleasing degree of closure all by itself. And yet there were clearly story threads left incomplete. Possibly Constantine eventually intends to reach some sort of compromise between her two Wraeththu genders. I can't tell, but I do know that it will be interesting finding out.

The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure - Storm Constantine - Tor - hardcover

Etched in the City

Experienced editors say that they can generally tell whether a submission will be any good or not from reading the first few paragraphs. Conversely, those same paragraphs can also sell you that a book is going to be very good indeed.

There were no milestones in the Copper Country. Often a traveler could only measure the progress of a journey by the time it took to get from each spoiled or broken thing to the next: a half-days walk from a dry well to the muzzle of a cannon poking out of a sand-slope, two hours to reach the skeletons of a man and a mule. The land was losing its battle with time. Ancient and exhausted, it visited decrepitude on everything within its bounds, as though out of spleen.

If K.J. Bishop asks you to come and see her etchings, beware, for she is an alchemist and transformation is on her mind.

Perhaps it is an Australian thing, for Australia is a land of extremes and contrasts. *The Etched City* begins in the Copper Country, which is of course the red desert; more Mars than Earth. In the time of the book it is a land of failed empires, dead cities, and Mad Max-like bandits. In this desert we find Gwynn, a former mercenary turned bandit leader turned desperate outlaw, and Raule, his former company doctor. Both of them have decided that life on the run is no longer fun, and that it is time to start a new life.

So we get contrast. The city of Ashamoil is not far off, but it is in a Queensland-like tropical world of torrid heat, torrential rain, giant spiders, and crocodile infested rivers. In this place, Raule and Gwynn try to start again.

Raule, being a doctor, has a few shreds of morality left to her. Turned away from the university because she has no formal qualifications, she elects to work in a charity hospital in one of the slum areas of the city.

Gwynn is an iceman. He is a foreigner from a snow-covered land. Perhaps it is Antarctica. The book says it is to the north, but that is correct by Australian reckoning. His skin is pale and he has to hide it from the sun in a big, black coat and wide-brimmed hat. Unlike the doctor he has no morals. He may never have had any. Expert with both sword and pistol, he easily finds well paid employment as an enforcer for a local gang boss and slave trader, Elm. The name Gwynn means "white" in Welsh.

It may be that Gwynn has no heart. But two people are determined to prove that theory wrong. The first is the Rev. Working as a provider of spiritual sustenance to the dying inmates of Raule's hospital, he sees saving Gwynn's soul as a worthy challenge, one that might finally restore him to the grace of God, whence he has fallen. The theological debates between the Rev and Gwynn form much of the backbone of the rest of the story.

The substance must first become white, and then red; it cannot become red unless it have first become white.

The Book of Alze
(A German treatise on Alchemy)

The other eyes on Gwynn's soul belong to the artist, Beth Constanzin. Seeing his handsome form in the street, she determines to work a transformation on his frozen being. She creates an etching: "The Sphinx and the Basilisk", and puts it for sale in the market. The Basilisk is recognizably Gwynn, with his dark coat patterned with peacock feathers. The Sphinx is a beautiful woman with flaming red hair. Gwynn buys the etching and sets out in search of the flame-haired temptress. When they meet, the white and red tinctures will be in place and the transformation will begin.

There is a theory that the world is not truly one place, shared by all people, but has a manifold form – a world for every person – and that like liquids, all our worlds pass through each other when they meet, though unlike liquids their substances are as easily separated as mingled.

The world of *The Etched City* is not a stable thing. It warps and flexes in and out of reality. Ashamoil is its own place, but its genes contain echoes of Viriconium, Nesus and Veniss. Raule discovers that the city is suffering an epidemic of strangely malformed babies. The Rev, in quiet inebriated moments, hatches insects from the palms of his hands. Beth tells Gwynn that they are not the same species, and it seems possible that this is not just a cute comment about gender. In the market there is a beggar with a beautiful flower growing from his navel. He lets people try to pull it out for a shilling a go. No one can. Ashamoil feels like it exists on the cusp of some great potentiality, and only a small push is needed to bring everything crashing down.

Hopefully the various people who hand out best first novel prizes have heard of this book, because they should be lauding it. It is a paperback, so it should be shortlisted for the Phil Dick Award too. Depending on what else turns up this year, it may even make my Hugo list. *The Etched City* is astonishingly good for a first effort. It is not, perhaps, in the same class as *Neuromancer*, but it is very splendid and it is a shame that being placed with a small press publisher it is unlikely to get the recognition it deserves. Thankfully Pan Macmillan in London have picked it up, so UK readers will be able to enjoy it next January. Amazon do have the Prime edition listed, but I'm told it can take them a while to deliver as they don't keep many copies in stock. Don't worry, it is worth the wait.

Oh yes, nearly forgot. K.J. Bishop lives in Melbourne. Yay!

The Etched City – K.J. Bishop – Prime – softcover

Send in the Crows

Part two of Cecilia Dart-Thornton's *Bitterbynde* trilogy is a somewhat uneven work. For around 250 pages it exhibits some of the worst features of modern fantasy fiction. Then three crows intervene and things get interesting again.

Let us start with the bad stuff first. At the end of *The Ill-Made Mute* our heroine had gone from being a presumed servant boy of great ugliness to a young woman of considerable beauty. By half way through *The Lady of the Sorrows* she is already betrothed to the incredibly handsome, utterly charming and perfectly skilled at all things King-Emperor of most of the world. Boy that girl works fast. Of course she has to suffer terribly along the way. Why, before it becomes known that the King-Emperor is madly in love with her, some of the courtiers are actually rude to her, and make fun of the fact that she doesn't know how to use her cutlery properly. How terrible. It must be awful being fated for greatness.

What irritates me most about this is not the ease with which heroines rise to glory, but the assumption that royalty is automatically perfect in every way, and that this is obvious to everyone who meets them. And this even in a world in which many of the ordinary nobility are shown as being fairly unpleasant (or at least as unpleasant as anyone is allowed to be in a piece of escapist fiction). I'm sorry, but every time Dart-Thornton gushed about how wonderful this King-Emperor James was, I found myself thinking about Prince Charles. This is not the sort of effect I want from reading.

But lo, as I said, just over half way in three crows make their appearance. This is not, in fact, Her Triple Self. Dart-Thornton has elected to deviate from folklore a little and perform an unasked-for sex change on Ireland's fearsome battle goddess – something for which the unfortunate author will doubtless suffer horribly for all eternity. But no matter, Her Deathliness works her magic anyway. Huge tragedy; hundreds, if not thousands, lose their lives most spectacularly. And all because our heroine is incredibly stupid. Oh well, she is apparently the only blonde left in the entire world, so perhaps she has the dumbness of an entire race stored up in her pretty head.

Anyway, with our heroine and her two maids apparently the only survivors of this great disaster, we go on to get 150 pages or so of plot denouement. It would have been nice if we could have found out some of this along the way, but Dart-Thornton has elected to dump the entire backstory on us in one go. Thankfully she does it with another story, not just exposition, and it turns out to be moderately interesting. Or at least interesting enough to have me buy the final book in the trilogy at Westercon to find out what happens. (Aside, of course, from the heroine and the King-Emperor being reunited and living happily ever after, which I suspect we can take for granted.)

There are, of course, a few little Australian references to pick up on. I'm prepared to forgive Dart-Thornton a lot in exchange for her spending a page or two on the glories of the wedge-tailed eagle, fabulous bird that it is. Quite why she felt it necessary to destroy the entire island of T/a/s Tamhania, whose peasant inhabitants bore a strong resemblance to the citizens of Innsmouth, is a mystery to me. Must be some inter-state rivalry thing.

Those of you who enjoyed the high quality descriptive prose in *The Ill-Made Mute* will continue to be enchanted in this new volume. Dart-Thornton is one of the best at this sort of thing I know of. Equally those of you who enjoyed the frequent re-tellings of bits of faerie folklore during the story will also be happy. Anyone who prefers a bit of plot, and ideally one that makes a bit of sense, will be much less pleased with this book.

The Lady of the Sorrows - Cecilia Dart-Thornton - Warner - Publisher's proof

Sand and Sun

One of the problems with the traditional three-volume structure for SF&F series is that part two almost always marks time. The right way to do it, I think, is the structure that Jon Courtenay Grimwood adopted for his *Arabesk* series in which each book was more or less a complete story in itself with its own pacing and its own conclusion. Sean Williams, in the second part of the *Book of the Change*, has gone for the more traditional route in which the characters get shuffled around, background gets filled in, and everything gets set up for the climactic final volume. *The Sky Warden & The Sun* is readable in its own right, which is just as well as it is ages since I read the earlier volume, *The Stone Mage & The Sea*. However, the first half of it would have been a lot less dull had it been a book in its own right.

Williams has also opted for the traditional young boy with awesome powers plot line. However, rather than load the kid down with prophecies about how he is going to

save the world, he has taken the far more believable route of having various interest groups squabble over control of him. In some ways the series is reminiscent of *Dune*. In addition to the setting in the Australian desert, there is the suggestion of a planned breeding program to produce the boy, plus an affair of the heart in which the boy's mother runs off with the wrong man, much to the consternation of her superiors.

Book one of the series held the interest well because it introduced the fantasy world and slowly revealed the details of young Sal's background. It also ended on a nice climax with Sal, freshly orphaned, fleeing the coast and the manipulative Sky Wardens who control it, to seek sanctuary in the desert Interior, the domain of the Stone Mages. In book two, Sal spends a lot of time fleeing across the desert and then seeing new and unusual sights as he is introduced to Interior society. It is not until around page 275 when the Sky Wardens finally catch up to him that that the plot really takes off again.

Having said that, Williams does a nice job of creating a society that would work in central Australia and makes suitably spooky use of the remains of present day society. Also, once he finally gets into gear in the final part of the book, the story grips the reader once again and provides a satisfying climax. The way in which the plot portrays Sal as a victim of competing groups of manipulative and greedy adults is nicely done. I still think that Williams' solo SF work is better than his fantasy, and he is most certainly wasted writing Star Wars novelizations, though I am sure it brings in much needed money. However, this fantasy series is well above the run of the mill trilogy. It has no dragons, no elves, and no all-powerful but fatally dim evil overlord. In other words, it is good stuff.

Song of Despair

I reviewed *Darkfall*, the first installment of Isobelle Carmody's *Legendsong* trilogy way back in issue #26, dated October 1997. I have finally got hold of part two, *Darksong*. The cover date is 2002, but the book wasn't in the shops when I was in Australia last August so it looks like it took about 5 years for the second volume to hit the streets. Of course if I had a house out on the Great Ocean Road in Australia then I would find it difficult to get down to writing as well. I'd just want to enjoy the weather and the view. And Carmody does mention in her acknowledgements that she finished the book at a friend's house in London, surely a far better location for having to sit in front of a word processor.

Of course the book is also of sufficient size to have the entire nation of cockroaches squealing in fear about weapons of mass destruction. It is easily two normal novels in length, and perhaps could have been done in two parts were it not for the sacred trilogy structure. Or possibly Carmody might have chosen to write less. She seems to have been influenced somewhat by Stephen Donaldson and so there is an awful lot of obsessive introspection on the part of the two main characters. Personally I could have done with less of that.

Carmody, however, clearly feels that it is important. This is one of those fantasy novels in which characters from our world travel through a portal to the fantasy world and, thanks to their actions in that world,

they, and in this case probably everyone in our world, are somehow redeemed. Carmody is convinced that our world is in terminal decline full of nothing but utterly awful things and that we need exposure to something more noble to save us. As the quote below shows, she does occasionally put her finger on what is wrong, but this too gets tiresome as she continues to overdo it.

"I'm talking about life. See, people live with this central perception of themselves which is mostly false. They see themselves as bright or beautiful, courageous or wise, deep or charismatic. Whatever. Their aims stem from that image. And they don't want anyone telling them those illusions are not true or the whole shebang falls down."

In any case, while there are clearly things about our world that are deeply unhealthy, I don't see that a world that has hereditary kingship and slavery can be held up as a shining beacon of morality. Of course the kings have always been honest and good (until now when our heroines come to put things right); of course no one ever starves because the king and his chieftans would not let that happen; and the lack of telephones and medicine are not a problem because anything really useful in our world can be replicated by magic in the fantasy one.

Which is not to say that this is a bad fantasy novel. Carmody clearly understands that there is a point to fantasy above and beyond thrilling tales about elves and dragons. Her world is innovative and imaginative. But her moral message is undermined by a persistent tendency to deny any value to things modern and at the same time romanticize things medieval.

Which is a shame, because she is a good writer. Her Obernewtyn series, which she wrote whole in high school and college, has got her US publication, and I'd like to see her more recent stuff do well too. But on the basis of the first two volumes (and let's hope we don't have to wait another five years for the conclusion) I cannot recommend *Legendsong* to US or British publishers.

Darksong - Isabelle Carmody - Viking - softcover

New Talent

Last time I did an issue that concentrated on Australian authors I looked at two of the new women writers who were hoping to follow in the successful footsteps of Sara Douglass. I was quite disappointed with what I saw, and consequently did not get around to trying Trudi Canavan. It transpires that this was a mistake.

Don't get the hopes up too much though folks. Canavan's *Black Magician* trilogy is classic fantasy material. But it is relatively competent fantasy and free of most of the annoyances of the genre.

The tale begins with *The Magician's Guild*, in which we are introduced to our heroine and her presumed intended. These two, however, are not royalty, nor even royalty in disguise. Sonea is an orphan whose aunt and uncle have recently struggled their way up the social ladder to a home inside the city, only to have their hard work destroyed overnight by one of the periodic purges of the poor. Now she and her family are back in the filthy slums outside the city walls where she used to run with the gangs. Cery, the lad who is sweet on her, has a senior

position in their gang due to having some family connection to the Thieves' Guild. Periodically the gangs arrange a riot, and always this is put down ruthlessly by the Guard and the Magicians' Guild.

It is during one of these riots that Sonea, in a fit of righteous fury, manages to cause the stone she threw to break through the Magicians' sorcerous barrier. Use of magic outside of the Guild is, of course, illegal. But then again the Thieves would be only too happy to get their hands on a tame sorcerer. The only trouble is that magic doesn't just require talent. It requires long and arduous training. Otherwise using it can be Very Dangerous Indeed.

Now of course we can expect that over the next two books young Sonea will grow to be the most powerful magician in the country. Hopefully she will marry Cery and not the king, although by making Sonea an orphan Canavan has left the door open for her to be the child of a nobleman. To a certain extent this book is just as artificial as the more romance-based fantasies, because it presumes a medieval society in which an enlightened group of characters happens to have similar political views to modern liberal Westerners. But at least once you have got a plot that progresses relatively believably rather than according to a pre-defined formula. The important point is that when the characters do something, even if it is stupid, they do it for a reason, and not just because the plot demands that they do it.

If *The Magician's Guild* were not a first novel there are a bunch of things that I might be tempted to nit-pick, most importantly that if that characters are going to drink tea or beer then the author should say "tea" or "beer", not invent some spurious word to give the world artificial "feel". However,

given that it is a first novel, I am very encouraged by this book. I'm looking forward to reading the rest of the series, and I'm pleased to note that it has been picked up by Eos so US readers will be able to find *The Magician's Guild* in their local bookstores in January. If you like traditional fantasy, give this a try, it is well above average.

The Magician's Guild - Trudi Canavan - Voyager
- softcover

Art for Art's Sake

L.E. Modesitt is best known for his blockbuster fantasy series, *The Saga of Recluce*. You know the sort of stuff: huge fat volumes, endless new books (11 to date). It is Robert Jordan territory. It may surprise you, therefore, to know that Modesitt's first love is SF, and that his editor at Tor is David Hartwell. Clearly there is more to Mr. Modesitt that meets the eye.

And so there is. I had the pleasure of sitting next to him at dinner at ICFA this year, and we soon discovered a common interest in environmental economics. He used to work for the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, and consequently his knowledge of American politics is comprehensive. His latest novel, *Archform: Beauty*, makes full use of this, and also makes a heartfelt plea for quality in the arts.

Let's start with the title. Archform is a term from classic music. It refers to a structure in which the composer repeats a number of themes in a there-and-back pattern that might be pictured as an arch. The pattern could be ABA, ABCBA, or any more complex variation thereon. So the book is a

novel in archform, and its subject is beauty and its presence in various areas of life.

There are five themes altogether in the story. Gene Chiang is a dedicated, hard-bitten cop in the Denver police. Jude Parsfal is a researcher for a local news media service, NetPrime. Luara Cornett is a music teacher at the local university. Eldin Cannon is a local Senator. And Chris Kemal is the head of an organized crime syndicate and company boss who is trying to set his family up for life the only way he knows how. All five of them experience the story from their own perspectives.

Modesitt does a good job of differentiating his five viewpoints. Chiang is classically Chandleresque. Parsfal's life is frantic and dominated by a J. Jonah Jameson style editor, Mr. Bimstein, who in our day would send all of his emails in capitals but in Parsfal's has managed to learn how to show over a neural link. The best character is probably Cannon, and his segments are a fascinating insight into how American politics works. Clausewitz once said that war is the continuation of politics by other means. It is obvious from reading Modesitt that American politics is a continuation of business by other means.

Ostensibly the story is a murder mystery, but it has none of the classic structure of that genre because we all know who did it pretty much from the start. The only real question is piecing together the various strands of the story to understand just why the wife of a prominent lawyer should be murdered. But the point of the story is entirely different. What Modesitt wants us to take away, alongside our enjoyment of an SF thriller with a rollicking ending, is a lesson about beauty.

Let's go back through the cast again. Chiang's life is spent finding solutions to

complex puzzles. When it all fits together, wow! Parsfal is a man of letters in a world of visual media. He provides data and background for the news anchors, but he'd much rather be reading Yeats. Cornett still believes in Schuman in a world where kids regard Presley and the Beatles as tiresome bores from a dead age in which pop stars actually tried to sing. Cannon loves nothing better than a neat political solution that leaves the maximum number of people happy and the rest fuming with impotence because they have nothing on you. And Kemal, for all his ruthlessness, loves his family dearly and wants nothing more than to be able to relax with them in peace and wealth. All of the characters seek beauty in their own way.

The future world too has a place in the lesson. As I intimated above, the "arts" in this imagined future are dumbed down as to require no effort on the part of performer or listener, writer or reader. Professor Cornett fights a losing battle against the bean counters at her university who are forever cutting her funding. She supplements her meager income by singing backing tracks for advertisements, which she succeeds at because the producer who uses her knows she can get the job done in one or two takes rather than have to have his techs slave for ages editing her work.

When society, government, business... when they just give people what they want, it's not art. It's not beauty. It's like the ancient Romans and their bread and circuses. And things get worse, not better.

I foresee another entertaining dinner conversation with Modesitt in which I make the point to him that some modern art forms require substantial amounts of skill,

but in different areas from those of times past. I certainly disagree with Senator Cannon where he suggests that people who use word processors rather than fountain pens no longer know how to write. But I also admire Modesitt's robust defense of quality literature (something very close to my heart) and I'm mildly stunned to see it come from someone who is generally associated with mass-market formula fantasy.

There are a few parts of the book that I might take issue with. The technology for mind control seems very developed in one area and highly experimental in another, which is odd. And the mountain of bodies that piles up towards the end of the book is unconvincingly stupid on the part of the bad guys. But it is certainly a very thoughtful book. It reminded me a lot of Brian Stableford (who is also edited by Hartwell). I shall be looking out for more of Modesitt's SF in future.

Archform: Beauty - L.E. Modesitt - Tor - hardcover

The Matter of Troy

An issue devoted to Australian writers is hardly complete without mention of the woman whose phenomenal success started the current wave of Aussie fantasy. I have reviewed Sara Douglass's *Axis Trilogy* and *Threshold* in earlier issues of *Emerald City*. They are to a large extent traditional fantasy material, but right from the start Douglass has shown an encouraging tendency to experiment and upset the standard expectations of the genre. She has been very busy since I last reviewed any of her work

(at least six books, I think) and has been picked up by Tor, so she's clearly doing well on a wider stage. I figured I should see what she was up to these days.

The Trojan War, it seems, is a popular subject right now. Last issue we looked at Dan Simmons's *Ilium*, which is superb. Next year will see a "blockbuster" movie on the subject, which looks guaranteed to be a disaster. Brad Pitt as Achilles? Come on folks. And I bet that poor Patroclus gets written out. But although Sara Douglass's latest book is entitled *The Troy Game*, it is only tangentially about Troy. It is most certainly about Crete, but much of the book is set in Britain.

Those of you who are familiar with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* will know that Geoffrey creates a fanciful history linking Britain back to the ancient of Homeric Greece. The Romans did the same thing. In the *Aeniad* Virgil traces the descent of Rome's founding fathers from Aeneas, a son of King Priam who escaped the destruction of Troy. Geoffrey builds on this, claiming that Britain was settled by one of Aeneas's descendants, a man with the unlikely name of Brutus. This, then, is the core of Douglass's story.

But you can't make a three-volume trilogy out of a fragment like that without introducing a little drama. So in the same way that Rob Holdstock has taken Medea, the wicked witch of the Golden Fleece tale, as his villainess for *The Merlin Codex*, Douglass has picked on the Cretan princess, Ariadne. In the legend of Theseus, Ariadne betrays her father, King Minos, and helps the hero kill the Minotaur and escape the labyrinth. But on the way home Theseus decides that he prefers Minos's younger daughter, Phaedre, and abandons the

pregnant Ariadne. It is a story ripe for revenge.

Douglass has been reading some of the wilder speculations about Cretan religion and has adopted the idea that the labyrinth was some sort of scared magic that seals evil in the heart of the city and thereby ensures prosperity. This magic is controlled by the sacred king of the city, and by the high priestess, the Mistress of the Labyrinth. Douglass calls this magical system The Game. As the guardian of the original labyrinth on Crete, Ariadne is the most powerful Game priestess in the world. Calling on the departed shade of her half-brother, Asterion, better known to us as the Minotaur, Ariadne destroys the Games of every city in the Mediterranean, this bringing to pass the destruction of Atlantis, the Trojan War, and the decline of Mycenaean civilization. Only one small, insignificant city is saved. Ariadne then flees as far away from Greece as she can get, to a cold but green island beyond the Pillars of Heracles, and teaches her daughters the secret of what she has done.

So much for the prologue. The main story begins generations later in the small city of Mesopotamia, the one place in the world where The Game still functions. Ariadne's descendant, Genvissa, is about to bring it back into play. Her tool is Brutus, the only surviving descendant of a sacred king. Her unwitting victim and potential enemy is Cornelia, the teenage princess of Mesopotamia whom Brutus absentmindedly takes to wife after sacking the city. How does this come about? Why the Gods take a hand, of course.

Douglass speculates that Ariadne's revenge and the disastrous Trojan War have fatally weakened the gods of Greece. Meanwhile her descendants have been busy

undermining Og and Mag, the gods of Britain, in preparation for the arrival of The Game. Yet Hera and Mag are not quite beaten, and they manage to place Cornelia on the board as the one piece that can threaten Genvissa's plans. Unfortunately in order to do so they have to enlist the aid of the vengeful Asterion, who has managed to get himself reborn down the centuries.

As you can see, we now have a very nice story of mythic conflict, plus the obligatory love triangle. I've often complained about writers who use stupid characters as a means of making the plot happen without having to work too hard. Douglass does this too, but she does such a wonderful job of portraying Cornelia as a vain, spoilt airhead that everything works perfectly. It is good, but it also sounds very predictable. Except that Sara Douglass is never predictable, and to soften the blow of the ending she even tells you that she won't be.

So what, exactly, are these little inserts at the start of each section of the book about? Why are Brutus and Genvissa wandering around WWII London under assumed names? Why does Brutus have this fascination with the works of Sir Christopher Wren and the Great Fire of London? Douglass states very clearly that this is not your average fantasy trilogy.

Where does that leave us? So far we have one entertaining piece of myth making set in ancient Greece and Britain with echoes of Holdstock and Marion Bradley. Douglass's writing is much more mature and assured than in the *Axis Trilogy*. The soppy bits, not to mention an entire chapter or two given over to the birth of Cornelia's baby, will doubtless prove a huge turn-off for male readers, but in no way is this formula romance. And we are left with the tantalizing expectation that the other two

books in the series will take place in the 17th and 20th Centuries. If that's not taking risks with the fantasy genre I don't know what is. Thank you, Ms. Douglass. The genre needs people prepared to shake things up.

The Troy Game - Sara Douglass - publisher's proof - Tor

Riding the Ghost Train

This month's mainstream novel is a recommendation from China Miéville. *Ghostwritten*, a 1999 novel from David Mitchell, was mentioned as the ICA events as a classic example of how mainstream writers are turning to SF&F themes in their work, and quite right too. While mainstream critics are still complaining that they can't be expected to read a book about something that isn't real, Mitchell has produced a magnificent explanation of how, in the modern world, it is very difficult to know what is real.

Structurally, *Ghostwritten* has a lot in common with Geoff Ryman's classic 253. It is a collection of short tales about seemingly unconnected people whose lives cross in unexpected ways. Mitchell's characters are not physically located on a train as Ryman's are, but it is easy to see the book as a collection of loosely connected carriages rushing headlong towards some mysterious destination that might be a crash and might involve the locomotive swallowing the tail of the train. We don't know where we are going, but we do know that life is getting stranger by the chapter.

The book starts off as a fairly ordinary modern thriller, but it has some strange characters: a terrorist responsible for a gas

attack on a Toyko subway; a British lawyer in Hong Kong lured into running a money laundering service for a Russian gangster. Even these people struggle with reality. Our terrorist, of course, sees the world in a totally different way to the rest of us. He may have been brainwashed by his Guru, or he may just be an emotionally damaged victim of the ferociously competitive Japanese education system. Our lawyer gradually loses his grip on reality as overwork, stress, alcohol, infertility and divorce take their toll. And the next carriage takes us to another world entirely.

Cut to China where an old woman reminisces about her life running a tea shack on the slopes of Holy Mountain. She suffers through Japanese invasion, civil war, Mao's Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the birth of Modernization. None of this is real to her. It all happens outside her world, which is all about her tea shack, the mountain, and her tree, who talks to her. As a lifelong Buddhist she doesn't find that unusual.

Then we find ourselves in Mongolia following the trail of a disembodied spirit who claims to have once inhabited an old Chinese woman and pretended to be a tree but who is actually in search of its origins in an ancient myth. Somehow we have found ourselves in a central Asian version of a Charles De Lint novel. This can't be real at all, can it?

And suddenly we have followed a Mongolian gangster into St. Petersburg where a former Politburo mistress has got mixed up in a ring of art thieves and has no idea of the trouble she is in. That leads in turn to a layabout musician and writer in London who spends all his life running away but who nevertheless manages to save the life of a woman who, unbeknownst

to him is a genius physicist on the run from the CIA. And suddenly we are in the middle of a Justina Robson style SF thriller, which obviously isn't really real but is by no means inconceivable. Much of the final chapter, which features a late night chat radio DJ in New York, wasn't real when the book was published, but is frighteningly plausible now.

I mean, who knows what to believe in these days anyhow?

Ah, Jerry. All my ideas are the same old scam: the bigger the fib, the bigger they bite. The first shamans around the fire were in on it – they knew growing maize along the Euphrates was for fools. Tell people that reality is exactly what it appears to be, they'll nail you to a lump of wood. But tell 'em they can go spirit-walking while they commute, tell 'em their best friend is a lump of crystal, tell 'em the government has been negotiating with little green men for the last fifty years, then every Joe Six-Pack from Brooklyn to Peoria sits up and listens.

Fiction is, by definition, untrue. So why do people still maintain that it is only legitimate to write fiction about things that are "real"? David Mitchell understands that, and has made the point quite brilliantly.

Ghost Written - David Mitchell - Vintage - softcover

Short Stuff

Slave to Love

Ursula Le Guin's novelette, "The Wild Girls", has already won a Locus Award which must put it amongst the favorites for a Hugo. And quite right too, because this superficially simple ghost story has plenty of depth that leaves you thinking hard about politics.

"The Wild Girls" concerns two barbarian girls who are captured by city men for slaves. But their lives are by no means harsh, for there is a custom in the city that its upper class men may only marry barbarian women. Unlike some of their fellow captives, Modh and Mal look like they will grow into beauties and become valuable on the wife market. Consequently they are brought up in every luxury and their virginity is jealously guarded. They might be slaves, but their lives are indistinguishable from that of the daughter of the house, Tudju, with the sole exception that they are destined to marry some young nobleman whereas custom dictates that Tudju must either become a nun or be married off to some fat, rich old merchant. (Merchant daughters can, of course, only be married to slaves.)

So Le Guin asks us to consider the nature of slavery, and contrast it with the condition of a daughter whom custom dictates is the property of her family. In the story, the elder sister, Modh, is brave and proactive. She engineers for herself a marriage to the inept but basically good-hearted young nobleman who captured her. It seems that they will grow to love each other. But little Mal has none of her sister's self-confidence, and when a cruel but very rich nobleman asks for her hand disaster threatens.

The lesson that Le Guin seems to be giving here is that social rules, in and of themselves, are not evil. It is often possible to work with them and, with good will on all sides, happiness can prevail. The evil happens when people obey those laws to the letter even though it is obvious that such action will lead to unhappiness and possible tragedy. It is a fascinating argument, and it is not surprising that the story has been so well received.

Lies, Damned Lies and Politics

Charles Coleman Finlay's entry in the novella category is a fast paced and gripping thriller called "The Political Officer". It concerns the mission of a somewhat decrepit and under-equipped space ship from a totalitarian state. The hero of the story, Max Nikomedes is the officer of the title: the man everyone on board hates and fears in equally huge quantities. The ship's mission ostensibly involves spying on an enemy planetary system. There is at least one traitor on board. Perhaps it is Nikomedes. And perhaps everything that I have just told you is a lie to put you off the scent. Yes, it is that type of story.

And a darn good story it is too: positively nail biting. And that should be good enough to put it in line for an award, except that it is in a category that already includes Paul Di Filippo's excellent "A Year in the Linear City" and Neil Gaiman's superb *Coraline*. So sorry, Mr. Finlay, you are probably going to do no better than third here.

Hey, but it is good to know that there are good works of short fiction out there.

Not Forgetting Maureen McHugh

I don't think that Maureen McHugh knows how to write a story that isn't full of awful things happening. They would class as horror if they all weren't drawn from real life, even the SF. McHugh's entry in a very high quality field for Best Novelette is "Presence", a deeply disturbing tale of Alzheimer's Disease. As a story it really isn't up to much. Mila's husband, Gus, has Alzheimer's. He becomes steadily less and less of a person and more and more of a trial. So Mila sells their house to pay for an experimental treatment, as a result of which Gus becomes a child who needs re-education and a totally different person to the man he had been before the illness. That's it. It is classic McHugh: the story is stark, pitiless and utterly without hope. It is the sort of thing that you read just before putting your head in a gas oven because you have decided that the world is such a terrible place that you just can't cope with it any more.

So why is this story a Hugo nominee? To start with, because it is very well done. But mainly because it is for once entirely appropriate. It is hard to think of anything more horrific than watching someone you love turn into a zombie before your eyes, and the only way to cure them is to let a new person take possession of the body. If this had been a story about Voodoo, if Gus had been turned into a zombie and then possessed by the spirit of a child, then it would have been spooky but no one would have turned a hair. But it isn't about Voodoo. It is a story about things that really happen to many loving couples every year. McHugh is right, there is nothing quite so horrific as real life.

Miscellany

Locus Award Winners

As promised in the Westercon review, here is the full list of winners.

SF Novel: *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Kim Stanley Robinson (Bantam)

Fantasy Novel: *The Scar*, China Miéville (Macmillan; Del Rey)

First Novel: *A Scattering of Jades*, Alexander C. Irvine (Tor)

Young Adult Novel: *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins)

Novella: *The Tain*, China Miéville (PS Publishing)

Novelette: "The Wild Girls", Ursula K. Le Guin (Asimov's, Mar 2002)

Short Story: "October in the Chair", Neil Gaiman (*Conjunctions* #39: The New Wave Fabulists)

Collection: *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Ted Chiang (Tor)

Anthology: *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Nineteenth Annual Collection*, Gardner Dozois, ed. (St. Martin's)

Non-Fiction: *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years*, Bruce Sterling (RandomHouse)

Art Book: *Spectrum 9: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art*, Cathy Fenner & Arnie Fenner, eds. (Underwood Books)

Editor: Gardner Dozois

Magazine: *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*

Book Publisher: Tor

Artist: Bob Eggleton

And the silly stuff...

Special Award: Tom Doherty, for winning the Locus Award 15 years in a row

Special Award: Eileen Gunn, best acceptor

Special Award: Bob Eggleton, for artistic contributions to Locus

Special Award: Connie Willis, best toastmaster

Overall I'm very impressed with these awards. I'm naturally delighted to see *The Scar* get an award at last, though my expectation that *The Years of Rice and Salt* will win the Hugo has gone up considerably. I just hope that Stan will turn up this time.

The short fiction results were also heartwarming. *The Tain* and "October in the Chair" were on my Hugo list but didn't even make the final ballot. The Le Guin is a Hugo nominee and probable winner, though I do like Greg Frost's story. Ted Chiang's victory was fairly predictable, though I'm disappointed that *Conjunctions* #39 did not get Best Anthology. On balance I think the Locus Awards have done better than the Hugos. Well done *Locus* readers.

Clarion Loses Funding

Slowly but surely the current perilous state of the world economy is having its effect on the science fiction community. One of the services to be affected is the Clarion East writer's workshop. Unlike its sister event, Clarion West, which is entirely volunteer funded (yay Potlatch!), Clarion East has been bankrolled for many years by Michigan State University. This year MSU is facing a severe budget crisis, and the university administration has decided that

Clarion is one of the things that will have to go.

This is a very sad state of affairs. Clarion has been busily turning out high quality SF authors for decades and its graduates include such notables as Octavia Butler, Bruce Sterling, Kim Stanley Robinson, Pat Murphy and Nalo Hopkinson. It has spawned a second campus on the West Coast (of which Justina Robson is a graduate) and next year the first Australian Clarion is due to take place in Brisbane. Writers and editors have been full of praise for the teaching techniques developed at Clarion, and many other similar courses around the world have probably borrowed from them.

However, I don't think this is a case of anti-SF bias or mindless bureaucracy on the part of MSU's administration. They have a money problem, and their own students presumably have to come first. Furthermore, given that Clarion West has proven that such a workshop can be self-financing, I don't think that there is any case for saying that Clarion will close if MSU does not reconsider. However, a Clarion workshop takes almost a year to plan and execute, and fund raising is also time-consuming. In order for the 2004 Clarion to go ahead as planned it needs to have a guarantee of money now. This is where MSU or some other benefactor is desperately needed. I'm sure that Clarion East could be self-sufficient, and I expect that Readercon will probably be the first convention to step in and offer to stage fund-raising events. But unless a substantial temporary source of funding can be put in place in the next couple of months the 2004 event will probably have to be cancelled, and that will make starting up again harder.

If you would like to add your voice to the pressure on MSU, the people to write to are the Interim President and Provost, Dr. Lou Anna K. Simon (laksimon@msu.edu) and the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Dr. Wendy K. Wilkins (wwilkins@msu.edu). Please copy any messages to clarion@msu.edu. A blow-by-blow account of the ongoing saga, plus the text of letters to the university by such luminaries as Gardner Dozois, Gordon van Gelder, Ellen Datlow, Cory Doctorow, Karen Joy Fowler and Justina Robson can be found on Eileen Gunn's webzine, *The Infinite Matrix* (<http://www.infinitematrix.net/>).

And if you happen to know a friendly millionaire...

Earthlight Extinguished

Still in the line of depressing news, UK publisher, Simon & Schuster, has decided to close its Earthlight subsidiary, the home of many notable and well-known authors from Michael Moorcock and Ray Bradbury through Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Rob Holdstock to Terry Brooks. S&S says that it will be retaining the authors and blending them in with its mainstream business through its own imprint and the Pocket Books line. However, the precedent for this is not exactly encouraging. S&S tried to pull this trick with Chris Priest, whose work they felt sat better in the Scribner line than as a genre book. Consequently *The Separation* was almost unobtainable at the time it was winning awards hand over fist. Priest was not pleased and managed to liberate the book as far as Gollancz who are reaping the benefit of its new found fame.

In theory, the only actual casualty of the move is the Earthlight editor, Darren Nash,

who has sadly been made redundant (John Jarrold having jumped ship some time ago). However, the Earthlight authors are doubtless looking pretty nervous right now, and other publishers are probably licking their lips at the prospect of picking up famous names such as Bradbury and Moorcock, or top sellers such as Brooks and Harry Turtledove.

What is interesting here is that this may prove to be a field test of the ability of SF&F to stand up in a mainstream environment. IF S&S stick to their promise and market their SF&F authors through mainstream imprints then they will be competing head-on with mainstream authors for attention. This should be especially interesting for Jane Johnson. After her comments (reported last month) about wanting Harper Collins to get their fantasy books out of the SF&F ghetto and onto the mainstream shelves, it will be instructive to see how she reacts to S&S doing just that with her novels (written as Jude Fisher). Will any of the existing Earthlight authors survive?

Well, obviously Bradbury should be saleable in any environment, no question. Some of the fantasy authors may well do OK on the back of the current Potter and Tolkien crazes. I would expect to see S&S putting a fair amount of effort behind Brooks, Fisher and Guy Gavriel Kay. Some of Turtledove's more conventionally historical work may also survive, but his more SFnal work won't, nor will out and out SF writers such as Grimwood and David Weber, or more experimental fantasy writers such as Moorcock and Holdstock. Those are the people whom the S&S editors and sales force won't know how to handle except through a specialist genre subsidiary, and they are the people who should probably be looking elsewhere for a home.

Emerald City Discussion Board

Thanks to Jeff Vandermeer and the nice folks at Nightshade Books, *Emerald City* now has its very own discussion board. It isn't on the *Emerald City* web site, though I have put a link up. Rather it is on the Nightshade site, where you can also find discussion areas for Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine and a whole host of authors, including Vandermeer, Jeffrey Ford, K.J. Bishop and Liz Williams. You can find the board at: <http://www.nightshadebooks.com/cgi-bin/discus/discus.cgi>. So far hardly anyone has shown any interest in posting to it, but you never know.

Footnote

Next issue I hope to concentrate mainly on Canadian writers in honor of the forthcoming Canadian Worldcon. Expect coverage of books by Julie Czerneda, Ursula Pflug, Karl Schroeder and Margaret Atwood. It will be out early because I want to have copies to take to Toronto with me. Look for it around the 24th.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl