EMERALD CITY #100

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An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at cheryl@emcit.com or online at http://www.emcit.com

Introduction

Well, well, well, I made it: one hundred issues. I certainly had no idea that the 'zine would last this long when I started it. Nor did I know how it would develop. I guess I should be rather pleased with myself, at least for my persistence. But a milestone like this is not just a cause for celebration, it is an excuse to take stock, to ask myself why on Earth I am doing this, and is it worth it?

In the November issue of *The New York Review of Science Fiction* (now up to 183 issues and therefore far more venerable than *Emerald City*) David Hartwell muses on the competition from online review sites. "Most online sites," he says, "are sporadic, irregular and generally inconsistent." Well after 100 monthly issues I think I can claim immunity from that charge. But David goes on to say that online sites don't have an "aesthetic position". This could simply be a polite way of saying that they don't have any taste, but I think David means something more complex than that. What I think he means is that far too many online reviewers (whether on specific review sites or elsewhere) have no theoretical framework on which to base their reviews. These reviewers simply take the line that, "I know what I like." And that's not good enough.

I have to admit that I started out like that. When I read early issues of *Emerald City* I get the impression that I have learned a lot about reviewing over the past 8 years. Reviews that I wrote 20 years ago just make me cringe. But at the same time I am not a professional author, so my understanding of authorial technique is poor. Nor do I have any formal qualifications in literary criticism. I suspect that I still have plenty of room for improvement.

There are other areas where *Emerald City* might come in for criticism as well. There is the usual carping from the literary community and the general public (work colleagues, relatives) that science fiction and fantasy fiction is trivial, escapist garbage that doesn't warrant the effort of opening the book, let alone writing a monthly review magazine. On the other side of the fence, Mark Plummer writing in a recent issue of the British Science Fiction Association's magazine, *Matrix*, notes sadly that SF fandom regards writing about books as something, "beyond which fanzines are supposed to have risen." You can see why I sometimes wonder why I bother.

The good side, of course, is that *Emerald City* readership (measured either by subscriptions or by web site hits) has been increasing steadily since I started the 'zine and that must mean that someone out

there wants to read what I write. Besides, I think it is important that someone does stuff like this. But I don't expect you to take my word for it. Which is why, for this anniversary issue, I have asked a bunch of folks who do have an aesthetic position, and who have experience in the field, to talk about these issues. We have several articles on SF&F as literature, several on reviewing, and one by John Clute that seems to nestle interstitially somewhere in between.

I should say right away that I am enormously grateful to everyone who has contributed to this issue. These are all people who normally get paid for their writing, and I'm very touched that they found the time and energy to produce something for a fanzine. Thank you, everyone. (And thanks also to those of you who originally agreed to contribute but got caught out by pressure of work. It was wonderful to know that you were interested.)

What I hope we have here, then, is a bunch of articles by very smart people that both explain why these funny books that we love do matter, and how one might go about reviewing them effectively. Hopefully I will learn something from this, and you'll get a better magazine in the future as a result. And of course I hope you will find the articles interesting too. Indeed, if any of it sparks your imagination and you would like to contribute there are two message forums where you can add your own comments. These are at Nightshade Books (http://www.nightshadebooks.com/discus/messages/872/872.html?1070326650) and The Third Alternative (http://www.ttapress.com/discus/messages/153/153.html?1065892468). (Yes, I know it is silly to have two sites, but practical experience has shown that the Nightshade site is patronized mainly during US working hours and the TTA one mainly during UK working hours. They have somewhat different audiences.)

If all that is a little serious, we have some more light-hearted stuff of a seasonal nature with regard to things to put in Santa's sack. There is also some relatively serious fannish stuff, and the usual collection of book reviews. It being that time of year, I've also been watching Hobbit-filled movies, and this issue sees the start of a new series of interviews with small press publishers. All in all it makes for a bumper issue, for which I apologize to people with slow web connections but this is a special occasion.

Not content with that, I have used the occasion as an excuse to get off my butt and give the web site a much-needed makeover. As usual, it isn't anything flash (if you can't draw, don't try), but hopefully it will be interesting. Most importantly there is a guestbook, so if you want to say, "happy 100th birthday!" or "why don't you just fold now" there is somewhere to do it. Here: http://www.emcit.com/kisgb/guestbook.php.

Not content with that, there's a seriously cute logo from Sue Mason, there's an online shop featuring fabulous Frank Wu art, and for the technically-minded amongst you I'm finally getting my brain around PHP well enough to start doing dynamic web pages: check out the recent photo pages.

(By the way, regarding the shop, I've only just set this up and haven't seen any of the finished products yet. Frank has been using CafePress for some time and is very happy with them, so what I've got should be OK. However, Kevin and I will be ordering stuff. If you are thinking of

getting something feel free to check with us first to make sure that ours was OK.)

And now I see that I have gone on way too long and am keeping you from all of this fabulous guest content that I have lined up. So without further ado, let issue #100 commence!

In This Issue

Short Stuff — Short fiction from Lucius Shepard and Dave Stone

Miscellany — the news section

Footnote — the end

The Inhabitants of the Planets and the Bottom of the Sea

By Ken MacLeod

The first book I read **about** SF was *The Disappearing Future*, edited by George Hay, circa 1970. I still have a copy of it, somewhere under the shifting stacks. It contained essays, a story or two and, I think, a poem. It was published as a mass-market paperback. (As, some years later, was a similarly fine volume of SF criticism, *Explorations of the Marvellous*, edited by Peter Nicholls.)

One essay, by James Blish, asked what the social justification of SF was. He began by demolishing some familiar codicils of the Gernsbackian contract. I don't have the issue to hand, so to speak, but here's how I recollect its general thrust.

SF helps us to foresee the future! No, it does not. SF's record of failed predictions, unforeseen events, and overlooked trends was already long when Blish wrote, and has lengthened since.

SF painlessly teaches science! No, it does not. SF painlessly teaches pseudoscience, misinformation and imaginary science. Conscientiously worked out hard SF that actually teaches science is as rare as archaeopteryx teeth. SF has been a coruscating tractor beam for psi powers, FTL, race memory, the prevalence of alien intelligence, evolution as a purposeful process, and many more scientific howlers. Today we can add the ease and imminence of the construction of AIs, uploads, and brain-computer interfaces to the dustbin of disrepute.

Nowadays, of course, anyone who wants to learn about real science without reading boring textbooks can find in any good bookshop a heady stack of well-written, well-informed, up-to-date books, often by practicing scientists, as well as a wealth of information on the Web.

I don't know if Blish mentioned this one:

SF encourages kids to study science and engineering! No, it does not. It encourages kids to wool-gather, daydream, write SF stories, and draw anatomically optimistic figures and kinetically implausible weapons on the covers of their exercise-books. To the extent that it does encourage kids into a scientific or technological career, it's often enough the wrong kids, setting them up for disappointment and, with luck and hard work, a job in IT. In ten or so years studying and researching in biological sciences, I don't recall meeting one colleague — student or scientist — who was a science fiction reader. As soon as I got into programming I was swapping SF paperbacks around the office like floppy disks, often with people who had irrelevant science degrees.

Blish went on to argue that the real value of SF was in dramatizing to people that the world is changing because of science and its application. I wouldn't disagree with that, but by now anyone not aware of this in their bones is probably beyond the reach of SF.

Closer to the mark, I suspect, was George Orwell in his essay 'Wells, Hitler, and the World State' (1941), in which he says:

"Back in the nineteen-hundreds it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H. G. Wells. There you were, in a world of pedants, clergymen and golfers, with your future employers exhorting you to 'get on or get out', your parents systematically warping your sexual life, and your dull-witted schoolmasters sniggering over their Latin tags; and here was this wonderful man who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who **knew** that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined."

— *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, 1984, 1994 ed., page 192

This was true for me word for word back in the nineteen-seventies, and I suspect for many it still is in the twenty-hundreds. SF, I felt then, was about something other than all this crap, and it was about something real and important that put all this crap into perspective. The way I'd express it now is that SF is not fundamentally about human-to-human, or human-to-supernatural, but about human-to-nature, and that this is what makes it both appealing (to some) and unique as literature.

The great advantage of this explanation of the importance of SF is that it resonates with the experience of the reader, who certainly hasn't opened a book with spaceships on the cover in order to learn science, or to discover that the future will be different from the present. They want to read stories set in the universe **outside** the world of human relationships, because (a) if they're a typical new reader, i.e. an adolescent, they already have the world of human relationships ringing in their ears **all the fucking time**, and (b) they know that universe to be full of interest and wonder. They may read fantasy too, but the special kick of SF comes from the fact that it's **not** fantasy. It's set in a universe as scientifically credible as the writer can make it, and as long as this clause is honored, the rest of the Gernsbackian small print can go hang. This incidentally is why it's possible to read scientifically dated SF with the same pleasure as reading contemporary SF, and why SF that was scientifically sloppy or dated when it was written can't.

This explanation neatly entails other familiar consequences. One is the distinction between fans and mundanes. However petty and divided fandom may sometimes be, it's at least a social milieu where you can meet other people who share a sense of the importance of something outside human affairs, and who therefore bring a peculiar perspective to bear on human affairs, at its best a certain experimental open-mindedness. (I once met a fan who told me she'd been asked in her twenties 'Is sex the same with mundanes?' and had to admit she didn't know, and wasn't exactly panting to find out.) It also explains why real scientists are usually not much interested in SF. They get their extra-human fix from their daily working lives, and they get their fannish common interests from their colleagues. The science community itself can sometimes curiously resemble SF fandom in its toleration of unconventionality in appearance and behavior, to say nothing of beards, beer and feuds.

Another is the frequency with which the habit of SF reading is outgrown. 'I used to read a lot of it in my teens,' people tell you, 'but not for a long time now.' I did that too. As soon as I was out of my teens I became bitterly hostile to SF, not because I'd sorted out all the employers and parents and clergymen and warped sexual

life stuff but because I felt reading SF was an active impediment to doing so. Maybe it was, because in my twenties I did sort it out, more or less. It was only in my thirties that I became interested in SF again.

Even now, I'd say that in some respects it **is** good to outgrow SF, if what you grow into is to read novels and learn about human relationships. But it is also worthwhile to reconsider that outgrowing, to look outside the campfire of humanity at the surrounding stars, and to ask yourself whether you're ready to read again about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea.

Why Science Fiction is Important…

A short fable by Candas Jane Dorsey

With the Emerald City in view, the voyagers sat down for tiffin on a grassy verge, and watched the traffic pass on the yellow brick road as they chatted.

What do they mean, 'Why is science fiction important'? the cyborg asked in annoyance. Why, look at me, a tin man in search of a heart. Could such a quest have been framed in any other way in this Industrial Revolution postlude? Science is the prevailing myth material of our time: commentators as diverse as William Irwin Thompson and Harlan Ellison agree on that. What better material to bring the ancient stories into modern relevance? To be prejudiced against it is to deny the *zeitgeist*.

Toto said nothing, but lifted his leg and, unnoticed by the voyagers, pissed against the Tin Man's leg, causing a chemical reaction, and the altered liquid which dripped down into the mosses beneath carried elements of both Toto's and the cyborg's recombinant DNA, which caused the next generation of moss to be born sentient, with a great desire for both emotional meaning and walkies. But that's another story — perhaps by Joan Sloncsewski.

I prefer to call it fantasy, the straw man said. In what other kind of story could a life like mine carry such an allegorical weight? Other cultures have no hesitation in using allegorical imagery and story lines to infuse their stories with the density of life while making them relevant to the modern concerns of an ordinary person. The *Odyssey* was just popular fiction in its time. According to Dave Duncan, Homer probably wrote it for the bar crowd: the same people today who buy these paperbacks with the flashy covers and don't know that they're sneakily being fed Greater Meaning. Fantasy gets in under the radar and packs a powerful punch. To be prejudiced against it is just *literati* snobbery.

Toto said nothing, though privately he thought the description resembled a kind of Good Twin of a date rape drug. You get it slipped to you, but you're *glad* after. Using his connexion to the forces of the land expressed in the ley line they were following, he projected an image of a bone before him and made it real, then commenced to chew. The flavor expressed to him the subtle changes in the earth and air magic, and to make the quartet complete, he called fire to char the bone a bit, and water to lap afterward, to take the aftertaste out of his chops. But that's another story, perhaps by Laurie Marks.

Me, said Dorothy, I prefer to call it speculative fiction. Bit of a joke, really —

all fiction is speculative. None of it 'really happened'. But I do believe characters in fiction must, in the words of Jane Siberry, '*speak a little softer / work a little harder / shoot less with more care / sing a little sweeter / and love a little longer / and soon you will be there*'. Yes, metaphor. Yes, allegory. Yes, a condensed and intensified version of life, in which flying cities and flying monkeys and flying bicycles are as viable as flying butterflies are in magic realism. But you know, it also occurs to me that asking 'why is SF important?', that's just like questioning the meaning of all our lives here, the meaning of our journey, of our struggles with good and evil. The questioners, they've gotten used to living shallow. They've forgotten that we get our models, our ethics, our culture from our art forms, that it's all interactive. And anyway, in a hundred years, who'll remember genre? It's individual texts, cultural artifacts which live on.

Toto reached back over his shoulder and with a ferocious snuffle he deconstructed a flea which had presumed to bite him. The flea was a symbol of the struggle to live in harmony with a giant neighbor with the power to destroy you physically, culturally, even spiritually. But that's another story, perhaps by a Canadian.

Toto, stop scratching, said Dorothy. It's time to go. And the travelers gathered their garbage ('Take nothing but memories, leave nothing but footprints.') and continued their journey to the Emerald City.

Strange New Horizons

By Mary Anne Mohanraj

I can't remember the first science fiction book I read. It could have been Heinlein's *Rocket Ship Galileo*. Or Asimov's *I, Robot*. Maybe it was Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, or Clarke's *Childhood's End*. I was about eight when I discovered science fiction, and I made no distinction between juvenile and adult SF — I read both voraciously. Rocket ships and aliens, the silence of deep space, voyages into the unknown; the stories caught my imagination and took me way way out there, with them. I was delighted when I found *Podkayne of Mars* — finally, a girl having adventures! But I was so desperate for these stories that I happily adventured with the boys the rest of the time. The librarians became accustomed to me showing up at the check-out desk every Saturday with a stack of twenty books (the most they would let you check out at once) — all SF.

For a few years, science fiction was all I read. In retrospect, I'm not surprised I liked it so. I was an Asian immigrant child, and you can imagine how alien I felt at my Polish Catholic grammar school. I was one of three brown people in my class, and until my sisters arrived, the only South Asian in the entire school. First contact stories were always my favorites (and still are) — there was such hope in those stories of aliens meeting, and becoming friends. And what about those robots of Asimov's — if someone could see them as human, then surely they could see me as human too? Science fiction was my refuge, and I spent every recess sitting in a corner of the playground with my nose in a book, ignoring my friends (I did eventually make friends) for the pleasure of wandering the stars with Poddy and the Stone twins.

Then I stumbled onto fantasy. I can name the first fantasy novel I read — Marion

Zimmer Bradley's *The Shattered Chain*. I was blown away — not just one girl, but a whole society of women! I dived into fantasy, and found tons of female characters; I'm afraid science fiction was rather neglected for a while. (Even in fantasy, though, I often preferred the male characters; in my head, I was always King Arthur, not Guinevere. He had a better story). I found *The Hobbit* before long, and then *The Lord of the Rings*, and a horde of fabulous children's fantasy, such as Susan Cooper's *Dark is Rising* sequence, and Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*. Kings and castles, magic and dark mystery — the chance to be a hero, battle the forces of darkness, and triumph at the end, along with a host of good fellowship.

I had started high school by then, a different school than the ones my old friends went to — a snooty prep school, full of girls who wouldn't talk to me. I hid in the library my entire freshman year, reading fantasy and science fiction. Eventually, science fiction saved me — the first friend I made in high school was someone whom I noticed reading a *Star Trek* novel, *The Wounded Sky*. I would have never had the nerve to approach her otherwise — she was one of those perfect blondes, extremely popular. But when I shyly mentioned that I loved that book — well, we've been best friends now for fifteen years.

What I'm trying to say is that science fiction and fantasy have had a huge influence on my life. The books found me friends. They opened my mind. King Arthur shaped my ideas of honor. Captain Kirk made me want to save the universe. The books of the field have been my consolation and my inspiration. After high school, I went on to be an English major in college, at a school that valued the Great Books — science fiction was not included (though you could make the argument for Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* as high fantasy). For a little while, I was busy with Chaucer and Faulkner and Gertrude Stein. But they let me write my thesis on Samuel R. Delany and alternative sexualities in speculative fiction, so I came back to the field again, and I haven't left it since. I still own more SF/F than mainstream literature, and even though I'm now in grad school, I don't think that's likely to change.

Speculative fiction (which for me encompasses everything from hard SF to vampire stories to magical realism) has been important to me. It's important to the world. These stories make us think. They critique society. They offer alternatives. They give us a vision of the future — and warn us of the potential dangers therein. They help us understand our past. They are full of beauty, and terror, and delight.

Some of my favorite authors have passed on, and others just aren't writing anymore, which is sad even though inevitable. But the field goes on, and in the last decade, I've discovered a whole host of new writers — and they're good. They're damn good. Hopkinson and Asaro. Lisa Goldstein and Dan Simmons. Sean Stewart. Pat Murphy. Pamela Dean. Ellen Kushner. Octavia Butler. Connie Willis. The writing just gets better and better — the stories are terrific. And in addition to those female characters who started creeping in a few decades ago and now are everywhere, I'm starting to notice some who are (startlingly) not white. That's rather nice, I have to say. The genre is starting to actually reflect the world I live in. The field is growing and expanding and shifting and changing, and it's an exciting time to be part of it.

I wrote the paragraphs above for the first editorial at *Strange Horizons*, in September 2000. In the years since then, a lot has changed in the field — there's been an explosion of exciting new small press ventures, from presses to zines to chapbooks, both online and in print, and a rich community of writers, readers, and critics has developed, exploring ideas, exchanging opinions, challenging each other to do more, and do it better.

At the same time, it seems to me that more and more literary fiction authors are experimenting with genre ideas – there's terrific crossover, and the terms like 'slipstream' and 'interstitial' and even 'fabulist', that have become so prevalent recently reflect the highly energetic movement within the wider literary field. We're swiftly moving towards what I feel is an inevitable breakdown of distinct genre boundaries, and while there will always be writers creating lovely pieces which are purely within spec fic's boundaries, I suspect there will be far more writing work that moves across the borders, or lives in the space between spec fic and literary fiction. I find that exciting, and I look forward to seeing what strange creatures will be born from those juxtapositions and meldings. It's a wonderful time to be working in speculative fiction — I'm just waiting to see what happens next.

Related Matters

While we have had some fascinating views on SF&F thus far, the articles above are by no means the entire debate. Talking to other people and browsing round the web I have found several other pieces that it would have been nice to have been able to include.

Guy Gavriel Kay has written a fascinating article on why he writes historical fantasy rather than historical fiction. You can find it on his official web site at: http://www.brightweavings.com/ggkswords/globe.htm.

Stephen Gallagher has an article on the Writers' Guild of Great Britain web site that has a go at people who dismiss SF. You can find it here: http://www.writersguild.org.uk/body.phtml?id=54&category=crafts&finds=0&string=&subject=books.

In issue #3 of *Zoo Nation* Farah Mendlesohn has a fascinating article about why politics cannot be off-topic for a discussion list that focuses on SF or fantasy literature. The essence of her argument (I hope) is that SF&F are literatures about how the world might be different, and thus every choice made in changing the world is political, whereas literary fiction can pretend to be apolitical because it is merely about characters in our world.

The argument turns up everywhere. For example, Vandana Singh in an article on the South Asian Women's Forum web site: http://www.sawf.org/newedit/edit06112001/sciencefiction.asp?pn=Editorial.

I'm sure I could find more with a bit of effort, but I have this zine to finish…

A Turn Up for the Books

By John Clute

I was thinking about the field of the fantastic in literature, and I was thinking

about how reviewers work in this field, because that was what Cheryl Morgan thought I might want to think about, and she was right. Proactive thinking about the interaction of these two overlapping foci of cognition is, after all, what I do; it is, I suspect, what anyone who reviews any SF or fantasy or horror novel does, even though there are reviewers who resolutely deny that they are pretentious enough to do more than tell it like it is: as though telling it like it is was the easy part, something a bit like stenography.

It follows then that some of these reviewers, and some of those who prefer to read reviews which pretend to tell the "unpretentious" "naïve" truth about books, might find nothing pragmatically or theoretically remiss in the following highly loaded utterance: I quote the first two sentences of Spider Robinson's Introduction to the first publication of Robert A Heinlein's first novel, previously thought lost, *For Us, the Living* (Scribner, **2004**), which is a utopia of a sort familiar to readers of Edward Bellamy, or Ignatius Donnelly, or H G Wells protesting too much, every verb a hot-air gerund blowing up the throat. Heeeeare's Spider:

Most authorities are calling this book Robert A Heinlein's first novel. I avoid arguing with authorities — it's usually simpler to shoot them — but I think it is something far more important than that, myself, and infinitely more interesting.

In a review I expect to write later this month, I'll probably comment on what Spider means (or thinks he means) when he says that Heinlein's text is "infinitely more interesting" than a novel. For starters, almost any non-mathematical use of the word "infinitely" could be described as fustian, a term which is generating a large entry in the dictionary of horror literature I've begun writing. So I may begin by suggesting that "authorities" tend not to use the word "infinitely" when they mean "kind of," and may go on to take our young non-authority to task for completely misunderstanding (and misdating) Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (**1899**); and will certainly comment on his rollicking travesty of a famous utterance by Hermann Goering (he backs away from his model real fast, one must say, in the very next paragraph). But what's relevant in the end about these sentences is the fact that, despite the wannabe radio-talk-show-host tone of the opening words I've just quoted, Spider is <u>obviously</u> doing cognition-about-the-field-of-the-fantastic stuff from the get-go. (I haven't done more than glance at the Heinlein text, but Spider's introduction, when he gets down to that text, looks very useful.) He has a theory of the novel (i.e. he knows, or thinks he knows, what isn't one). He has a sense of the history of the particular genre of the fantastic (that is, the utopia) from which Heinlein was deriving the shape of his not-novel. And when he mentions the not-novel *Flatland* a few paragraphs into his piece, he is making a relevant scholarly citation — even though, in his just-us-folks guise, he doesn't tell us the book was by Edwin A Abbott, or published in 1884) — and he is doing all this because he, too, is an authority.

Because any real person who publishes words about any other real person is an authority. Tenures are icing. Whenever we open our mouths in public, we make a public utterance, we speak <u>civic</u>; we utter our civilization. In 2003, to speak civic (as I've already argued too often in print to

feel comfortable going on about again) is to utter the world. What Spider needs to do is to admit that he's speaking to the mike; what we all need to do is to recognize that every word we speak modifies (almost imperceptibly but always, always) every word that has ever been spoken. Authorities are us. There is no one else.

So I was thinking about thinking, and context, and the nature of the genres we used to swim in like fish but now (December 2003) understand to comprise what an extremely articulate lungfish looking back at the breeding pool might call a web of interactive stitia. I'm trying to do a piece for Helen Pilinovsky for the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* about interstitiality (for the Interstitial Arts site, go to www.endicott-studio.com/IA/Index.html), and propose to describe genres, at some length, as being self-conscious interactive negotiations, as "motile stitia" — a term which will mean almost nothing to anybody now, but maybe I'll be able to make sense of the coining. In any case, I'll be trying to create a pragmatic case for jumping sideways in this fashion from most definitions of genre, which tend to seem either too rigid, too lacking in awareness that genres are intimately and knowingly bound to the passage of time; or simply otiose: any discussion of genre which claims that the term is an artifact without substance, and that modern literary theorists properly refuse to use the term to describe any relationship between words and time, understands the last two centuries as a different kind of turn up for the books than I do.

But you've got to lie in hiding for thoughts to come, or at least I do. You've got to ambush them. The best way to surprise oneself with the miracle of Story is to read one. For the last two or three autumns, ever since I've managed to acquire copies of all his collections, I've been in the habit of returning to A E Coppard, partly because he is genuinely brilliant, partly because (though brilliant) he is excluded from serious notice by the apparatchiks who oil the Great Tradition Machine every Sunday in the Quality Press, and partly because his tales have a chameleon relationship to any genre one might wish to fix them into. He is one of the prime writers of EQUIPOISE (the SMALL CAPS here and below indicate terms I've made entries out of in various books, or plan to use as headwords for entries not yet written; so to put a word in SMALL CAPS here is to apologize for not being perhaps entirely lucid here about what I mean by it). EQUIPOISE, for me, is a term which points to the capacity of writers over the last century or so to "hover" amidst modes of telling a story without either caging that story within genre expectations, or attempting to establish (disingenuously in my view) a sense that no genre expectation could possibly mediate our understanding of the story in question. So Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (**1899**, Blackwood's), which hovers along cusps of the fantastic but never literally becomes a tale of supernatural horror, is a far more sophisticated operation than its post hoc handlers (many of whom have to try to teach it) have found easy to grasp. As with Conrad, so with Coppard.

So, while writing these notes for *Emerald City*, I read one of his tales I hadn't come across before, the title story from *Silver Circus* (coll. **1928**), and, as usual, made some notes on the story, in case I could catch something on the wing, something

of pragmatic use for the next review perhaps, because anything is grist for the job of reading something new, because there's not much point trying to read something new if you've no idea what the new grows out of. In any case, I think the story is deeply interesting and would like to convey my sense of why this is so. I copy my notes now:

"Silver Circus": A story which is FANTASTIC in everything but an "actual" fantastic element (see note below). In Vienna, huge sponge-faced (i.e. his "bulbous hairless face" is inherently shapeable) Hans Siebenhaar, a 50 year old porter, laments the loss of his younger wife Mitzi to Julius Damjancsics, a year ago. He has searched for the pair in Budapest (Mitzi being Hungarian) and Belgrade (Julius was a Serb), but they have disappeared.

An impressive though slightly tawdry man summons him as a porter; he is the "boss of a Roumanian Circus" (> CIRCUS). He takes Hans to a bier-garten, where he and his brother slowly persuade Hans to undertake a job for them at the end of the following week: to impersonate a tiger and, "sewn up in the tiger's hide", to fight a lion. The pay will be good. The lion is guaranteed to be knackered. Hans suddenly roars loudly, capers about the bier-garten in the guise of a beast to show his acquiescence. He is put into training at the circus, but never has a chance to see the lion. The night of the show arrives, he is sewn into the hide, but is too terrified to go into the central ring, until he is cruelly prodded, like an animal.

Once in the ring, he recognizes Mitzi in the audience, and then realizes that the weary-looking lion he is to fight is also a man in a hide, and that the man is Julius. They begin to fight (while all three were friends, Mitzi had a habit of stripping off to suntan in the Wiener Wald; some sort of contest was already underway), replicating in BEAST FABLE guise their human condition, their inarticulate AGON. Eventually, Julius bites Hans's little finger off (presumably a castration joke), and Hans chokes Julius to death.

The people hushed their laughter as Hans slunk trembling and sweating from that droll oaf wrapped in a lion's skin. […] Mitzi was there, craning forward, her face as pale as snow. Hans caught hold of the cage bars and lifted himself to his feet. The onlookers could hear wild tormenting sobs bursting from the throat of the tiger as it hung ridiculously there. The door of Hans' first cage now slid open again, it was finished, he could go. But Hans did not go.

End of story, in a state of stalled METAMORPHOSIS or BONDAGE: Hans will never escape the bondage of who he is. The whole tale brings one back to what must be an ancient thought, but it is very vivid here: that STORY is <u>inherently</u> non-mimetic, that the coherence and coincidence and density and serpent-like cunning of Story inherently strains against the mimetic, that Story inherently pushes the envelope of EQUIPOISE: it is obvious that nothing that happens in "Silver Circus" is literally supernatural, but that everything that happens is inherently non-mimetic: the heightened venue (Vienna being exotic in 1928; the circus being an omphalos in which a vortex of fixed and free LIMINALS weave THRESHOLD sigils for the reader); the coincidence-dense plot; the hints of ALLEGORY; the SLINGSHOT ENDING that leaves us in a *medias res* that is not exactly

of this world, nor exactly of a next. If nothing fantastic happens in this story, it is simply because nothing does: there is no stitial threshold whose crossing/violation signals shift of genre, no TOGGLE demarcating the fantastic from the non-fantastic. Contrast, therefore, this story with tales (i.e., like most of the stories we normally read as fantasies) which are in constant negotiation with the stitia.

And so on, in the head, a kind of susurrus that sometimes reaches coherent expression, more often does not. Whether or not entirely conscious, something like this play of echoes and intuitions in the mind's eye must (I'd have thought) underlie the responses of any reviewer who is serious about understanding a process as complex as genre over the past two centuries. We do all know, at the same time, that to understand is in a sense to murder. Here is Stacey D'Erasmo discussing Paul Auster in the 30 November 2003 *New York Times Book Review*:

He seems to exemplify what Harold Bloom, writing about making poetry, identified as the drive never to be trapped in literal meaning. We make image after image, Bloom suggested, as a defense against such an entrapment, which he equates with death. Or, as the psychologist D W Winnicott once put it, artists are continually torn between "the urgent need to communicate, and the still more urgent need not to be found."

We know that we, as reviewers, are in some sense agents of entrapment. And I'm also conscious that some of the more highly motored metaphors I like to use in trying to get at texts might be understood in terms of the "need not to be found," while at the same time, through the multivalency of metaphor, language of this sort can also give the text a little breathing room. In the end, though, it is harder and more useful to try to understand enactments of the real in words, than to luxuriate in the intuition that words are a mug's game. Words are a mug's game. But words, it must be added, are the only game in town.

The Simple Art of Reviewing

(with apologies to Raymond Chandler)

By Gary K. Wolfe

Not all fiction has always intended to be realistic. Chandler was wrong on that point, but much of what he wrote about the hypocrisy and intellectual pretentiousness of the book page of your local paper and the discussion groups in little clubs, about the "trained seals of the critical fraternity" and the "powerful pressure groups whose business is selling books, although they would like you to think they are fostering culture," is of such striking relevance today that one could almost think he was writing prophetic science fiction. It's not likely he would have had much patience for science fiction or fantasy (though he might well have understood the world portrayed by good horror fiction), even though his famous defense of what he called the realistic detective story may well hold more meaning for these genres today, when detective tales regularly occupy bestseller lists and Chandler himself has become a lion of American literature, and when

those same bestseller lists, when they include science fiction or fantasy at all, are likely to feature only the latest luggage of the franchise trade.

The fantastic story for a variety of reasons can seldom easily be promoted. It is usually about instability and hence often lacks the element of comfortable familiarity. Its concerns and its forms are too old for it to be news, and its ideas are often too new to be the stuff of common currency. It has a depressing way of minding its own business, of speaking to the initiated, of failing to provide easy points of entry, and in the end, despite its alarums and provocations, there is not really much to discuss except whether it is well enough written to be good fiction — and the people who make up the multimillion dollar contracts wouldn't know that anyway. The detection of quality in writing is hard enough for readers and reviewers, without having to pay attention to the matter of advances and movie options.

The serious fantastic story has to find its core public by a slow process of distillation, and yet once that public is in place, it shows remarkably little patience for pretense and preciousness. The reviewer of this kind of story needs to know what that public knows, and to know something of the larger world as well. He needs to recognize both stories that do not come off intellectually as problems and stories that do not come off artistically as fiction, stories that are dishonest without knowing it and stories that are dishonest because they don't know what to be honest about. He is not distracted by the power of canonical names, either within or without the genre, or by the opinions of other reviewers or readers. It is not at all uncommon for a critically favored writer to try a hand at science fiction or fantasy, bringing to it a sack of literary tricks that disguise poor concepts in high style, or for an otherwise competent genre writer to decide to dress up a thin story in what he takes to be the literary togs admired by book-page reviewers. But the boys with their feet on the desks know that the easiest novel to take down is the one somebody tried to get very fancy with; the one that really bothers them is the one that somebody just thought up, that remains at home in its neighborhood and that somehow, without benefit of frippery, elevates a pretty good story to the condition of art. Such stories may be rare in any genre, but they are not as rare as you would think, even though they may not always be widely read.

And why they may not be widely read is fair game for the reviewer as well. The realistic reviewer writes of a world in which talented editors can be banished like third-string ballplayers and formula-driven hacks can be lavished with advances which could fuel the economy of a third-world nation for months; in which backlists are rapidly becoming rumors and good midlist writers can't get phone calls returned because the computer reports that last year's sales in Detroit declined from the year before; in which brutal corporations with shady histories can buy up once-distinguished imprints and shape their product on the model of oversugared breakfast cereals; in which powerful buyers for chain booksellers can determine the fate of a book or a career by distractedly listening to thirty-second pitches from nervous publicists who might as well be desperate screenwriters trying to salvage their studio contracts in the office of a cynical producer.

It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world we live in, and certain critics with

tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can find very interesting and even amusing patterns in it. It is not funny that a brilliant novel should be dumped on the market in a nearly-invisible trade paperback edition or that the year's best collection of short fiction should surface only in a tiny edition of a few hundred copies from an amateur press whose feeble marketing plan seems to involve telepathy, but it is sometimes funny that these same books should be nominated for and win major awards months after they've gone out of print. Such ironies will not escape the notice of the reviewer, because they are the coin of the modern publishing industry. And yet all this still is not quite enough.

In everything that can be called criticism there is a quality of celebration. It may be celebration of the collective aspirations of a particular form or genre — even when the author under review may have failed to further those aspirations — or celebration of a highly individual but honest voice who violates or ignores the terms of that genre. It may be simple celebration that good stories can still be written in an industry that wants to present them as this year's new model coffee makers. It may be a celebration of discovery or of survival in a world in which reading has become an eccentricity, and genre reading nearly a perversion, in which an author can gain great fame and honor in convention halls, yet remain virtually unknown in the larger literary community, and spectacularly obscure in the world at large. But down these mean streets the reviewer must go without himself becoming mean. He is no hero, yet he should be a complete reader and a common reader and yet an unusual reader. I do not care much about his private life; he may haunt fan conventions or isolate himself in his study, avoiding all contact with the machineries of buzz. I think he might commit mayhem on a bestseller and I am fairly sure he would not ruin the career of an aspiring writer with honorable intentions but an instrument not yet fully formed.

He is not a wealthy man, or he would not be a reviewer at all. He is a common man, or he could not understand the virtues of common fiction. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no assignment dishonestly and read no book, not even those by close acquaintances, without a due and dispassionate assessment. He believes in integrity and competence, and his pride is that you will honor those standards or be very sorry you sent that book to him. He may write with rude wit or with arcane style, but always with a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.

Criticism is this reader's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a reader prepared for adventure. His range of awareness may startle you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough readers like him, I think the books we see in the shops and on the bestseller lists might be more varied and ambitious and individual, and yet not too dull to be worth reading.

[Note: Writing "The Simple Art of Murder" for the Atlantic in 1945, Chandler was not much concerned about genderless pronouns or non-sexist language, but it seemed impossible to attempt to modernize such matters without doing even more damage to the tone than I've already done. Apologies to everyone.]

The Critic in the Walls

By Farah Mendlesohn

Trying to write about why I review or write criticism reduces me to centripetal stumbling. Book reviewing always struck me as just what one did: it's part of being an evangelical reader. "Here, read *this* one…." "Don't leave the store without at least buying *one*…."

Right now, it's read these *three*. Peter Straub's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* (2003), Neil Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls* (2003) and Patrice Kindl's *The Woman in the Wall* (1997) are all wainscot tales (Clute, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p. 991) in which a separate, hidden world exists between the walls, one which interacts with ours but has its own, perfect kind of life. Read them together. They have things to say to each other about the writing and reading of fantasy. These books have linked themselves in my mind as a representation of the possibilities of criticism and specifically of reviewing. Each one makes me think differently about the other.

In Peter Straub's *Lost Boy Lost Girl*, the wainscot is a threat which remains invisible and possibly non-existent. The wolves in Neil Gaiman's walls want to break out, and themselves fear what might be hidden in the spaces between worlds, while Anna, in Patrice Kindl's *The Woman in the Wall*, sees her created space as privileged, safe. Straub's book is written for adults, Gaiman's for small children, Kindl's for teenagers. Straub's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* is both a detective and horror story (although after a term of teaching crime writing I'm beginning to wonder if the detective/crime narrative and the horror genre are separate: their internal structures are very similar); Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls* is a child's first book of horror; while Kindl's *The Woman in the Wall* is hard to categorize in genre terms. Anna is so shy that to escape school she makes herself a home in the walls. It isn't fantasy, but it is recognizable to the fantasy reader. A comparison of their uses of the wainscot — a very typical approach for an academic critic — forces us constantly to face the differences between these books.

But although the term "wainscot tale" links these book it's a critical term that describes landscape and position; it doesn't describe the way the books function. Clute didn't intend it that way, although I've heard the term "wainscot fantasy" bandied around on the ICFA mailing list. It's a critical dead end. As Clute argues more generally, each book deploys the wainscot and wainscot society in very different ways and detailing this is essentially a matter of description. An extended essay on this topic won't have that quality that I mean by evangelism; it won't make you want to go out and buy the books. If I want to show you a way into these three books, if I want to send you out with the nimbus of longing, I need another route, and as a reviewer, rather than a critic, I have another route open to me: that of *recognizability*

Most people who operate as both critics and reviewers recognize — with some sadness — that our academic audience is often a lot less well read in the genre than are attendees at conventions and readers of review columns such as *Emerald City*. Academics tend to read in depth, not in breadth (although of course there are exceptions). Academic articles may consider one trope in one or two texts as I began to do above. A widespread study of, say, the significance and use of the wainscot within the entire genre of

fantasy is considered appropriate for an encyclopedia entry, but not for an academic article.[1] Synthesis, the bringing together of broad swathes of seemingly unrelated books or ideas, seems to have very little place in the academic criticism of SF or fantasy. And enthusiasm for what I've read and want to talk about? The last time I tried that in an academic conference (at the SFRA) I was accused by one member of the audience of commercialism and nationalism. I have yet to work out why persuading people to read interesting books is *commercial.*

But in a review I have a quite different situation. Few readers of reviews are in-depth readers, who read and re-read a text, but most of them will read widely, and in a review I can play on that issue of recognizability that links these texts far more powerfully than the setting that initially attracted my gaze. For the wainscots that are the settings of these books are elements that are *made* by the characters and it is the making of the wainscot that fascinates because in each case the making or writing of the wainscot rests on what the protagonist can expect the "reader" (sometimes us, sometimes other characters) to know.

Tim, the narrator-protagonist of *Lost Boy Lost Girl*, and a professional author, needs to believe in the other to convince himself that his nephew is not dead but translocated. Peter Straub has written that horror "is rooted in an apprehension of the unknown",[2] but Tim can do this for himself and for us because we understand the traditions of haunted houses, what lurks between walls, and we comprehend, because we have encountered it in different forms, that the space between the walls is a metaphor for the space between worlds and between each other. So that when Anna hides in the walls of her house she also signals that she knows what she is doing. Kindl uses this physical and metaphoric space to create not just a safe space but a secure role for her protagonist. Instead of the invisible child Anna can become the household elf, the worker of magic in fabric and food. She rewrites herself within the story and succeeds in almost convincing her family of her unreality. Her youngest sister cannot distinguish between the fairy tales she is told and the existence of Anna between the walls. The sense that this book is fantasy while there is not so much as a trace of magic comes, as with *Lost Boy Lost Girl*, because we and they know the codes.

Of the three protagonists of these novels, Neil Gaiman's Lucy is the sanest and most in control both of her world and the wainscot. This is of course deliberate. The reason *The Wolves in the Walls* can maintain its delicious thrill without scaring the bejeezus out of a five-year-old is because Lucy is so in control of her world. I've read so many post-Rowling fantasies recently that have adults rushing to the rescue that it's very cheering to see some solid, Arthur Ransomish expectations of competence. Like Tim and Anna, Lucy knows how wainscots relate to houses — that they hold both threat and promise. One suspects that Lucy has read both *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* and *The Wind in the Willows*. I can pretty much assume that review readers have, so when I say that this book captures the flavours

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[1] Which is why all sane academics should have both of the Clute, Nicholls, Grant Encyclopedias chained to their desks.

[2] Peter Straub, from *Leningrad Nights* by Graham Joyce , PS Publishing, 1999, pp. 5.

of Beatrix Potter, none of them will make the mistake of thinking I mean it's cosy and cute. The structure of *The Wolves in the Walls* is of narrative inevitability — the repetition of the chorus underlines this — everyone but Lucy seems to know the rules of the game. But Lucy chooses to exist outside this text. It is not quite a meta-narrative, but Lucy insists that the family can rewrite the chant (or spell) and when at the end the people come out of the walls, it really is all over (maybe).

Lucy, Tim and Anna all have to deal with others whose understanding of wainscots is more ambiguous. Anna's family simply don't want to believe that their missing child might be living in the space between the walls. Lucy's family accepts the threat but refuses the challenge: "when the wolves come out of the walls, it's all over." In Tim's world the presence of the world behind the wainscot is consistently denied. Although a torture chamber is eventually revealed, the wainscot world as Tim envisages it, inhabited by ghosts, exists only because he writes it.

And this is the crux of that link that haunts. All three of the protagonists of these books are knowing, and they use their understanding of the genres in which they exist to write the shape of their adventure, and direct the gaze of the reader to a specific relation with the fantastic. Anna is the most practical; she even builds her own wainscot. The charm of the book is in the construction of this liminal space between one reality and the next and the creation of romantic tension for those in the outer world. Anna observes and manipulates from the safety of the wainscot, Tim's metaphoric and horrific wainscot offers perhaps a greater escape. Tim writes the threat of the wainscot in order to hide from the reality that serial killers live in the sun. He writes into existence almost every relationship within the book. Careful study reveals that the only evidence we have for *anything* comes from the pen of a novelist, the entire narrative is a meta-text, and the wainscot world may be that of the audience. Lucy, contemplating wainscots and their relationship to the world generally, challenges the pre-written nature of the adventure and suggests that wainscots are all relative.

Writing criticism is scary. It's scarier than writing history, which is what I was trained to do. When I write history, I am assembling and interpreting *information* (documents, artifacts, opinions). There is a fair amount of creativity and poetic license, but as each interpretation has to be supported by large amounts of corroborative evidence, by the time I've finished even my most fanciful arguments can look staid and boring. If I get it wrong, it will be because someone else has found information to which I didn't have access. No one is going to think me a fool. Writing literary criticism has nothing to do with evidence. Good literary criticism — whether reviews or academic articles — is about opening a window into the text, offering the reader another way into it that may not have occurred to them.

Contextualisation is not the same as evidence. Contextualisation is knowing enough about your field, about what others have written and said, about the conversation that is books and science fiction in particular, to be able to draw your interpretations from the shared pool of understanding. To show how this, and this, and this links. It is not on the basis of evidence that I suggest Peter Straub's *Lost Boy Lost Girl*, Patrice Kindl's *The Woman in the Wall* and Neil Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls* can all be understood as a reappraisal of wainscot tales, because in

the end the concept of the wainscot tale is not *real* — it is simply a label that, because we all understand it, can be used to link three very different texts and unpack each in a way that, stood on their own, they might resist.

Talking about SF and Fantasy

By Javier Martinez

On a regular basis I peruse the various sites, magazines and journals about SF and fantasy, just to catch up on all that's been happening lately in the field. It struck me that I had come to take for granted the diverse sources we as SF and fantasy readers have when it comes to discussion about the books we feel so strongly about. Furthermore, not only do we have a diversity of sources, but many of them are remarkably credible as well, with some very good people producing them and writing for them. I do not know of any other field where there is so much insightful opinion that is collected on a regular and easily accessed basis. This says something about the people who produce it — the fans, the scholars (or fans in academic disguise), the writers, the reviewers and the various combinations of them all — as well as the field that sparks it.

But just what does this situation say, exactly? First, it says that our field is an active and healthy one, full of conflict, argument and disagreement, the essentials of any good discussion. Second, it says that everyone can join. As an academic, I come from a field that traditionally has told people they cannot be part of the discussion, that they do not have a voice. Thankfully, this is changing, in part because the ideas and insights that emerge from across the spectrum of our discussions provide a deeper insight into our field. I do not always agree with what I read; in fact, I find myself disagreeing more than agreeing lately. But there are different types of arguments to be made, and it is the collision of these arguments that provides the burst of energy necessary for critical engagement.

Emerald City is part of this network, as is the academic journal that I edit, *Extrapolation*. There are others as well, too numerous to list here (and if you're reading this you know them all anyway). And while we all inhabit different points along the critical continuum, what is important for us to keep in mind is the discussion itself. *Emerald City* does something different that *Locus*, which does something different than *SF Site*, which does something different than *New York Review of SF*, which does something different than… well, you get the picture. Good and bad novels will always be there (and thank God for that), but good discussion of those good and bad novels is also important. Thankfully, it looks like that will be around for a while too.

The Soul of the Good Review

By Sean McMullen

In June 1992 I was at a science fiction convention in Adelaide. I had actually gone over to meet Neil Gaiman, who was visiting Australia for the first time, but when I found myself at a loose end for an

hour or so - and against my better judgement — I attended a session on criticism. One of the fans present did quite an enthusiastic talk on great invective that he had read in SF criticism, and another spoke at length on how professional authors could improve their work many times over by studying criticism of them. My turn came. Over the year past I had won two awards for fiction and another for criticism, so I was not exactly a beginner to either writing or criticism. I had also been subjected to a couple of gratuitous and vindictive reviews for both of my award-winning stories in recent months.

I declared that if I had paid the slightest attention to some of the material written about my work, I would never have won awards for it, had it published, or even finished writing it. The other speakers were scandalised that anyone could ignore their brilliantly written, perceptive, and scathing words. What they did not see was that there is a distinction between clever criticism and good criticism. Anyone can tear the best of works to shreds, and the better and more highly regarded the work, the better the critic is regarded by some people for demolishing it. I related the story of a very erudite Melbourne fan, who once told me that he particularly liked one of Phillip K. Dick's novels until he read a very clever and detailed review demonstrating how bad it was. The other speakers declared that this review — that had spoiled someone's favourite work for him — was obviously what good reviewing was all about.

This session was something of a watershed for me, because for the next eight years I did not read a single review that had not first been vetted by my wife or daughter for vindictive attacks or gratuitous cleverness. These days I do read some reviews un-vetted, because I have learned to trust the opinions of some reviewers. This is not because they always say nice things about my works — sometimes they don't — but because I respect their opinions.

Reviewers are actually in a very vulnerable and delicately balanced position. Should they win attention for themselves at the author's expense by ripping fiction to shreds, or should they only review what they really like and thus get a reputation as a lapdog critic? Every so often the hatchet critics mount automatic attacks on future classics, and look passably silly. *Forbidden Planet* was described by one British reviewer as not being worth bothering with when it was first released. *Star Wars*? Lucas was told by a colleague that he had got it seriously wrong after the first showing. *The Lord of the Rings*? The book was apparently rambling and boring according to one section of critical opinion. *Neuromancer*? Badly written and pointless, was the verdict in one review that I read. Why are the above four criticisms seriously flawed? The two movies and two books were actually not without their flaws, and personally I would rate only one of them above 8 out of 10 (try to guess which). The problem was that those critics, in their zeal to find something to attack, overlooked what was actually great about the works. Sometime I wonder whether some reviewers and critics are actually afraid to praise what is worthwhile. I suppose it does take a certain amount of courage to say that you like something.

Moving on to lapdogs (and naming no names) I shall describe how I criticised one very poor novella that some reviewer had praised — apparently because he could not understand it. It was on a hot summers evening, after a very bad day at

work. Karate gradings were coming up, so my students had been a bit scratchy at lunchtime training. I had put dinner on, and was on the exercise bike, reading the novella in a magazine while trying to wind down. The reviewer had not flagged the fact that it was turgid, rambling, about 400% too long, rather slight in concept, and worst of all, totally predictable. I began ripping out the pages as I read them, crumpling them, and tossing them over my shoulder. By the time I got to the end of the novella — whose ending I had correctly predicted about a quarter of the way in - I was feeling extremely relaxed, and was so cheerful that my wife said I must have had a really great day at work when she eventually got home.

In spite of all the foregoing, I do try to seek out reviewing that I trust and respect in spite of having very little spare time for reading. I need reviewing and criticism that attempts to say what is good about works as well as pointing out perceived flaws. I want to see future classics identified as such, rather than being ripped to shreds merely because they are published works. I read reviews to learn about what is worthwhile, so that I can go on to read those worthwhile works while bypassing the dross. Like I said, I do not have much time to spend on reading, so I get very scratchy about wasting time on turgid, meandering works that give the reader back a lot less than the effort of reading them.

Praise is not easy for most people, it is far more cool to put the knife in. On the other hand, I find most cool people are pretty boring because they have little passion within them. So what is cool? Is Neil Gaiman cool? Meeting him at that 1992 convention taught me that he is calm and well mannered, not cool. His writing is both clever and heartfelt, which is very hard to achieve. I wish I could manage it. Next time you see what looks like a really cool bit of reviewing, stop and think. Is it calm, clever, heartfelt, and well mannered, or is it actually cold, psychopathic, or lacking in soul? If the former, it is good reviewing and worthwhile criticism, the sort that I want to know about. When I want entertaining sarcasm, I reach for my complete book of *Blackadder* scripts, not book reviews.

Banks on Booze

Some ideas in publishing are just so obvious that you end up kicking yourself that you didn't think of them first. But someone has to, and in this case the genius in question is presumably Oliver Johnson, the editor at Random House who commissioned the book. His reasoning probably went something like this: Christmas is a time when people buy a lot of whisky, so a book on whisky should sell well if well written and amusing. Whisky comes from Scotland. Iain Banks is an excellent and entertaining Scottish writer who is well known for his appetite for alcohol. Therefore we get Banks to write a book that is ostensibly about whisky, but is just as much about Banks and his mates wandering drunkenly from distillery to distillery and telling funny stories along the way.

See, pure genius. Why didn't I think of that? Oh well.

Of course you might worry that, with his famous affinity for things alcoholic, Banks might not have quite the discerning connoisseur taste that is required for a serious book on booze. The author himself was aware of this issue, and faithfully

boned up on several tons of whisky books (not to mention several barrels of whisky) as part of his research. But actually it turns out that he has excellent taste in food and drink.

I came to the realization many years ago that I like big, strong, even aggressive tastes: cheddars so sharp they make your eyes water, curries in general, though preferably fairly hot, garlic-heavy Middle-Eastern mezes, chilli-saturated Mexican dishes, hugely fruity Aussie wines, and thumpingly, almost aggressively flavoured whiskies.

Banks channeling Cheryl

His dislikes are a little more worrying, and I shall have to have words with him about Amaretto and marzipan, but he's absolutely right about the Brussels sprout, a vegetable that was clearly invented by the Forces of Evil for the sole purpose of allowing parents and schools to torture small children at meal times.

As I intimated above, one of the objectives of the book was to have Banks travel around Scotland, and indeed the book is actually marketed as travel writing. So whisky fans please be warned, not all of this book is about the golden nectar. Banks is a self-confessed petrol-head, and while he does own a motorbike, he seems somewhat doctrinally confused when it comes to the basic religious mantra of, "Two Wheels Good, Four Wheels Bad." Consequently there is much fussing over automobiles and parts of the book sound like a script for an edition of *Top Gear*.

The Jag can pick up its skirts and make an overtaking dash when it needs to all the same, and the engine sounds great when it is gunned, like a Tyrannosaurus fart sampled and played back at 960 b.p.m.

Banks channeling Jeremy Clarkson

Oh well, he does have to take other people along with him for the purpose of generating amusing conversation, and that is hard on a bike. Also his descriptions of dashing around Scottish country roads in his BMW M5 are somewhat reminiscent of my own experiences of flinging an Australian Ford Falcon around the Dandenongs. Cars are not worth bothering with unless they have at least a 5-litre engine.

Given the travelogue nature of the book, Scottish scenery and history also play a major part in the text. Indeed, it would be a good idea to read the book with a road map of Scotland to hand so that you can see where Banks is going. Being a lover of maps himself, Banks has made sure that his route is fairly followable, and he has chosen interesting minor road routes wherever possible. Naturally he seeks out famous Scottish landmarks.

The Loch Ness monster seems to be one of those quantum creatures, maybe distantly related to Schrodinger's Cat; its existence is only possible when there is nobody there to observe it.

Banks in SF writer mode

Banks also touches on other Scottish monsters, most notably the abominable midge, a fearsome bloodsucker that makes the anophelii women from China Miéville's *The Scar* seem like the sort of cute and loveable creature you might want to keep as a pet. Then there is the supposed red squirrel, a creature even

more elusive than Nessie. And of course, the scourge of all British roads: the caravan. (For the benefit of American readers, a caravan is a sort of miniature travel trailer, often two-wheeled and generally towed by something with less horsepower than a Volkswagen Beetle. It has the handling characteristics of a three-legged hippo that has just consumed its own weight in strong, dark Scottish ale. Sadly a certain type of Brit thinks that it is *de rigeur* to tow vast fleets of these monsters all over the country for the whole of the few rainless days that counts as a British summer.)

But let us return to science fiction for a moment, because Banks does supply a number of amusing anecdotes. There is, for example, what is presented as the true story of the hotel abseiling episode from the 1987 Worldcon. Well, Banks claims that it is true, but all fans will know that he is making it up because it involves neither actual abseiling nor Banks being dressed in SAS gear. It does have an amusing postscript about Mike Harrison trying to teach Banks to climb properly the following morning, but even so… Then there is the admittedly false tale of how Banks and Ken MacLeod met at school, which involves an overly serious young MacLeod trying to talk to young Banks about his writing while the lad himself is busy ogling scantily dressed girls. You may also be interested to know that the schoolboy Banks was an expert in pun-filled stories, and that he takes great pride in having got to the level of expertise where he could manage at least one pun every ten words. And finally there is an explanation for the famous 'M' (for Menzies) that appears in the Banks name on his SF books.

The book should provide useful reading for American fans (Amazon initially listed it but have since withdrawn it so you'll have to go to Amazon UK) for a number of reasons. Firstly it will provide an excellent source of ideas for touring before or after attending the Glasgow Worldcon (and the Mother India restaurant looks like a good bet for a curry expedition during the con). In addition the book includes a helpful pronunciation guide that will enable you to cope successfully with complex Gaelic words such as Laphroaig, Bunnahabhain, Menzies and Football (trust me, you have no idea how to pronounce the last one). Be warned, however, that Banks wrote the book while Gulf War II was in progress. Being a bit of a lefty (as opposed to MacLeod or Miéville who are, or at least have been, proper, card-carrying lefties), Mr. Banks is not entirely enamored of the state of world politics and has a few choice words to say about Dubya and Tony Bliar.

The other potential problem for American readers is that this is a book about alcohol. Now I know that many of you are well educated in such matters and enjoy a good dram or two. But there are still Americans around who are deeply suspicious of intoxicants — the type who tell you that you have a drink problem when you have a second glass of wine with your dinner. Such people may be deeply disturbed by some of the tales of alcoholic excess and consequent brain-in-neutral laddishness found in this book. Indeed, they may be so disturbed that they decide to declare a War on Alcohol and invade every country in which the demon drink is manufactured until such time as it is banished forever from our lives and honest, upstanding, abstemious Americans can live in safety once more. (The major American beer manufacturers will be granted an exemption on the grounds that their product does not

contain a significant amount of alcohol.) Dubya, I gather, does not drink. Scotland, you have been warned.

Talking of alcohol, I should return once more to the major theme of the book, whisky. Banks does indeed know what he is talking about, and while I do not agree precisely with his preferences I'm with him all the way on general principles. The usual suspects all turn up in his recommendations: Laphroaig, Lagavulin, Balvenie, Talisker, Springbank, Macallan, Glenmorangie. That encourages me to try some of the other brands that Banks rates highly. Being of the opinion that regular Glenfiddich is malt whisky designed for people who don't like the taste of whisky, I'm a little nervous of some of his favorites, but I will give their 21-year-old Havana Reserve a try at some point. I'd sign up for the Scotch Malt Whisky Society too (http://www.smws.com/) if only I had a larger and more regular income. And I will purchase a sample bottle of Chateau Musar at the earliest opportunity. So hey, the book did its job in recommending some fine tipples, and it amused greatly along the way. Kevin enjoyed it too, and he's a non-drinking American. You can't ask for much more than that.

So now, about the next Culture novel, Mr. Banks…

Raw Spirit - Iain (M.) Banks – Century - hardcover

Making Points

If whisky is not high on your list of personal interests in life, another good bet, given that you read this magazine, is that you have a love of writing. A surprise best seller in the UK at the moment is a book on punctuation. Columnists in the more highbrow newspapers have been heard to herald this as a significant victory for Tradition and Old Fashioned Values, but there is rather more to it than that.

The title of the book, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, gives you a good idea of the sort of style that its author, Lynne Truss, adopts. If you don't know the quote, it is the punch line of a joke that begins, "A Panda goes into a restaurant…" You can figure out the rest yourselves. The book is subtitled, *The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, but this is just a clever marketing trick designed to sell more copies to The Guild of Telegraphers, sorry, *Daily Telegraph* readers. In actuality Ms. Truss has a much more even-handed approach.

The trouble with English grammar these days is that we have swung from one ridiculous extreme to another. When my parents' generation went to school kids were taught the rules of grammar by rote. No rationale was presented, and none was deemed necessary beyond the obvious need to parrot said rules in examinations. The fact that such luminaries as Shakespeare, Milton and God (as channeled by King James I's clerks) repeatedly flouted said rules was a matter not to be discussed. By the time I went to school this rigid discipline was already breaking down, and the generation following me was seemingly not taught grammar at all (or spelling for that matter).

Consequently we have two generations, both with no understanding of the structure of language, hurling abuse at each other. On the one hand we have the old fogies complaining that no one now follows a set of arbitrary and pointless

rules, and on the other the young barbarians are incapable of formulating a coherent verbal argument and therefore respond with various bodily signals. Because this is what is now referred to as a "religious" war, even those in the middle are vulnerable. Truss cites the case of Kingsley Amis, who divided the world into two groups: Berks, who were more rigid in their approach to language them him; and Wankers, who were less rigid. Amis, being Amis, regarded everyone except himself as either a Berk or a Wanker.

The unfortunate truth is that grammar and punctuation do have a purpose. Indeed, as we shall see, punctuation has more than one purpose. But let us begin with the obvious one, that of elucidating meaning. One of the best examples in Truss's book comes from the *Gospel of St. Luke*. When originally written, the book contained no punctuation — it wasn't in wide use, and sadly God neglected to inspire St. Luke to popularize it for us. Catholics will punctuate the sentence in question as follows:

"Verily, I say unto thee this day, Thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

Protestants, on the other hand, will move a comma ever so slightly:

"Verily, I say unto thee, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

The difference between those two versions is sufficient to get the two sides shooting each other. (If you haven't worked out why, consider which side in the argument believes in Purgatory.)

Punctuation, therefore, is important. Unfortunately it is also complicated. Its rules and traditions have grown up piecemeal over the centuries and are now hopelessly confusing. The apostrophe, for example, is put to two very different uses: it denotes possession, and it denotes dropped letters. Hence the ongoing difficulty in getting people to distinguish properly between "its" and "it's". With commas it is even worse. When they were first invented (by a librarian in Alexandria in 200BC, Truss tells us) their sole purpose was as a guide to breathing points for actors and singers. It wasn't until the 16th Century that an Italian printer, Aldus Manutius, hit on the idea of using those little signs to assist in the elucidation of meaning. Commas are still used for both purposes to this day.

The existence of these different and sometimes contrary purposes for punctuation leads to all sorts of entertaining debate, particularly because much usage is traditional and is therefore subject to change and cultural preference. When *Emerald City* is being proof-read Anne and I have had occasion to resort to dueling style manuals in order to resolve whether a difference in opinion is a question of changing practice with time or a trans-Atlantic preference gap (or, in most cases, simple ignorance on my part). Kevin and I have a relationship similar to that Truss describes between Harold Ross and James Thurber at *The New Yorker* in the 1930s. Whatever I write, Kevin adds commas to it, and I take them out again.

The great thing about Truss's book is that she has sufficient respect for her audience to understand that simply presenting a set of punctuation rules and expecting everyone to abide by them is futile. Indeed, she even quotes Sir Ernest Gowers as saying, "the use of commas cannot be learned by rule." Instead she seeks to educate the reader subliminally through the use of entertaining and instructive anecdotes that are likely to remain in the mind far longer than a bald rule. In this

she is simply following the example of the grammar manuals I had at school that illustrated their instruction with amusing examples such as, "the chair belonging to the lady with Queen Anne legs," but she does it very well and should be commended on this subtle guerilla approach.

Although Truss exhibits an extensive knowledge of the differences in practice between British and American editors, and has a glowing admiration for the excellent *Washington Post*, several of her jokes contain peculiarly British references. Indeed, many of her modern British readers will be confused by references to a TV show called "*Not only… but also*." American readers may also be disquieted by the robustness of some of her humor. Offhand rudeness about the size of Martin Amis's ego is probably permissible, it being on a par with making jokes about Dolly Parton's breasts. However, Truss's relentless hounding of poor Gertrude Stein seems a little over the top. True, Stein had some very extreme opinions (about how punctuation should be abolished), but surely in this case she was a harmless eccentric who should be consigned to a rest home for the terminally contrary. Truss's pillorying of Stein comes over rather like a treatise on politics that punctuates its academic discourse with frequent comments of the form, "of course, [famous hard-line Libertarian X] says … [utterly absurd comment presented as incontrovertible fact]."

Where Truss is at her weakest is where she attempts to analyze the development of language that is being driven by the online environment. She appears to assume, for example, that everything on the Internet is conversational and transitory, and that therefore clarity of meaning will be sacrificed. In actuality vast swathes of the Internet are semi-permanent and are thoughtfully composed. Truss also rails against the use of her beloved punctuation marks in the formation of emoticons, which she regards as a regrettable short-cut to precise statement of meaning. She speculates that in the future people will know punctuation only as a means of creating emoticons. However, with the advent of HTML-encoded email and browser-based message boards, the emoticon as Truss knows it is already an endangered species. Graphic smileys are now the in thing. They allow you to express a much wider range of emotions, and also provide leeway for indicating clan affiliations: you too can have a Mr. Spock smiley to indicate your loyalty to Trekkiedom.

What amuses me about the Internet is that it was created by people whose job, one might assume, is to express themselves as precisely as possible: computer programmers. Unfortunately those most closely involved with Internet development appear to have been users of C, a programming language which still values economy of code over clarity of meaning, and indeed over absence of bugs. The inability of such people to use grammar and punctuation effectively is understandable. But there is yet hope. The Net is a diverse and opinionated society, and there are few things that its denizens love more than a good "religious" war. I am sure it is only a matter of time before the current small community of online punctuation geeks grows to be a major force, engaging in endless doctrinal disputes and launching guerilla hack attacks against grammatically impure web sites. So too will there be online pedants in the grand tradition of George Bernard Shaw: people who are convinced that an

appropriate application of HTML syntax to everyday English will result in a grammar that is utterly unambiguous and will therefore be immediately adopted by all right-thinking people.

And that, of course, would be a disaster. Because while lack of clarity in writing is regrettable in many ways, it is also an essential feature of the English language. If it were not possible for ambiguity to exist, it would not be possible to make puns, and then where would we be? Unable to write highly amusing books like *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* for a start.

Eats, Shoots & Leaves – Lynne Truss – Profile - hardcover

Dear Santa

By David Brin

Sure, there are the gimme items at the very top: World Peace. True empathy and compassion that extend beyond the selfish self, even to those who dare to disagree. A willingness to question assumptions, All that stuff. Then back it up with some real donations of money and time and self. There's a world to save, and we don't do it by grumbling.

Okay, now on to toys! I got kids so I am familiar with the range. Some are neat. My daughter (heading for her black belt at age nine) has a wearable, digital secret message-typing thing that can send gossip to her friends hundreds of feet away. Cool.

But looking at what's here today, vs. what we **could** have, well, this just doesn't feel like the Twenty-First Century yet. (Will it, ever?) Here's one item I hope we see in our near term sci-fi future. In honor of Buffy, call it "Buff Multitasking".

We tend to envision any time that is spent before a computer or TV screen as time that is also spent broadening the waistline, coating arteries and generally sliding into sloth. Physical and mental activity are mutually exclusive, right?

I'm not convinced. Lots of people, especially in the new generation, are used to multi-tasking. In fact, they really dig it. Multi-tasking lets you pack more into a day that has too little hours. (One inspiration for my novel *Kiln People*.)

So why does it seem to be assumed — even required — that we keep the mental and physical realms forever separate?

Some years ago I saw a system that had a television set linked to an exercise bike. A parent's dream. Give it to your kid and say — "You've been demanding a TV for your room? Now you can watch however many hours of TV that you power with your own two legs." Trolling around the web, I found a few still available. Pity it never caught on. Maybe bad marketing. Or else... maybe the idea was just premature, awaiting the age of LCD screens and WiFi net access!

(And ponder this added benefit. If the lights go out for an extended time in an emergency, you've now got a personal generator for the bare essentials.)

I think this is just the beginning. Imagine game controllers that respond to the clenching of muscles all over the body. Not only would it increase the visceral "there-ness" of any game, but it could turn Tomb Raider into real exercise. Yeah, a majority of kids would still prefer to lie there, fantasizing and twiddling their thumbs. But a fair sized minority might really dig the multi-tasking aspect.

Getting exercise while playing video games. Mollifying Mom while becoming buff enough to impress Laura Croft. (Or Orlando and Viggo.) Hm.

Attack of the $100 Worldcon

By Kevin Standlee

SMOFcon (http://www.smofcon.org/) is an annual gathering of people who organize science fiction conventions, usually with a substantial, but not necessarily overwhelming, emphasis on Worldcons. This is not due to some nefarious plot; it's a function of the fact that a substantial portion of the people who attend are those who can afford the moderately expensive hobby of organizing SF conventions, particularly Worldcons. Besides, for a group as diverse as this, Worldcons are often the only thing we have in common. Convention styles differ considerably from place to place — something I didn't understand until I started traveling around myself. I try to go to SMOFcon as often as I can — this year was my 14th — because not only are these people my friends and peers in the realm of conrunning, but also because it's usually much easier to have relaxed conversations here than it is at Worldcon. For all that I love the multi-ring-circus atmosphere of a Worldcon (would I have bid for and co-chaired a Worldcon if I didn't like them?), there's no doubt that it's a little frantic. The hundred or so SMOFcon attendees this year gathered in Rosemont IL, a suburb of Chicago near O'Hare airport, in a wonderful Embassy Suites hotel, and the committee, led by Erik Olson, did a great job of making us feel comfortable and able to talk shop about running conventions.

As has become common for SMOFcon, there were two relatively low-key panel tracks discussing many aspects of running SF conventions, not just Worldcons. Panels of general interest included dealing with program participants, effectively communicating with members, parties and fan tables, exhibits, convention web site design, decorator contracts, and others. There was also a panel on which I sat that discussed an idea for reducing the cost of Worldcon memberships and attracting new people to Worldcons.

Why would SMOFcon want to discuss this? Well, Worldcon memberships, which are now about $200 at the door or up to $75 for a single day's admission, are widely perceived as too expensive. This may not be such a big deal to people who travel to all or most Worldcons, because most of those people buy their memberships long in advance for around $100. Besides, for the out-of-town fans, the travel costs (airfare, hotel, etc.) usually swamp the membership price anyway. However, for local fans, in particular those who have never experienced a Worldcon, that high price is almost certainly keeping away people who might otherwise be interested in attending.

Why Worldcon memberships cost what they do is a subject for an entirely different article; however, it mostly boils down to Worldcon having grown to the wrong size. It is either too large or too small. Once it grew beyond around 2,500 attendees, it started having to use expensive convention centers that saddled Worldcons with enormous fixed costs (about $250,000 in the case of ConJosé). But membership size is now broadly stable at around 5,000 attendees, which

isn't really enough to spread those large fixed costs effectively. Roughly speaking, we could cut the cost per member of Worldcon in half by either halving the membership or doubling it. As it is, we're stuck at a bad spot on the price curve.

Our current pricing structure, including an escalating-price-over-time feature designed to encourage people to buy long in advance, is putting people off and probably reducing total attendance. Potential attendees hear about the event a few days or weeks beforehand, say "that might be interesting," but see the price and balk. Particularly when there are other similar-appearing events like large anime or comic book conventions with day admissions on the order of $25. Those of us with Worldcon experience realize that there are a lot more things going on at most Worldcons than at these less-expensive events; however, getting that point across to people is sometimes a little difficult. I believe that if we could give people a taste of what a Worldcon is, we could overcome that price aversion.

Personally, I'd rather grow Worldcon than shrink it. I think a $100 at-the-door membership price is achievable without unduly compromising the event's character. It would be hard work and would probably mean aggressively growing our membership up to the eight-to-ten-thousand level, but I think it would be worth it for several reasons. Obviously, all of the regular attendees would save money, but there's more to this issue than just the money. Worldcons get more attention than your average local SF convention, and I think they therefore are a place where newcomers to the SF community should be welcomed. This is a controversial stance to take, and not everyone agrees with it. Many fans I've heard say that people should start small, with local conventions, and work their way up to the big conventions like Worldcon. Leave Worldcon to us with lots of experience, they say. I disagree. My first SF convention was a Worldcon — the 1984 Worldcon in Anaheim. It cost $75 at the door (about $130 in 2003 dollars) and was also the largest Worldcon ever held. There were smaller conventions in my (more or less) local area, but I'd never heard of them until *after* I went to Worldcon.

(Incidentally, I have done a small study comparing the increase in Worldcon membership prices to the US consumer price index since 1984, and I concluded that Worldcon prices are increasing at about twice the annual rate of inflation. Contact me if you want a copy of the details. Mark Olson, the prominent East Coast conrunner who chaired the 1989 Worldcon in Boston, has been collecting Worldcon statistical and price data. This information is available at http://www.nesfa.org/data/Worldcon/.)

One group that recently complained more loudly than usual, in my opinion, about Worldcon membership costs were Toronto-area fans associated with Toronto Trek, an annual ongoing media SF (not just *Star Trek*) convention in Toronto. TT runs for 49 hours (6 PM Friday to 7 PM Sunday) over a three-day weekend and costs significantly less than a Worldcon, and indeed much less than most general-interest SF conventions I attend. I still reject some of their arguments, as I contend that they boil down to "I don't think I should have to pay more than about $40 (US) for *any* convention." I think it's a little unfair to compare a convention like TT to a Worldcon, which lasts for nearly three times as long over five days and has far more things happening over that time, and say that they're both the same thing. On the other hand, popular-

culture conventions like Dragon*Con cost less than half the cost of a Worldcon and draw tens of thousands of people. Even Forrest J. Ackerman, whose traditional fannish credentials are unquestionable and who has attended more Worldcons than anyone else, skipped Torcon 3 and went to Dragon*Con in 2003. Maybe Worldcon is doing something wrong, and maybe we should look at what other conventions are doing.

One thing that TT does that I think other SF conventions should consider doing is offering a "trial membership" at a free or reduced rate. In TT's case, if you buy a single-day membership, you can come back within two hours and get a full refund. They've found that most of the people who come to the convention planning to take advantage of this offer do not actually come back and collect their refund. They stay for two hours and discover that they're having so much fun that they want to stay for at least the rest of the day.

Could this be made to work for a Worldcon? At the request of Christian McGuire, chairman of L.A.con IV, I drew up a draft policy statement that a Worldcon could use to administer Trial Memberships (write to me at kastandlee@yahoo.com if you want a copy). SMOFcon gave us programming time to hold a panel to discuss the idea. The policy as written is necessarily more complicated than how you'd actually market it, fans being very good at seizing upon technicalities to evade the spirit of a rule, so we have to spell out a few things in detail. But the basic idea is that you'd put up the one-day membership cost at the door, and if you returned within two hours of having purchased your membership, the convention would give you all but $10 of this back. If all you really want to do is hit the Dealer's Room, or there is a single item that interests you, then this is a really cheap way to do it. Otherwise, it's intended to give people a reduced-price sample of a Worldcon at little risk to them.

Many of audience were opposed to the idea. The major arguments in opposition boiled down to:

- It would require a lot of extra work. In particular, it would require a large marketing effort to promote the Worldcon in areas beyond its traditional membership base of other SF conventions.
- It would be difficult to administer. Anything that makes more work for Registration is likely to cause a meltdown. Requiring the security guards to distinguish yet more badge types is just asking for trouble.
- Almost everyone who buys a trial membership will get a refund. Nobody will stick around after the trial period. Therefore, the money contributed to the convention's bottom line is negligible.
- Many local fans who might have otherwise bought a full membership will buy a trial instead (and get a refund). Therefore, the scheme might have a net *negative* affect on convention revenue.

I do not deny that this proposal requires more work, but I think that it is manageable. While most of the extra work and expenses actually falls on Marketing and Communications, most conrunners seem to concentrate on the technical issues affecting Registration and Operations. The current proposal is designed to minimize

the impact on convention operations, but it would require Registration to maintain a separate "Refund Window," and to time-stamp single-day admissions as they were sold in order to confirm that the person requesting a refund is within the allowed time. Operational impact on the convention is otherwise small, because we do not propose special badges or access restrictions on trial memberships. It's the responsibility of the member to return for his/her refund. They've bought a day membership and can go anywhere and do anything any other day member can do. In fact, this proposal is merely a modification of the existing and traditional day membership. The real extra effort has to go into marketing the Worldcon to the local "commuter distance" potential audience.

The thing I found the most disappointing about the disparaging opinions expressed by the SMOFcon attendees is that, in my opinion, they've assumed we've lost any hope of a next generation already. They seem to imply that there is no market for growing a Worldcon, but only for shrinking it. Every fan (as we recognize the term) who there ever will be is already part of the fannish community. Plans such as Trial Memberships would do nothing but reduce revenues because only our existing membership base would use them. Few if any new people would find this deal attractive, and all of those who are attracted will simply come for two hours and leave. None of these day-trippers will stay; none of them will become fans as we know them. Why should we go to so much effort when we know that all fans have already been discovered?

Okay, I'm probably overstating things a little, but it sure sounded like that to me, and if that's what the opponents believe, then it's sad, because in my opinion it's saying that fandom as we know it is already dead. The body just hasn't finished twitching yet. I recall Ben Yalow, prominent convention runner and one of the few people who has been a division manager for multiple seated Worldcon committees, saying a few years ago at a panel about future Worldcons that he doesn't think there will be a 100th Worldcon. (Torcon 3 was the 61st Worldcon.) I'm more optimistic than that, but I also think that it's our responsibility to reach out to new fans and to encourage them to get involved, even if this means Worldcon has to change and evolve. The Worldcons of the last twenty years are nothing at all like those of its first twenty years. Why should we expect them to stay static?

My desire for us to recruit new people and to try things to bring in people who are reluctant to commit what they see as way too much money for too little reward appears to mark me as a radical lunatic among much of SMOFdom. Ironically, my explanation of Worldcon traditions and defense thereof, particularly the "everybody pays" policy, makes me look like a hidebound old fogey to a lot of younger fans. I'm caught between the groups here, and castigated by both.

I will continue to chart the course I have been following, and will encourage Worldcons in particular and all conventions in general to take steps to attract the next generation of fandom. Fandom as we know it is getting older because the population is getting older, but that doesn't mean we can assume that the future will take care of itself. A $100 Worldcon is possible. There are other things we can do to lower the cost besides growing the attendance — my calculations show that simply shortening the lead time

to two years will result in a 5% cost savings, for instance — but that's a subject for another article. Nonetheless, if we don't take steps to assure our own fannish future, in a generation's time it won't matter because Worldcons will have ceased to matter — or maybe even to exist.

The Name and Shame Game

A major row has broken out amongst Worldcon runners over something called Pass-Along Funds. This is kind of complicated, but it has a major effect on Worldcon finances and therefore you (as potential Worldcon attendees) need to know about it. Bear with me while I explain.

Each Worldcon is an entirely separate legal entity owned and operated by the committee that wins the right to host the event. In this respect it is very much like the Olympic Games. Cities bid to host the event, and if they win they are then on their own. This has an interesting effect on Worldcon finances in that committees start with very little cash and constantly have to worry about bankruptcy. If they get it wrong at their convention there is no possibility of fixing things next time round. Consequently, through cautious financial management, Worldcons almost always end up making a profit.

Of course this is undesirable. Worldcon is a volunteer-run, fan-based event. We don't need it to make a profit. Indeed, we don't want it to profit at the expense of its members. So having ended up with some extra money, what do you do with it? You could give it back to the members. Chicago once tried that. They ended up paying around $10 to each attending member. I'm sure that there were people who were grateful for that, but there would have been others who said, "Why did you bother?" And it will have taken a lot of work and expense in postage, bank fees and so on. So the usual practice is to use the money for good works that happen to involve science fiction and fantasy.

Then, at the 1988 SMOFcon in Phoenix, a group of fans led by Mark Olson (Chair of the 1989 Boston Worldcon) came up with a good idea. Wouldn't it be useful, they said, if Worldcons could give part of any surplus to their successors? Then the new committees would have a lot more starting cash to work with. That would make it easier to budget and to pay things like deposits on facilities. Thus the Pass-Along Funds (PAF) system was born. The agreement (available online at http://www.smof.demon.co.uk/pa-funds.htm) is that each Worldcon shall pay at least half of any surplus forward, the money being divided equally between the three currently seated future Worldcons (Worldcons are elected three years in advance of the convention date), provided that those Worldcons agree to do the same for their successors. It seemed like an ideal solution, if it worked.

So does it work? Let's take ConJosé as an example. Melbourne's Worldcon (1999) gave us just under $6,000 in good time, for which we are very grateful. Chicago (2000) and Millennium Philcon (2001) came up with $6,000 and $10,000 respectively, but only a couple of months before the con shortly after we had just announced that we were in financial trouble. Chicago did have a good excuse: they had been in dispute over a very large bill for some time and were unsure that they could pay anything. They have since made good on all of their obligations, but

even so we could have done with something much earlier. MilPhil's money was a big help to us, and they paid a similar amount to Torcon 3 (2003) and Noreascon 4 (2004). So far so good.

But in examining the MilPhil accounts presented to the Torcon 3 Business Meeting Mark Olson discovered that MilPhil had a much larger surplus than expected and should have paid out around $57,000, not the $30,000 they actually paid. Having failed, after some considerable effort, to get what he felt was a satisfactory answer out of the MilPhil management privately, Mark took the matter public by stating his concerns on the SMOFS mailing list.

And so a row erupted. It transpired, for example, that MilPhil had offered T3 an additional $5,000 at the convention, but T3's management reportedly turned it down. I can understand why they might have done that. By the time you get to the actual convention all of the major financial decisions have been taken. About the only major item that T3 could have spent the extra money on immediately would have been better food in the con suite. Then again, they might be able to use the money now to pay the traditional membership reimbursements to con workers and panel participants. I don't know where T3's finances stand.

MilPhil's Chair, Todd Dashoff, also claims that he has some bills in dispute that need to be settled before he can make additional payments. But Rick Katze, a senior member of the MilPhil organization, said on SMOFs that the amount of contingent liability (i.e. money needed to be held back to cover possible future expenses) is only around $13,000 and that in his view some $22,000 could be paid out now without endangering MilPhil's finances.

As you can see, it gets ugly. No one is accusing MilPhil if trying to keep the money. Everyone involved knows how exhausted a Worldcon committee is after the event, and that finding the time, energy and enthusiasm to discharge your obligations afterwards can be hard. But at the same time the obligations are there. And in this particular case it is very important that they be discharged promptly. PAF is a lifeline to newly seated Worldcons. At ConJosé we took this very seriously. We paid out $30,000 in PAF less than 4 months after the end of our Worldcon, well in time for our successor, T3, to make good use of the money. A year later, with nearly all of the bills settled, we think we can probably pay a further $9,000. Indeed, we paid $3,000 to T3 well before we were certain about the sum so that they got it in time for it to be useful. N4 and Interaction will get similar amounts very shortly. The intended additional PAF distribution was reported in our accounts presented at T3 (http://www.conjose.org/wsfs/CJ03WSFSBM.html). More than 2 years after their convention, MilPhil is still holding on to some $27,000, money that ConJosé and T3 could have made very good use of had it been paid more promptly.

But what do we do about it? As Mark Olson said in his original SMOFS post, "When PAF was created back in 1989, we deliberately chose fannish public opinion to be the only enforcer of the PAF agreement. […] If Pass-Along Funds is actually going to do what it is intended to do, fandom **must** insist that Worldcons take seriously their obligation to pass on funds promptly."

Mark is right. We do not want to have any sort of legal requirement on Worldcons to fulfill their obligations. Indeed it would be incredibly difficult to write one. As Mark says, "If we have to write a formal contract to get Worldcons to live up to their responsibilities, I think we've failed." So the only thing left is to put public pressure on those involved to get on with things. No one likes doing this. Todd and Joni Dashoff are good friends of mine, and I hope they don't take any of this personally. I'd be quite happy to cut them more slack if it were only them involved. But if they don't pay up quickly then future Worldcons will also think they can get away with being tardy as well, and then people start to think that maybe they don't need to pay PAF at all. And then the whole system collapses.

The trouble with an honor system is that it only works if everyone behaves honorably. Here's hoping that they do.

Mystery 101

The Great God Pan is Dead!

And so he is. But what exactly did that story of Plutarch's mean? Has Pan really expired with the coming of Christianity, or do his followers simply lament the death of the year king? Some ideas truly die, but others, with the turn of the season, live once more.

New York, towards the turn of the millennium: for Pierce Moffet, historian, dates are a tool of his craft, a filing system for recalling significant moments of the past. For others, they are written in the stars, a harbinger of the future, the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. What once was can come again.

December is generally a dead time in publishing. Few authors want their book to come out in the teeth of the Christmas shopping frenzy, unless it has some chance of becoming a surprise stocking filler hit. But when I was thinking about books to review for *Emerald City* #100 I knew I wanted to include something special. Serendipity came to my aid. One of the things I knew was sadly lacking from my archives was mention of the great fantasist, John Crowley. I was stuck. His famous *Ægypt* cycle is being published over a period of many years. I had volumes two and three, but the first book had been a casualty of my continent-hopping and was missing. I couldn't remember it well enough to feel confident of reviewing the later sections. In the US, second hand hardbacks of *Ægypt* sell for $40+ a pop, but in the UK there was a paperback edition. And just in time for this issue, Brian Ameringen of Porcupine Books found a copy for me.

Once, the world was not as it has since become, it had a different history and a different future, and the laws that governed it were different too.

The first thing you note about *Ægypt* is that it is a classic mainstream novel. Heck, it is actually about a college professor with an unsatisfactory love life. It is almost a cliché, especially when you think that it dates from 1987 when such things were rather more the fashion than they are now. It is also deeply convoluted and self-referential. The book, *Ægypt*, is about a character, Moffet, who is writing a book

called *Ægypt* about the history of magical thought. In it he comes across a manuscript of a lost historical novel that dramatizes the very events he is researching. A book within a book within a book.

Yet after a while you realize that the structure of the book is much more complex than that. It is divided into three sections with unexplained Latin titles. Slowly it dawns upon the reader that these are astrological references, and that the events in each section are somehow driven by the nature of the sign under which they occur. There are three sections in *Ægypt*, and therefore there will presumably be four books to complete the entire zodiac. The fact that Crowley is turning the books out slowly — volume three, *Dæmonomania*, only appeared in 2000 and the concluding part is still eagerly awaited — gives the impression that Crowley is producing something truly monumental, on the scale of the vast zodiac supposedly drawn into the landscape around Glastonbury.

The most lasting impression from the book, however, is that it is full of things: marvelous and wonderful things of which for the most part we can only dream. It is full of the stuff of fantasy.

There were angels in the glass, two four six many of them.

The reason that so many experts in fantasy literature love this work of Crowley's is that it is not just a fantasy novel, it is about the very stuff of fantasy. In writing his book, Pierce Moffet sets out to explain just why it is that fantasy works. Why do people believe that Gypsies can tell fortunes? What is the riddle of the Sphinx? Why do we believe these things? Crowley, in the person of Moffet, traces everything back to the Renaissance, when men first turned an enquiring and scientific eye upon the past. Lacking analytical tools and a body of theory to build upon, men like Giordano Bruno and John Dee gave equal credence to the astronomical speculations of Nicholas Copernicus and the mystical treatises ascribed to the supposed Egyptian sage, Hermes Trismegistus. Moffet postulates the existence of an alternate, imaginary history: Ægypt, a place in which magic really did work. His book will be the ultimate secret history of the world.

Moffet's agent and ex-girlfriend, Julie Rosengarten, a true child of the Sixties, believes that it is all true, and that Ægypt will come again. After his discovery of the lost novel, the synchronicity starts to get to Moffet and he begins to worry that Julie might be right.

No author likes to hear it said that their work is somehow based on someone else's. But with *Ægypt* there is no escaping it, simply because the book is about the building blocks of fantasy. Just look at how many great books reference the same events. Only this year, Mary Gentle writes about the students of Bruno in *1610*; Neal Stephenson finds Ægypt very much alive in the Hermetical speculations of Newton in *Quicksilver*; Liz Williams has John Dee talking to aliens in *The Poison Master*. Even Ken MacLeod's *Fall Revolution* series, which is about as far from fantasy as you can get, has a character called Jordan Brown.

What if Julie were right, what if it were all true? Where do we get our ideas from? Ægypt.

There is more than one history of the world.

Ægypt – John Crowley – Bantam - softcover

Hollywood Knights

The morning is dead and the day is too
There's nothing left here to lead me, but the velvet moon
All my loneliness I have felt today
It's a little more than enough to make a man throw himself away

"Burning of the Midnight Lamp"
Jimi Hendrix

Aftermath. The Rock 'n' Roll Reich is dead. So is Rufus O'Niall. He and Sage fought to the death at the end of *Castles Made of Sand*. Rufus won, but Sage changed reality so that he didn't. Or something like that. They still had to rebuild much of Sage's body, and having a new liver really cramps your style when you are into rock star excess. Fiorinda was tortured and raped by Rufus, and almost burned as a witch by the London mob. Ax is just coming to terms with the frightful mess that came down upon his kingdom when he tried to abdicate. So the Triumvirate is on permanent vacation, in Mexico. It is a favorite retreat for political exiles. But this time it is the Ax that is the exile, not the murder weapon. Trouble comes in a very different form: an offer of a contract. Mexico, you see, is not so very far from Hollywood.

Gwyneth Jones knows how to push buttons. Mine in particular. *Midnight Lamp*, the latest episode in her near-future post-Arthurian techno-fantasy is about two things that I love: music and California. It is also about movies, of course, but we can mostly forget about that. They are so shallow, darlings.

It sounds like Jones had a lot of fun researching this one. She has some great location shots (movies are good for some things) and a fine sound track. She is also starting to understand Americans. There are jokes. The rock stars make lots of them. The Americans stare bemusedly back. In the books, one of the first casualties is the United Kingdom. The Celtic countries have long since gone their own way. Ax was King of England, nothing more. But after years of hectoring the Americans have finally started using the word "Britain". "England", the rock stars keep having to correct them. And of course the Americans are in love with everything Celtic, without having any idea what it all means.

The President stared. "Expected," *he repeated. "That's a turn of phrase. We can* expect *the heads of our enemies to become objects of exchange value?*

Oh yes, the Americans don't understand Celtic at all.

But when neo-pagan ritual murder sites start turning up all over Los Angeles the Feds finally twig that something is up. Wasn't this something that used to happen in Europe under the Green Nazis? Does this mean that magic has finally sneaked through the trade barriers and immigration controls? Could what happened to Europe happen on this side of the Atlantic too? The FBI would like some expert advice. The President and former-dictator Ax Preston are old friends.

And what better way to entice a group of faded rock stars to lend you a hand than to offer them roles in a movie about themselves?

They will never forget you 'til somebody new comes along

"New Kid in Town"
The Eagles

There is just one problem with this cozy little scenario. The President thinks that he knows who is responsible for these atrocities. Magic, after all, is a matter of national security. The ability to alter reality is pretty damn powerful, and Sage's research into the Zen Self has proved that this field can be approached in a scientific manner. Like it or not, there is an arms race, and the Pentagon does not like being left behind. Of course, with the death of Rufus, there is only one well-known, honest-to-goodness, living weapon of mass destruction left in the world. Its name is Fiorinda.

We satisfy our endless needs and
justify our bloody deeds,
in the name of destiny and the name
of God

"The Last Resort"
The Eagles

The middle book of a trilogy is often the weakest of the three, a case of marking time. Would the middle book of a five volume series suffer even more so? I was very worried about this book before I read it. Thankfully Jones comes through with flying colors. The idea still works, although the legend of Ax Preston's infallible charisma is beginning to wear thin. Yet maybe that is all to the good. There are only two books to go, and no obvious sign of Mordred. We know, or at least think we do, that it is downhill from here on in to Avalon. Jones has shown an impressively deft and innovative touch in re-imagining Arthur so far. But then again, ending the book with a descent into the Dark Ages that Ax has fought so hard to stave off may not be what Jones has in mind. We can only wait for next year to see what new delights she has in store.

Midnight Lamp – Gwyneth Jones – Gollancz - softcover

The Wicked Stepmother

Vincente called the girl Bianca, for her pale complexion. It was something of a joke too, for his family name was de Nevada. "White", then, "White of the snowy slopes." But for all his whimsy in naming her he loved her dearly. True her birth caused the death of his wife, but he was not bitter. Rather he showered his affection on all he had left of the woman he loved. And so he kept her cloistered away in his mountain-top villa of Montefiore, safe from the dangers of the world. And safe she would have stayed, had not his master, the Pope, sent him two young people as guests. They were, apparently, the Holy Father's adult children. That should not be so, of course, but the world was a wicked place, and wicked too were the visitors. He, Cesare, was a handsome bully. She was a beauty, but wise in the ways of the world: vain and used to getting her own way by fair means or foul. Her name was Lucrezia Borgia.

Mirror, mirror on the wall
Who is the fairest of them all?

Gregory Maguire has been making a career out of re-writing fairy takes. His first such novel, *Wicked*, has been made into a musical and recently opened on Broadway. The fourth, *Mirror Mirror*, is the subject of this review.

What Maguire has done here is a fairly standard piece of alternate history. He has a tale to tell and he has fitted it neatly into early 16th Century Italy. His genius is in finding somebody truly wicked to play the role of the stepmother and make it work.

Vincente de Nevada, recently emigrated from Spain to Italy, finds work with his countrymen, the Borgias. It wins him the villa of Montefiore, but it is also a dangerous position. When one of Cesare's wild passions forces Vincente on a long journey he has no option but to leave his beloved daughter in the dubiously maternal care of Lucrezia. And when the growing Bianca catches Cesare's eye Lucrezia's jealous mind turns, as ever, to murder.

The story has the usual pantomime buffoons. Vincente's servants number a coarse and superstitious cook, Primavera, and a fat and lazy priest, Fra Ludovicio. The huntsman turns out to be Primavera's grandson, and of course there are dwarves. Oh yes, there are dwarves. Gimli fans will doubtless be as offended by Maguire's portrayal as they were by Jackson's but it is beautifully done.

Indeed, the whole book is very clever. Maguire has had to take a few liberties with history, and one major one with the story (he has eight dwarves). But all in all it is a very clever piece of work, and exquisitely written as well. Recommended.

Mirror Mirror – Gregory Maguire – HarperCollins - hardcover

War Without End

The President stared at his Science Advisor in disbelief. "So, what you are telling me is that Kennewick, Washington, has been taken over by a bunch of space aliens."

And so indeed it has. They are called Minervans, and they claim that Kennewick is their ancestral homeland, a place of deep religious significance for them. The Minervans have been exiled from their homeland for many centuries, but following the great war against the Central Galactic Empire, in which the Centrals attempted genocide against the Minervans, the rest of the Galaxy has decided that the Minervans need a home of their own. Kennewick is to be theirs, and the might of the Western Galactic Empire's Imperial Space Navy is available to back up their claim.

Dr. Beasley seemed distraught. "Maybe we're moving too fast. Certainly the Minervans are weird, but they offer a lot of benefits. […] Their knowledge of physics, chemistry, and biology is phenomenal. We could learn so much from them."

The President was decisive. "No. The Only thing Americans need to know is how to be Americans, and they are not going to get that

from a bunch of pagan foreigners from outer space. We're going to wipe them out."

Fortunately for the planet Earth, a direct war with the Western Galactic Empire never comes to pass. For one thing the USA is discovered to have vast reserves of helicity, a mysterious substance required for powering starships. In addition, the President quickly discovers that armed confrontation is a game he is destined to lose. Therefore he has to resort to something a little less obvious: terrorism.

OK, if you haven't got the idea by now then you never will. *The Holy Land*, by Robert Zubrin, is an extended satire on Middle Eastern politics in which the part of the Israelis is taken by the Minervans, the Arab nations by the USA and the USA by the Western Galactic Empire (knows as WeeGees). Got that? Good.

The purpose of satire, of course, is to make certain things (people, policies, etc.) look ridiculous. Zubrin pulls no punches. There is something in *The Holy Land* to offend almost everyone involved. The Minervans (Israelis) are portrayed as arrogant, insensitive and viewing the Americans (Arabs) as smelly, ignorant barbarians who are markedly sub-human. The Americans (Arabs) are portrayed as smelly, ignorant barbarians who are quite happy to send suicide squads of children against the Minervans because they know that their soldiers don't stand a chance. Their leaders (the Saudis) get fat on the profits of helicity (oil) trading while keeping the Kennewickians (Palestinians) in poverty to encourage them to fight. The WeeGees (Americans) are soft, lovers of opulence, militarily incompetent, obsessed with political correctness and far more interested in getting their helicity than in the dispute on Earth.

The rest of the world gets their share too. For example, the Central Galactic Empire is a bunch of neo-Nazis who side with the Kennewickians (Palestinians) as an excuse for further persecuting the Minervans. Zubrin's obvious target here is Germany, but he makes no attempt to distinguish the Germans from, say, the French or British, and given that the main source of his ire is media reports sympathetic to the Palestinians you would guess that he includes most British media in his targets here. The Scandinavians are given a specific exemption from the neo-Nazi charge, being portrayed instead as well meaning but wet people more concerned with archaeological relics than politics. The Russians get a small role as the Eastern Galactic Empire, famed for being cruel, ruthless and fond of extreme tortures. And Peru gets a cameo as Afghanistan, a country that Zubrin seems to think was duped by the Arabs into hosting terrorist camps.

This all brings into focus the difficulty of using a satire like this to represent a very complex political situation. For example, by making the Peruvians (Afghans) dupes of the US (Arabs), Zubrin seems to be suggesting that the "bad guys" are the Arabs as a race rather than Islam as a religion. It is an opinion, and either way he is going to annoy someone, but the structure of the book may have in some way influenced his choice and my reading. Equally portraying the Arab nations (of which there are many) as a single, united political force (the USA) seems to misrepresent the complexity of the real situation. Nor is there any historical context: we don't know whether the Minervans that Zubrin is describing are meant to represent the Israel of

Yitzhak Rabin or that of Ariel Sharon or some other period. There are differences in Israeli policy at different times, but the book allows very little space to illustrate this.

What I'm trying to get at here is that the situation in the Middle East is immensely complicated and that a satire such as Zubrin has tried to create is almost bound to contain simplifications and distortions that the author may well not have intended. In judging the book I have therefore tried to extract what appear to be the key messages of the book without being distracted by possibly unintended side effects.

The first point to note is that the backbone of the plot concerns the developing love affair between a Minervan priestess (all of the alien societies are matriarchal) and a US soldier who is captured during the initial attack on Kennewick. The message is quite clear: if the two sides get to know each other and start treating each other like fellow human beings we can work this out. I don't think many people would dispute that analysis.

Secondly Zubrin makes the argument that the US preoccupation with cheap oil supplies has distorted its attitude to Middle Eastern politics. This again is certainly true, although how things would have gone if the Saudis did not have so much wealth is another matter.

And finally Zubrin maintains that the Palestinians have been used as a political football by the rest of the Arab world who keep them in poverty and desperation so as to forge them into a weapon against Israel. This again is a valid point, but what do you do about it? Zubrin believes (and I checked this with him by email) that the US should go in with force and require the other Arab nations to find homes for the Palestinians within their own countries. I leave it to the reader to suggest reasons why this policy might not be 100% successful.

The thing that is most obvious to me from reading this book is that there is no neat, logical scientific solution to a complex political issue. There is a tendency amongst the SF community to think that we are superior to politicians: they are stupid, corrupt and venal; we are cool and logical. We might even claim that we can see the right answer because we are apolitical. But the reality of the situation is that someone who claims to be apolitical is simply someone who is unable to recognize their own political prejudices. Zubrin has done a fine job in highlighting some of the idiocies of Middle Eastern politics. But as for his recommendations for a solution, I don't think I would bet on them.

The Holy Land – Robert Zubrin – Polaris Books - softcover

The Return of Mr. Right

John C. Wright was somewhat upset with my review of The Golden Age. He has a point too. It is unfair of me to assume that an author holds the same views as he puts into the mouths of his characters. You can read his rebuttal of the review here: http://fantasticadaily.com/misc.php?fID=36.

Nevertheless, I think I am getting a feel for authors by now. In his article Wright says (in his own voice), "Socialism is a theory that is both illogical and inhuman." Now, I can think of a lot of rude things to say about Socialism, but those two words are

not ones I would use. And I think on the basis of that comment that I was correct in thinking that Wright was not going to produce a terribly fair and balanced view of competing political theories.

More bizarrely, when I try to draw conclusions for our own world from the political ideas that Wright appears to be advocating through his book he comments, "the book takes place hundreds of thousands of years in the future. These issues will not be fashionable then. I am writing for the ages, not for the present generation only." Wow, what vision! Most authors, of course, do try to embed lessons for today in their writing, but if Mr. Wright wishes to be judged by the inhabitants of times eons hence who am I to deny his ambition.

All the same, it is rather a shame, because there are things in the second volume of the trilogy, *The Phoenix Exultant*, that might be of interest in our little world. For example, early on in the book Wright's hero, Phaethon, describes the cabal of fabulously wealthy magnates who control most of the world's industry as "monopolists". His companion of the time, who is rather older and remembers past eons, comments:

They are not monopolists. Your laws allow other efforts and businesses to compete against them. In my day those who opposed the General Coordination Commissariat were sent to the absorption chamber, and members were swapped between the compositions.

This would seem to imply that true monopolies exist only in a Communist-style society, although of course it is merely the view of someone who survived that society. Sadly Wright does not develop the idea, and presumably doesn't wish it to be applied to the present day. But it would have been interesting to know if, for example, he regards Microsoft's use of its market dominance as in any way damaging. There are those who say it is, and those who say that in a free market other businesses are able to try to compete so Microsoft is doing nothing wrong in using its position to crush opposition. Then there are state-granted private monopolies such as utility companies. In a democracy rival businessmen are always free to try to get their own pet politicians voted into office and have the contract transferred to their companies instead. Does that mean that the existing utilities are not really monopolies? It would have been interesting to see Wright's views on such questions.

Anyway, the book picks up immediately from *The Golden Age* stops, with an admirably short if slightly clumsy section of recap. Some lovely imagery follows. Phaethon has now been declared outcast by his society and is thus unable to use most of the technological gadgetry on which his fellow citizens rely. Shorn of its level of VR imagery, his world is shabby indeed, full of dull mannequins and lifeless, unadorned surfaces. When computers can create anything that the user wants, who cares about reality any more?

Phaethon, however, is his usual, pompous self.

Justice and rightness are on my side: I need never think a weak thought again.

That little aside to himself was thought during an encounter with the crime lord, Ironjoy. For a while it seems that Phaethon might be about to get his comeuppance, for he appears to underestimate his opponent and ends up in a fair amount of trouble.

Why had he not checked every element, every command line of his armor when he had recovered it? His armor on which his life depended? Why? Because he had been raised a pampered aristocrat, with hundreds of machines to do all his bidding for him, to think his thoughts and anticipate his whims, so that he had lost the basic survival skills of discipline, foresight and thoroughness.

That's more like it, my son. Sadly for Phaethon's freshly punctured ego, he is quickly back on top of things and nodding sadly at such thoughts as:

Most poor are only poor because they lack the self-discipline necessary to forego immediate gratification.

That presumably refers only to the poor in Phaethon's world and not to anyone in the present day. It might be interesting to ask whether Phaethon's easy triumph over his fellow outcasts is in any way due to his having skills, contacts and assets that they do not, rather than his superior self-discipline, not to mention the fact that justice and rightness are on his side, but maybe that would get in the way of the plot.

Phaethon's luck continues to run true because although every citizen in the world has been banned from helping him in any way, at pain of joining him in exile, there is one person who is willing to take the risk and try to save him. This person is Daphne Tercius, the clone of Phaethon's wife, Daphne Prime, whom you may remember is weak-willed and has committed suicide because her husband's bold antics terrify her so much. Daphne Tercius is a much more spunky and determined character, and as she has all of Daphne Prime's memories she is the only person in the world with enough personal knowledge of Phaethon and affection for him to seek him out in his exile. Unfortunately that doesn't stop her from being a fluffy-minded dupe who is used by both the bad guys and the world government as a means of tracking down Phaethon. Nor does it stop her from getting in the way at a critical point during a confrontation with an alien and getting held hostage. How terribly traditionalist of her.

Wright responds to my criticism of the apparent gender bias in his books by saying, "The war between the sexes is over for a race that can change sexes as easily as change clothes." And yet in *Phoenix*, when Phaethon is about to set off on another daring adventure, we get this exchange:

Daphne: *"This is all mere masculine testosteronic condescension! If I were a man I'd not be slighted in this way! I'd be allowed to go and die with you!"*

Phaethon: *"I think not, my dear" […] "Were you a man you would not be befogged with romantic ideas"*

Sadly for poor Daphne she is by then in exile and is therefore unable to shrug off her female body and don a Mike Tyson-like one, with its attendant capacity for

cool, rational thought. However, at some time in her past she must have made a conscious decision to remain female and thereby condemn herself to a lifetime of feeble-minded incompetence. One wonders why.

By the way, given that gender is mutable in this future society, Phaethon does encounter something called a "she-man" at one point. I could not find an explanation of what this meant, but this person, Drusillet, is referred to as "she" from then on. The only different I can identify between Drusillet and other females in the book is that she displays a certain amount of common sense and a head for business, as opposed to staying at home all day reading romantic novels. Perhaps this is what Wright meant.

Of course Daphne does gets some of the best lines in the book. She is forever berating Phaethon for his arrogance, pomposity, stubbornness, testosterone-fueled recklessness and incompetence at DIY jobs. It is all very funny in a sitcom sort of way. Unfortunately for her, as we discovered in the first volume, Phaethon is always right. This time poor Daphne has what she thinks is a cast iron argument as to why Phaethon might be logically proved incorrect (one provided to her by some of the world's smartest AIs). Phaethon is reduced to a form of argument normally found only amongst conspiracy theorists, namely that if all of the facts demonstrate that he is wrong then that proves that some nefarious intelligence is manipulating the evidence against him.

And guess what? That is exactly what is happening. As it turns out, Phaethon was right all along. Indeed, as we eventually discover, even the various disastrous accidents described in *The Golden Age*, which began Phaethon's fall from grace, were in fact not accidents at all but the result of nefarious interference by the bad guys. So not only was Phaethon right, his engineering was flawless as well. How useful it is to have the author on your side.

By the way, in case anyone is worried that Daphne will miss the final volume of the trilogy, she does at least get part of the way along the trip. Phaethon is swayed thus:

He noticed that it was a good nose; a cute nose, indeed, a well-shaped nose. Her eyes, too, were good to look upon, her shining hair, her curving cheeks, lips, graceful neck, slender shoulders, graceful, slender, and fine figure, and, indeed, every part of her.

Well, not her brain, but he can't see that. No mention of bravery, wit, skill as an author or absolute devotion to him, although she has shown all of these attributes. No, Phaethon takes her along because she has a cute body. It is so heartwarming to see that he too shows such commitment to traditional roles.

Meanwhile, back with poor Daphne being held hostage by the alien. What is poor Phaethon to do? As Wright points out in his article, one of the abiding themes of his books is that the world he described is run by intelligent machines who work by logic, not fluffy old emotion.

We seem to you humans to be always going on about morality, although, to us, morality is merely the application of symmetrical and objective logic to questions of free will. We ourselves do not have morality conflicts, for

the same reason that a competent doctor does not need to treat himself for diseases.

Daphne, being terribly brave, tells Phaethon to let her die and save the world. Thankfully for the world, he does so, which presumably was the logically correct thing to do. One would not want to think he did anything out of foolish sentiment. Thankfully again something turns up in the nick of time to save Daphne's life, because it would be a terrible shame not to have her around later in the plot. If she were not there, Phaethon would not be able to say:

You have read far too many of those romantic fictions of yours. In your type of stories, heroes always prevail because they are good, not because they are correct.

It is a good job that the lessons of these books apply primarily to far future times. Poor Professor Tolkien would have been mortified to learn that he had been foolish and romantic to have his heroes triumph merely because they were good.

I note also that having justice and rightness on your side has nothing to do with being good; it is simply evidence that your thoughts and actions have all been logically correct. In Phaethon's world logic always triumphs over good. Goodness, it seems, is something of a waste of time. Ironjoy, having been bested by Phaethon, is punished for his crimes and emerges from prison a changed man determined to repent and do good.

If I were now as I was then, I would gladly change myself to remain as I was then; but I am now as I am now. The me that I am now has no desire to be any other than me.

This, incidentally, is a large part of Tolkien's argument about the Ring. Those who are wicked of heart see no danger in trying to use it for personal gain. Those who are good at heart are able to see what they might become and are better able resist its charms. Phaethon, however, has no time for such nonsense and informs Ironjoy that he has a criminal personality and therefore logically he is likely to continue to behave in a criminal fashion regardless of any foolish, romantic notions about repentance he may hold.

And perhaps that explains poor Daphne's problem as well. Perhaps deep down she knows that she has a soft and fluffy female personality and that therefore it is logical that she project as such rather than trying and failing to adapt to life as a male. But it is all very odd, especially in a world in which people are supposedly able to re-program their brains to order.

Is it just me, or do other people also find this hopelessly simplistic? Isn't the idea that all human affairs can be reduced to symbolic logic for which there is a formal and correct solution just a little naïve?

In his essay, "Politics and Science Fiction", in the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Ken MacLeod says:

In the worlds of Macaulay, "Logic admits no compromise. The essence of politics is compromise." The characteristic SF cast of mind is inclined to the logical and uncompromising. The consequent "engineering mentality", or an apolitical mentality in general, is, however, well equipped to dramatize political philosophy, by

thought experiments which take ideologies to uncompromisingly logical conclusions.

Perhaps this is what Wright is trying to do. Perhaps the whole edifice of his novels is some massive exercise in satire, and in the final volume he is going to show the whole of his society to be based on foolishness and his hero to be a pompous ass. But why? What exactly is the point of creating a caricature of 1950's science fiction and then exposing it as foolish? Haven't we had four decades of poking fun at it already?

Then again, Wright's work is intended for future ages, and doubtless they will be wiser and more logical than us. The issues that Wright addresses will, I presume, be back in fashion by then. Still, at least I have discovered one part of the books that does have a direct bearing on present day life. It is quite clear to me now that, as a female, my thinking is altogether illogical and clouded by foolish, romantic notions. Were it not so I would obviously be able to understand the genius of Wright's fiction and the logical inevitability of whatever points it is that he is making. Sadly my inferior brain is only able to conclude that in the final volume Phaethon will once again be proved right at every turn and will triumph over all, thereby proving the logical correctness of everything he says; and that rather than being a carefully argued dialog these books are merely wish-fulfillment fantasy.

The Phoenix Exultant – John C. Wright – softcover - Tor

Literary Aliens

The Book

You may not be aware of this, but there are in fact two intelligent life forms on Earth. One of them is humans, although at times their right to describe themselves as intelligent is cast into doubt by their own behavior. The other is books. How do I know this? Because I have just read *The Book*, by Zoran Živković, which is in part narrated by one of these noble beings.

Naturally the books are not entirely enamored of the creatures with which they share the planet. I mean, they can perhaps forgive the casual vandalism of dog-eared pages, scribble in margins and cracked spines, but have you any idea how embarrassing it is to be read in the toilet?

You might perhaps think that this is a clever and amusing conceit, but not one that can be sustained far beyond a dozen or so pages. But in this you would have greatly under-estimated Živković's capacity for invention. In fact the story continues for over 150 pages as we cover every conceivable aspect of bookish life. We learn, for example, of sordid transactions that take place in public parks. We learn of the cunning and nefarious tricks employed by publishers to bring their works to the attention of literary award judges before they hit upon the ultimate solution of inventing lots more awards so that everybody could win one. And we learn the intimate details of the unexpectedly sordid process by which baby books are conceived and brought into this world.

Then again there is the whole vexed issue of cloning. How can human governments possibly justify banning this distasteful

practice for humans, have it strictly controlled for sheep, but yet permit it on a vast industrial scale in the case of books? It is quite scandalous.

In reading this book we should not forget that Živković is a Serb. His English is very good (I have corresponded with him by email), but he prefers to write in his native tongue and he employs the services of a translator. Producing an English version of a very funny satire is a daunting task, but Tamar Yellin has done an amazing job. I would never have picked this book as a translation had I not known. It has cockney rhyming slang. It has jokes about spelling. Živković takes a page of the book to acknowledge Yellin's achievement and suggest that being recognized as co-author of the English version might be an appropriate reward. Mental note to self: we must have at least one panel on translation at the Glasgow Worldcon.

The Writer

Because *The Book* is rather short as novels go (though it does seem to meet the Hugo word count requirement) Živković's US publishers, Prime, have elected to package it alongside a novelette called "The Writer", thereby giving the entire package the amusing title of *The Book/The Writer*. However, common authorship aside the two works have no specific connection. "The Writer" is a story about two men, one of whom is uncertain of his skills and suffers from writer's block, and another who receives whole novels in flashes of inspiration and is utterly confident in his literary ability.

I'm not entirely certain that I have fully understood "The Writer", but it is clearly about science fiction. Indeed, if I have followed it correctly it is about the despair of the genre writer when faced with the dismissive arrogance of his "literary" colleague. As such it is an ideal story to appear in this particular issue of *Emerald City*. I rather wish I had commissioned it.

Živković, you will recall, has just won a World Fantasy Award for Best Novella, beating out fine work by Liz Hand, Paul di Filippo and Neil Gaiman. Prime, being a small press publisher, probably won't get *The Book/The Writer* into enough stores to get it noticed by the bulk of Hugo voters, but you people now know about it and should be looking out for it.

The Book/The Writer – Zoran Živković – Prime - hardcover

Dreaming in Triplicate

"It's always exciting to see a writer try something completely unlike everything else that's out there"

Kathe Koja

Now that's what I call an enticing piece of blurb. But it could also be a way of saying that it is always exciting to see something new by Stepan Chapman because by now we should know such an event to be to a signal to expect the unexpected.

Not that the book being reviewed here is new. *The Troika* won the Philip K. Dick Award for 1997 (the PKD being for the best paperback original published in the US that year). It is by now a rather famous novel; and it is deeply, deeply weird.

Beneath the glare of three purple suns, manipulated by unseen forces, three travelers cross an endless desert: Alex, who wanted to be a machine, Naomi, the human corpsicle, and Eva, who escaped the whale emperor of her native land…

Whatever else you might say about this book, it has some really great back cover blurb.

Yet it is also accurate. That piece of blurb is a precise summary of the plot. Of course there are some flashbacks telling us how our three heroes got themselves into their current predicament. Except that if anything they are even more weird than the desert scenario. There is also the occasional glimpse of the outside world, which is populated by angels.

OK, so something very odd is going on here. Something not quite real. Alex, Eva and Naomi know that. If their world were real then they should be able to die. But they have tried suicide often, and have tried killing each other even more regularly. They always wake up alive again. Besides, why is Alex wearing the body of a jeep, and Naomi that of a brontosaurus? And why do they sometimes wake up in each other's bodies? Perhaps they are mad. They certainly behave as if they are, and so maybe they are undergoing some bizarre sort of psychiatric treatment. Or maybe someone is trying to drive them mad, trying to get them to reveal some secret in their dreams. Who knows what motivation angels might have?

Who indeed? But I'm also interested in what motivation publishers might have. Would this wonderfully bizarre book have been picked up by any of the big SF publishers? I very much doubt it. So three cheers for Jeff Vandermeer and the Ministry of Whimsy Press. Once again a small press publisher comes up trumps.

Which just leaves us to ask what, exactly, is it all about? I don't often look through other people's reviews before writing my own, but in this particular case I was short of time (*The Troika* being the last book I read for this issue) and fascinated to see what other people would say. Most reviewers have concentrated on the weirdness of the book and the fact that it is wonderfully readable, maybe even believable, despite the ongoing craziness. One reviewer bravely admits to not having a clue what it is all about. But I did find out there one person whose explanation made an awful lot of sense. Indeed, it was all set out for us in the book, as plain as plain can be. Alex, Eva and Naomi are reportedly dead, and the people torturing them are described as angels.

The Troika - Stepan Chapman – Ministry of Whimsy Press - softcover

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The Ice Cream Gumshoe

The night-dark streets are slick with rain, peril lurks in narrow alleyways. The police are ineffectual as usual; murders are going unsolved. A beautiful woman has appealed for aid. It is time for a man of action to enter the fray.

In the time-honored, gritty footsteps of Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade and Nick Danger walks Louie Knight, private eye. His patch is the Welsh seaside town of Aberystwyth. For inspiration he visits the ice cream stall on the prom and chats to its amateur philosopher owner, Sospan. The

love of his life is Myfanwy Montez, the famous singer from the seedy Moulin Goch night club. His enemies are a gang of sadistic schoolmasters who have been murdering their pupils to cover up some deadly secret. Not to mention the determined ladies of the Sweet Jesus League Against Turpitude.

The back-cover blurb from the *Times Literary Supplement* has it right. This book is a combination of Raymond Chandler and an Enid Blyton *Famous Five* story. What is more, it takes place in a run down Welsh seaside town. And yet, this is not Wales as we know it. It is Wales as an independent country. It is a Wales that, back in the 1960's, fought a colonial war in Patagonia. Noir fiction, schoolboy mysteries, alternate history: like the bizarre chimeras of medieval grimoires and Bosch paintings, this book is something that should not live. And yet it does.

I dropped Myfanwy off at her flat overlooking Tan-y-Bwlch and drove uphill to Southgate and then turned left into the mountainous hinterland beyond. The sun was shining in Aberystwyth but as I climbed it clouded over until soon I was driving through a chilly fog, in a world of drystone walls and cattle grids. Frightened sheep clung to the banks on either side of the road, wondering desperately how they were going to get back into the fields from which they had somehow escaped.

Against all expectations the book, *Aberystwyth, Mon Amour*, somehow manages to be both grimly dark and seriously funny. You do have to know a bit about Welsh culture in order to understand some of the things that Malcolm Pryce is poking fun at, but if you think of Aberystwyth as Brighton run by a bunch of hillbillies trying to pretend that they are civilized you won't go far wrong.

Most importantly, the book does have a good mystery with plenty of twists and turns. There has to be a reason why the brilliant Dai Brainbocs and the notorious young thug, Evans the Boot, both end up dead. Is it something to do with the fact that their Welsh teacher, Mr. Lovespoon, is also the Grand Wizard of the Order of Druids? What is the connection with the town museum and its famous collection of lingerie? Why is everyone fascinated with the legend of the drowned kingdom of Cantref-y-Gwaelod? And what exactly is the significance of the fabulously rare knitted tea cosy bearing the image of the Mayan god, Mhexuataacahuatcxl?

It does, of course, help to know that all things evil ultimately stem from England.

"Can you see the fawn Allegro behind us?"

"It's been following us since Southgate."

I squinted at the driver in the rear-view mirror. Trench coat and trilby, beard, dark glasses, newspaper balanced on the steering wheel, it didn't prove anything, but when did an innocent person ever dress like that?

And somewhere along the line Pryce manages to make a serious point or two. Poking fun at tin-pot local politicians is perhaps a little too easy. Doing so by giving them a role in a colonial war that you compare with Vietnam is a stroke of genius, because you show that deep down all politicians are the same. This is a very clever book. It is also genre on at least two levels (crime and alternate history). And the mainstream critics love it. See, recommended on all sides.

Aberystwyth Mon Amour – Malcolm Pryce – Bloomsbury - softcover

Interview: Pete Crowther, PS Publishing

I have been noting for some time now that much of the best SF&F published today is coming from small presses. Obviously their product can be difficult to find in the shops, and even Amazon isn't necessarily a reliable source. There is a barrier to be overcome if you want to buy these books: you have to seek them out. It is worth it. But I don't expect you to take that on trust, so in order to encourage you I am starting a series of interviews with small press publishers that I hope will give you more confidence in them. The series starts with the company that came close to sweeping the board at the recent British Fantasy Awards, PS Publishing. This interview is with the company's founder, Pete Crowther and took place at FantasyCon in November 2003.

Cheryl Morgan: How long has PS Publishing been in existence?

Pete Crowther: It started in 1998, and the first books, four novellas, came out in 1999.

CM: And how has it been going?

PC: Incredibly well. But I've created a bit of a rod for my own back because I didn't expect it to be the success it has been — and that success has brought with it a colossal workload. I did five novellas in the second year, and then it just went up in leaps and bounds, going to full length books: novels, anthologies, collections, whatever. I've just done the 49th book. Two more are due out in early January and we have a further 25 books on the schedule.

CM: Was the decision to publish stand-alone novellas a marketing decision, an accident or something you desperately wanted to do?

PC: As a writer I found it hard to place novellas of my own, and as a reader who loves reading them I've grown frustrated because they're so hard to find. For me, novellas are the most effective length. A lot of short stories are the result of emasculation necessary to meet restricted word-counts while too many novels are often padded out to unfeasible lengths in order to fulfill publisher requirements. If you go back to the 1950's and even the 1960's, genre novels — and by that I mean crime/mystery, horror, fantasy and SF — tended to be around the 60-80,000 words mark. Consequently they still stand up as exceptional reads… particularly the Gold Medal paperback originals by the likes of David Goodis and John D. MacDonald, plus Ed McBain's 87th Precinct books (still going strong, I'm happy to say) and the Ballantine SF line featuring Fred Pohl and a score of other authors. Despite the popular ad line, size is **not** the be-all and end-all.

CM: In America most of the short fiction is published through the magazines: *Asimov's*, *F&SF* and so on. They can do novellas. Here the short fiction magazines are generally for short stories. Has that made a difference to the UK market place, creating a market niche for you?

PC: It isn't only our length that distinguishes us. We do limited signed editions, so we are aiming at a collectors' market. Our print run is normally 500 paperbacks and 300 hardbacks for the novellas and 500 trade hardcovers plus

200 slipcased hardcovers for the bigger books.

PC: But you are right about novellas in the magazines. *Asimov's* Editor, Gardner Dozois, in particular is a fan of novellas — I think one of the finest examples of the last 10 years was Connie Willis's "The Winds of Marble Arch" which Gardner ran in *Asimov's* a couple of years back. I would have given my eyeteeth to have published that story.

PC: In the UK there aren't any magazines that can go to novella length: certainly not *Interzone* or *The Third Alternative*. But I am starting my own magazine next year. I've received some funding from the Arts Council of England for at least the first two issues. At the start I'm just going to be doing short stories. The current inventory includes Adam Roberts, Gene Wolfe, Brian Aldiss, Ramsey Campbell, Ray Bradbury, Robert B. Parker and Ed Gorman, so you can see I'm doing science fiction, fantasy, horror and even crime. Each issue will be around 60,000 words, published quarterly, and be digest size like *F&SF* and *Asimov's*. It will be called *Postscripts* and there is more information in the news section of our web site (http://www.pspublishing.co.uk/).

CM: Going back to the books, how have you managed with distribution?

PC: I deal with all of the customers directly, both retail and wholesale: in other words, individual readers plus all the specialist bookstores and dealers.

CM: What about Amazon?

PC: PS books may be obtained through UK distribution companies such as Bertram's and Gardners — a customer goes into a small bookstore and inquires about a PS title and the store then orders it from one of them. I think that's what Amazon does or, at least, have done in the past — they list my books without actually having copies in stock, and when they receive an order they get the book from Gardners.

CM: If a non-UK customer wanted to order your books what would be the best method?

PC: Direct from the web site. We have a US checking account and we can take credit cards. We can also take PayPal.

CM: Do you intend to always target just the collectors' market?

PC: I'm considering doing mass-market runs — unsigned of course — of some of the books. But if I were to do that I really would have to get distribution to the major bookstores. The downside is that you then have to run the gauntlet of sale or return. The stores generally don't deal with you any other way, and if a book doesn't sell and you get a huge return 6-8 months down the line it can decimate your company finances. But I'll face up to that when I have to and make a decision.

CM: Some of the material you publish does become available in other forms at a later date.

PC: That used to be the case. I ran a deal with Gollancz for four years where they published a series of books called Foursight that collected four of my novellas in a single volume. We did four of them.

CM: That included *Cities*, which was a wonderful collection.

PC: Yes, it had China Miéville's *The Tain*, Paul di Filippo's *A Year in the Linear City*, Geoff Ryman's *VAO* and Michael Moorcock's *Firing the Cathedral*, all of which have been highly acclaimed.

PC: Unfortunately Gollancz took the decision not to continue with the series, so our novellas won't be available in any other form except through the PS line . . . or until the author includes the story in one of his or her own collections, or maybe it gets reprinted in a Year's Best volume.

PC: Where I am going to do an unsigned run is with Steve Erikson. His first novella, *Blood Follows*, sold out very quickly, so I'm doing an unsigned reprint to go along with his next book, *The Healthy Dead*, which features the same characters. We're aiming to get that out next spring, and Steve has two other novellas lined up for us next year as well.

CM: You have published a lot of big name authors. Was that part of the plan: collectors' market, big name writers?

PC: My plan was to publish people I like, whether they are big names or not. For instance, I think that *The Astonished Eye* by Tracy Knight is one of the best things PS has put out. It sold out eventually, but I still don't think it got the acclaim that it deserved. I believe it's going to be published next year in a mass market edition in the US — I strongly recommend people to get hold of a copy: it's a wonderful book.

CM: Do you consider unsolicited submissions?

PC: We have done in the past but at the present time we're concentrating on commissioned material. What I generally do is ask people to try me with something. Of course I still reserve the right to say no, no matter who the author is.

CM: So you have turned down some big names?

PC: I've certainly passed on some work from, shall we say, well-established writers simply because it didn't work for me. But that's part of the business. I've edited a lot of anthologies too and the same thing happens with those. The authors are professionals; they know the ropes. They'll send what I didn't like to someone else — where it'll probably be better received — and then they'll maybe try me with something else a little further down the road.

CM: Which of your books have been most successful?

PC: I don't measure success only in financial terms. Of course, it would be nice to have every book sell out in huge quantities but only because it would give me more funds to buy more projects. My primary aim is to produce exemplary work and I believe we've managed to maintain that standard. Thus all of our books have been equally successful inasmuch as they've tended receive very positive reviews.

PC: But in terms of high performance, China Miéville's *The Tain* sold out almost before we printed it. The Erikson I have mentioned. Peter Hamilton's *Watching Trees Grow* was also very successful. And right back at the start, Graham Joyce's *Leningrad Nights* and Mike Marshall Smith's *The Vaccinator*. But I kind of expected all those titles to do well — Mark Chadbourn's *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* was a surprise success. It's an astonishing piece of work and has done very well for us… like James Barclay's *Light Stealer,* which is another one I'm get regular orders for even though it's sold out in paperback. With someone like China — currently riding high in commercial terms — you expect to sell a lot of copies. Other authors on the PS list

who are maybe not enjoying the same commercial success have turned in equally fine material and it's a pleasant surprise when the public picks up on it. And it's even more gratifying to think that maybe they've picked up these other titles by lesser-known writers simply because they're a PS title.

CM: Are there any books that you are particularly fond of that haven't sold as well as you had expected?

PC: I don't 'expect': I 'hope' and maybe I 'anticipate'. As far as I'm concerned, a PS titles has performed well when it's sold out — if it sells out quickly, then it's performed exceptionally well. Thus books that have not yet sold out have not performed as well as I would have liked. They're all wonderful stories, every one of them . . . but I'll go out on a limb and mention Cliff Burn's *Righteous Blood* and Robert Freeman Wexler's *In Springdale Town* both of which are superb stories. And they're both still available. As are Paul Di Filippo's *A Year In The Linear City* and Mark Chadbourn's *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* . . . though the latest stock count from my mailing house suggests not for too much longer.

CM: So where do you go from here?

PC: Well actually I'm trying to cut down a little. We've just had four books roll off the production line, and I think I've started one new project in their place. I'd like to get it down to a more manageable level so that I can get back to my own writing, which has really suffered over the last eighteen months. My aim would be to get onto a nice solid one-book-a-month schedule: we've done 15 this year… 16 if you count the special 50th birthday commemorative for my good friend Steve Jones.

CM: And how do you see the future of small presses in general?

PC: I think small presses will always have a future. The bigger publishers recognize that the smaller concerns can do things that they can't or are not prepared to do… such as publish lesser-known authors and put out novella-length books on a regular basis. But, to be fair, they're hampered by huge overheads that smaller houses such as PS don't have to contend with. I think the market needs both small and large publishers and I see no sign of that changing. The book industry — particularly the genre book industry — is pretty much at the end of the same rationalization that the comics industry went through in the 1980's: one day you had only DC and Marvel and seemingly the next day you had lots of small independents who gave the whole thing a much-needed shake-up. In our field, the appearance of CD, Subterranean, Golden Gryphon, Earthling, Gauntlet, Telos, Nightshade, Tartarus, Ash Tree, Sarob and, of course, PS has brought a breath of fresh air into the industry. I think the future is bright.

CM: Any last words?

PC: The response and the support I have received — the awards, the press coverage, and the regular letters and emails from satisfied customers — have been as unexpected as they've been welcome. I didn't think PS would take off the way that it has. To all those people — on both sides of the Atlantic, plus Australia, mainland Europe, Japan, South Korea and places even more exotic — who have promoted us, sung our praises, and sold, bought, read and enjoyed our books… I just want to say "Thanks". Rest assured we'll keep up the high standard.

CM: Pete Crowther, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

Yet More Hobbits

The Two Towers: Extended Edition

As with the Extended Edition release of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the new, longer version of Peter Jackson's *The Two Towers* makes much more sense that the theatrical release. Freed from the need to turn in a product under 3 hours in length, Jackson and his team have been able to spend much more time on plot development, character development and humor. Consequently the roles of Éowyn, Faramir and the Ents in the story are much more understandable.

One of the major complaints about the theatrical release was the revised role of Faramir. Many Tolkien fans (including Kevin) were unhappy at the way his character had been changed and his attempt to take the Ring back to Gondor. The explanation for this given by Jackson and his script-writing team (Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens) makes a lot of sense to me. Firstly they point out that Faramir has little or no character development in the original book, which I think is a reasonable charge. Secondly they say that they don't like the idea of Faramir being able to resist the Ring's lure that easily. He has to see for himself how evil it is before setting the Hobbits free. That too makes sense. Gandalf, Galadriel and Elrond can resist the Ring, and later Sam too gives it up, but no one else, not even Frodo, is able to do so.

The final point made by the script team is one of dramatic balance in the movie. Tolkien wrote the two books of *The Two Towers* entirely separately: one about Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, the other about Frodo and Sam. You can't show a movie in two halves like that: the stories have to be inter-cut. But that means you have to balance the dramatic endings. Helm's Deep has to stay as is, but it is up against the Hobbits' encounter with Shelob. Jackson took the decision to delay the Shelob scene until the final film, and introduce a worrying but less dramatic final problem for Sam and Frodo that would not detract from the big battle. Again I think he was right to do so.

The Extended Edition discs also contain the usual vast amount of documentary and background material. I was a bit worried at first because many of the documentaries had very similar titles to those on the *Fellowship* discs. However, it is all new material and it is fascinating in varying degrees depending on your area of interest. Although my primary interest is in the script, I very much enjoyed the section on Gollum in which the huge role that Andy Serkis played in defining the character is acknowledged. Serkis had originally been hired only to provide a voice-over, but the physical presence that he projected in his audition convinced Jackson to use him more in the movies.

The new plan was to shoot the scenes with Serkis in them and then re-shoot with him absent with the other actors reprising their actions, but they found that the Serkis-less scenes were generally less convincing because the other actors had nothing to respond to. In the end many of the Gollum scenes either used motion capture (harking back to the previous Bakshi movie, although with two and half decades of technological development since then) or they are the Serkis-inclusive

scenes with Andy painted out and the Gollum CGI added in.

Gwyneth Jones's novel, *Midnight Lamp*, is clearly reacting to the increased use of CGI in films. It postulated a future in which the actors don't have to act — they just have their appearances scanned and the CGI guys do the rest. Only starring roles are scanned — everything else is done with a stock collection of standard human body types. Quite possibly the technology will one day get to the point where that is possible, but the experience with Serkis on *The Lord of the Rings* shows that we are still a long way from being able to dispense with good actors.

The final thing I was interested in with the *Two Towers Extended Edition* was whether anything would be said about the idiotic events in the battle scenes. It wasn't. Jackson is normally very good about addressing areas where fans have complained in his commentary, but on this area he was completely silent. What we did get was a lot of evidence about just how hard the design team had worked to make the weapons and armor realistic, and in this they have done a fine job. Even the pump-action crossbows, which some people may have balked at, are genuine medieval inventions (dashed cunning Germans!). John Howe, one of the creative directors, is a keen medieval re-enactor. The poor guy must be getting hell from his mates about how some of those scenes were shot, and that is very unfair because the poor guy did work hard. There is a lovely story about the ongoing battle between Howe and artist, Daniel Falconer, who has biology training. Falconer was forever complaining about Howe's anatomically implausible creatures and Howe responded with comments on the ergonomic problems of Falconer's armor designs. Howe also reports a dispute with Jackson about the tactical vulnerability of the wheels on the Black Gate, which he eventually won.

Nevertheless there are elements of the battle scenes that are just daft. Obviously many people won't notice this, but for anyone who knows anything about military tactics and medieval warfare it screams "wrong" just as badly as if *Fellowship* had been shot with the Hobbits tending paddy fields dressed as courtiers from Versailles. Anyone who knows anything about horse riding will at least know that the final charge at Helm's Deep is idiotic. And if you don't think that the scree-covered slope down which they charge is really that steep, take a look at a distance shot of Helm's Deep. There is a lovely one in the scene where Aragorn is riding in wounded. That slope must be at least 70°. And then there is the question as to how they got the horses up there in the first place because the back route is even worse.

Overall, however, the Extended Edition is an excellent cut of the movie, far better than the theatrical release, and full of fascinating stuff. It also makes great viewing just before you are planning to see the final part of the trilogy in the cinema.

Spoilers

OK, so Jackson changed a few things, but it does make for an interesting story. Here's what happens.

Sam and Frodo get eaten by Shelob, so their quest fails. Gollum recovers the Ring and returns it to Sauron. He is rewarded by being made King of the Shire. He grows fat on Rosie Cotton's fine cooking,

but is roundly despised by the rest of the Shire because he owns two thoroughbred racing donkeys when every Hobbit knows that you can only ride one donkey at once.

Aragorn and Arwen flee to the West with the other elves. The exiled Middle Earth royalty are briefly fashionable on the New York party circuit, but this dries up when everyone realizes that they have no money. They were last seen running a small motel in Florida. Gandalf gets a job teaching Elvish Literature at Minas Tirith University. He spends his time writing politically charged interpretations of classic legends that would get him arrested if anyone could understand them. Legolas and Gimli do rather better, finding considerable success with their stand-up comedy double act in working orc clubs.

Saruman never quite manages to get clean after escaping through the muddy waters surrounding Isengard and is henceforth known as Saruman the Brown. Sauron appoints him Chancellor, from which position he constantly but ineffectively plots against his master. The Dark Lord himself appoints Grima Wormtongue to run a campaign of national reconciliation. With the "Just call me Tony" slogan, Sauron becomes very popular, especially after allowing a couple of orkish thrash metal bands to play a concert in the rock gardens at Barad-dûr. In gratitude for its part in his triumph, Sauron grants a peerage to the One Ring. Henceforth it will be known as Lord Rupert of Wapping. They all live happily ever after — perhaps.

The Return of the King: Theatrical Release

OK, so I lied. The film is rather closer to the book than that. But, to paraphrase John Shirley in *Locus Online*, it is not Tolkien, it is merely Tolkien-like product. Knowing that she is not getting real Cheddar, the reviewer is therefore left with the question as to whether the product on offer is some magnificent New Zealand cheese made using a cheddaring process, the orange soapy stuff sold as Cheddar in American grocery stores, or Velveeta.

The Return of the King starts promisingly. It opens with a flashback to Sméagol and Déagol finding the Ring. This is partly a tribute to Andy Serkis (who finally gets on screen as Sméagol) but also a brilliant lead-in to Frodo and Sam on their way to Mordor and Gollum's subsequent attempts to use the Ring to turn them against each other.

From there things go largely downhill, with the honorable exception of Merry and Pippin's clowning, which is as fine as ever, and more poignant given the danger that they are facing. The Legolas and Gimli double-act continues to work well too, though it will doubtless further infuriate persons of a dwarvish disposition. But much of this film is centered on the battle scenes that Jackson loves. They are certainly very spectacular, and CGI gives Jackson the opportunity to do crowd scenes that must have Cecil B. De Mille writhing in jealously in his grave. But, just as with *The Two Towers* much of the action is deeply, deeply silly. If any literature professor wanted to show his students just how idiotic and unrealistic fantasy fiction is, he would just have to show them one of Jackson's battle scenes: QED.

With the film being over three hours long we might have hoped that it would not feel quite so chopped about as the previous episodes, but that was not necessarily the case. Denethor's role in particular is very badly handled and we can only hope that the Extended Edition will put back the missing scenes that explain why he behaves as he does. The extra running time that might have been used on plot is instead squandered on endless reaction scenes in which the cast gets to act with their eyes. I spent the entire last half hour of the film thinking, "for goodness sake get on with it." It would not have been so bad if we could have seen some of the war on the Shire, or even had a realistic view of the effect of losing the Ring on Frodo, but no, sweetness and light was the order of the day.

I don't want to belittle Jackson's work here. To simply manage to bring *The Lord of the Rings* to the cinema is a mind-boggling achievement. The work done by the art and costume people is amazingly detailed and dedicated; the special effects are awesome. I'm also very impressed with the way in which they have handled the script (once I've got to see the real thing in the Extended Editions). You can't just turn a book into a film by following the text. Jackson, Walsh and Boyens have shown a real understanding of the book and its messages in creating their adaptation. It used to be said that Tolkien's book was unfilmable. At the end of the cast commentary on *Two Towers* John Rhys-Davies says that *Lord of the Rings* has changed the sense of what is possible in movies, and he's absolutely right.

But in the end the films are inevitably a product of Hollywood. That means that they have mindless and idiotic action scenes, mawkish sentimentality and a mandatory happy ending. However good the basic material, they end up with orange coloring and the taste of soap. The key element in Tolkien's triumph is his focus on suspension of disbelief. He wanted his readers to believe that Middle Earth was real. Peter Jackson's support team has worked incredibly hard to bring that belief to the screen. And all of their efforts have been thrown away in the quest for dramatic visuals and the need to appease an audience that is known to demand happy endings. What a tragic waste.

Finally a quick word for the real star of the show. There is one scene in *The Return of the King* that truly takes the breath away. And it belongs 100% to the spectacular New Zealand scenery. Wow!

Surveying the Field

If there is to be academic study of science fiction then there needs to be textbooks, or at least guide books, to help new students explore the landscape of the genre. Peter Nichols and John Clute have produced some excellent encyclopedias, but these are reference works, not something you would sit down and read. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn have set out to compile something that is accessible and readable, and with the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* they and their collaborators have succeeded very well.

The book opens with a selection of chapters on the history of SF. The most interesting of them is Brian Stableford's piece on SF-like works from before the rise of the pulps. There is always debate as to who wrote the "first" science fiction novel.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a popular candidate, but the *Halstead Treasury of Ancient Science Fiction* turns up some fascinating works stretching all the way back to ancient Greece. Stableford chooses to begin the history of SF at the same time as the beginning of modern science, reasoning that the one cannot logically occur without the other. That's a smart starting point. He then goes on to cover a range of interesting works and writers. I had no idea that people such as Johannes Kepler and Sir Humphrey Davey had written SF. Stableford is magnificently well informed.

The section then gets into much shorter time periods. Brian Attebery covers the magazine era from 1926-1960, Damien Broderick looks at the New Wave (1960-1980) and John Clute takes us up to date. Broderick's is the only essay in the section that strikes a sour note. He clearly has opinions as to which writers of the period were good and which were not, and he expresses them forcefully. He sneers at the Hugos, whose winners he often dislikes, describing them as being awarded by "self-selected fans", as if the members of the World Science Fiction Society had no right to give out awards should they choose to do so. The sad thing is that by and large Broderick is right: the books he says are good are good, and the ones he says are bad are at least less literary. But the fact that he states his case so forcibly and personally while all about him are maintaining an air of academic detachment makes his essay sound petulant and biased.

The initial section is concluded by essays from Gary K. Wolfe on editors and Mark Bould on the media. If you haven't been convinced by my claims that David Hartwell deserves a Hugo or two for Best Professional Editor, read Wolfe's essay and check out some of the books he has bought during his career. Bould's essay is somewhat of an anomaly as so much of the rest of the book is about written SF. He covers a wide time period competently, but you end up wondering why there was no essay on anime. That then leads you on to ask about manga and comics, and that way lies the madness of an ever-expanding book. On balance I think the editors have drawn the line in the right place.

Section two is all about the relationship between SF and various types of literary theory. This is the hardest part of the book to make accessible because it is where the academics start to talk in their own jargon. Nevertheless the essays are still readable. Veronica Hollinger and Wendy Pearson have it easy: SF, with its themes of alienation and otherness, is an ideal medium in which to discuss feminism and gender issues. Hollinger handles the feminism side very well, but Pearson seems to spend rather too much time whingeing about their not being enough GBLT content in SF rather than celebrating what is there.

It is inevitable that a chapter on Marxism and SF be included because so many prominent literary theorists are Marxists. However, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr.'s essay comes across as rather sad. It is, after all, difficult to see how much relevance a Marxist analysis has to a genre many of whose writers have such a fondness for Capitalism, Libertarianism and the American Dream. There are parallels — for example both Marxism and SF have a fascination with history as a process — but this isn't covered. Instead Csicsery-Ronay concentrates mainly on the ideas Frederick Jameson and Donna Harraway, both of whom are indeed Marxists but who are also rather better

covered in other essays on postmodernism and feminism respectively.

James and Mendlesohn gave the most difficult job, that of relating SF to postmodernism, to their friend and oft-times collaborator, Andrew Butler. Thankfully he succeeds very well, producing an informative essay that actually had me thinking for a while that I knew what postmodernism was all about. Butler also convinced me that SF lends itself to postmodernist analysis, which is kind of scary.

The final section is a survey of a range of different SF themes from space ships to alternate history to gender, race and religion. Several of these are written by well-known authors, and Ken MacLeod's piece on politics in SF is particularly good. Inevitably with this sort of thing the reader is left wondering about things that are left out. Why is Al Reynolds not mentioned in the piece on space opera, or Gene Wolfe in the piece on religion? David Brin will doubtless be unhappy about the exclusion of *Glory Season* from the essay on gender. But if you think about it, there is way too much good stuff in the field to cover everything. The authors have chosen works that they knew well and which allowed them to make their points. More than that you can't ask without producing a boring series of lists or an encyclopedia.

Overall then, this is an excellent introduction to SF as a field and also a book that can be read with interest by both SF fans and by literature students. Normally I fall asleep on planes. This book kept me awake and interested all the way across the Atlantic.

The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction – Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn (Eds.) – Cambridge University Press - softcover

Nothing's Inimitable

In inscribing this particular volume to me so that I could not make a fortune re-selling it as a rare, unsigned copy, Dave Langford made the following comment: "you don't have to review this!"

Ha! Little did the foolish mortal estimate the depths of my ruthless cunning! He thought to save your pathetic, human souls from an eternity of torture. But he has failed utterly.

Bwaaaaahahahahahaha!

Now you must suffer!

That, friends, is pain as I have known it. Castrating, bowel-searing, tooth-drilling, drecky pain that makes all of Hiroshima and Auschwitz look like a case for a parking ticket and maybe a small fine.

Reading Langford is like that.

Langford channeling Harlan Ellison

This monstrous tome, known throughout the galaxy as *He Do The Time Police in Different Voices* (*Voices* to its friends), is structured in two diabolically different halves. (The temptation to say, "it is a book of two halves, Brian," is overwhelming, but I know a lot of you won't understand soccer commentator jokes.) The earlier part, one inscribed in mighty strokes of cuneiform on its deep, blood-red leather bindings as, "*The Dragonhikers Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two; The Collected Science Fiction and Fantasy Parodies of David Langford, Volume 1…*", was once published under that ringing, sonorous epithet, but

has since languished forgotten amongst the crumbled, blasphemous vaults of the sea-weed drenched, cyclopean, basalt-blocked library of the cursed forgotten city of R'lyeh, hidden in an angle of the shelves that human geometry is unable to comprehend. The latter section, known only by its cryptic online "handle" of "2", is a fast-paced, chrome-plated, virtual stab at the bleeding edge frontiers of science-fiction pseudo-multi-hypertextual imagery. Or something like that. Anyway, there are two bits, one of which was published eons ago under a different name, and one of which wasn't. Unfortunately for you, O luckless victim of my undoubted criminal genius, both of them contain devastating Langfordian parodies of well-known writers. These texts have, in the past, been known to reduce cool, rational, scientific beings with minds much stronger than those of mere, feeble humans to gibbering, witless wrecks. Now, before some dashing, clean-cut hero can appear in the nick of time and save you from your ghastly fate, I present some examples.

"Well," Baley wheezed, "let's try this angle. Suppose you remind me of the facts of the case as though I knew nothing of them, since it's deeply traditional and we've never figured out a better way to put the information across."

Langford channeling Isaac Asimov

At that fateful signal, each of Nivek's countless ships and planetary installations discharged the full, awesome power of its primary projectors, the blazing beams of destruction combining into a hellish flare of incalculable incandescence before which no defence might prevail!

Nivek snarled in rage.

"Missed!"

Langford channeling E.E. "Doc" Smith

"The Mad Gods," mused the doomed prince as they walked in darkness. "How can this be? The Law of the Cosmic Debit and Credit Balance does not permit it!"

"It seems the Cosmic Book-keeper doth be on holiday." Dylan Worm's voice was grim.

"And now the Mad Gods run up a perilous Cosmic Overdraft…"

Langford channeling Michael Moorcock

Ha! While you have been listening helplessly to the hypnotic tone of my voice an irresistible subliminal command has been inserted into the deepest parts of your feeble brains. You will go out and buy this book. Now! Immediately! You are all doomed. Doooooooomed!!!!

Bwaaaaahahahahahaha!

He Do The Time Police in Different Voices – Dave Langford – Cosmos - softcover

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Short Stuff

Voodoo Apple

One of the most recent releases from PS Publishing is *Floater*, by Lucius Shepard. I picked this one up at FantasyCon for two reasons: firstly I wanted to have a PS Publishing book in this issue to go along with the interview, and secondly because Shepard is someone who I have heard a lot of good things about whose fiction I had not read before.

I was further encouraged by the introduction which is by Jeffrey Ford and which explains that Shepard is well suited to the novella format. Ford explains that Shepard has a very economical writing style, doesn't go much for world building, but does really great characters. Thus he can pack a very good story into a small space. So far so good.

Now for the plot. Shepard has based *Floater* on an actual incident in which New York police gunned down a Haitian immigrant because he reached into his jacket to get his ID and they assumed he was pulling a gun. In Shepard's story the killing turns out to be a staged execution because one of the cops and the victim are on opposite sides of a dispute between two voodoo churches. And if you think that is an exercise in exonerating the police, just read the story.

I have to admit that two thirds of the way in I was rather disappointed. The story seemed very simplistic and I had expected something with more depth. Shepard is clearly a great writer, but here we had good guys and bad guys and a very straightforward plot. It reminded me a lot of Peter Straub's *Lost Boy, Lost Girl*. Indeed, in his introduction Ford says that the novella is a horror story. But then we come to the final third, and suddenly we are not in horror land any more, we are in a fantasy, and everything clicks into place.

Is there a difference between how horror and fantasy stories use the supernatural? I think there is. To start with we need to think back to the articles at the start of this issue. I was particularly reminded of the Farah Mendlesohn article from *Zoo Nation* that I mentioned in passing. A horror story doesn't have to engage with the world the way that fantasy does. It can be simply about frightening people and still work as horror. In addition, with a fantasy story it is essential that the reader comes to accept the existence of the fantasy world. Part of the skill of the fantasy writer is to make that world believable. But in a horror story it is better if the reader is not convinced. There needs to be an air of, "this isn't real, it can't be happening!" There may be other complications too — I have only just started thinking about this. But it does sound like there is a convention panel in here somewhere.

Anyway, trust me, the last third of the book is really good.

Floater – Lucius Shepard – PS Publishing - softcover

Dreaming the Doctor

The previous Dr. Who novellas that I have reviewed have all been by well-known writers who have taken the opportunity to have a lot of fun in their respective manners. The current review is of *Citadel of Dreams* by Dave Stone, and it is a very different book. So different, in fact, that I'm slightly surprised that the BBC passed it. This is not a case of, "let's do a Dr. Who story and have a bit of fun", it is more of, "let's do a serious story and put Dr. Who in it."

I can't say a lot about the plot because that rather gives things away, but I can say that much of the story is told from the viewpoint of an alien character, not the Doctor or his companion. Indeed, the Doctor hardly features at all, and when he does he comes across as a much more powerful being than you normally see on TV. Ace is in the story, and is her usual, loveable self, Nitro-9 and all, but that is about the only levity in the entire story.

I'm not quite sure how this one will play with Dr. Who fans because it is so different, but I can certainly say that Dave Stone has crafted a fine story here. It is worth reading in its own right. Having Dr. Who in it is just an added aside.

Citadel of Dreams - Dave Stone – Telos - hardcover

Miscellany

Greg Bear Interview

Those of you who do not follow *Strange Horizons* regularly (shame on you) may be interested to know what my latest article for them is an interview with Greg Bear. As you may know, Greg is the chairman of the advisory committee for Paul Allen's Seattle-based science fiction museum, Experience Science Fiction. We talked about how Greg got involved in the museum project and how it is likely to develop. It all sounds very positive and I'm looking forward to the museum opening next summer. You can find the interview at: http://www.strangehorizons.com/2003/20031208/museum.shtml. And the museum web site is here: http://www.experiencesciencefiction.com/.

Speculative Literature Foundation

Talking of *Strange Horizons*, Mary Anne Mohanraj, having retired from editing that magazine, has found a new time sink to play with. She has set up The Speculative Literature Foundation, with a mission to: "promote literary quality in speculative fiction, by encouraging promising new writers, assisting established writers, facilitating the work of quality magazines and small presses in the genre, and developing a greater public appreciation of speculative fiction." Things are just getting off the ground at the moment and consequently the web site is a little basic, but it does have more information if you are interested: http://www.speculativeliterature.org/.

SMOFcon News

While I have been working hard on this issue Kevin has been to the annual conrunner get-together known as SMOFcon. This is normally a good place to get the latest and greatest rumors about Worldcon politics. Sadly nothing much new has come from either the Yokahama or Columbus bids, both still being very low key. The Washington folks are also keeping quiet about their proposed bid, but we all know that they are going to do it really, it is just a matter of time.

The one possibility of a new bid that has surfaced is for Denver in 2008. There is already a Chicago bid for that year. It seems that the Chicago folks offended the rest of SMOFdom so badly in Toronto with their antics over the 2/3 year lead time debate that there is sufficient strength of feeling for people to want to run a bid against them. I'm not exactly surprised, and if someone would like to point Kent Bloom, the leader of the Denver bid, in my direction I'll willingly give him some money.

Phil Dick Web Site Announced

Some writers quickly fade from the scene when they die. Others just keep getting more and more famous, even if they didn't get much critical acclaim when they were alive. The best example of the latter is Philip K. Dick. And as a marker of that increasing fame, there is now an official Phil Dick web site. It is run by the Philip K. Dick Trust (essentially his three children) and you can find it at: http://www.philipkdick.com/. Well worth a look. As is any Phil Dick novel that you might happen across.

Storm Constantine Publishing News

I'd somehow managed to miss the fact that Storm Constantine had set up her own publishing company, Immanion Press, but I've just seen news of her 2004 publishing schedule. I'm pleased to be able to report that Storm will be producing UK editions of her new Wraeththu series, beginning with *Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* any time now. The word is that these will include extra stuff, though quite what form this will take is unclear. Storm is also planning a reprint of her SF novel, *Hermetech*, which is my personal favorite of her works. There will be books by other authors as well. See the web site (http://www.immanionpress.wox.org/immanion/home.htm) for news.

UK Conquered

As many of you will know, the BBC has been running a poll to find the nation's favorite novel. This has been going on for some time, occasioning many hours of TV coverage. From an initial choice of 100 books the public was asked to get down to a short list of 21. This contained a wealth of famous novels by the likes of Dickens, Austen, the Brontës, Tolstoy and Orwell, along with more populist fare such as Harry Potter and Winnie the Pooh. Now at last the winner has been announced. The top five, with percentages of the over 750,000 vote achieved, are as follows:

5th: 7% *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, J.K. Rowling

4th: 7.5% *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams

3rd: 8% *His Dark Materials*, Phillip Pullman

2nd: 18% *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen

1st: 23% *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien

So who is the Austen woman anyway, and has she written any fantasy?

No, seriously folks, the results can almost certainly be explained by the great interest taken in the contest by schools, and by the fact that voting was only online thereby disenfranchising every literature professor and *Daily Telegraph* reader in the country. But it is amusing. It is official: we have won the culture war.

Fount of Fanzine Knowledge

There are many reasons why I don't review fanzines very often in *Emerald City*, but one of the most cogent is that other people do it way better than I can. I have recently received a copy of *Zine Dump #5* from Guy H. Lillian III. Guy, you will remember, is the editor of *Challenger*, a Hugo-nominated fanzine. But he also finds time to put together this amazing directory of zines. It includes (assuming I counted them correctly) some 112 different zines of all different styles and tastes. I have no idea how Guy manages to

keep up with them all. Anyway, *Zine Dump* is a wonderful service, and if you would like a copy write to Guy at GHLIII@yahoo.com and ask.

Aurealis Award Shortlist

Australia's Aurealis Awards, which are of the judged award variety, have announced the 2003 shortlist. There are five categories: SF, fantasy, horror, young adult and children. This being rather a lot to deal with, I'm just listing SF and fantasy here. If you want to see the full list go to: http://www.sf.org.au/aurealis/aa2003.html.

Best SF Novel: *Fallen Gods*, Jon Blum and Kate Orman (Telos Publishing); *Wyrmhole*, Jay Caselberg (ROC Science Fiction); *Terminator Gene*, Ian Irvine (Simon & Schuster Australia); *Blue Box*, Kate Orman (BBC Worldwide); *Orphans of Earth*, Sean Williams and Shane Dix (HarperCollins).

Best SF Short Fiction: "Acquired Tastes", Stephen Dedman (*ASIM* #9); "Louder Echo", Brendan Duffy (*Agog! Terrific Tales*, Agog! Press); "Amy's Stars", Sue Isle (*Orb* #5); "Sigmund Freud and the Feral Freeway", Martin Livings (*Agog! Terrific Tales*, Agog! Press); "State of Oblivion", Kaaron Warren (*Elsewhere*, Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild).

Best Fantasy Novel: *The Etched City*, K J Bishop (Prime Books); *Grass for his Pillow (Tales of the Otori Book 2)*, Lian Hearn (Hodder); *The Aware (Isles of Glory Book 1)*, Glenda Larke (HarperCollins); *Voyage of the Shadowmoon*, Sean McMullen (Tor); *Abhorsen (Book 3 of The Old Kingdom Trilogy)*, Garth Nix (Allen & Unwin).

Best Fantasy Short Fiction: "Tireki and the Wind", Lily Chrywenstrom (*Fables and Reflections* #4); "In the Bookshadow", Marianne de Pierres (*Dreamhaven Books*); "Hope Chest", Garth Nix (*Firebirds*, Penguin); "La Sentinelle", Lucy Sussex, (*Southern Blood – New Australian Tales of the Supernatural*, Sandglass Enterprises).

The winners will be announced at Swancon in Perth next Easter.

It is interesting to see one of the Telos Publishing Doctor Who novellas in the SF novel list, but it is the fantasy novel list that really catches the eye. Sean McMullen's book is great fun, and Garth Nix is very good, but if I were a judge I would want the award to go to *The Etched City*.

Footnote

So, there it was. I think that qualifies as the biggest issue so far. My thanks once again to everyone who contributed; and to those of you who found it too long, I won't do this again for a while, promise. But meanwhile, where do we go from here?

A number of people have already written to me kindly expressing sentiments such as "looking forward to the next 100 issues." It is heartwarming to know that people feel like that, but at the same time I'm not the sort of person to be happy with "more of the same". What you see before you now is a far cry from what this magazine was in its first few issues. And if it is going to continue I want to find ways to make it even better. Quite what that will entail I don't know yet, but suggestions are always welcome.

Of course much of my ability to do work on this magazine is a result of the fact that I'm not getting enough paying work, and

therefore have time on my hands. There have been times over the past few months when I have had to seriously consider whether I can afford to keep the magazine going. But so far so good, and we'll just have to see what 2004 has to bring.

Which is a good cue for hoping that you are all having a very happy celebration of whatever religious festival you have at this season, and the very best for the New Year. See you again in January,

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl
