

EMERALD CITY #106

Issue 106

June 2004

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Introduction

June 2004 is not a month that I will remember with any fondness. The problems started with work. I do need to do some occasionally; otherwise I can't afford plane fares and convention memberships, let alone pay the rent. For this month I had three projects lined up, worth a total of around \$8,000. June was going to put my finances back in order. All three projects got cancelled at the last minute.

Well, I thought, at least I can read a bunch of books, and maybe do some work on the web site. Except that shortly after coming back from Wiscon I went down with a very nasty intestinal bug that at one time had Kevin rushing me to the local hospital to have me checked out for possible appendicitis. Thankfully I don't appear to need surgery. But I have lost two whole weeks to illness and I'm still not fully fit. Being confined to bed doesn't worry me. That's what wireless networking is for. But being unable to stay awake for more than an hour at a time, and having a headache so bad that I can't read, is exceedingly annoying.

Consequently, there are things missing from this issue. There is no Found in Translation column, and no mainstream novel. This is because the two books in

question are works that I had picked up myself out of personal interest rather than works I had promised someone I would review. The books I had in mind for those two columns will get their chance in a later issue.

Fortunately there are many good books in this issue, most notably a new novel from China Miéville. Apologies to UK readers who won't be able to buy *Iron Council* until September, but the US edition is out next month so I need to cover the book now. There are lots of other good books too, so I'll shut up now and let you get on with the reading.

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Madison Once More

Looking through the past con reviews on the web site, I see that this year marks my sixth Wiscon. It would have been the seventh, except that in 2001 I was unable to attend because I had a visa application pending. So you might get to thinking that there is something good about this convention. You betcha.

Overview

To start with, Madison itself is a really nice town. OK, so the airport is small and you have to fly in on connecting services from Minneapolis or Chicago on puddle-jumper planes. But there is great

shopping. There are loads of really good restaurants. Lots of bookstores. There is Michaelangelo's coffee shop. And the hotel is within easy walking distance of everything except the airport (to which it provides a free shuttle). There's no such thing as a perfect convention town, but Madison is about as close as it gets. And I'm delighted to see that the 2005 World Fantasy Con is going to be in the Wiscon hotel. That's one I will certainly try to get to.

You may remember that last year I was somewhat disappointed with the quality of the program. I felt that rather too many people had become obsessed with the need to be anti-Bush and had consequently left their critical faculties at the door. There was also some pretty poor moderating, which allowed panels to run away like that. This year, as you will see, I was a lot happier. By the end of the con I thought we'd really got things right again, which is why I was very depressed to read this in Jed Hartman's con report (http://www.kith.org/logos/journal/show-entry.php?Entry_ID=2067):

I feel like both on and off the panels there was a lot of knee-jerk and doctrinaire argument, a lot of gratuitous conservative-bashing, not nearly as much awareness as I'd like of differences of opinion or belief. It felt to me like a lot of people were going with the easy answers. What I heard about the religion panel seemed particularly unfortunate in this regard; it sounds like the panel started and ended with the premise that all Christianity is (a) the same, and (b) loathsome. Panels shouldn't, i.m.o., start out with the answers; they should pose questions, and possibly (sometimes) arrive at answers.

Oh dear, it looks like I was just lucky in my choice of panels. And Susan Marie Groppi had some unpleasant things to say about that religion panel too. Ah well, let's talk about the good stuff a bit.

Opening Ceremonies

Convention opening ceremonies are not the sort of thing I normally go to. They usually comprise of the con committee being nice to the guests, and making a whole bunch of boring but necessary announcements for the benefit of people who have not been to the con before and might not read the newsletter. This time I decided that I would make an exception, and I am very glad that I did.

The dull but worthy bits lasted about 2 minutes. The rest of the event was given to a presentation by the Wiscon players. The story went something like this:

Rick Blaine, a failed Worldcon runner, is so reduced in circumstances as to be running the con suite in a small Madison convention called Conablanca. His only trade is overflow from Wiscon, which is, of course, sold out again. Rick manages to keep body and soul together by running a black market in stolen Wiscon memberships. But of all the con suites in all the cons in the world, who should walk in...

Yes, it is Ilsa. He hasn't seen her since he was running the con suite at Worldcon in Boise. He has dreamed about her ever since. But she has a man in tow. It is the famous spy thriller writer, Victor Lazlo. It turns out that Lazlo is desperate to get to Wiscon. Why? Well I'll leave it to your imagination as to why guys go to Wiscon. (Hint, it isn't to pick up girls.) Unfortunately Lazlo's current publishers

are equally desperate to prevent him from getting to Wiscon. Will Rick take their money, or help Ilsa's friend?

It was very funny, and extremely clever the way they wove all of the major plot elements of the movie into the skit. And of course it gave them the excuse for a brilliant ending line:

Louise - I think this is the beginning of a beautiful convention...

As I understand it, Tracy Benton and Bill Bodden are largely responsible for the script. You can see the whole script (including the explanation as to why Victor wanted to go to Wiscon) here: <http://personalpages.chorus.net/benton/conablanca.html>. I shall try very hard to remember this when it comes to nominations for Short Form Best Dramatic Presentation next year.

Science in Science Fiction

This one didn't turn out quite like I had hoped, but then Wiscon isn't really the place to have in-depth discussions on the meaning of genre. Ben Rosenbaum had been caught a bit on the hop through not having discovered he was supposed to be moderating the panel until a few days before the con (even Wiscon can make the mistake of assuming that all panel participants are intravenously connected to the Internet). Nevertheless he did a fine job at con of finding things to talk about. Most of us had something interesting to say, but I had this sneaking feeling that we were all going in our own directions rather than creating a conversation.

One of the things I talked about on the panel goes back to Matt Cheney's comments on *The Light Ages*, which I referred to in my personal blog just before

the con. Matt takes umbrage at the way reviewers have described *The Light Ages* as "Dickensian." Sure it is set in 19th Century London, he says, and it talks about factory workers and owners, and how bad social conditions were, but it has none of Dickens' writing style and none of his larger-than-life characters. To that I would add that MacLeod is on the side of the factory owners, which is a stance I can't imagine Dickens taking. So how is the book "Dickensian"?

Well, there are two ways in which it is arguably identifiably so. Firstly, as I mentioned above, it has many of the tropes of Dickens' work. In addition the plot borrows many ideas from *Great Expectations*. But to use this as a definition of "Dickensian" is rather like Margaret Atwood describing SF as nothing but "talking squids in space." Just as SF is more than just a bunch of tropes, so is Dickens. So thank you, Mr. Cheney, and let's continue to think of SF as more than just space ships, ray guns and aliens.

The Blogging Panel

I was moderating this one, and once again it suffered from having a bunch of people on the panel who all wanted to talk about different things. Ostensibly the panel was about writers' blogs, but quite clearly we did not have Neil Gaiman or Cory Doctorow on the panel, or even Justina Robson to do the "blogging is a distraction" thing.

What we did have were a number of people whose writing careers were on the way up (Tim Pratt being the most notable) but whose blogs are not (yet) household names. And we had me, who has no right whatsoever to call herself a writer. There was an argument for talking about how

young writers can use blogging as a sort of informal writers' group. While that would have been a great subject for a focused discussion in a smaller room, only a few of us on the panel had any experience of such things.

Despite all of this the panel chugged along quite well. We found lots of things to talk about, and I created a somewhat chaotic live blog direct from the panel (which was kind of cool to do but difficult if you are trying to moderate as well). I don't think anyone said anything startlingly new, but we entertained the audience. Talking of which, I was particularly grateful for the presence of Kathryn Cramer in the audience because as the only high profile blogger in the room she was able to bring an interesting perspective to the discussion.

For next year I think that Wiscon should consider doing more focused blogging panels, and here are some suggestions:

Blog communities as writers' groups - a discussion panel for writers;

Blogging as a literary form - everything from Jim Munroe's new novel to the diary as literature to whether Belle du Jour is real or fictional;

Blogging as journalism - how does it compare to the traditional media of newspapers and television, what are the pros and cons, how can bloggers become better journalists;

Blogging as a marketing tool - how to market your blog and use it to further your writing career;

Blogging technology - the "keep Bill Humphries happy" panel. Because if you are a serious blogger, this stuff is important.

The Haraway Panel

Donna Haraway is probably cited more often as an influence on SF than any other academic, which is odd because she's a biologist. I had never quite understood the attraction of Haraway's work, at least in part because most of what she writes is completely incomprehensible to people not familiar with the jargon that she uses. I had hoped that this panel would enlighten me. I was deeply disappointed.

On the plus side I now think I have more of a handle on what Haraway is all about, although it is hard to be sure without going back to the source and I still don't know how to make sense of anything Haraway has written. But basically my understanding is as follows. Haraway is all about being on the edge. She's not just interested in simple questions like, "what is the difference between a man and woman?" She wants us to ask more difficult questions, such as "what is the difference between a human and an animal?" or "what is the difference between a human and a machine?" It was quite a relief to hear Joan Haran say that, despite what you read in many places, Haraway is not a raving technophile and she doesn't want us all to become cyborgs.

Being on the edge is, of course, also about asking questions. It is about constantly questioning your assumptions, questioning the way you live, questioning what you are doing. This is clearly a problem for a lot of people, especially at Wiscon where rather too many of the attendees tend to feel that they hold some sort of superior moral position vis-a-vis the rest of society. Haraway, it would appear, is fond of telling her students that no one is innocent. Those of us in Western society spend much of our lives exploiting people in the third world, exploiting the

Earth's natural resources and so on. All of this is true. But I got this distinct impression that both panel and audience were tempted to stop at this point and wallow in guilt and self-pity. There is no way that any of us can both stop being guilty and do anything productive. Sure we can give up everything that we have and go and live off the land in the Australian outback, but even that doesn't pay for what we have already consumed. The only way to be a successful activist is to come to terms with your guilt and go and do something positive about it.

The real problem with the panel, however, is that as it went on I became more and more convinced that what I was listening to was a pitch for a religious cult. There was no real attempt to expound a consistent Haraway philosophy. Rather we got told parables about the Great Woman's life and testimony about how she had changed other people's lives. When, at the end, Emily Pullins said that you shouldn't even try to read Haraway as a coherent text, you should just read random sentences and meditate upon them, I gave up in disgust. I like to think that Haraway would have been appalled too.

The 'T' Panel

Panels on transgender issues are normally where the Wiscon community tends to turn on itself. We've gone well past the days when transsexuals were regarded as "male spies" and banned from feminist meetings, but there is still a way to go in understanding their issues. It has been commonplace up until recently for transsexuals who wanted to be accepted by the feminist community to be forced to agree that there is no medical basis for

their condition, because feminist theory holds that there can be no fundamental biological differences between men and women apart from the obvious ones of chromosomes, sex organs and reproductive organs. Because of this, many feminists, and pretty much the whole of what has become known as the "transgenderist" movement, has held that gender is a life choice, not a medical or biological condition. Bizarrely this meant that at the same time as claiming that homosexuality could not be "cured", feminists were claiming that transsexuals could be "cured" very easily, simply by choosing a different gender role.

The effect of this on science fiction has been twofold. Firstly it has resulted in books such as *Mission Child* by Maureen McHugh, which appears to make a case for the claim that transsexualism is an invention of over-zealous male doctors. Secondly it has uncritically accepted works by the likes of John Varley that have essentially trivialized the process of changing gender (whether biological or mental or both). A classic example of this is the character of Zebra in Al Reynolds' *Chasm City*.

This year's panel at Wiscon, which had two self-identified trans-persons represented, was a breath of fresh air. For once trans-people were allowed to argue their own case, rather than being forced to fit into somebody else's definition of what they should be. I'm not entirely sure why this should have happened just now. Maybe feminism feels under threat from George Bush and his allies, and realizes that it can't go around fighting itself when it has such a clear and present enemy. But whatever the reason, I am glad that it has happened.

Next year, however, we could really do with someone on the panel who has chosen to live in the opposite gender but has made a decision not to have any medical intervention. Not all trans-people are the same, and they should not be fighting each other any more than they should be forced to fight feminists.

The Economics Panel

I was down to moderate this one, and I was terrified. To start with I knew that I had at least three committed Socialists on the panel (the fourth turned out to be a banker, much to my delight). And of course the audience would be full of Socialists, Environmentalists and other persons of the Left. It could so easily have turned into the sort of nightmare panel that Jed Hartman was talking about. But it didn't.

I take no credit for this, other than having had a quiet word with the panel by email beforehand and asked them to argue their case rather than grandstand. And they did. I should probably have put Matt Austern over my knee and spanked him at one point, but I didn't because he'd been well behaved the rest of the time. Eleanor Arneson in particular was wonderful. It was a pleasure to have someone else make the case that economics is not a zero sum game.

It was, however, exhausting to moderate. I had a lively and intelligent panel intent on debating issues. Particular thanks here to Lyn Paleo for the continuing riff we had going about the relative benefits of technological and social solutions to society's problems. We did get rather off the subject of science fiction for a while, but it was really only when Eleanor starting talking about the evils of towing

big boats around the Wisconsin countryside that we got seriously sidetracked. (It is interesting to note, by the way, that even at Wiscon you can find Americans prepared to argue for the absolute necessity of owning their own boat, and a huge SUV to tow it around on the couple of weekends a year that they actually use it.)

All in all, however, it went very well. I only had to deal with one person who claimed that by getting rid of economics we could cure society's ills. And despite the stress I had great fun. It made me feel very positive about Wiscon once again, which is why I was so distressed to hear about the religion panel.

The Publishing SF Criticism Panel

This was one of those panels that was both great fun and hugely disappointing. The fun part was that just about all of us who turned up knew each other well and we had a great chat about reviewing SF. Aside from me, there was David Hartwell, Mike Levy, Joan Gordon, Paul Kincaid and Helen Pilinovsky. And there was Todd, our much appreciated token ordinary convention member, and Mike's wife, Sandra. It was good, and we probably could have talked for much longer.

Then again, that wasn't what I was hoping to get from the panel. I was rather hoping that people who wrote, or wanted to write, SF criticism, might turn up to see how they could get published. I know Trent Walters was at the con, as was melymbrosia, and doubtless several other good reviewers. It would have been nice to have had a broader discussion about how and where SF criticism gets published. I guess that, as usual at Wiscon,

there was just too much other interesting stuff going on.

The Campbell Award Smackdown

For the benefit of those of you who think that Wiscon is made up of a bunch of very serious ultra-feminist types who think that laughter is inappropriate until after the gender war has been won and that fraternizing with men is the height of disloyalty, I bring you the Great Wiscon Campbell Award Smackdown contest. I suspect that this was all Jay Lake's fault (though everyone seems to be blaming everyone else). But still, we did have three of the five Campbell Award nominees in attendance: Jay himself, David Levine and Tim Pratt. So they decided to fight it out, that being a traditionally boy sort of thing to do. The event was to be decided over a series of bouts of full-contact rock-paper-scissors. Sadly I was busy at the time and didn't see much of the event, but Frank Wu has pictures and commentary on his web site: <http://www.frankwu.com/smackdown.html>. Yes, you too can see David Levine without his shirt on. Which doubtless explains why he won.

Tiptree Auction

The primary reason that the Tiptree Award can afford to give a \$1000 prize to the winner is the amount of money raised by the Tiptree Auction at Wiscon every year. I generally do my best to avoid this event because there are always some really neat items on offer and they always go for far more than I can possibly afford. I didn't even look at the items on offer this year, except of course for the fabulous "Wonder Woman and Supergirl Get

Married" Barbie set. But, given that there is absolutely no action in the parties whatsoever until the auction turns out, I did venture downstairs briefly to see what was happening.

Well, it was the usual stuff. Strange and amusing things were being paraded around the audience. People paid lots of money for them. Someone had clearly been wearing a giant chicken suit, and given that Ellen Klages was, as usual, in charge of the stage, I was pretty sure who it was. Little Elizabeth Hartwell tried very hard to buy something, but much to David's relief Ellen declared that, "Eh! Eh!" did not constitute a recognizable number and was therefore not a valid bid. Someone in the audience offered to give money if Ellen would take her shirt off. Ellen said she wanted at least \$150. The chicken head was passed around the audience to collect cash. Everything was proceeding as normal, so I left them to it.

The Parties

There were parties: lots of them. Some deserve special mention. My Party of the Night on Friday went to Leslie What and Timmy Duchamp. In honor of Leslie's new novel, *Olympic Games*, they had provided a table full of excellent Greek snacks. Stuffed vine leaves, yum! Small Beer Press rather appropriately did good beer. Madison's other SF convention, OdysseyCon, has a cow mascot, and to help recoup costs their party had a "cow tipping jar." This will only make sense if you are up on strange Mid-Western hobbies. If you are not you really, really don't want to know.

Saturday night saw the annual Tor party. I generally exclude them from the Party of the Night competition because they can

afford to hire caterers, but the party was notable for me in another way. The Tor folks always decorate their room with covers from recently published books. I was browsing along the walls to see if there was anything interesting that I had not read when I came across the US edition of Neal Asher's excellent novel, *The Skinner*. There on the back cover was a piece of text I recognized, because I had written it. This is, I believe, the first time ever that an extract from an *Emerald City* review has appeared on a book's cover blurb. I was delighted. Somehow it made what I do seem serious and worthwhile rather than just a silly old fanzine. As David Hartwell said when I went to thank him for using my words, I have now become a quotable source. Wow!

Of course they got the web site URL wrong: they printed it as emeraldcity.com, but that's publishers for you. I would have had that URL, but it was taken before I started the zine (let alone before I discovered the Web) and I can't afford to buy it from the current owners.

Saturday's Party of the Night was undoubtedly the Yokohama in 2007 event. I didn't learn much about the Japanese Worldcon bid (indeed the lack of information was rather worrying), but I got some fascinating sushi. Tom Becker and his team had been up early that morning and had gone around the Farmers' Market (in the pouring rain) looking for interesting Wisconsin delicacies to use in sushi-making (C/a/l/i/f/o/r/n/i/a Gender Rolls, of course).

Some of the fare was fairly traditional. Carrot and asparagus fillings were not too out of place. Other types were very successful: the smoked trout and the garlic shitake. But it was the weird stuff that

really caught the eye. Summer sausage sushi sadly does not work, because the sausage is just too chewy. Rhubarb sushi was far too sweet for my taste, but I did find people who had enjoyed it. Scarily cheese curd sushi worked remarkably well.

Sunday was dominated by the Pirate Party. Pirates are obviously the in thing this year (couldn't be anything to do with Johnny Depp and Orlando Bloom, could it?) and Wiscon was not to be left out. In particular it gave Ellen Kushner and friends a good opportunity for an impromptu filking session. You want sea shanties? We got sea shanties. Admittedly they did have some strange verses to "What Shall We Do With a Drunken Sailor." I'd not heard the one that goes, "Dress him like a girl and take some pictures" before. But hey, it was Wiscon, we do those sorts of things there.

Guest of Honor Speeches

Sunday night also saw the dessert banquet, Guest of Honor speeches and Tiptree ceremony. Patricia McKillip had clearly been handed the comedy slot, and she produced a fine speech about where authors get their ideas from. There were lots of amusing anecdotes. And those of you planning on a successful authorial career should be aware that two very important things you need are to be desperate for the money and to be set a tough deadline.

In stark contrast Eleanor Arneson produced the traditional political speech. Naturally it went down very well, and I was surprised at how much of it I agreed with. Arneson, like China Miéville, is clearly the type of person who thinks very deeply about their Socialist beliefs and

whose ideas are therefore free of the usual naïve wish-fulfillment.

The Tiptree ceremony went very well, with John Kessel's daughter, Emma, doing a fine job of transferring the Tiptree Tiara from her father to the new Year King (see photos:

<http://www.emcit.com/photos.shtml>). To my surprise and delight, Matt Ruff said in his speech that he had always viewed *Set This House in Order* as a science fiction novel and was disappointed at how little attention it had got from the SF community. Hopefully winning the Tiptree will have put that right for him.

Conclusions

Last year seriously shook my faith in Wiscon and made me wonder whether it was worth going back simply to hear a bunch of people rant and whine about how terrible Bush is. Possibly my view of the con was colored by the fact that I was following China around a lot, and the poor guy was clearly a magnet for anyone who wanted to have a rant. This year I managed to get to a better set of panels and enjoyed myself much more. But it is clear from what Jed and Susan have said that some panels went very bad indeed. Therefore there must be more work to be done.

I'm all in favor of having a feminist science fiction convention. And I don't particularly mind it being full of Socialists and Environmentalists, even if many of them are dreadfully naïve and absolutely convinced of their own moral superiority. It is certainly better than having to mix with a bunch of extremist Libertarian jerks going on about how good it is to be able to shoot people who get in your way. But having a feminist science fiction

convention that doesn't question its own beliefs, that refuses to listen to outsiders, and that acts as a huge group hug session designed to reinforce its members' own prejudices, does nothing to further science fiction, or society at large. Wiscon should always remember that.

Train of Thought

China Miéville's new novel, *Iron Council*, is best experienced raw. Almost any review that you read of it will give away several of the surprises that Miéville has in store for you during the book. It simply isn't possible to talk about the book otherwise. If you are prepared to take my word for it that it is really good, then just go out and buy a copy, and avoid all reviews until you have finished it. But if you really must read a review first, here's my attempt to say as much as I can with as few spoilers as possible.

New Crobuzon: another day. The sun rises over Perdido Street Station, casting a bloody pallor over the Tar and Canker rivers. The Remade clank to work in the factories. Other, more conventional beings follow, if they are lucky and still have jobs. The greatest city in the world has fallen upon hard times. The war with Tesh is going badly, sucking the strength out of the economy. Capitalism, unrestrained by competition and crippled by corruption, is falling apart at the seams. Even once mighty companies such as the Transcontinental Railroad Trust are slipping into bankruptcy.

Ori Ciuraz knows that something needs to be done. His friends in revolutionary

movements such as the Runagate Rampants do nothing but talk. What the city needs is direct action, something to inspire the people and make them rise up. There is a new revolutionary group in town, one that believes in hitting the rich where it hurts. Parliament, of course, brands Toro and his gang as criminals, murderers. And so they are, but at least they are Doing Something. As far as Ori is concerned, desperate measures are called for.

Other people have a rather different kind of desperation in mind. Judah Low, the golem-maker, has set off into the wilds in search of hope. Cutter and his band of revolutionary companions are following him. Each has their reasons, but above all they want what Judah wants, they want to find a myth, and they want it to be true. For Judah claims to be possessed of ancient knowledge, something that Parliament is so frightened of that it will send large troops of militia out after him. Judah thinks that he knows how to find *Iron Council*.

Those who were disappointed that *The Scar* took us away from the despoiled gothic pustulence that is New Crobuzon will be delighted by *Iron Council*. The city is back, uglier than ever. Those who have complained that Miéville puts little of his politics in his books (though that is not true, they just haven't noticed it) will be delighted with this tale of political activism and revolution. Those who just love Miéville's runaway inventiveness will be paralyzed with ecstasy as Cutter and his crew traipse through the wilds of Bas-Lag, encountering one marvelous beast after another.

In a zone of dead, bleached trees, an ursine thing, unclear and engorged with changing shapes and colours, reeled out of the brush toward them. They screamed, except Pomeroy who fired into the creature's chest. With a soft explosion it burst into scores of birds and hundreds of bottleglass flies, which circled them in the air and recongealed beyond them as the beast. It shuffled from them. Now they could see the feathers and wing cases that made up its pelt.

"I been in these woods before," said Pomeroy. "I know what a throng-bear looks like."

Structurally, *Iron Council* is a sandwich. The front and back thirds of the book chop back between the viewpoints of Cutter and Ori, the former part setting the scene, the latter building to a stunning climax. The central third, which I suspect many will find over-long because it lacks the frenetic pace of the other sections, tells the decades-old backstory of Judah Low, how he came by his magical powers, and how *Iron Council* came into being. Miéville uses it at least in part to have fun with genre, because much of the action is set out in the wild west of Bas-Lag, along the construction line of the Transcontinental Railway. There are cowboys, there are gamblers, there are whores. It is all very desperado.

But there are workers too. The whole economy is dependent not on cows, but on the railroad, on the investment of Weather Wrightby and his company. If things go badly back in the money markets of New Crobuzon then things go far worse out at the railhead. And that far away from the city, it is rather easier to call a strike.

Oh, and if you haven't had enough of genre-mangling, there are also trains. Miéville trains.

Its headlamps were eyes now, predictably, bristling with thick wire lashes, its cowcatcher a jawful of protruding teeth. The huge tusks of wilderness animals were strapped and bolted to them. The front nub of its chimney wore a huge welded nose, the smokestack ajut from it in nonsense anatomy. Sharpened girders gave it horns.

I suspect that *Iron Council* will attract more debate than any of Miéville's previous books, simply because the politics is so much more overt. Parts of it remind me of my own days in student politics. The Rungate Rampants are reminiscent of the Socialist Workers' Party, forever holding caucuses, producing and distributing newspapers and pamphlets. Toro and his crew are more like the International Marxist Group, heading off to demonstrations with their studded boots, baseball bats and hard hats looking for some "bovver". Which is the correct way to further the revolution? Miéville doubtless has his views, but he has his characters argue the point forcibly before showing us how things turn out.

The GLBT community will be pleased to hear that a major theme of *Iron Council* is a gay love story. I suspect that they will be mostly pleased. Drag queens may be a little less impressed with their portrayal in the book. There will be discussion. There will be argument. But then the whole book is shot through with argument.

"It's a fairy tale," he said.

"It ain't."

"A fable. There's no Iron Council."

"They want you to think that. If there's no Iron Council, then we ain't never took power."

But if there is, and there is, we did it before, we can do it again."

What I like most about the book is that the sentimentality, such as there is, is in the right place. While there may be starry-eyed talk of the purpose of revolution, there is no disguising the ugliness of its process. When things get bad in New Crobuzon, the working classes don't raise the red flag and man the barricades, they seek out defenseless foreigners and massacre them. The New Quill Party is Miéville's version of the British National Party. In a beautiful piece of imagery their uniform is not shaved heads, braces and Doc Marten's, it is pinstripe suits and bowler hats, evoking both the City Gentleman and *A Clockwork Orange*.

The book's argument, which is made very forcibly, is that solidarity is not a moral choice, it is a necessity. Revolution cannot succeed without it. Equally, every revolution has its traitors, and every revolution has someone seeking to turn civil disruption to their advantage. And finally, there is no shining path of dialectics on which the true believers can ride to victory. If you want a revolution to work, you have to fight for it, and die for it. And even then it may not succeed.

"We were meant to do this," she said.

*"There's no plan to history," he shouted.
"You'll die."*

What I liked least about the book is that New Crobuzon and its minions are so unutterably nasty. That is perhaps understandable with Mayor Stem-Fulcher, but there is a squad of militia that tracks our heroes half way across the world

through unimaginable dangers. Surely they must have in some way believed in what they were doing, rather than relying solely on the vituperative arrogance they get for a farewell speech.

In the end, however, it all comes back to Lampesuda: "all things must change so that things can remain the same." Consider three books. In *Lucifer's Dragon* Jon Courtenay Grimwood stages a revolution where the good guys win and, as a result of their victory, discover that they have become The Government. In *The Light Ages*, Ian MacLeod cheats by hauling in a miracle so that conservatism can triumph and radicalism be painted foolish. Miéville, as you might expect, is not so enamored of Lampesuda's fatalism. The message that I get from *Iron Council* is that if things change, if only for a moment, then nothing is ever the same again. No one knows where the rails of history will take us, but we know where they have been. And if we record that somehow, perhaps in a book, then in some little corner of the world there will always be hope.

There will always be Iron Council.

*All along the southbound odyssey
The train pulls out at Kankakee
Rolls along past houses, farms and fields.
Passin' trains that have no names,
Freight yards full of old black men
And the graveyards of the rusted automobiles.*

"City of New Orleans"

This has been a public service announcement on behalf of the Send A Hugo To China Campaign. We now return you to your normal programming.

Logic Gates

Imagine a world where speaking or writing words can literally and directly make things happen, where getting one of those words wrong can wreak unbelievable havoc, but where with the right spell you can summon immensely powerful agencies to work your will. Imagine further that this world is administered: there is an extensive division of labour, among the magicians themselves and between the magicians and those who coordinate their activity. It’s bureaucratic, and also (therefore) chaotic, and it is full of people at desks muttering curses and writing invocations, all beavering away at a small part of the big picture. The coordinators, because they don’t understand what’s going on, are easy prey for smooth talking preachers of bizarre cults that demand arbitrary sacrifices and vanish with large amounts of money. Welcome to the IT department.

Ken MacLeod

Ah, but is it IT that sounds like magic, or magic that sounds like IT? Suppose that Alan Turing really had completed his theorem on “Phase Conjugate Grammars for Extradimensional Summoning.” Suppose that you had read Knuth’s secret fourth volume of *The Art of Computer Programming*, the one dealing with Turing’s theorem. Suppose also that you were familiar with the works of IT pioneers such as Dee, Crowley and Al-Hazred. Then you would probably be a threat to national security of such monumental proportions that you would

have little choice but to join The Laundry or face summary execution.

“Nobody even noticed me until I’d worked out the geometry curve iteration method for invoking Nyarlathotep and nearly wiped out Birmingham by accident. Then they came and offered me a post of Senior Scientific Officer and made it clear that ‘no’ wasn’t on the list of acceptable answers.”

If you are thinking that Charlie Stross’s new book, *The Atrocity Archives*, sounds a bit like a Marcus Rowland *Call of Cthulhu* scenario only without the Nazi nuns on motorbikes then you’d be dead right. Except that it does have Nazis, they just aren’t nuns on motorbikes. If you are also thinking that it reminds you of Tim Powers’ superb novel, *Declare*, then you would be right also. Stross makes a point of noting in an afterword that he was made aware of *Declare* while writing the book and made a point of not reading it until he was done, just in case. Having now read Powers’ novel, Stross notes that his book is to Len Deighton as *Declare* is to John Le Carre; it is a different sort of spy story, and he’s quite right there. I should also note that word for word, character for character, *Declare* is a much better piece of literature. But wacky idea for wacky idea, fabulous pseudo-science justification for fabulous pseudo-science justification, Stross’s book is streets ahead as a marketable concept. That it should be being published by an American small press speaks volumes for the lack of talent-spotting ability of the British publishing industry.

But let’s get back to the book. *The Atrocity Archives* is actually two stories bound together. The first, “The Atrocity Archive”

(no final 's') is a blessedly short 200 page novel which introduces us to the concept of The Laundry, a super-secret British Intelligence unit devoted to protecting Her Majesty's Kingdom from tentacled beings from beyond the stars. It has computers, it has Nazis, it has an atom bomb and it is really quite deliciously silly. There is also "The Concrete Jungle", a cautionary tale about Milton Keynes and concrete cows, Ken MacLeod's introduction (quoted above), an essay by Stross on the origins of the stories, and a helpfully glossary of acronyms (MI5, GCHQ, NSA, SAS, CPU, TLA and so on).

If I have a concern about the book it is mainly about gender roles. The primary female characters in the stories fall into three main classes: drop-dead-gorgeous-love-interest (who spends all her time screaming and getting kidnapped), action-babe (as per *Alias* and many other TV shows) and bitch-boss. I suspect that Stross has suffered from bitch-boss syndrome in the past. It is, after all, not at all unknown. But the way it is used in the book, and some of the things Stross says in his essay, remind me strongly of that old saw about division of labor in married couples. The men worry about important things like whether the Chancellor should raise interest rates, who will win the FA Cup and how to protect the nation from tentacled monstrosities; and the women worry about trivial nonsense such as whether they have enough money to pay the rent and what they will have for dinner. There is a definite air of "the women want to prevent us from playing with our toys" air about *The Atrocity Archives*. But the toys are so much fun that you can't imagine why any sane person would not want to play with them.

Other than that, no complaints. Stross's knowledge of computing is top notch,

which is understandable as he used to be a programmer and then a computer journalist. His historical research is excellent. His geeky knowledge of hardware of all types is way beyond anything that I might expect (and most of the time confined to relatively short bursts of expository enthusiasm). He even manages to prove that the Iraqis didn't have access to any serious weapons of mass destruction.

"He means that the Mukhabarat simply don't have the technology to summon an incubus. Nor do they generally manage incarnations that leave Precambrian slime all over the carpet; about all they're up to is interrogation and compulsion of watchers and a little bit of judicious torture. No real control of phase-space geometry, no Enochian deep grammar parse-tree generators - at least none that we've seen the source code to."

There, aren't you relieved to know that?

After all, the universe is an infinite place, and other dimensions are closer than you might think. The many-angled ones lurk at the bottom of the Mandelbrot set, and they have infinite patience. Sooner or later, someone will open a gate, and if The Laundry isn't there to close it up again very quickly then the spawn of Cthulhu might get to eat our brains at last.

A mind is a dangerous thing to taste, and sometimes - only sometimes - things come out of the woodwork that like the flavour of our thoughts.

This review has been classified under Section Three of the Official Secrets Act. By reading it you have, de facto,

consented to sign that section, in blood. Please report to Mornington Crescent underground station in London. You will be collected. Do not speak to anyone concerning what you have just read.

The Atrocity Archives – Charles Stross – Golden Gryphon - hardcover

Perfectly Horrifying

As regular readers will know, I'm not a great fan of horror fiction. Splatter doesn't do anything for me. I really don't see the point. But horror doesn't have to mean a body count that exceeds the page count, or enough blood to feed a legion of vampires for eternity. With his new novel, *Perfect Circle*, Sean Stewart shows that horror can be very simple and very effective.

Of course if you are going to write horror it does help to set it in Texas. I'm sure that people are going to write to me and complain that Texas is a perfectly wonderful place, but as far as I am concerned just about everything about Texan culture (at least as portrayed by Stewart, who does have the advantage of having lived there) can easily be turned to use in a horror story. You have a macho obsession with guns, you have widespread devotion to thought-free philosophies such as evangelical Christianity and patriotism, and you have Family. Just about the only thing that is missing is Catbert the Evil Human Resources Director. Shudder.

One of the big drawbacks with being left wing is that you aren't supposed to want to blow shit up, which is purely unnatural in any full-blooded Texan male. My feeling is, if you are a

James Taylor/Simon and Garfunkel liberal, you definitely aren't allowed to pick up a gun, but those of us in the Sex Pistols/Buttonhole Surfers crowd get a little more leeway for random acts of violence.

Stewart, however, is content to mostly work with more traditional horror themes. Sure he has macho and guns and a dysfunctional, white trash background for his characters. But his main frame of reference is that of the ghost story. Ghosts are, after all, seriously good horror material. To start with they are dead, so it is kind of hard to get rid of them. Stakes through the heart and silver bullets don't really cut it. And of course in order to get to be ghosts they must have died horribly. Best of all, ghosts really hate the living, especially those who might have had something to do with said horrible demise. Over all else, ghosts want revenge. They want people to suffer.

Texas, of course, is just full of people who have been shot in a quarrel, or rundown by SUVs, or raped and murdered, or blown up in refinery accidents. Texas is full of ghosts, and Will Kennedy can see them.

The present is a rope stretched over the past. The secret to walking it is, you never look down. Not for anyone, not even family. The secret is to pretend that you can't hear the voices of the people who have fallen down there in the dark.

Being able to see ghosts is not good. You end up knowing a whole load of things that other people have no means of knowing. It means you start conversations with people that you can see but others can't. And of course you become a prime

target for any upset ghost wanting to meddle in the affairs of the living. It is hardly surprising that most people you know tend to assume that you are totally crazy.

Maybe a smarter, more together person than Will Kennedy might have been able to cope better. But if you are the sort of guy whose wife divorces him when she gets pregnant because she'd rather raise the child alone than risk you having anything to do with it. If you are the sort of person who gets fired from a succession of ever-more dead-end jobs. If you really can't cope very well with life, then you are probably not going to cope very well with the dead either.

It would have been easier to believe in happy endings. But not every ending is a happy one, for Christ's sake. That's life in the real world. There is a fountain filled with blood.

If *Perfect Circle* has a flaw at all, it is that it is fairly easy for the reader to guess what the ghosts are up to long before Will does. But then Will isn't exactly the brightest spark in Texas so perhaps this is understandable. What is much more important, however, is that the story sucks you in, drags you along, even gets you caring about its many-time-loser hero. That's anxiety at work. All of the best horror fiction works on generating anxiety. You can't put the book down because you just have to know what is going to happen next. You can't sleep if you don't find out. Sean Stewart manages this brilliantly. This is the way that horror fiction should be done.

Oh, and the soundtrack is great too.

Perfect Circle - Sean Stewart - Small Beer Press
- trade paperback

The End is Nigh

I think that I would have ended up recommending Lyda Morehouse's cyber-apocalypse series even if she had made a total hash of the ending. To start with, you just shouldn't be able to get away with what she has done. It shouldn't be possible to get published with a cyberpunk detective series in which several of the characters are angels. And even if it was you should not be portraying Gabriel as a black Muslim and Uriel/Ariel as a cross-dressing Buddhist. Nor should you have your angel characters consistently refer to God as "Mother". Not in America, anyway. Someone at RoC had a serious case of suicidal bravery when they bought this series, and I'm so glad that they did.

Of course when Morehouse first started writing this series the prospect of an Evangelical Christian government in the US was a depressing but distant possibility. Now it is very close to reality. And that makes the whole thing much more serious. Up until recently, Morehouse has been able to get away with what she is doing because she has a wonderfully twisted sense of humor. Now, with the series reaching its conclusion, and theocracy on the rise all around the world, she has to say something serious. There has to be a theological message, and it is by no means obvious from the earlier volumes what that is going to be.

But let's stick with the humor for a little longer. *Apocalypse Array* opens with the Antichrist (rogue Inquisitor Emmaline McNaughton) getting married to Satan (Sammael Morningstar, as he prefers to be

called). This doesn't happen in just any book, and the characters are well aware of the absurdity of their being joined in holy matrimony.

I watched Emmaline smile and clasp hands with the various celebrities that passed us in waves. Even though Em kept her hair short, the locks above her forehead threatened to twist into three perfectly shaped loops that, at the right angle, looked almost exactly like three sixes. My darling Antichrist, I thought, and leaned over to whisper in her ear our private joke. "You're the Beast," I told her.

She gave me a little peck on the cheek. "You old devil, you."

Not standing much of a chance with the religious authorities of her world, Emmaline starts out getting supporters from those segments of humanity who have been forsaken or rejected by traditional religion. She courts the atheists, the gays, the pagans, the Gorgons (victims of the nanotech Medusa Plague). She becomes very popular. To those of us not of a fundamentalist frame of mind she does an awful lot of good. And to the others she simply confirms her status as the Antichrist. I mean, the Antichrist would be in favor of gay marriages, right?

Of course, not everything goes easily for her. Being Evil, Emmaline and Morningstar are both ferociously competitive and somewhat jealous of each other.

Where was this written? I wondered. Where in the Talmud or the Koran or the Bible did it say, "Lo, and Satan fetcheth the coffee for the Antichrist and her minions"?

Meanwhile, Amariah, daughter of the Archangel Michael and former New York cop, Deidre McManus, is growing up. In the last volume, *Messiah Node*, Michael gave his human life to save her and returned to Heaven. If she is to be the new Messiah, Deidre is going to have to guide her through that role by herself. Well, maybe with a bit of help from the expert hacker, Mouse, and maybe from Ariel if she can stop thinking about clothes for more than a few seconds. God, it seems, does not exactly have a very good plan.

Catching up with the rest of the cast, the AIs, Dragon and Page, are rather worried by a new development online. There is a game called Soul Stealer that seems to be eating up more and more processing power. Out in the real world, teenage kids are getting addicted to the game and going missing. Deidre is hired to investigate one such case, and Amariah would seem to be the perfect person to infiltrate the game subculture.

Quite how this had bearing on the End of All Times is by no means clear. Frequent "quotes" from the output of The Fundamentalist Press suggest all sorts of wild theories. But that's just Morehouse having fun. At some point God's plan has to be revealed. And the one thing that you have to bear in mind is that She moves in Very Mysterious Ways. Much like the author, really. If you can fathom what Morehouse is up to, well you are doing better than I did. But wrap it up she does, all of a rush in the last few pages. And it is beautiful.

Job done, series over, very much looking forward to something new.

Apocalypse Array - Lyda Morehouse - RoC - mass market paperback

Twilight of the Gods

If you are looking for a pair of stereotypes to represent the sex war you can't do much better than go back to ancient Greece. Zeus and Hera are the archetypal feuding couple. He is a bad-tempered, bullying philanderer. She is vain, nagging and consumed with jealousy and plans for revenge. The ancient Greeks might not have solved the sex war, but they have surely framed the argument. Which makes it entirely appropriate that Zeus and Hera should turn up once again in modern-day New York, as they do in Leslie What's debut novel, *Olympic Games*.

Of course the divine couple are by no means the only characters in the book. Much of the action and entertainment is provided by a range of interesting mortals of various types. For example, early in the book, while spying on her husband in insect form, Hera ends up getting raped by a beetle. Being pregnant does help bring her husband back into line for a while, but it also results in a very strange child. Then there is Penelope, the nymph who Zeus seduced back in the old days and who, to save her from Hera's wrath, he turned into a tree. And then forgot about her for 8,000 years. There is also The Oracle, an old man who can tell the future and therefore knows it is time to pick a successor.

Her son looked straight at her. His eyes were all iris, black, and framed by full dark lashes, and his tongue darted out, as if sniffing the air. When the nurse picked him up to hold against her shoulder for a burp, Hera saw he had a hunchback and scrawny brown wings that wrapped across his back like a cape. His tiny feet were shaped like hooves.

The more human characters include Alexander, a chef at the Parthenon Diner, a restaurant close to Zeus's apartment. There is Possum, a talented young artist who has spent most of his life cooped up in a remote mountain cabin with his mad mother who encouraged him to walk backwards everywhere. And there is Eddie, 30+ years in body, going on 15 in mind, who likes nothing more than doing the laundry and moving boxes around his father's grocery store, all to a very rigid schedule.

Much of the book is highly amusing, in part because of the stereotyped sex-war narrative, but also because What has a delightfully down-to-earth view of the world. She has a great time puncturing pretensions.

The man with crossed eyes was eating the "Healthy Start-Up" breakfast of granola, plain yoghurt, fresh fruit. The Oracle fought not to feel superior. His cinammon roll had been buttery, spicy, and sticky sweet. How could anything be healthier than experiencing the joy of eating?

It would be a mistake, however, to view this book solely as a comedy. Sure it has some great funny moments, but there are two things that set it apart from the usual comedy fantasy fare. The first is that What seems to have an excellent touch for the fantastic. Zeus and Hera, of course, use their powers in crass and selfish ways to satisfy their current whims. Other occurrences of magic, however, are much more in keeping with what you'd expect from a high quality urban fantasy such as you might get from Charles De Lint or Terry Windling.

"Dang!" Hera said. "Religion! Why's it always have to be religion?" Men! They were either porking virgins or founding new religions; never anything in between.

The other important thing about the book is that when it gets to the end all pretence at comedy is dropped. The book has serious points to make about men, gods, personal responsibility and so on, and it makes them well. I don't expect to see this book on the Hugo shortlist next year, but for a first novel it is pretty impressive. Leslie What is certainly a talent to watch.

Olympic Games - Leslie What - Tachyon Press
- trade paperback

Springing the Trap

If you are going to write a six-volume series it is pretty important that you pace it properly. Chaz Brenchley has set up a whole bunch of plot elements in the early volumes of the Outremer series. By volume five, *Hand of the King's Evil*, it is time for him to start doing something with them. Thankfully, he doesn't disappoint. Let's briefly review the situation.

1. Marshall Fulke and the Knights Ransomer have sworn to destroy the hidden city of Surayon.
2. Hasan, the Sharai war leader, has sworn to drive all Patrics (including the Surayonese) from Outremer.
3. The King of Outremer's chief diplomat, Coren de Rance, is trying to prevent a war from erupting.
4. De Rance's daughter, Julianne, has somehow found herself married to both Hasan and a Patric nobleman.

5. The Ifrit appear to be determined to foment trouble.
6. The djinni, for reasons of their own, are manipulating events, though to what end is not certain.
7. Julianne is best friends with Elisande, the Surayonese princess. Elisande is in love with Marron, the Patric boy possessed by the demonic King's Daughter. Jemel, the Sharai boy, is also in love with Marron, but Marron loves both Jemel and Sir Anton d'Escrivy, whom Jemel has sworn to kill.

Is that complicated enough for you?

Well, knowing you lot, probably not, but then I haven't listed all of the complications that Brenchley throws into the pot. *Hand of the King's Evil*, however, is all about bringing plot strands together and getting all of the characters together for the climax. Brenchley manages this deftly, even if it does involve moving people quickly by magical means.

The rug beneath them rippled and rose, began to move towards the tent's doorway. The other men not named, all those haughty and useless sheikhs crowded hastily back to give it room; the crowd outside fell over itself to make way. There would be more quarrels shortly, Elisande thought, unless the wonder of a flying carpet were balm enough to soothe the humiliation of crawling in the dust. Somehow, she doubted it would be.

Look, if you have a book with djinni in it, you have to have a magic carpet at some point, right?

Along the way there has to be a plot for this volume. That revolves around a crazy prophet, a virulent plague, and something of a zombie army (rather reminiscent of

The Unanimous Army from Raphael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall*). I'm rather disappointed that Brenchley didn't make more use of this, because it is a really powerful symbol of religious devotion. But he's more interested in tricking his heroes into doing something stupid, and of course in tricking his readers into not understanding what he is up to. All of this he does very well. By the end of the book, everything is in place for a titanic conclusion. I wish I didn't have to wait until next month to read the final volume.

Hand of the King's Evil - Chaz Brenchley - Ace
- mass market paperback

The Land of Story

This is probably the most fannish fantasy novel ever written. Which goes right along with Karen Anderson's comment in her introduction that, "There's never been a book like this one." *Silverlock*, by John Myers Myers, is a truly unique work of art, and it is wonderful to see it back in print again.

Many writers have produced books in which the lead characters encounter famous characters from fiction. Some have even name-dropped several characters in the same book. China Miéville's *The Scar*, for example, is packed with references to works of nautical fiction. But *Silverlock* is something quite different. It is not a book set in a story world that happens to contain guest characters from other books. It is a book set entirely in what John Clute might call the Realm of Story.

The lead character, A. Clarence Shaldon, is a gentleman from Chicago with an M.A. in Business Administration. He has probably

never read a work of fiction in his life (certainly he recognizes none of the characters whom he encounters). Deciding to take the usual (for him) step of taking a holiday from work, Shaldon is shipwrecked off an unknown island. (His ship is called *Naglfar*, also the name of the ship that Loki and the giants sail at Ragnarok - this is the start.) Fortunately he is rescued by an itinerant bard whose names include Taliesin and Golias (by which he normally goes) but who hides the fact that his first name is Orpheus. That is part of the guessing game. Before the first chapter is done, the pair witness a great white whale destroy a whaling ship. In quick succession they visit the islands of Circe and Robinson Crusoe. And that is before they get to the mainland.

It is the name-spotting that is the main attraction of *Silverlock* for fans. If you are a bibliophile with a good memory then it is a wonderful game to play. Of course, as Jerry Pournelle pointed out in his preface to the 1979 edition of the book, it can also be damnably infuriating. If all of your friends are getting the references and you are not, it can be deeply humiliating. But the great delight of the new NESFA Press edition is that it comes complete with a glossary of all of the major references (compiled by fans of the book, naturally). There is even a helpful list of novels, poems and mythological texts used by Myers as source material.

Another thing that will delight fans is the mixing of genres. Nowhere but in *Silverlock* will you find the story of the Alamo told as Saxon poetry. Indeed, given that one of the lead characters is the world's greatest bard, there are lots of poems and songs throughout the book. Naturally fans have set some of these to music, the late Bruce Pelz being one of the principal culprits. Sheet music for these

folk songs is included in the NESFA Press edition. There is a plethora of other interesting related material as well, including a fair amount of background information about the author.

Of course we should not lose sight of *Silverlock* as a novel. The basic premise is sound: a boring and colorless businessman learns to appreciate the joy of story. That's a sentiment that I think every reader of this zine would support. Should you be averse to intellectual games, or allergic to the sort of prose you get in a book first published in 1949, then you may have trouble with the novel. But regardless of all this, *Silverlock* is a book like no other. It is a book that every lover of fantastical literature should read. And the NESFA Press edition makes the work far more approachable than it was in the past (not to mention that it keeps it in print). What more could you ask for?

Silverlock - John Myers Myers - NESFA Press - hardcover

Interview - Kelly Link & Gavin Grant of Small Beer Press

Small Beer (<http://www.lcrw.net/>) is an American small press that has been garnering a lot of critical attention. Its books have been nominated for and won the Philip K. Dick Award, it counts Ursula Le Guin amongst its authors, and if that wasn't enough one of the owners of the company, Kelly Link, is fast becoming one of the top-rated short story writers around. It sounds like a success story. I caught up with Kelly and her partner,

Gavin Grant, at Wiscon where their books were selling very quickly.

CM: So how did you guys get into publishing?

KL: By working in bookstores.

GG: We met while working in a used-book store in Boston. At some point during that time I started publishing *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. My writing career was going nowhere and I wanted to do something to do with fiction, and then Kelly came along and made the magazine better. And it kind of snowballed from there.

KL: We were working at the bookstore, Avenue Victor Hugo, for a number of years. Then Gavin decided to get a temp job because it paid better. That gave him a chance to learn a bit about design, which helped with producing the magazine.

CM: I wanted to ask about the name, Small Beer Press, it sounds almost apologetic.

GG: Well eventually we are going to be International Conglomerate Alehouse.

GG: It is one of those things there you need a tag, you need a name, and we didn't come up with anything great.

KL: It was kind of the same with *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. It was a tiny bit jokey, and we couldn't come up with anything better.

GG: With *Lady Churchill's* it was that all the things with "fiction" or "story" or "magazine" or "zine" seemed to be taken. Our ideas became more and more baroque.

CM: Many of the small presses I talk to explain their business plan: they only publish collectibles, or only publish anthologies and collections. You guys

seem to publish everything. You have a fiction magazine, you have chapbooks, you have novels, collections and anthologies. Is there a business plan there somewhere?

GG: Sure: we publish good fiction that has been falling through the cracks. We knew of some manuscripts that we thought were wonderful, and were pretty convinced that other people would like too. So the business plan was that the first two books would fund the next ones, and it worked. And, touch wood, it keeps working.

CM: What do regard *Lady Churchill's* as? Is it a fanzine, a semi-prozine, or what?

GG: I'm not hugely big into categories. Before I met Kelly I had never been to a convention or anything like that, so I didn't know the expectations. I came at it more from a background in music zines. I've been told that it is a fanzine. I've been told that it is a semi-prozine. It is like "slipstream" or "interstitial": point at it and that's what it is.

CM: But you do pay for the stories?

GG: Oh yes.

CM: Is it pro rates?

KL: <sadly> No.

GG: We pay about a penny a word.

CM: And presumably that barely covers costs.

GG: It breaks even yes.

KL: We've been experimenting with format. Number thirteen we put out perfect bound because we liked the piece of art that we had for the cover. We also printed more of that issue. We figure that *Lady Churchill's* is the experimental part of our publishing empire.

GG: It really does fall between everything.

CM: I recall from the web site that one issue was mainly reviews of other zines, which is a sort of fanzine thing to do.

GG: I do a number of zine reviews, yes. The music zines I read did the same thing.

CM: You do chapbooks as well. Is this somehow the next step, that if you find a good writer through *Lady Churchill's* you'll do a chapbook?

GG: Some of the chapbooks have grown out of *Lady Churchill's*. It is all symbiotic. Some of the stories that are in *Trampoline* came in as submissions for the chapbook series or for *Lady Churchill's*. We just try to find an appropriate home for the material we get.

GG: The chapbooks are specifically to try to introduce people to writers that we would like more attention paid to.

KL: The chapbooks are probably a harder sell than either the zine or the books, because they are the most in-between of anything that we do.

GG: They are a really good way to catch up with someone who has produced only a few stories. Here they all are in one place instead of in all these magazines.

KL: We want the chapbooks to be introductions to writers that we like. But with them, like with *Lady Churchill's*, we are always experimenting with fonts and layouts, and that's stuff that feeds back into the books.

CM: The books have been very successful. Ray Vukceвич got a Phil Dick Award nomination for *Meet Me in the Moon Room*, and then Carol Emshwiller won it with *The Mount*. Carol also got a Nebula nomination for *The Mount* and won a Nebula with one of the stories from *Report to the Men's Club*.

GG: It's been fantastic; although now we are not doing trade paperback originals so we won't get any more Philip K. Dick nominations.

GG: When we were first starting we thought we might publish Kelly's book, *Stranger Things Happen*. But then Kelly suggested that we might publish a collection by Ray Vukceвич because she had been reading his stories down the years. We asked him and he said yes. That made it much more of a real endeavor. Well, obviously it was all real to us, because we were both working full time as well, but by doing Ray's book we became more serious to other people. And Ray has been fantastic for us.

CM: Has getting these awards made it easier for you to get distribution?

KL: We were very lucky from the beginning. We were using a fulfillment house...

GG: That Mike Walsh of Old Earth Books recommended to us...

KL: ...that had distribution through Ingram and Baker & Taylor. We are now switching to SCB Distributors, a West Coast-based distributor, so we are now in a catalog and there will be reps going to bookstores pushing our books. We are kind of curious as to how that will go.

GG: We currently have eight titles. There's one more coming out this year. So we are still a small press but we are getting towards a decent-sized list.

CM: How did you come to be publishing a novel by somebody from Argentina?

KL: I had read Ursula Le Guin's translation of Angelica Gorodischer's "The Natural History of Ferrets," which is one of the stories that makes up *Kalpa Imperial*,

in one of the *Starlight* anthologies. I absolutely loved it.

GG: We wrote to Ursula to ask if she would write a blurb for *The Mount* or *Report to the Men's Club*. She said that she had just asked Carol to blurb one of her books, and while she loved Carol's work it didn't seem right to do mutual blurbs. So we wrote back and said we understood, and by the way did you ever finish translating that book. Six months later...

KL: It turned out she had been working on it...

GG: To help herself learn Spanish...

KL: And also just for pleasure.

GG: We'd love to do more translated works, but we don't speak any foreign languages. So we are needing trusted readers to recommend books to us.

CM: I have the same problem finding books for the "Found in Translation" column in *Emerald City*, so if you come across any good books do let me know.

CM: *Trampoline*, that's an anthology. Was it invitational or by submission?

KL: It was mostly invitational. But not in the traditional sense of asking authors to write stories. I knew of a lot of stories that I had read and loved but which had not been published. Probably 50% of the book is stories that I knew existed and made me want to put an anthology together.

GG: And then another couple we got as submissions to *Lady Churchill's* or the chapbook series. Then we filled it out with a few invitational stories.

CM: So is it going to turn into a series? Will there be *Trampoline* #2 next year?

KL: Of all of the books that we have, *Trampoline* is proving the hardest to make money on. It will eventually break even,

but not for a while. It was sort of my reward for *Stranger Things Happen* being so successful. It allowed us to do a project that wasn't really commercially viable.

CM: Sean Stewart has been with big name publishers before. How did *Perfect Circle* end up with you?

KL: By accident.

GG: He moved publisher, and after he had submitted the book his editor left. You know how these things happen.

KL: He wrote *Perfect Circle* over four years ago. It has had different titles. It had changed a great number of times. I love it, and when Sean's editor left HarperCollins I started asking what was going to happen to the book. And eventually we got to publish it.

GG: In the meantime he's been writing game scripts for Microsoft and stuff like that.

CM: Now, *Trash Sex Magic*, it is a wonderful title.

KL: <laughing> I love the title. Gavin didn't like it at first.

GG: It isn't something that immediately appeals to me.

KL: I read it about seven years ago, after meeting Jennifer Stevenson at ReaderCon. I really liked the book. At the time she had submitted it to Tor. I know it was read by a lot of different editors, but it is a book that doesn't slot easily into any particular category so it was a very hard sell.

CM: So good small press material.

KL: Yes, exactly.

GG: And yet we sent it out to a lot of booksellers, and they know how they are going to sell it. They are loving it.

CM: You have a new project coming up: Peapod, a line of reprints.

GG: A reprint line of really good books. At this point it is a wonderful time for readers because so many books are available. The *New York Review of Books* has a great reprint line. With Print on Demand lots of books are coming back. We are actually going to use regular printing for our books initially, but later keep them in print as long as the authors want them to be using PoD.

GG: Peapod is a way to expand our catalog in a fairly easy way. Also there are some books that we are always pressing into people's hands saying, "read this."

KL: This is just a bigger version of that.

CM: Do you use PoD for your other books?

GG: No, we've never used PoD.

KL: We will probably start at some point when our existing stocks sell out, but right now we just do very small initial print runs.

GG: We started off doing 2,000. Now our print runs are between 3,000 and 6,000.

KL: We are much more cautious than a larger publisher would be about print runs.

CM: You obviously need capital to do even 2,000 copies.

GG: Yeah, but the unit cost of PoD is so high that I've heard that people have trouble with anthologies. If you have 20 people and you give them two copies each, that's 40 copies, maybe \$240 dollars right there before you've even started selling. Our books you can get printed for between \$1.50 and \$3 each at a minimum run of 2,000. And as I have said the books are continuing to fund each other.

CM: Do they fund you guys as well?

KL: No.

GG: We've got all of these freelance writing and editing jobs that we do. And we need to look for some more.

KL: We are sort of at the point where one of us might need to go back to work again.

CM: On the distribution, you said that Mike Walsh recommended a company.

GG: Mike Walsh recommend Pathway Book Service in New Hampshire. They are a fulfillment house. They hold your books for you and supply to distributors, bookshops and to individuals. They are very helpful.

GG: We've just signed with SCB, who approached us and asked if we would sign with them. The guy working there had been with PGW, one of the largest independent distributors. He had asked PGW if they would look at us, but we are far too small. They are looking at a million a year revenue before they will take a publisher on. But now through SCB we will be part of the traditional bookselling chain.

CM: I've seen you selling at quite a number of conventions. How successful is that for you?

KL: Wiscon and Readercon are the conventions where we sell the most books.

GG: We only go to a few. Nowhere near as many as Larry Smith goes to, for example. But we get some of those regular convention dealers to carry our books. We go to three or four cons a year ourselves: Wiscon, Readercon, World Fantasy, maybe one more. We'll go to Worldcon this year because it is in Boston so it is local.

CM: But you are not going to ship your books to Glasgow?

GG: I'm not sure at the moment. It seems like it would be kind of fun.

CM: You are both writers yourselves, and Kelly you are starting to get a lot of critical acclaim. How is that interacting with being a publisher?

KL: I spend most of my time reading books, a smaller percentage of my time on Small Beer, and then an even smaller percentage of my time actually writing. I like books a great deal, but I don't write as much as other writers do. I like writing and that people like what I do, but a lot of the time it seems less complicated to be presenting people with books that I really loved.

CM: You are shaking your head, Gavin, are you disagreeing?

GG: No, no, I was just thinking that one of the reasons that Gardner Dozois recently stepped down as editor of *Asimov's* was so that he would get more time to write, which is fantastic. Gordon van Gelder started as a writer and morphed into an editor. I'm just hoping that Kelly doesn't morph into an editor.

KL: I think people go through phases: wanting to write, wanting to edit, wanting to write again.

CM: So about these plans for International Conglomerate Alehouse. Do you have a lot of good material lined up? Are you going to become a publishing house supported by a best-selling author?

KL: I keep hoping that Gavin will write a best-selling novel that we can use to seed a lot of publishing projects.

GG: Our aim is to keep going. Because we have worked in bookstores and because we have a lot of friends who had run

fantastic magazines like *Crank* and *Century* we were very aware of the somewhat common career trajectory of small presses where you burn out for various reasons, usually bankruptcy. So we are trying to be careful. The temptation is just to put six books out, but we can't do that.

KL: We have at least four or five books lined up that we would like to publish, but we will probably be spacing them out over two years.

GG: We have *Carmen Dog* by Carol Emshwiller and Naomi Mitchison's book, *Travel Light*, both of which we have signed. And we are talking to a great short story writer. Hopefully that will work. And we are looking at various other books, but most of them are not under contract.

GG: Mitchison was a Scottish woman who lived in Africa. She was hugely prolific. She wrote a couple of science fiction novels and quite a few historicals. *Travel Light* is about a young woman who grows up with dragons and bears, and goes to Constantinople in the 12th Century. It is just an awesome story. I've been buying copies of this and sticking it in people's hands for about four years. I cannot wait to put it out. It is scheduled for Spring 2005, which for us probably means June.

CM: Kelly and Gavin, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

SF for Kids

One of the great mysteries of SF publishing is why there is so little SF published in the children's and young adult markets. Of fantasy there is, of course, a surfeit. Everyone still wants to

write the next Harry Potter. But of SF there is very little to be found. It is therefore perhaps appropriate that *The Lion and the Unicorn*, an academic journal devoted to study of children's literature, should devote a recent issue to science fiction.

Some of the issues immediately become apparent. Robert Von der Osten, studying the famous Tom Swift series of American children's books, notes a distinct change in ideology with time. There have been four distinct series of Swift books. The first three all showed the young Swift producing more and more impressive inventions, with a corresponding lack of care about the social and environmental consequences of his work. The most recent series, however, shows Swift repeatedly coming close to causing major disasters through his inventions, thereby sounding a much more cautionary note as to the value of science. Kay Sambell echoes this, noting that most recent children's SF is set in post-disaster societies. (Sambell makes a specific exception for Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, of which more later.) It is as if the adults writing SF for children are convinced that science will destroy the world, and that it is their duty to prepare today's children for that disaster. Given such an attitude, it throws a whole new light on the supposed "graying of fandom." Who would want to read SF, given that it is so depressing? (Manga, on the other hand, is still full of heroes.)

The most interesting essay in the journal, however, is one by Farah Mendlesohn that postulates a rather different explanation for the lack of children's SF. It is an argument that is based on definitions of genre. This takes us back to this discussion of genre that I produced following last year's paper by Gary K. Wolfe at ICFA. It builds on the idea of SF as a literature of

rationality, whereas fantasy is essentially a literature of morality. Mendlesohn notes that much of what passes for SF in children's literature is, in fact, fantasy. This certainly seems true of *Mortal Engines* from Sambell's description of the book. While the novel is full of SF-style tropes, the narrative thrust of one of a quest by three children to put right a wrongness in the world. That's a standard fantasy theme.

Mendlesohn extends Wolfe's argument using material by Darko Suvin and John Clute. She starts with Suvin's idea of SF requiring a "novum," something that is different about the world of the book. Whilst this is disturbing to the reader (producing "cognitive estrangement"), SF always follows the introduction of the novum by a rational investigation of its implications, eventually leading to consequences for the world.

M. John Harrison has vigorously argued that what is wrong with most modern fantasy is that it lacks consequences. The hero succeeds because it is held to be morally right that he should do so, and they all live happily ever after. Good fantasy (all the way from *The Lord of the Rings* to *Perdido Street Station*) makes the achievement of resolution challenging for the hero, and whilst it may result in the world being put to rights, there are often unfortunate consequences for the hero. Science fiction, on the other hand, must have consequences. If the novum exists, it must somehow change the world. And the point of the novel is to provide a rational argument as to what that change is and why it comes about.

Given this definition of SF, which I happen to think is a good one, Mendlesohn argues that writing SF for children is difficult. Up until the age of

around 9 or 10 they are not really equipped for such arguments, partly because consequences are an idea that it takes time and experience to grasp, and partly because adults are so bad at teaching that lesson. Once we get into the young adult age group, Mendlesohn argues, far too many writers seem to believe that what youngsters need are consolatory stories in which the world is put to rights, fantasy style, and consequences do not happen. They specifically opt for a Michael Crichton style approach in which the scientific novum is done away with, rather than absorbed and coped with, by the end of the book. Consequently teenagers with a penchant for SF tend to dive straight into adult works (or rediscover classic works such as the Heinlein juveniles that do have the right style to them).

All of this makes a lot of sense to me (assuming that I have understood Mendlesohn's argument aright). It also set me off thinking about some of the touchstone books of last year, in particular *Pattern Recognition*. But, as with any discussion of genre, there are bound to be widely differing opinions floating around. With any luck I might get to hear some of them (hint).

The Lion and the Unicorn Vol 28 #2 - John Hopkins University Press - Janice Bogstad & Mike Levy (eds.) - journal

Short Stuff

Small Beer, Big Talent

I first picked up a copy of the Small Beer Press anthology, *Trampoline*, because there were authors in it whose work I wanted to

try, which is as good a reason as any for buying an anthology. I confess, however, that on beginning to read the book the first thing I did was turn to the Jeffrey Ford story. Ford is one of those short story writers whose work I almost always enjoy, and I figured he'd get the book off to a good start for me. I was right. "The Yellow Chamber" is a delightful meditation on the absurdities of academic pretension, on quantum physics, and on the nature of unreality. So far so good.

On then to some new names. Glen Hirshberg is a writer of ghost stories who is making a name for himself in the horror community. I can now confirm that this is entirely deserved. You might well think that it is impossible to write a really creepy story set on an idyllic beach in Hawaii, but Hirshberg's "Shipwreck Beach" is both poignant and entirely free of the expected clichés. Vandana Singh's story, "The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet", is perhaps more traditional. I suspect that stories of Indian men who are obsessed by social status, and their bored, neglected wives are commonplace. But at least this story involves an intriguing science-fictional eccentricity rather than adultery, and in any case it is an absolute delight to have someone born in India writing SF for a Western audience. It is a nicely written tale too.

I've just about given up on Maureen McHugh. She writes very well about people who have unfortunate lives. We are doubtless supposed to feel guilty and give away all of our ill-gotten comforts to atone for others' sufferings. But you get to the point with McHugh's characters where you just want to take them by the shoulders, shake them and yell, "get over it and get on with your life." And you know darn well that if the poor character did so then the author would twist fate to

make everything go wrong just to prove the point that everything is hopeless and we are all going to live long in suffering and wish that we could die. "Eight-Legged Story" is about how awful it is to be a stepmother. Contrast it with the blunt, space-born realism and sense of social responsibility of the viewpoint character in Susan Mosser's "Bumpship". As an exercise, try thinking about how McHugh would have written about the events of "Bumpship".

There are lots of other fine stories in the book, many of which I would class as surreal rather than SF or fantasy. I can see Christopher Rowe's strange little tale of sailing a cork boat from a creek in rural Kentucky all the way to Paris getting rejected by editor after editor because the action is so clearly infeasible, but it is a fun story anyway. Ditto Ed Park's odd tale about an archaeological dig staffed by eighteen women all called Tina. Why? Who knows? Who cares? *Trampoline* is a collection of stories put together by someone who is more interested in questions of style and feel rather than whether the narrative makes logical sense. If you like that sort of thing, you will love this book.

Trampoline - Kelly Link (ed.) - Small Beer Press - trade paperback

Life at a Tangent

It may help to assume that Jeff Vandermeer is mad. Alternatively you could try assuming that Vandermeer lives in a different part of space-time which is somehow at a tangent to our own and whose inhabitants live lives that have similar effects on the human mind to Lovecraft's non-Euclidian geometries. Then again you could just accept that

Vandermeer is wildly inventive and possessed with the sort of warped imagination that few writers can match. In any event, you will find his new collection, *Secret Life*, by turns inventive, disturbing, hauntingly beautiful and mind-blowing.

The rabbit was dead. Was white. Was dead. Was six feet long. Supine on the ground. A trace of red against its mouth. A pocket watch half-buried in the sand. Rubbery and indistinct, a blackish waistcoat curled across its midriff. While above us the mountain rose like a threat or a throat.

I could smell the death in its matted fur. I could feel its death in the complete, the utter stillness of the body. The eyes stared out into a great nothing, a vast nowhere.

I was supposed to solve this.

There are caveats here, however, on this view of Vandermeer as a writer. The first is that he is by no means always weird. There are stories in *Secret Life* that are set in very recognizable locations: South-East Asia, Peru after the Conquistadors, London during the Blitz, a Central American dictatorship. Sure fantastical things happen in these stories, but they do so simply to make a point about very real world situations. They are the sort of things that a mainstream writer could get away with doing without being thought mad.

Straight to the city's heart they went, the buildings encroaching on the highway, while beneath their feet four-o'-clocks, cactus blossoms, and sedge weeds thrust up through the cracks in the highway pavement. Scuttling through these miniature oases, anonymous gray lizards waged a war with coppery metal

scorpions that pursued with mechanical implacability, their electric stingers singing static to the wind. Con Fegman had shown them one cracked open: beneath the metal exterior lay the red meat of flesh and blood.

Secondly, Vandermeer is not always whimsical. There are very few Ambergris stories in *Secret Life*, presumably because most of them have already gone into *City of Saints and Madmen*. There are, however, Veniss stories, and I am beginning to think that Veniss may prove to be a more impressive creation than Ambergris. Stories like the magnificent "Balzac's War" show that Vandermeer has an excellent grip on the far-future dark science fantasy corner of the genre. I'm also looking forward to learning more about the city of Black, which features in only one story, "The Mansions of the Moon" but which Vandermeer says he has written a lot more about.

The flesh dogs appeared promptly at twilight, bringing silence with them in a black wave. They wore the masks of friends, the guise of family. They jogged and cantered across the fires: fueled by a singleness of purpose, pounding on shadow muscles, ripping swathes of darkness from the night so as to reimagine themselves in night's image. Eyes like tiny dead violets. An almost-silent ballet of death.

Finally the author's notes at the end of each story tell us a lot about Vandermeer and the process of writing. It is clear that becoming a top-rated writer is something that Vandermeer has worked very hard at, and of which he now has a deep understanding. I think that if I were ever to go on a creative writing course I would want Jeff Vandermeer to be the tutor.

In the meantime we have *Secret Life*, a very fine collection of short stories that will probably feature on just about everyone's "best of 2004" lists come January. Highly recommended.

Secret Life - Jeff Vandermeer - Golden Gryphon - hardcover

Riding the Rails

Lucius Shepard is, I think, a very brave man. There are a lot of dubious things that journalists have to do in order to get stories. I'm not entirely sure I'd want to be in Iraq right now. But I think I would rather be there than do what Shepard did. He was contracted by a magazine to do a story on an organization called the FTRA (Freight Train Riders of America). Talk to certain law enforcement officers and you will be told that this is a well-organized clandestine operation specializing in drug running with close links to the mafia. In actuality they turned out to be more like a dissolute and geographically dispersed biker gang, with neither the money nor the ability to stay sober for short periods that are required to own and maintain a bike. Two things are clear, however. Firstly, in order to gain their confidence and get them to talk to him, Shepard had to be prepared to get as drunk and stoned as the hoboes themselves. And secondly, at any moment one of them was liable to have turned nasty and tried to kill him.

Still, a story is a story, and Shepard duly produced his. What is more, being a writer as well as a journalist, he also produced two more stories, of the fictional type. The whole collection is now available in a single volume from Golden Gryphon called *Two Trains Running*. And very good it is too.

The non-fiction piece is a fascinating study of a little-known part of American life. Particularly bizarre is the police officer from Spokane who is convinced that the FTRA is the biggest conspiracy since the Rosicrucians and Mafia decided to hook up with Fu Manchu. Having been to Spokane (and briefly to its even less pleasant neighbor, Boise), I can understand this. There are parts of America that would breath a huge sigh of relief if there was a military coup because at last they would be able to get to grips with the fiendish commie subversives in their midst. But the hoboes are fascinating too, particularly the way that they invent new identities for themselves when they begin to ride the rails, as if to protect the core of their being from the person that they must become in order to survive.

As for the fiction, "Over Yonder", by far the longer piece, won the Theodore Sturgeon Award for the best short fiction of 2002 I am at a loss to know how it didn't even appear on the Hugo nomination long list. The other piece, "Jailbait", is much shorter and unpublished. Both of them are fantasy, of a sort, but of course there's not an elf in sight. Shepard is a great writer. What more can I say?

Two Trains Running - Lucius Shepard - Golden Gryphon - hardcover

Hugo Short Fiction

With the Hugo voting deadline being only a month away I figured it was about time I got around to reading the rest of the short fiction nominees. As I have mentioned before, all of them are available online via the Noreascon 4 web site (<http://www.noreascon.org/hugos/nomi>)

nees.html). So without any further ado, let's make a start on the short stories.

"Paying it Forward" by Michael A. Burnstein and "Robots Don't Cry" by Mike Resnick are sadly both sentimental tosh. This is, apparently, the sort of thing that many Americans love. But for me it sets my teeth on edge as badly as Country & Western music and rings as false as the sugary verses that they put in greetings cards.

"Four Short Novels" by Joe Haldeman is, as it says, a collection of four ideas that Haldeman either doesn't want to develop or can't be bothered to take any further. They all revolve around the idea of a world in which immortality is the norm, and Haldeman finds various amusing and absurd ways in which such a world could go wrong. It is quite funny in places, but rather lacking in substance.

David Levine's "The Tale of the Golden Eagle" is a piece of classic Golden Age space opera that spans the centuries. It is certainly an entertaining story, but as with so much short fiction it still leaves me feeling that there was something lacking.

Which leaves us with Neil Gaiman's "A Study in Emerald". It doesn't take a lot of prescience to realize that Neil is going to win, regardless of what any of us pundits say. This isn't one of his best works, but it is very amusing, especially the newspaper outtakes. I won't be at all disappointed to see Neil walk off with another rocket.

Men Who Love Trees

Kevin loves amusement parks. I am one of those people who only has to look at a fairground ride for her stomach to turn

queasy and her face to turn green. However, there is one theme park in the world that both of us can enjoy. Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you, Bonfante Gardens (<http://www.bonfategardens.com/>).

This is a story of two men who loved trees. Chronologically the first of them was Axel Erlandson, a Scandinavian immigrant to California who perfected a technique for training trees to grow in strange and unusual shapes. He could even persuade multiple source trees to graft into each other, separate again as branches, and come back together again. It is a truly amazing feat of horticulture. Back in the 40's and 50's, Erlandson ran a "Tree Circus" exhibit in Scott's Valley. It was never a great success, despite occasional mentions in publications such as *Time*. When he died in 1964 it was feared that his amazing trees would be lost.

The other hero of our story is Michael Bonfante. The successful owner of a chain of grocery stores (that's supermarkets for UK readers), Bonfante is also a keen environmentalist. Nearing the latter part of his life, he decided to cash in his fortune and do something to benefit mankind. His project was an ecologically-focused theme park, which he located near the Californian town of Gilroy, some 20 miles or so south of San José. One of the attractions that he determined he must have was Axel Erlandson's Circus Trees.

So the Circus Trees have a new home, but the story is not all happy. Bonfante's business acumen with retailing did not extend to amusement parks. Given that the main selling point of such venues is to have a bigger and more frightening ride than anyone else, a park that has calm, quiet rides and lots of educational value is never going to conquer the market. Also

Bonfante picked a very poor location that is difficult to find and well off the major tour bus routes. Management of the park has now been subcontracted out to professionals in the business, and that is helping keep it afloat, barely. But it is well worth a visit, and if you happen to be in Northern California I encourage you to take a look.

There are essentially three main attractions to the park. The first is purely horticultural. From the Circus Trees to exotic wild flowers, the park has plenty of things to keep lovers of gardens and landscape happy. My mother would have loved it, save of course of the baking California sun. Then there is the educational aspect. Small huts all around the park show videos explaining various aspects of park operation from the history of the Circus Trees to the very sophisticated water treatment system that the park uses to keep the water clean and yet free of stuff like chlorine. Even the wild bird display is heavily loaded down with environmental messages. Probably the best, if corniest, example of this approach is the fruit and vegetable puppet show that teaches kids about the glories of Californian agriculture to the tune of classic pop songs.

*I've been all around this great big world
From sea to shining sea,
But I can't wait to get back in the state
To see the best fruit on the trees.*

I wish they all could be California fruit...

I did warn you that it was corny.

Then there are, of course rides. Most of these are so mild that even I can go on them without suffering motion sickness.

There are a train and a monorail, which kept Kevin very happy. And of course there is a (rather tame) roller coaster. If you have very young kids and you do not want to risk them on the big and dangerous rides at places like Great America then Bonfante Gardens might just be the place for you. I have photos online (<http://www.emcit.com/photos.shtml>) if you'd like to get a preview.

The food is dubious, but then again what did you expect? The price is high at \$32, for an adult and \$23 for a young kid, but all rides are free once you get inside the park, so it doesn't work out that badly. We had a fun day out, and I'd be happy to go back again.

Miscellany

Blog Philosophy

I think I am finally getting a handle on how to use the *Cheryl's Mewsings* (<http://www.cheryl-morgan.com/blog/blogger.html>) and *Emerald City* blogs. The *Emcit* blog (<http://www.emcit.com/blog/blogger.shtml>) really wasn't doing anything outside of conventions, but it has occurred to me that it does have a bunch of potential uses outside listing awards news.

Firstly I am now getting sent more books than I can handle. This is kind of good for my ego, but bad for my bookshelves and for the publishers who send me stuff. It is especially bad for all of the self-published writers who send me eager email asking me to look at their books, because with around 40-50 SF&F books coming out from major publishers each month they really don't stand much of a chance. Heck,

I've recently made a decision not to review a short story collection by Gene Wolfe. Getting a place in *Emerald City* is hard these days.

But I can at least make a brief blog comment about every book I get sent, and every review request I receive. That way I am at least doing something with the material.

Of course I could always get other people to review books for me, but given that I can't afford to pay them I can't for the life of me see why anyone should agree to do that. There are a lot of good SF book reviewers out on the Internet these days, and most of them publish their reviews on their blogs, or in paid markets like *Strange Horizons* and *The Internet Review of Science Fiction*, which give them space to write an in-depth review. So, whenever I spot something good, I'm going to post a link to it in the *Emcit* blog.

The same goes for con reviews. With the prevalence of blogging (including live blogging from the convention) these days I can see that *Emerald City's* con reviews are going to end up more as summaries of what a whole bunch of people have said rather than the personal reports that they have been in the past.

Of course if any of you folks happen to spot a good book or convention review (or movie review for that matter) that you think I should be telling people about, please let me know.

And with any luck that should provide me with enough material to keep the *Emerald City* blog viable. It may not be updated every day, but of course you can always just subscribe to the webfeed so you will know when new postings go up.

Sunburst Award Shortlist

The shortlist for the Sunburst Award, Canada's juried fantastic literature prize, has just been released. The finalists are: *The Bone House*, Luanne Armstrong (New Star Books); *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood (McClelland & Stewart); *A Place So Foreign and 8 More*, Cory Doctorow (Four Walls Eight Windows); *Initiation*, Virginia Frances Schwartz (Fitzhenry & Whiteside); *Blind Lake*, Robert Charles Wilson (Tor).

The award is for works by Canadian writers (regardless of where they are published) and carries a CA\$1000 prize. I'm delighted to see *Blind Lake* in the list, though it would be amusing to have Margaret Atwood win just to see whether or not she's prepared to accept the award.

Neil Gaiman Convention

I spent one breakfast at Wiscon talking to Davey Snyder about a convention she is running for Neil Gaiman in Minneapolis this coming November. The con is called Fiddler's Green and it will focus on the Sandman stories. Neil will, of course, be the main Guest of Honor, but Karen Berger (editor), Todd Klein (letterer), Charles Vess and Caitlin Kiernan are also attending, and other famous people well connected with Sandman have been invited and are looking at their overcrowded schedules. For more information about the con see their web site (<http://www.fiddlersgreencon.org>).

Minneapolis on November 12-14 might not seem like the warmest place in the world, but the Millennium Hotel is on Nicollet Mall and is connected to the skyway so you can get to the shops and

restaurants in ease and comfort. You need not get cold or hungry, trust me.

The other thing that you may balk at is the price. \$100 is not cheap for a small weekend event, but remember that all proceeds from the convention are going to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (<http://www.cbldf.org>). This is a charity event, and they want your money (as you'll find out when you see some of the stuff they have in the auction).

Anyway, it should be a great con, and you'll doubtless be hearing more about it from me soon.

Fan Fund News

Norman Cates will be traveling from New Zealand to the Worldcon in Boston, courtesy of DUFF. James Bacon will be heading the same way from Ireland, courtesy of TAFF. Congratulations to both, see you in Boston guys.

Meat

Jed Hartman writes to let me know that Terry Bisson's superb story, "They're Made Out of Meat", (which he read at the Speculative Literature Foundation event in San Francisco) is available online. You can read it here (<http://www.electricstory.com/stories/meat.asp>). Go do so, it is wonderful.

Borders Events Change Day

Pat Cadigan announces that her soirees at Borders on Oxford Street will henceforth be on Tuesdays rather than Mondays. The next event will be on June 8th and will

feature Cherith Baldry and Michael Marshall.

A Civilized Convention

To nobody's surprise, a new bid has appeared for the 2008 Worldcon. The antics of the Chicago bid in Toronto so infuriated the rest of SMOFdom that it was only a matter of time before another bid appeared. Not that this one looks entirely serious. The chosen site is the Geneva Palexpo in, yes, Geneva, Switzerland. Consequently the con will be called The Geneva Convention. It will be very civilized. And presumably very clean and tidy. Details of supporting memberships can be found here: <http://www.thegenevaconvention.org/>. So now the only question is, who will be the first fan to be arrested for "un-American activities" for wearing a badge that says, "I Support The Geneva Convention."

Hugos Review Watch

Nicholas Whyte has a web page (<http://explorers.whyte.com/sf/Hugo2004.htm>) that not only reviews all of the Hugo fiction nominees but points the reader in the direction of many other reviews of the pieces as well. This is an extremely useful resource for anyone with a ballot to fill out.

Gillespie Collection Available

The *Incompleat Bruce Gillespie*, a selection of Bruce Gillespie's fanzine writings, is now available from selected fannish outlets around the world. The collection is edited by Australian fan, Irwin Hirsh, and

includes the Atheling-winning article "The Non-SF Novels of Philip K Dick", the Fanthology-selected article "Trains in the Distance", and two selections from the long-running "I Must Be Talking to My Friends" column, plus other articles long out of print. There is also an introduction by Dick "Ditmar" Jensen.

Proceeds from the sales help to fund an air fare so that Bruce can attend Corflu (the fanzine fans' convention - <http://www.corflu.org/>) in San Francisco, February 2005. This is the BBB (Bring Bruce Bayside) Fund.

The collection is available from fans in the USA, UK and Australia. I'm not sure whether they want contact details published, so if you want to order a copy write to me and I'll pass on the contact details.

Footnote

Barring further unforeseen medical disasters, next issue will include a report on this year's Finncon (something I am very much looking forward to). On the fiction front we have lined up works from Elizabeth Hand, Robert Freeman Wexler, Patricia McKillip and John Crowley. We have an interview with Wheatland Press. There's another academic book at about Gene Wolfe, and Ursula Le Guin's translation of the famous Argentinean novel, *Kalpa Imperial*. Guess I'd better get reading.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl