# EMERALD CITY #108

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## Introduction

Hello, Noreascon 4. If you have picked up this zine at the convention, my apologies about the size of the type. I wanted to have a lot of issues available at the con, but as usual this issue is a monster and there are issues of weight and cost. If you would like a copy of the zine with larger type, the standard issue is available for download from the web site.

Oh, and welcome to *Emerald City*, I hope you enjoy it.

This issue sees a guest article from multiple Hugo-winning fan writer and Worldcon chair, Mike Glyer. It was originally commissioned for #100, but due to an unfortunate sequence of events involving earthquakes, hurricanes, meteor strikes, and being abducted by aliens, Mike was unable to complete it until now. I'm sure you'll find it is worth the wait.

Talking of former Worldcon chairs, we also have an article from Kevin about what is likely to be the main item of contention at this year's WSFS Business Meeting. If you are a member of the Worldcon then you are also a member of the World Science Fiction Society. WSFS is a democratic institution, and as a member you have the right to turn up to meetings and say how you think Worldcons (and the Hugos) should be run. You have a vote: don't waste it.

Still with guest articles, as I couldn't face reading Robert J. Sawyer's latest novel I got someone else to do it for me. A warm welcome to Sherryl Vint, who is a Canadian academic (and don't be put off by that "academic" bit – she's very readable).

When I get back to the UK I will probably find that this issue has been banned and that I'm being arrested under the Obscene Publications Act. This is because our featured small press this month is the very wonderful and utterly irreverent Savoy Books. Please do not show this issue to small children, cute kittens, or persons of a conservative disposition.

And of course there is the usual mix of con reports, book reviews and industry news. Here's the full list…

## In This Issue

# Four Weddings and a Convention

The Science Fiction Foundation held a conference on Commonwealth SF in Liverpool last month. Visitors from all over the former British Empire converged on the city to discuss and debate, and marvel at faded imperial grandeur.

### The Grand Old Dame

There is something horribly appropriate about billeting a bunch of Commonwealth scholars in that doyen of decrepit Victoriana, the Liverpool Adelphi. The Empire, she seems to say, is most definitely on its last legs. It is several years since British fandom last held an Eastercon there, and sadly little has changed. The poor old dear still looks desperately in need of renovation, and therefore desperately in need of some wealthy clientele. Sadly, despite her undoubted elegance, not to mention one of the best hotel lounges in the world, she is reduced to begging from bottom feeders like us, and being refused because we know she'll only spend the money on gin.

Some of the visitors were genuinely impressed by the Adelphi. It does have some large and impressive rooms. To people used to the sterile repetitiveness of Hiltons and Marriotts the dark wood and gloomy interiors have an air of gothic decadence. And the place fairly reeks of history. Close your eyes and you can still see the ghosts of the Titanic's passengers gossiping excitedly about their forthcoming voyage. But the fact is that hotels, especially very expensive hotels, are supposed to conform to certain standards. This includes having friendly, knowledgeable staff, having elevators that

work, owning the occasional vacuum cleaner, and not finding the corridors reminiscent of the streets of Blackpool when you get up in the morning. A little soundproofing would go a long way too.

## The Liver Birds

Much of the excitement of our visit was caused by the local fauna, who turned out in vast numbers for the several weddings that were taking place in the hotel over the weekend. These were part of the mating ritual of the famous Liver Bird (*avis liver alcoholica*). The female of the species is gorgeously plumaged in varying shades of pink and adorns itself with as many sequins as it can carry. It also gives off an extremely pungent scent, though whether this is designed to attract or repulse males is uncertain. Sadly much of this elegance is wasted because the female liver bird is almost unable to walk, due to a sharp 4-inch spur protruding from each heel. They waddle, rather like penguins.

The male of the species is much more drab, the typical plumage being plain white with a red cross. Driven into a sexual frenzy by the presence of the females, they rush around in great excitement, banging on doors and yelling out their distinctive mating cry of, "fu-ca, fu-ca!" Eventually they fall over.

Normally Liverpool is also home to another species of brightly colored bird (*avis liver soccerthugus*). This type of Liver Bird is found in two sub-species, one with red plumage (*av. liv. soc. gerrardii*) and one with blue (*av. liv. soc. rooneii*). These creatures congregate in huge flocks and are know to be intensely territorial, often engaging in mass warfare with flocks of the other color. Thankfully the entire population had flown south to Portugal for the summer and was not expected back in Britain until the following weekend.

## Readings and Rainings

Thankfully we were not using the Adelphi for convention space. The downside of this, however, was that we all had to make a sizeable hike up the hill to the very excellent Liverpool University Foresight Centre. I don't recall seeing any Queenslanders in the membership, but someone had brought along a Brisbane tropical storm and had let it out to play on Thursday afternoon. Somehow I managed to get there more or less dry, accompanied by a somewhat lost Sean McMullen. And we got through the readings in the gaps between percussive downpours on the roof.

Due to the extreme difficulties of getting anywhere from Darkest Somerset, I arrived too late for the initial readings, but I did get to hear John Clute, K.J. Bishop and Jon Courtenay Grimwood. Clute read the section of Appleseed in which the aliens comment on the bizarreness of human sexual behavior, which is quite hilarious. Kirsten gave us a sample of the novel that she is working on, which was also very funny. And Jon read the prologue from his forthcoming book, *Stamping Butterflies* (available in the UK in November). That, of course, was only funny in parts, and hinted at all sorts of seriousness to come. I rather look forward to it being banned in America.

## University Accommodation

At this point I should say a few words about the Foresight Centre. Whereas the Adelphi is sinking slowly into ruin, this

fine piece of Victorian institutional architecture is being well maintained and served us well over the weekend. It did struggle to cope with the tropical humidity (not normal Liverpool weather), and the meeting rooms were sometimes a little crowded, but all told it did quite well. This time there were somewhat fewer attendees than at the 2001 event. This made for less crowding in the main hall during mealtimes, but reduced us to two streams of programming, hence the slight overcrowding elsewhere.

One of the good things abut these events is that most of the food is included in the conference fee. We got lunches and dinner on two days, plus a generous supply of tea, coffee and snacks. The dinners were not very impressive, but the lunches were great. The Foresight Centre is the only place I know of where they serve so much dessert that we can't eat it all.

This is also the appropriate place to say "thank you" to the University of Liverpool, Middlesex University, and Pan Macmillan for their support of the event. I know it is easier to get money for an "academic conference" than for a "science fiction convention", but I have this sneaking suspicion that Eastercons don't get sponsorship either because they don't try, or because they have some foolish moral objection to such things. We need to put a stop to that.

## Canada: Gibson and Atwood

Friday morning saw Veronica Hollinger talking about William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Various nice turns of phrase kept popping up, including "nostalgia for the future", "post-genre SF" and "SF as mode rather than genre." Veronica neatly sidestepped the "is it SF" question by pointing out that neither book could have been written the way it was if SF did not exist. Hopefully no one can argue with that.

The image that stayed with me most after this paper was the contrasting views of history that the two books have. *Oryx and Crake* is a creature of the old-fashioned view of history that has great men bestriding the world and changing destinies. *Pattern Recognition*, on the other hand, is fully a creature of the 21st Century, acknowledging that the world is way too complex for us to understand, let alone predict, and is in any case terminally fucked up in all sorts of annoying ways. Things that happen most often happen by accident. Risk management is the science of our times.

## The Science of Collecting

A panel on how to build a science fiction collection for research purposes might not sound the most stimulating event, especially as there were no librarians around prepared to fight to the death to defend the sanctity of their favorite cataloguing scheme. However, it was surprisingly informative in two ways.

Firstly I learned about the terrible crime of dust jacket stripping. Major libraries apparently do this. Really, they do. I have no idea why. I guess it saves a little space. But, as John Clute pointed out, it also destroys information.

Science fiction is a genre whose works are inextricably bound to the time in which they were published. One cannot have a literature of ideas that is divorced from the philosophical context in which those ideas were created. And often the dust jacket

carries valuable information. Clute proved this point by ferreting in a second-hand bookstore and coming up with *Down to Earth*, by Paul Capon, a 1954 publication from Heinemann. That much you could tell from the book alone, but the dust jacket told you so much more.

To start with we learned that the funny logo on the spine was in fact the logo of Heinemann Science Fiction, a specialist line of SF novels. The back inside blurb even essayed a definition of what SF was, for the benefit of confused newbies. That's not bad for 1954. (I note also that Capon wrote many novels, most of them mainstream. Publishers presumably had no qualms about such cross-genre activity in those days.) The dust jacket also had an interesting painting by an artist we had never heard of. You can learn a lot from dust jackets.

The other major lesson of the panel is how important fanzines have become to SF's academic community. Rob Latham talked enthusiastically about how useful he had found archived fanzines when researching the intellectual climate in which SF stories had been written. We are back with that philosophical context again, and if authors were prepared to debate their ideas with each other, and with their fans, in the pages of the likes of *SF Commentary*, then fanzines suddenly become invaluable.

Which brings us to an interesting point: archival of fanzines. I know that various fans have done a fine job in trying to collect and preserve old fanzines. But when it comes down to it, they are amateurs doing the job on their own time, with their own money, and none of the right equipment. The right place to preserve fanzines is in a library. Preferably a library dedicated to SF studies, such as that at Liverpool. So if you happen to have a paper fanzine that you would like future researchers to have access to, please add Andy Sawyer to the mailing list. I'm sure he and his colleagues will be very grateful. Contact details are here: http://www.sfhub.ac.uk/contacts.htm.

## Markets and Hemispheres

Friday afternoon saw a panel on getting published in those upstart former-colonies known as the USA. Various prejudices were aired, but if we learned anything at all about America it is that you cannot make generalizations. Even within a particular publishing company, if it has multiple editors then it will have multiple policies of what it will and will not take. The art of getting published involves matching your work to the sort of editor who likes what you do. The only caveat is that the more uncompromising and adventurous your writing, the harder you will find it to hook up with an editor.

Pause here for a round of applause for Juliet Ulman at Bantam who has bravely bought the rights to some of the best non-US authors around: M. John Harrison, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Justina Robson and K.J. Bishop. Here's hoping that those US editions sell by the skip-load.

The other important thing that we learned was that while the US could be quite a difficult market to crack, the UK is darn near impossible. The poor Australians were tearing their hair out about how unresponsive they found British publishers. Doubtless this is all some sort of silly revenge for the frequent humiliations at cricket.

## Parents, Children and Squid

Sunday morning saw Canadian academic Sherryl Vint tackling the wholly un-Canadian Ken MacLeod. Her paper was on the Engines of Light series, and it finally kicked my brain into understanding what MacLeod is up to. I think (and that is always a dangerous thing to say when talking about MacLeod) that the series is all about escape from paternalism. MacLeod sees authoritarian political regimes as a sort of parent that might be necessary for a society while it is growing up, but which ultimately has to be left behind. The gods from Engines of Light are a deeply authoritarian form of parent, always complaining that the children are making too much noise. So they do the usual parent thing of rounding them up and putting them somewhere "safe" where they can't get into trouble. And they do the usual authoritarian government thing of providing an enemy against whom to divert any excess energy that might otherwise be spent on rebellion.

Matt Cairns and Grigory Volkov represent two radically different aspects to growing up. Volkov plays a sort of Oedipal role, simultaneously wanting to kill his parents to escape their oversight and to become just like them: in charge. Cairns has a much more mature view of the problem, and is trying to create a universe without parents. The fun-loving, toy-making Multipliers are just the sort of allies that he needs.

There are other aspects of the books that play upon these themes, most notably the generation gap dispute between Elizabeth and Susan. I think that these ideas will provide fruitful ground for further analysis of this as yet fairly un-explored MacLeod trilogy. Sherryl also noted a potential political hot potato in the form of the Multipliers' attitude that the galaxy was there for them to exploit as they wished. MacLeod's view of environmentalists is well known. I think I need to go back and check this one out.

## Ethnicity, What Ethnicity?

One of the more interesting themes of the event was the question of ethnicity. What exactly does it mean, and who has it? No one seemed to object to Nalo Hopkinson being described as a Caribbean writer, despite the fact that she lives in Toronto and writes mainly in English. (Caribbean people do, of course, mainly speak and write English, but Nalo has done a fair amount of writing in Creole as well which encourages some politically correct people to think that this somehow defines Caribbeanness.) Stephen Dedman, on the other hand, defined "Australians" as people living in Australia. They didn't have to be born there, they just had to be part of the culture. Those who left to live abroad, he suggested, would begin to lose their Australianness. That sort of approach has its advantages – in particular it was very kind of the Aussies to let me into the Ditmars even though I was only a temporary migrant worker. But the impact of that theory became very clear in the panel about Welsh SF in which Mark Brake started talking about living in Wales and writing in Welsh. That struck way too close to home.

In practice, of course, the definition of Welshness is very easy. You simply sit the subject down in front of an England-Wales rugby match and see whom they cheer for. Those who sit in silent bemusement are foreigners. Those who cheer for Wales are at least honorary Welshmen. And the rest are not worth discussing. Academics,

however, are rarely satisfied with such simple and elegant methodologies.

I don't think I would have minded so much if Brake hadn't also tried to define Welshness in terms of being a Socialist, an Environmentalist and quite possibly a Methodist as well. Ethnicity, I submit, has nothing to do with economic theories or religion. In the end, however, ethnicity is very much about oppression. Those who are on the wrong end of it will band together, regardless of other differences. And I suspect that most Welsh SF fans would reject a definition of Welshness that excluded Dave Langford and therefore deprived us of the opportunity to note that the Welsh have won more Hugos than any other nationality except the Americans. So there.

All of which rather detracts from the fact that some science fiction has indeed been written in Welsh. There is even a Welsh feminist SF novel. It is a utopian suffrage novel called *Lady Gwen*, written in 1891, about a Welsh republic governed by a female president. There's brief mention of it online in an article by Ann Heilmann from *Women's History Review* Vol #11, No. #4. See http://www.triangle.co.uk/pdf/viewpdf.asp?j=whr&vol=11&issue=4&year=2002&article=3_Heilmann_WHRE_11_4&id=82.69.46.47.

Nor should I forget Stephen's paper, which showed colonialism in a very different light: a view based more on class than on race. And that brings me back to Australia. Over dinner this evening I was watching a nature program about the Australian outback, during which I realized that if I have any sense of hiraeth at all it is for Australia. Funny old world, isn't it. (Hiraeth is a Welsh word meaning "intense longing", normally for one's homeland.)

## Cultural Appropriation

The other major theme was cultural appropriation. This again is not as easy as it sounds. Nalo described the agonies that she went through with *The Salt Roads* in having to write about the culture of Haiti, a very different environment to the English-speaking parts of the Caribbean where she grew up. There is no doubt that cultural appropriation happens. Indeed, most American claims to admire Celtic culture are on a similar level to telling someone from India that you really love that wonderfully authentic Indian writer, Mr. Kipling. But what exactly are the limits, and how can you avoid doing it?

One answer was provided by Jon Courtenay Grimwood. Having had an international upbringing, stretching from Malta to India to Norway, Grimwood claims to have little or no sense of Britishness. His Arabesk novels use characters and locations from many different cultures. Is he appropriating them? He says not. He is not trying to write an "Arabic" novel. Raf is half-English anyway. What he is doing is describing some of the very many cultures that he sees in the highly multi-cultural city of El Iskandria. Maybe if we could all be like Jon and lose our sense of nationality we could write about other cultures with a clear conscience. But then again, if we did that there would ultimately be no multiple cultures to write about.

## An Honorable Fan

The highlight of Saturday night was Peter Halasz's Guest of Honor speech. It was a triumph of minimalist elegance, a paragon of economy and linguistic exactitude, a positive pleroma of nuance and subtlety. Other people lucky enough to witness it described it as follows: "Mostly important for what it didn't say" — Jon Courtenay Grimwood; "Severely understated" — Gary K. Wolfe.

(All silly jokes in this section are copyright Clute, Morgan and Wolfe Ltd., official jesters to SF academia. With thanks to Danny Lin for providing the wine.)

## Sri Lanka, India and China

Sunday morning saw discussions of SF in various parts of Asia. Edward James talked about Sir Arthur C. Clarke's relationship with Sri Lanka. T.M.J. Indramohan gave a paper on the use of Vedic myths in Indian cinema. Apparently the magical powers of the various Hindu gods and their servants are portrayed very much in the style of an SF blockbuster movie: fabulous special effects. I've often wondered how a polytheistic religion like Hinduism would present itself in this atheistic and scientific time, but I didn't quite expect it to pick up on Roger Zelazny.

Mark Thomas, a student at Liverpool University, gave a paper on the lamentable tendency of Australians to write "yellow peril" stories about invasion from China. He focused on a particular book, *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia* by Kenneth Mackay. The descriptions of the Chinese in the book are rather reminiscent of Tolkien's descriptions of orcs. I was very impressed with the way that Danny Lin sat patiently through the whole thing without getting annoyed at the racist nonsense Thomas was describing. Later Danny explained to me that the Chinese write "yellow peril" stories about invasion from Taiwan. Here the paradigm is reversed: rather than imagine themselves invaded by hordes of savage barbarians, the Chinese fear attack by high-tech Taiwanese armies backed by American nuclear weapons.

## The End is Nigh (not Melbourne)

The plenary session was given by Andrew M. Butler. I think it was supposed to be about Australian film, through it wandered all over the place in getting there. It turned out to be rather more comedy than academic, which wouldn't have been so incongruous if Mark Bould, in introducing the session, hadn't given Butler such an impressive build-up. One doesn't quite expect the greatest SF critic the galaxy has ever known to come out with comedy.

Still, we laughed a lot, even when Butler was being slightly rude about Melbourne. Clearly he hasn't spent much time in the city. There are far better candidates for the City at the End of the Universe, including Perth and Hobart. Melbourne is a city whose houses wear lacy exteriors and whose citizens lounge the days away in coffee bars drinking latte. It is the home of Dame Edna Everage. 'Nuff said.

And so we came to the end of another fine Foundation event. This is the closest that the UK comes to having something like ICFA. Of course Liverpool is not exactly Fort Lauderdale (though it was humid enough at times), but the smaller size of the event seems to lead to more

concentrated quality. Even though there were only two programming streams, you frequently wanted to be in both of them.

With a three-year gap since the last event, I'm not expecting the Foundation to put on another such conference any time soon (especially as Farah Mendlesohn is heavily involved in the Glasgow Worldcon, ICFA and the 2006 Eastercon). But the next event is obvious: we have done Britain and the Commonwealth. Now we have to do Europe. I hope someone can make it happen.

For those who like such things, there are photos on the *Emerald City* web site.

## Enough About You…

By Mike Glyer

It's about me. There, I've finally admitted it.

It seems as if my review ought to be about your book, I know. The title and your very own name appear in the headline, or are mentioned in the first sentence. And as many words as I spend summarizing your story, it ought to be all about you. But it's not. It's all about me.

Cheryl Morgan asked an exclusive list of about 4000 authors, fans and Nigerian spammers to contribute their special thoughts about the reviewer's craft to the 100th issue of *Emerald City*. Did any of the others confess this fact about themselves?

Some other reviewers dwell on the quality of your writing, but not me, I'm a science fiction fan. I'm really only reviewing your story because that lets me play some more with the fascinating ideas you invented or hang out with the characters you made up. If the writing is good, that's gravy.

In fact you'd better watch out, I may try to take away the wheel and drive your universe myself. They're never the same after a fan does that. Just ask Larry Niven — the most passionate hard SF fans get completely absorbed in his stories. A high school math genius, Flieg Hollander, calculated the gravitational forces at work on Niven's *Ringworld* and proved it was doomed to crash into its sun. Dan Alderson wrote "The Grog Problem," 10,000 words about how impossible it would be for Niven to keep using "Known Space" now that he had made the mistake of introducing a particular alien species. A young writer can't guard his livelihood too carefully against that kind of popularity!

Of course, sometimes I write a review simply to relieve the sense that I may explode unless I tell the whole world that *I got it*. I mean, did anyone else notice how Harry Turtledove's Confederates in *Guns of the South* fought essentially the same Battle of the Wilderness *even with* AK-47's? Obviously, this is not news to Harry, the whole point is *I* noticed. (And what a relief to finally get that into print. Thank you.)

I buy books, but my reviews are not feedback for a consumer survey. I don't think publishers realize this. An embarrassing truth about the book business is that if enough fans say we prefer green aliens in our fiction the marketing department's only question will be, "Would that be guacamole green, or further down toward the celery end of the spectrum?"

No, I'm not writing these reviews to become a "0" or "1" in a mass marketing data bank. It's all about me. My inner toddler wants to have every babble and

pratfall acknowledged. When I publish reviews in my fanzine I always send copies off to the writers. Rarely does something good come from this. Well, there was the time a friend and I got invited to visit and interview under-appreciated SF writer Robert Moore Williams. The reason he was under-appreciated seems clearer in hindsight. One of the things he told us is that no SF editor would buy a too-literate story for his magazine, so "You have to stink 'em up just right."

When it looks like you stank it up wrong, I try to help. If my review criticizes your story, I really believe in every improvement I suggest. That makes it hard to explain why I'm surprised when you use one. Jerry Pournelle said he changed something in the next edition of a novel after reading one of my reviews. I preened about the compliment — and heaven forbid I should fail to work it into this article. But I find the drawback to being a fan is that I was as surprised by Pournelle as if I had found fault with Mt. Rushmore, then Abe Lincoln answered, "You're right! Get someone with a chisel to straighten my nose immediately!"

Sometimes your work is sublime and all I write is praise. Since it's never that easy for me to separate your creation from you, it gets even harder when you strike an especially sensitive chord in me. For example, reading something like *Expiration Date* or *Doomsday Book* makes me want to hear about how your faith coexists with this rather secular genre.

Being a reader is like joining a literary conversation as a listener. Being a fan means I can't stand on the sidelines of something this interesting. I want to speak myself. Until that unlikely day in the future when *I* am the writer who can answer "Soldier, Ask Not" with *Bill the Galactic Hero*, reviews serve as my voice in your conversation. So when your story makes a ripple in my pond, thanks to the amazing social network within the science fiction community I can send a ripple in reply.

In fact, I am forced to admit in the end that it's all about me *and* you!

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## Ringworld: The Next Generation

Some books get sequels because their fans beg for them, but in the case of Larry Niven's Ringworld series it is almost as if the fans write the books themselves. The Ringworld has become a cultural icon, beloved of science and engineering students the world over. They ponder over its physics, they debate how it might have been built, and of course they try to find fault with what is already written. The results of all of these deliberations find their way to Niven, who thinks about them, and eventually decides that he should write another book, just to clear up a few loose ends. Thus *Ringworld's Children* was born.

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*Gravity near a Ball World follows an inverse square law. In contrast, the Ringworld is a plane surface. Gravity does not dwindle as you rise, nor do spin gravity nor magnetic force, until the Ringworld looks less like a plane than a ribbon, from hundreds of thousands of miles high.*

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Of course that isn't exactly the best way to approach writing a novel. You do need to have a plot. Still, at least the characters are

all there in place. Yes, it is time to dust off poor old Louis Wu again, and send him into battle against terrifying foes, all much more powerful and intelligent than he is, but somehow less cunning. The Hindmost is still hanging around too, bless him, though he does seem to spend an awful lot of the book curled up with his heads between his legs, as puppeteers do when even running away seems a futile gesture.

With the last book, *Ringworld Throne* (way back in issue #14!) I complained about Niven playing amateur ecologist. He is not at his best when doing biology. In *Ringworld's Children* he does make passing mention of Greg Bear's viral theories of evolution (from *Darwin's Children*) as a possible explanation as to how the transformation from breeder to Protector takes place. But for the most part *Ringworld's Children* sees Niven in the much safer territory of space war. The Ringworld is, after all, an incredibly valuable artifact. Everybody wants a piece of it. And with warships from the human, Kzinti and several other space empires now hanging around the Ringworld system, it is only a matter of time before somebody breaks something.

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*"An antimatter missile destroyed one of the ramjets on the rim wall," the puppeteer's voice said. "Twenty-eight Ringworld days ago. The explosion was tremendous, not just antimatter but kilo-tonnes of confined plasma under fusion. Spill mountains melted. I couldn't learn what faction did that."*

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The Fringe War, as it has become known, is about to explode. And once it reaches the Ringworld structure then nothing is safe. Not Louis and the Hindmost, desperately trying to find a vessel in which to escape the coming conflict, not Chmeee in his idyllic hunting grounds on the Map of Earth, and most certainly not the billions upon billions of sentient and semi-sentient hominid creatures that inhabit the Ringworld. What the structure needs is someone to protect it from all that violence, and of course the very last thing it needs is a Protector.

One of these days someone will write a series of academic papers about the Ringworld and the American psyche: about how all that open space is the ultimate frontier, able to house three million Libertarians, each with an empire the size of Earth, without them having to fight each other. Those papers will talk too about the idea of the Protector, that a species should evolve in such a way that an obsessive sense of ownership of one's offspring should result in a psychotic desire to "protect" them at all costs, thus ensuring a permanent state of war with all other beings. It is, I think, one of the craziest and most depressing ideas in all of science fiction.

Thankfully Niven is only too aware of how mad Protectors are. They might have the abilities needed to fight off an entire armada of invading starships, but at what cost to the creatures they are trying to save? In *Ringworld Throne* Niven came up with the cunning plan of making a Protector from a scavenger species: the Ghoul, Tunesmith. Scavengers, you see, rely on other forms of life for nourishment, and therefore have a vested interest in maintaining a healthy ecology. But Tunesmith is a very young and inexperienced Protector, and perhaps cannot be relied upon to survive the Fringe War. What the Ringworld really needs is an outsider, someone with no particular vested interest in any of the

Ringworld's myriad species, but rather a general devotion to the world itself.

And here, perhaps, things get a little sentimental, because the person who loves the Ringworld best is not Louis Wu, not the late, lamented Teela Brown, not even the mysterious Pak who are supposed to have been responsible for building it. The only person who can truly protect the Ringworld from all that threatens it is a guy from Southern California called Larry Niven. It is time for him to act.

Of course, being a very nice guy, Niven does try to do a favor or two for his friends along the way.

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*One pattern must be the Penultimate's name or portrait… there, traces of a cartoon, very simplified, a style weirdly reminiscent of William Rotsler.*

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I note finally that the book is dedicated to the firemen who saved Larry, Marilyn and their home from the wildfires of last October. It is always nice to have a work of fiction remind us that there are real heroes in this world.

*Ringworld's Children* – Larry Niven – Orbit - hardcover

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# Humans and Inhumanity

A polemical review of Robert J. Sawyer's Humans

By Sherryl Vint

Despite a truly impressive ability to self-promote, Robert J. Sawyer is neither one of the best nor one of the most interesting writers of science fiction today. In fact, Robert J. Sawyer does not seem to be particularly good at writing science fiction, as opposed to pulp fiction that happens to be set within science fictional contexts. Let me explain what I mean by this. Very good science fiction, the best science fiction, the sort of science fiction that should win awards, pushes us to challenge our complacent views and come to new understandings of the world. The best of science fiction is "thought experiment" as it has been described by Ursula K. LeGuin, fiction that takes as its starting point the idea that things might have been different and then works through the implications of this difference. Along the way such good thought experiments ask us to rethink what we take for granted as normal or natural, and often to see the world through new and alien eyes.

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### An interesting premise

On the surface, Robert J. Sawyer's *Humans* appears to be a work perfectly poised to perform such a thought experiment, and thus it is all the more disappointing when Sawyer fails to work through his ideas with any rigor. This novel returns us to the world of *Hominids*, a world where a portal has developed between a parallel earth in which it was *Homo sapiens* rather than *Homo neanderthalis* who went extinct after the brief period when the two species co-existed some 40,000 years ago. The premise is interesting, and Sawyer does do some "thought experiment" things with his construction of what a 21st century Neanderthal world might be like. The key differences between our world and theirs center on questions of pollution, crime and violence, and domestic relationships. And Sawyer has provided the sort of detailed explanation of what lies behind these

differences through passages such as this one, a chat at a bar.

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*'All right,' said Henry. 'Then tell us. Your people never developed agriculture, right?'*

*'That is right,' said Ponter.*

*Henry nodded. 'You're probably better off without farming, anyway. A lot of bad stuff goes along with agriculture.'*

*'Like what?' said Mary, being careful, now that Henry had apparently calmed down a bit, to have her voice convey curiosity rather than a challenge.*

*'Well,' said Henry, 'I already alluded to overpopulation. And the effect on the land is obvious: forests are chopped down to make farmland. Plus, of course, there are the diseases that come from domesticated animals.'*

*Mary saw that Ponter was nodding. Reuben Montego had explained that to them back in Sudbury.*

*Dieter – who turned out to be pretty sharp for an aluminum-siding guy – nodded. 'And there's more to it than just physical diseases; there are cultural diseases. Slavery, for instance: that's a direct product of agriculture's need for labor.'*

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This idea, that a lot of the problems of modernity and modernization are related to the shift from a predominately hunter/gatherer and mobile society to a predominately agricultural, fixed culture, is taken from *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* by Hugh Brody. This is a very interesting book, and one well worth thinking about in a science fiction framework. However, I'd have to recommend reading Brody's speculations (about what life might have been like had the hunters predominated) over Sawyer's. The novel also opens up a space for an interesting treatment of sexuality as Neanderthal culture is organized around two sets of couplings, one homosexual and one heterosexual, rather than the compulsory heterosexual pairings that are the presumed normal for human society. However, Sawyer doesn't explore the implications of this domestic arrangement with sufficient rigor, and the fact that his human heroine, Mary, is jealous of her Neanderthal partner's male mate is reason enough for Ponter to throw over his culture's distinct sexual partnership to live as a heterosexual couple with Mary by the end of the novel.

So, you might be asking yourself, what is my issue with this novel, why am I so vehemently against it? The sins I have listed thus far are minor. The answer to this question is short and simple: gender. If I were being generous I would say that the novel is naïve and perhaps a bit chauvinistic in its representations of gender. However, reading this book does not bring out my generous side, so I'll be more to the point: *Humans* is insulting. And I'm not alone in the view that, as one highly placed industry insider put it to me, Sawyer is not someone who *should* write about gender.

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## Cross-Species Sex

The main story in this middle book in the sequence (*Hybrids*, the third, is recently out in hardcover) concerns the personal relationship between the Neanderthal, Ponter Boddit, and the human, Mary Vaughan. They met in the previous novel when Ponter accidentally opened the portal and became stuck on our Earth. An attraction developed between them but

was not consummated before Ponter had to return home. In theory the main narrative in this novel is the opening of a more permanent portal between the two worlds and Mary's experiences when she crosses to the Neanderthal side (to balance out the focus on Ponter's perceptions of human society in the first novel). But really the story is about Mary and Ponter's decision to pursue a relationship together despite the species and other cultural differences.

And why this is all so distressing is that Sawyer apparently felt he needed a very strong reason to motivate a female character to consider sex with a Neanderthal, and the motivation he stumbled upon was rape by a human. Those of you who read *Hominids* will recall the rape at the beginning of that novel, and the somewhat awkward prose Sawyer uses to describe Mary's emotional reactions. He can perhaps be forgiven this, as rape is clearly not a topic that is easy to write about. In fact, Sawyer's work makes me feel that perhaps we should have a caveat that no one who has not been raped should try to write about rape from the point of view of the victim as the result will be – at best – inadequate, and at worst much, much worse. Here is Mary considering her decision to pursue a sexual relationship with Ponter:

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*But Ponter belonged to another species! Mary had seen Showboat when it was on stage in Toronto; Cloris Leachman had played Parthy. She knew that miscegenation was once a big issue, but …*

*But miscegenation wasn't the appropriate term for a human mating with something from outside her own species – not that Ponter and Mary had done that, of course.*

*No, the appropriate term was*

*My God, thought Mary.*

*Was bestiality.*

*But …*

*No, no.*

*Ponter wasn't a beast. The man who had raped her – Mary's conspecific, a member of Homo sapiens – had been a beast. But Ponter was no animal.*

*He was a gentleman.*

*A gentle man.*

---

This passage just makes me want to sigh. But wait, it gets worse. Sawyer also treats us to long and loving descriptions of Ponter's attractions as a man … well… er… a male in any case.

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*Ponter was massive – thick and long. He was uncircumcised, although his purpling glans was sticking well past the foreskin just now. Mary ran the flat of her hand slowly down the length of his penis, feeling it move with each beat of his heart.*

---

And further descriptions of the joys of their lovemaking

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*Mary had performed fellatio before on Colm, but always halfheartedly, doing it because she knew he enjoyed it but deriving no pleasure from the process herself. This time, though, she devoured Ponter eagerly, passionately, enjoying the rhythmic bobbing of his massive organ and the salt taste of his skin.*

---

Now, it is not that I object to the purple prose here or the explicit sexuality of these

passages. It is just that I find these descriptions of sex to be quite biased toward stereotypical male concerns and pleasures, and not a particularly insightful analysis of sex from the point of view of a woman who has been characterized as terrified of men up to this point. But of course Ponter is not "really" a man (read: rapist) but is literally another species. I don't know which gender should be more insulted by this vision of the essence of heterosexual coupling.

## The Politics of Rape

Now, where I lose even more patience with the novels (and apologies for spoilers here but this really is necessary to adequately convey my concerns about this book) is in the reason given for the rape once the identity of the rapist is known. The rapist turns out to be a non-tenured colleague of Mary's, Cornelius. This is how he is described to us when we first meet him.

*Mary felt sorry for poor Cornelius. He was thirty-five or thirty-six, and had had his Ph.D. in genetics for eight years. But there were no full-time jobs for white males in the department. Ten years ago, he'd have been well on his way to tenure; today, he was picking up $6,000 per half course and $12,000 per full course, and living in a dump on an apartment building in Driftwood, a nearby neighborhood even students avoided.*

So, Cornelius is one of those poor souls we have recently heard so much about, the straight, white male who is unable to find a place in a world now dominated by women, people of color, and other queer subjects who no longer know how to keep their place. Sawyer makes it very clear that Cornelius is in this inferior position solely because of identity politics and affirmative action sorts of policies. When Cornelius is assigned to take over Mary's classes while she is on a research leave, she exclaims,

*'I can't think of anyone better qualified to do it.' She wasn't just being polite; she knew it was true. Cornelius had been quite the wunderkind; his undergrad had been at U of T, but his Ph.D. was from Oxford, where he'd studied at the Ancient Biomolecules Centre.*

Now, where this all gets upsetting, and goes beyond a mere representation of a character who may well be a realistic portrait of a *small minority* of male academics in the present marketplace, a marketplace made more competitive by the presence of more people, is when Cornelius's problems with employment become posited as his motive for rape. What I see as particularly problematic and distressing here is the fact that it is Mary who makes this connection, in doing so seemingly accepting the logic that Cornelius is legitimately upset because he *has* been treated unfairly, even though neither Mary nor (in theory) the novel accept his way of dealing with this frustration. When Mary is told that her rapist is not some random stranger but rather a colleague, it takes very little for her to see the logic.

*'Well, I thought of us as co-workers. But he – he was just a sessional instructor. He had a Ph.D. – from Oxford, for God's sake. But all he could get was sessional teaching assignments – not a full-time appointment, and certainly not tenure. But Qaiser and I …'*

*'Yes?' Ponter said again.*

*'Well, I'm a woman, but Qaiser really won the lottery when it came to tenure-track appointments in the sciences. She's a woman and a visible minority. They say rape isn't a sexual crime; it's a crime of violence, of power. And Cornelius clearly felt he had none.'*

Now, I'm not suggesting here that the novel goes so far as to endorse the rape of women as an appropriate act of revenge, but I think the way this rape motif in the novel intersects with other themes and events comes dangerously close to doing so. The novel gives us reason to think that Cornelius's anger is legitimate, even if his way of dealing with it is not. The novel makes violent, personal vengeance a major narrative trajectory, as it is structured around Ponter's discussion of a crime he committed (later revealed to be the castration of Cornelius) as an act of personal vengeance. (Ponter, too, has his rationale for why his revenge is legitimate. Sterilization is an approved way of dealing with violence within Neanderthal society. But the novel makes it clear nonetheless that personal vengeance for Mary is a larger part of Ponter's motivation). And most damning, I think, is the fact that the novel has the victims of this crime accepting the worldview of the rapist, the view that academic appointments are a "lottery" in which women and people of color are unfairly advantaged.

I have read a number of other reviews of this book, and I'm aware of the general consensus that it is an enjoyable read which posits some interesting ideas about the *what if*? of Neanderthal culture. On one level, I don't agree with this assessment. There are some good points to the novel, the influence of Brody's work on hunter cultures vs. farming ones is apt, and Sawyer does do the occasional clever thing with language that is characteristic of science fiction's imagining of otherness, such as use "gristle" as the curse word likely to develop in a culture so steeped in meat eating. However, more striking to me seems to be what these reviews are *not* saying, which is anything about the very problematic treatment of gender that does lie at the novel's core, since this book is really about the Neanderthal/Human experience through the personal relationship of Ponter and Mary.

## Neanderthal Justice

Beyond my serious concerns about gender, the novel also treats rather simplistically the differences between human and Neanderthal culture that are the meat, so to speak, of its science fictional mode. For example, Mary and Ponter have many discussions about god and the possibility of existence beyond mortal life, conversations that don't stretch much beyond the mental ability of a relatively alert 10 year old. Ponter is supposedly incapable of understanding war, yet one of the reasons Mary gives for humans to go to war is revenge; something that Ponter himself acts on within the text.

Most limited, I think, is Sawyer's treatment of the different justice system that he develops for the Neanderthal society. This system is based in eugenic castrations of all violent criminals and those who are related to them by at least 50%. The system also relies on continuous monitoring and recording of every moment of each citizen's life. The Neanderthal system is presented as far superior to the human system, a system that allows rapists to escape and Ponter to be shot, not to mention massive death tolls such as that in the Vietnam War (whose

memorial Ponter visits). However, I would really feel more comfortable if a bit more sophisticated analysis had been paid to the nastier implications of Neanderthal society, particularly in this age of Homeland Security.

Ultimately I think the same problem flaws Sawyer's treatment of justice in the novel as flaws his treatment of gender. He sees everything in binary black and white terms. He cannot provide a more nuanced analysis of how someone might be both sympathetic and a criminal, a racist yet also a good scientist. Sawyer's characters are either good and hence right in all they do – including vigilantism – or bad and deserving of punishment. Thus, rather than push the reader to think through moral questions in a more complex way, Sawyer uses the encounter between Neanderthal and human culture to allow those who share his politics to feel smug and complacent about their ideas about gender roles and vigilante justice. And award-winning fiction really should offer us more than what we already think we know.

Entertaining as it might be, *Humans* is not representative of the best that science fiction can be, and that is why I'm discouraged to see this novel make it on the ballot for the Hugo award. This novel is enjoyable in the same way that eating at McDonald's is enjoyable: it offers short-lived pleasure, you know that it really isn't very good for you, and it leaves you nothing with which to build your body or your mind. And I'd like to see us reward science fiction that is going to grow a better and stronger genre, science fiction that shows the very best of what the genre can be, that really challenges us to see what is familiar with new eyes and experience what is alien with sympathy and understanding. Sawyer's work does none of these things.

*Humans* – Robert J. Sawyer – mass market paperback - Tor

# Political Subtlety

L.E. Modesitt's latest science fiction novel, *Flash*, is symptomatic of the psychosis that is affecting American politics at the moment. It is a product of a country that has become increasingly paranoid, frustrated and intolerant, to the point where lashing out with violence is seen as the only possible solution.

The book begins hopefully enough. The hero, Jonat deVrai (clearly signaled to be a speaker of Truth) is an economic consultant specializing in analysis of the effectiveness of advertisement placing. In the world of the novel, digital technology has advanced to the point where viewers can block obvious attempts at advertising (read "Tivo" here), so the only way that companies can get their message across is to get their products "placed" in ordinary media shows. If you want to sell your sofas, get Oprah to sit on one: that sort of thing. The process is enhanced by the use of "Rez", a sort of musical subliminal advertising first introduced in the novel *Archform: Beauty*.

DeVrai is hired by a research organization called the Center for Societal Research. They are concerned that Rez-based advertising is becoming used in political campaigns. They want deVrai to confirm their suspicions, and to tell them whether this is something to be concerned about. As the Center's Director puts it:

*"To what degree does popular entertainment affect politics? Can that effect be quantified? What ties exist between political campaigns and popular media? Are there quantifiable carryover effects? Could a candidate for public office employ those effects? Are any doing so? How effectively?"*

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These, of course, are interesting questions. What deVrai doesn't realize when he takes on this job is that he is not being hired to expose unscrupulous politicians. He is being hired by people who want to discredit the democratic process and thereby strengthen their own positions of power. His clients' case will, of course, appear much stronger if it appears that deVrai has been murdered by agents of the politicians his work exposes. That will also make it difficult for him to object if his work is later mis-used, quoted out of context, or even subtly re-written.

Unfortunately for them, these secretive manipulators have picked the wrong man to use as a patsy. DeVrai is a former Lt. Colonel in the Marines. He knows how to look after himself. And he is not the sort of person to take being manipulated lying down. Here's an extract from his letter of resignation from the military.

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*"A nation should stand for ideals and ethics beyond mere commercial freedom, and its leaders should not commit young men and women to battles designed not to expand freedom or the rule of law, but merely for multilateral comparative commercial advantage."*

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My, what can he mean by that? Something like one nation invading another for the primary purpose of stealing its oil supplies? What sort of government would do that?

Modesitt's answer is the sort of government (by which we mean here the people comprising that government) who are far more concerned with protecting their own interests and lining their own pockets than advancing the interests of the people that they have been elected to represent. Such a government, Modesitt's text argues, will be deeply corrupt, and will not think twice about tactics such as suborning the police force (sorry, "Safety Office" – Modesitt does have a good eye for the absurd Newspeak of modern America) and killing anyone who gets in their way.

That's not an unreasonable assumption. That sort of things does happen in some countries today. Some of the people engaged in such practices are probably executives of Western oil and engineering companies. It isn't too much of an exaggeration to imagine that sort of behavior being transplanted to a future North America.

Where *Flash* appears to go off the rails is in going on to say that normal democratic and legal processes will be ineffective in such an environment. Because safety officers, media outlets and judges can be easily bought, he argues, the only remaining option is vigilantism.

This argument is an extension of Modesitt's previous novel, *The Ethos Effect*. In it he presents a galaxy facing an enemy that is a combination of Nazism and religious fundamentalism. Modesitt asks the legitimate question as to how far one might have to be prepared to go to defeat such an enemy. While there are concerns as to the necessity of dropping atomic weapons on Japan, few will disagree that World War II was necessary.

In *Flash*, however, Modesitt brings that same argument into the domestic political arena. The new book does not ask questions. It states the need for violence as unquestionable fact. That is a very dangerous thing to do, as the author and his hero should well know.

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*I winced at that. Carlisimo and I were not living in the same world, not if he believed that. People always claim that want the truth, but most people only want a truth that fits their beliefs. Of course, they like to delude themselves that they make up their minds on the facts, but they really just select the facts that back up what they already believe.*

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Sadly, by the time he has got halfway through the book, deVrai seems to have entirely forgotten that thought. In his defense, he has suffered greatly at the hands of his enemies, and is certainly in the sort of mental state that would predispose him towards violent acts of revenge. But Modesitt shows that deVrai is aware that innocents are killed during his bloody vengeance. The author even provides his hero with plenty of evidence that, in a properly functioning free and democratic society, would lead to the downfall of his enemies. None of this stops the killing. DeVrai achieves a "happy" ending. But what he has actually done is create a society in which politics is fought through assassinations rather than through the ballot box.

I should note here that Modesitt is by no means alone in these defeatist attitudes. The day before I wrote this review there was a bizarre editorial in *The Independent* attacking the use of lawyers to settle disputes at the Olympics?

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*In the days of ancient Greece, the contestants at least used to settle their differences in the old-fashioned way: fisticuffs if not war between the states. Lawyers, or even philosophers, were kept out of the equation.*

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You what? Is *The Independent* really suggesting that it would be better for Britain and Germany to fight a war to decide who has the best horsemen than to get lawyers to arbitrate? Well, I guess given the effectiveness of recent judicial reviews of the actions of the British government, or indeed the near impossibility of getting anyone convicted of rape in the UK, perhaps they are as frustrated as Modesitt.

There may indeed come a time when it is necessary for the world to take up arms against George W. Bush in the same way that our parents did against Hitler. But that time is not now, and assassinating Bush and Cheney will not make the world a safer place. Indeed, it will almost certainly make it a much more dangerous one, because they will become martyrs. There is no doubt that democracy and law are in a bad way in parts of the West, but they are not yet dead, and it disturbs me greatly to see an American writer apparently assuming that they are.

*Flash* – L.E. Modesitt Jr. – Tor – publisher's proof

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## Forged in Fear

Steve Cockayne's Legends of the Land trilogy really has got me terribly confused. Book two in the series, *The Iron Chain*, is a much simpler piece of fiction than the misdirection-filled first volume, *Wanderers*

*and Islanders*, but it isn't at all clear why the second book exists. Which is not to say that it isn't a good book: it is, it just seems to be a classic piece of mid-trilogy filler.

For the most part, *The Iron Chain* is a horror novel. It focuses on Tom Slater, a minor character from *Wanderers and Islanders* whom Rusty Brown encounters at cartography college. Slater, it turns out, has a long and complex history. His parents, Geoffrey and Ruth, used to be apprentices of Leonardo Pegasus, but they had to quit their magical studies when Ruth got pregnant. (The Magicians' Academy apparently has rules about celibacy, though this never seemed to worry Leo in *Wanderers and Islanders*.) Blamed by his parents for their misfortune, poor Tom suffers horrific abuse as a child and grows up deeply disturbed. But he is also very smart, and begins to wreak terrible vengeance on those he thinks have wronged him.

It is a classic serial killer plot in which a sympathetic but deeply disturbed young man stalks and kills characters that we have come to know. Cockayne cleverly adds to the tension by having Slater relate his life story to an unknown listener in a separate viewpoint stream of the narrative. Slowly but surely it becomes obvious that the unnamed listener is being told more than Slater can afford to have made known.

So far so good: *The Iron Chain* is a very effective piece of horror in which you can feel the anxiety build from chapter to chapter. But what, apart from the connection to Rusty and Leo, does it have to do with the Legends of the Land series? Mainly it is character development. From Rusty's point of view we see him grow into middle age, get married, have a family, build a successful business, and get stalked by Slater. We see very little of Leo, but we see a lot of his invention, the empathy engine, which comes to be used to create a sort of magical Internet under the clever guidance of King Matt's scientific advisors.

The main character being developed, however, is the city. In *Wanderers and Islanders* we saw the young King Matt throw his people into turmoil with a bunch of reforms that might have come out of a business school. *The Iron Chain* takes matters further, inflicting all sorts of shibboleths of modern life on the unfortunate populace. The trains (sorry, coaches) don't run on time, the streets become unsafe, and children meet evil people on the Internet who lure them into delinquency. Rusty's wife turns out to be hideously middle class and obsessed with getting a nice house, two perfect children, and all of the latest fashionable household gadgets. She's the sort of person who would be addicted to Martha Stewart (or more likely Delia Smith as Cockayne is British).

There is a definite hint that what we will see in the final volume is King Matt and his evil technocrats being driven out by the forces of pastoralism and an idyllic rustic society, complete with benevolent, paternalistic monarch being restored. And yet I'm not sure. There are things that don't fit with that analysis. For example, the coaches did run on time when Tom Slater's private company was in charge of their schedule. It was only when the government took over that things fell apart. And Alice, the Islander heroine, is a devotee of yoga: a yuppie pastime if ever there was one. In short, I still don't have a clue where Cockayne is going with all this. And given the mind-numbing predictability of most modern fantasy that has to be a very good thing. I have a copy

of the final volume, *The Seagull Drovers*. I suspect it won't be long before I get around to reading it.

*The Iron Chain* – Steve Cockayne – Orbit – trade paperback

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## The Harper's Tale

*True Thomas sat on Huntley bank,*
*And he beheld a lady gay;*
*A lady that was brisk and bold,*
*Come riding o'er the ferny brae.*
*Her skirt was of the grass green silk,*
*Her mantle of the velvet fine;*
*At every lock of her horse's mane,*
*Hung fifty silver bells and nine.*

Steeleye Span

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To someone like me who has traveled widely in the world, who has lived on three different continents, the concept of "home" can be somewhat nebulous. Who am I? Where have I come from? There are very few things that anchor me to the part of the world where I was born. The thing that works best is stories.

There are, of course, many stories of the history of Britain. King Alfred hid out in the marshes of Somerset, supposedly burning cakes, and most definitely receiving the surrender of the Viking chieftain, Guthrum, not far from here. But that is a Saxon story and it has no hold on me. The stories that tug at my heartstrings are older than that. They tell of the Isle of Avalon (also not far from here), of brave warriors and magical swords, and they tell of the Land of Faerie. Some people still have the skill of telling those tales. Guy Gavriel Kay found it for *The Last Light of the Sun*. But the book that does it best, the book that had me hopelessly hooked from its first paragraph, is older than that. It won the World Fantasy Award in 1991. And it has just been re-issued.

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*"The Wild Hunt rides tonight." Meg's eyes glinted with her eerie tale. "They ride on horses with nostrils like burning coals, chasing the souls of the wicked, that cannot rest for – " Then her head came up sharp. And, "Gavin," she says, "there's knocking at the door."*

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There are no new stories, only old ones told in different ways. The ballad of *Thomas the Rhymer* has been around for a very long time. It has been told in song from ancient times down to the present day. It was, perhaps, a brave thing for Ellen Kushner to do, to decide to tell it as a novel, but it works brilliantly.

The core story is very simple: Thomas, an expert harper, is abducted by the Queen of Elfland and bound to serve her as minstrel and lover for seven years. At the end of that time she returns him to his own world, un-aged, greatly increased in skill, and blessed (or cursed) with the ability to always tell the truth.

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*I pulled her to my mouth, and tasted fruit and flesh undreamed of, She quenched my thirst, and at the same time filled me with hunger I knew would never leave me, For just one moment my mind cleared as I thought,* I am lost.

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So much for the plot. What, then, are the characters of this tale: who are they and what roles do they play? Kushner chooses to begin by grounding Thomas in his humanity. We first meet him as a young,

talented but unknown man begging shelter from a simple farming couple: Gavin and Meg. He charms his way into their friendship, and returns to them often, either as a respite from the trials of court, or to hide out while some social storm he has caused blows over. It is while staying with Gavin and Meg that he meets Elspeth, a beautiful and spirited young woman who, almost uniquely in the world, he is unable to charm into his bed.

Then everything changes, for Thomas's harping has come to the attention of the rich and powerful. With no chance even to say his farewells, he is hauled off to Elfland to take up his new position as court harper and royal concubine. Kushner's Faerie is magnificent, a place of constantly shifting landscape and intricate politics. The elves themselves are playful and charming, but also arrogant, selfish and thoughtlessly cruel. Elfland is no place for a mortal to live.

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*"I love you," I said over and over to her, until it was one more piece of sensuality that meant nothing to my mind, everything to my body. And she was saying words to me, but never that she loved me, never that. I pleaded with her, my sobs a thorny rose of pleasure. There was no pride left in me; I have never loved a woman more. She was not a woman, of course.*

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And yet, having lived in Elfland, how can one stand to live anywhere else? When all the colors are drab, all the laughter stale, all skin and fabric rough to the touch, and one's harp, even when perfectly tuned, sounds like it has lain in a muddy bog for a week. How too is one to survive in the society of men, in the courts of kings, when one is unable to tell a lie?

Hence the last third of the book tells how Thomas manages to re-integrate himself into mortal society, found a family, and deal with the legacy of his former days as the medieval equivalent of a rock star. For all the glory and strangeness of Faerie, it is, in the end, a very human tale.

There is, as I have said, nothing terribly new about this book. It is an ancient folk tale re-told, with very little added. Nevertheless, it is a fine example of the novelist's art. Take a well-known song, and write a novel from it. Could you do that? Could you do it so well as to create one of the best fantasy novels of all time? Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer* is a book that deserves to stay in print. I am delighted that it is back.

*Thomas the Rhymer* – Ellen Kushner – Spectra – mass market paperback

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# The Rabbit of Doom

People have tried some strange ways of promoting SF books, but to my knowledge this is the first time that someone has used an animated video clip on their web site (http://www.juliaandthedreammaker.com/). I like that. It shows a bit of imagination and initiative. And of course who can fail to be charmed by a small press called Traitor Dachshund Books? Which brings us to *Julia and the Dream Maker* by P.J. Fischer. Does it live up to the promotion?

Actually what I want to do here is talk about *Oryx and Crake*. My apologies to Mr. Fischer for that. I'm not going to be contrasting writing styles. Comparing Ms. Atwood to a chemical engineer writing his first SF novel would be unfair in the

extreme. But there are interesting parallels in the plot, as I hope to explain.

Both books feature a triumvirate of characters. One is a ferociously intelligent scientist. One is a scarily capable young woman whom the scientist loves. And the third is the scientist's slightly geeky sidekick, who also loves the girl but knows that he has no chance. In both books the mad scientist invents things the like of which the world has never seen before. In *Oryx and Crake* he destroys the world; in *Julia and the Dream Maker* science gets a much more favorable hearing.

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*Steven realized that with the development and growth of his program there would be unintended consequences, and not just for him. However, what was the choice? Would it be better not to take chances, to live in the dark like a forest animal, dying at an early age? That was no choice at all; one must learn what one can and deal with the unintended consequences, which were so often the result of ignorance anyway. Emergent properties. That is the risk. Knowledge and curiosity as well as consciousness are emergent properties of a living being's physical nature. People could only eliminate unintended consequences by eliminating the human species.*

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The plot of *Julia and the Dream Maker* is, throughout most of the book, very simple. Three impoverished grad students, Steven, Eli and Bennie, cook up a scheme to make some cash to tide them through some lean times and fund their passion for experimenting. Bennie has a useful sideline in virtual toys, and is a capable salesman. The gang decide to twin Bennie's skills with Steven's biology and programming genius to make a physical toy rabbit. Eli is the manager: it is her job to make the dinner and to get the boys back on track when they get distracted by beer, sex or the desire to play dominance games between themselves. Unfortunately Steven's software is rather cleverer than he anticipated. Professor Rabbit earns the gang millions, but Steven ends up in court charged with endangering national security. Slowly it dawns on him that he is being tried for something that his software has done.

Where Atwood tries to make the case that science is dangerous (and should presumably be stopped before it kills us all), Fischer believes that curiosity is inherently human and that we need to learn to live with the results. The publicity for the book compares Steven to Galileo, a misunderstood genius who is persecuted by an ignorant and frightened government.

The case is not badly made. There are places where Fischer needs to brush up on his writing style. I got particularly tired of his habit of presenting a section of dialog and then following it up by telling us what the characters are thinking and feeling. The dialog is supposed to do that for the author. But on the other hand he does develop a feel for his central characters and gets us quite fond of these naïve and ambitious kids.

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*They each had their own voice-activated passwords for the lock. Steven's, of course, was "Eli is gorgeous." He always let Eli unlock the door when they were together. For her password, she used an unintelligible number sequence that represented some protein she had been working on.*

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So far so good. Unfortunately towards the end of the book it gets religion. I suspect

that it is always a bad idea when SF writers take their speculation so far that they feel the need to bring God (or the Goddess) into their work. Fischer is certainly no exception. I was very disappointed to find the last few chapters descending into mysticism. On the other hand, the story isn't over and a sequel is promised. Possibly Fischer will be doing something interesting with the mysterious priestess, Julia. I do hope so.

*Julia and the Dream Maker* – P.J. Fischer – Traitor Dachshund Books – trade paperback

## Death and Destruction

What's this, another fantasy series? And a trilogy to boot. Well, you know, you have to keep trying these things. You never know what might turn up. And besides, Michael Cobley moved heaven and earth to get me a copy of the first volume of his Shadowkings trilogy. And he lives in Glasgow. I need to check out the local talent in time for Interaction.

The back cover blurb for *Shadowkings* describes Cobley's novel (his first) as "impressively unpleasant". What the reviewer at Amazon.co.uk (actually Roz Kaveney, who surely ought to be credited by name) meant by this is that Cobley has taken the standard fantasy formula, dipped it in black paint, doused it in blood, subjected it to unspeakable torture for several centuries, and forced it to read Thomas Covenant novels over and over again. *Shadowkings* has, and here I quote Roz again, "unrelenting bleakness," and that is what saves it from mediocrity.

Much of the plot is entirely as anticipated. The Khatrimantine Empire has been overrun by vast hordes of smelly, uncouth and enthusiastically violent barbarians called the Mogaun. (No, that was "Mogaun", not "Morgan".) This bunch of engaging thugs have slaughtered the Imperial family (and anyone remotely related to them), smashed up countless temples and sacred groves, and generally gone around replacing the wholesome and environmentally correct Khatrimantine religion with their own worship of the modestly named Lord of Twilight. Doubtless he hopes that this campaign of desecration will help him graduate up to a true Lord of Darkness.

Into all this is thrust the usual band of characters with marginally pronounceable names and little sign of linguistic consistency. There is, of course, a young lad who discovers that he is the lost heir to the throne. There is a princess with magical powers whom he will no doubt one day marry. There is a crusty old warrior, a kindly old wizard and a sword maiden. And of course a whole host of truly nasty bad guys.

But the good news is that the supposed good guys are at each other's throats much of the time, and so are the bad guys. There are almost as many factions as characters in this book. The Shadowkings themselves are a particularly fractious lot. They are a bit like Tolkien's Ring Wraiths, except that they are impressively corporeal and a damn sight nastier than is necessary to put the spooks up a gang of adolescent Hobbits. Entire armies of Mogaun cringe when these guys walk by. Apparently they are all fragments of the poor old Lord of Twilight, who has been sundered and is rather desperate to get himself together again. Except that togetherness is not a concept that the Shadowkings are at all comfortable with. Domination, yes; subjugation, yes;

ripping, rending, tearing and torturing of their rivals, yes. But not togetherness. They don't do hugs.

My favorite character in the entire book is the Daemonkind, Orgraaleshenoth. This is not because he has the longest and least pronounceable name in the book, but because he has an air of ineffable cool about him and flatly refuses to be drawn into the foolishness of mortals. The Daemonkind serve no one but the Lord of Twilight, and as he happens to be unfortunately sundered right now, well…

There was a potentially more interesting character. Betrayed by an ex-lover, one of the Shadowkings makes a Mirrorchild, an anti-person, to hunt her down. He can't do this out of nothing, and so uses his current lover, a teenage boy, instead. There are all sorts of interesting psychological and gender possibilities here, but sadly Cobley doesn't make much use of them. Psychological drama is not his style. He'd much rather hack people to pieces in new and amusingly inventive ways. And that, I am sure, goes down well with a certain type of audience.

Somewhat to my surprise, it went down well with me as well, because Cobley did it with style. One rather hopes that the good guys and bad guys will end up slaughtering each other, and that dear old Orgraaleshenoth will smile knowingly to himself and stride out to take possession of the wasted land. But I have this awful feeling that it will all end in wedding bells.

*Shadowkings* – Michael Cobley – Earthlight – mass market paperback

# Seriously Rebellious

Biographies normally get written about people. They do not get written about small press publishing companies. Unless, of course, the company in question has had a very colorful life. And, as I hope the interview elsewhere in this issue will show, Savoy Books is anything but an ordinary small press. Surely it deserves a biography.

Then again, this is Savoy we are talking about here. If there is going to be a history of the company, the one thing that you can be certain of is that the resulting book will be fascinating, idiosyncratic and quite likely darn well eccentric. *A Serious Life*, by D.M. Mitchell, is all of these things, and more.

To start with, the book design has been done by John Coulthart, which of course means that it is a very beautiful piece of work. With its white cover and silver dust jacket, *A Serious Life* looks very serious indeed. It looks like it is about someone very rich, very important, and quite possibly very talented. Savoy Books has never been very rich. As Mitchell says, "They continuously snatch failure from the jaws of success." M. John Harrison, we are told, is in the habit of lecturing his former colleagues about how idealistic publishers never make any money. The Savoy team: Michael Butterworth, David Britton and John Coulthart, apparently just look at Harrison blankly as if to say, "You think we don't know that?" More than anything else, Savoy has an agenda, and it sticks to it through hell, high water, and the worst that the British establishment can throw at it. Therefore it is, in the annals of small presses, very important indeed. Of the talent of its staff and contributors there should be no question.

But I am getting ahead of myself, because *A Serious Life* is, in its own way, a seriously eccentric book. Savoy would not have published it otherwise. To start with, it is possessed of a long and enthusiastically argued introduction that surges through the history of avant garde art, connecting Savoy to such figures as Baudelaire and de Sade. Mitchell seems to think that Savoy is at the leading edge of a centuries long battle between the forces of Dionysus (the good guys) and the forces of Evil Capitalism. Quite how capitalism can have been suppressing art for centuries before it was invented is a mystery to me, but thankfully Mitchell's philosophy isn't that important to telling Savoy's tale.

What is perhaps more important is why Savoy does what it does. What keeps Butterworth, Britton and Coulthart continually pricking at the rigid, puritanical heart of British social and political orthodoxy? The answer, I suspect, is "because it is there," or at least "because someone has to," both of which are undeniably true.

Some of the most interesting passages in the book are where Mitchell talks to David Britton about his personal philosophy: why he writes what he does. At one point he opines that the French are quite happy to allow their most eccentric literary figures into the artistic establishment, thereby providing an approved outlet for artistic excess. The UK, on the other hand (and America more so though Britton doesn't make the point), is terrified of anything unconventional. One just doesn't talk about well, you know, what men and women get up to behind closed doors. Especially when they happen to be persons of, shall we say, unconventional tastes. And this, Britton argues, is just the sort of society that needs, nay breeds, something like rock 'n' roll. In France, anarchy is a serious political philosophy; in the UK it is the subject of a famous pop song.

Meanwhile, back with the book. Another of Mitchell's eccentricities is that he tends to assume that his readers are very familiar with Savoy and its output. That is going to make life a little difficult for the non-UK reader. Most of us will doubtless be familiar with the likes of Michael Moorcock, M. John Harrison, Harlan Ellison, Samuel Delany and William Burroughs, to name but a few of the stellar names who populate the text. But even us Brits will be somewhat less familiar with some of the colorful figures from the Manchester music scene whose records Savoy produced, or with Savoy's homegrown works (mostly written by David Britton). It is, after all, hard to become familiar with works that keep getting banned as "obscene".

Quibbles aside, however, *A Serious Life* does manage to provide a fascinating glimpse into the long and tortured life of an unrepentantly rebellious publishing company. It also succeeds in showing that what Savoy does is not simply shock, but deploy a vast arsenal of artistic techniques and allusions to shock with style, panache and visceral intelligence. Were they simply pornographers, they would not have survived one decade, let alone several.

I think I should recommend this book primarily because you ought to know about Savoy. It is good to be reminded that there is a little corner of England that is forever making abominably rude gestures at those in authority and somehow getting away with it. It is even better to know that these people run an SF&F small press company. The Literature of Ideas would be a poor thing indeed if

some of those ideas were not deeply subversive. I should recommend it also because it is a truly beautiful book. As for D.M. Mitchell's text, had I been in charge, I might have done it differently, but I would have been guilty of the cardinal sin of being boring, and Savoy would have refused to publish my efforts. Quite right of them too.

*A Serious Life* – D.M. Mitchell – Savoy - hardcover

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## Interview – Savoy Books

Savoy Books is one of the UK's longest-lived and most notorious small presses. It has been associated with some leading SF and Fantasy writers, with a range of highly controversial comics, and with a number of Manchester's leading rock and pop musicians. Savoy is a company that, according to its biographer, David Mitchell, "has always eschewed the fashionable." Mitchell's book about Savoy, *A Serious Life*, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. I spoke to three of Savoy's leading lights: writer/publisher Michael Butterworth, artist/book designer John Coulthart and artist Kris Guidio. Missing from the conversation was writer/artist/bookstore owner David Britton. I am pleased to say that this was for entirely normal reasons and not because Britton was in prison on obscenity charges again.

**CHERYL:** I understand that you were inspired to start publishing by the demise of *New Worlds*. What was it about Michael Moorcock's magazine that you particularly liked? Did you want to do SF and Fantasy, was it the anti-establishment stance, or did you see yourselves as more literary?

**MICHAEL:** For me personally *New Worlds* offered the chance of publication. Until Charles Platt introduced me to the magazine I was getting rejection slips everywhere. It's important to hold onto this fact, as I suspect it was a common experience to many of the *NW* writers. The magazine provided a platform for genuinely new writing — and for established writers like Ballard, Aldiss, Moorcock himself of course, and Americans like Disch and Sladek to experiment with material they knew would not be acceptable elsewhere.

**MICHAEL:** I was inspired by SF and Fantasy, but wasn't a fan. I read the genre voraciously after leaving school at 16, for about a year. I read through the night and at every available waking opportunity. I have read very little SF since. I was equally taken by the works of the great satirists such as Cervantes, Voltaire, Rabalais and others like Alfred Jarry. I also admired Poe, and odd writers like George Borrow and contemporary fantasists like William Burroughs. Coming across Burroughs actually prevented me from writing narrative! (which I had been trying to do, my style commended by John W. Campbell who liked a novella I sent to *Analog* sufficiently to ask to see anything else I wrote.)

**MICHAEL:** My writing was anti-establishment in stance, I suppose, though I wasn't and never have been political. As a young man in the 60s I was more than scornful of the entire human race, who were presiding over the destruction of the environment, Left and Right it did not matter which. I liked books with a social edge, and still do. I wanted a much looser society, less materialistic and more individual-centered. I see censorship —

the arm of oppression that is most likely to affect the writer — as being there to be eternally challenged. But there has to be an intelligent reason for attacking laws. I grew up in an age of great change, when some of us felt certain things needed to be said in a certain way. That attitude carried over into Savoy when Dave and I met up, as we inevitably did, living in Manchester.

**CHERYL:** Michael, in *A Serious Life* you say that Savoy's game plan is to produce "intense, individualistic books." Has this always been the case?

**MICHAEL:** Yes.

**CHERYL:** Your first publication was a comic: James Cawthorn's adaptation of Moorcock's *Stormbringer*. Some of the art from that was absolutely stunning — I remembered it instantly on seeing it in *A Serious Life*. How come you were not an overnight success?

**MICHAEL:** We did Jim Cawthorn for the same reason as we would have done Mervyn Peake. He is a great original. He drew the definitive Elric, as Mike Moorcock would agree.

**JOHN:** I think my comments about Cawthorn's work in the book answer that somewhat. Despite the obvious quality of Jim's work, he's never had the kind of style that most British and American comic fans prefer, which at that time meant some kind of Jack Kirby-style superhero look. Comic styles in Continental Europe are a lot more varied, as is the story content. Any "failure" on Jim's part can be leveled at the innate conservatism of British comics fans.

**CHERYL:** Kris, any comment on American comics?

**KRIS:** One of the major problems (apart from the sentiency of many of its inhabitants) that I had with Los Angeles was the heat. On an average summer day in the City of Avaricious Angels, no one would be surprised to find Stephanotis blooming unmolested through cracks in the pavement: but on the day I'm remembering — depressingly, a lifetime ago — the rain was falling with a rare panache; piston-wise and heavy, reinvigorating and unrelenting.

**KRIS:** I was outside the Los Angeles pet memorial park and there, in that neat necropolis, rainshined and imposing, I found the tomb of Hopalong Cassidy's horse. Lord above, what wet boy could ask for more?

**KRIS:** Inspiration, often motivated by one's direct surroundings, can lead down the strangest paths: Bill Everett and Bob Kane both took their home-ground of 1930's New York and turned it into a Hugh Ferris-in-Legoland Art Deco nightmare stage for their respective creations, the Sub-Mariner and the Batman: a basic set design that, with very rare exceptions, held its (visual) ground right up till the early 60s when Steve Ditko more or less invented lateral-realism for cities (and the costumed individuals prone to leaping from rooftops and landmarks alike).

**KRIS:** Literature, of a less disposable nature, has had its share of touchstones, too, even among the great and the good: Melville said the sea taught him to write, O'Connor maintained she found the basics of *Wise Blood* by watching pea-hens strutting around her mother's farm, and henceforth never wrote anywhere else; Chandler preferred to surround his old typewriter with the sound of traffic and rain "whenever possible"; Byron, famously, insisted that he must pamper his muse with six nights of whoring before

starting work on any new poem or play. I could go on with obsession opusculum, of course … but enough: – the vaguery of genius speaks for itself, if you listen carefully.

**KRIS:** All of which brings me back to the point about surroundings and inspirations: in so many ways, Savoy is an oratory in a crowded place: possibly a place of malevolence and mean grimaces; I don't know what the north of England breeds in its sons and daughters, so it would be inappropriate for me, a southern exile, to go into the metaphysics of dark mills and messianic needs, factory floors and the proverbial anguish to order. It doesn't interest me, and I'm not even sure I believe it exists, beyond its physical nature at least.

**KRIS:** By the way, Hopalong's horse never got beyond an old notebook and a fading dream: okay; maybe you should pay attention to your inspiration every time it corresponds with your surroundings. Rare moments indeed.

**CHERYL:** Your first actual Moorcock title was *Sojan*, which is mainly a collection of stories written in the author's teens. Is there anything else of interest?

**MICHAEL:** How about essays about the origins of Elric and Jerry Cornelius?

**CHERYL:** I think that will do nicely. And the other fascinating work for the Moorcock collector would be *Death is No Obstacle*, in which Moorcock is interviewed by Colin Greenland. There's also an introduction by Angela Carter. What sort of insights does it give into Moorcock the writer?

**MICHAEL:** It opens up his box of tricks. Mike regards it as a seminal guide to the writing of his books. He gives a wealth of information on plotting and structure — from Fantasy to straightforward literary works.

**CHERYL:** I know that *The Golden Barge* was a Savoy original. Did you manage to publish any other Moorcock novels?

**MICHAEL:** Alas no. We almost did. We commissioned *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, but lost it to New English Library in our liquidation in the early 80s. We did publish a few original short stories in *My Experiences in the First World War*.

**CHERYL:** But I understand that you have a new book about Moorcock in preparation. Can you tell us something about it?

**MICHAEL:** A wide-ranging collection of literary criticism, book introductions, fanzine writings, political polemic that Mike has published over an almost 50-year period. There's some wonderful stuff in it.

**CHERYL:** Moving on to another *New Worlds* writer, M. John Harrison worked for Savoy at one point. What was his job?

**MICHAEL:** Mike joined us in the late 1970s for about two years. He had no specific job function, but helped editorially, inspirationally and with promotional writing such as book jacket blurbs. This was at the height of our mass market paperback phase — Savoy's first publishing phase, in fact — where we were trying to give paperback books the kind of identity only Picador and American publishers were doing at the time. Mike's involvement was very relevant to that, and his arrival very opportune.

**MICHAEL:** Sometimes he served behind the counter, deftly wrapping *Razzle*, and *Big Tits From Bermuda*! We all mucked in as a team to extract as much money as

possible from the paying public — to fund Savoy. Sometimes Mike sat downstairs writing. His experiences in the bookshop were captured in "Egnaro" and splintered into his novels. We ingested an inestimable amount of good advice about the craft of writing. Mike was a superb teacher, and very good company, and there is no doubt that the experience of working with him enriched us as people and the company.

**CHERYL:** Is it true that he wrote *A Storm of Wings* while working for you?

**MICHAEL:** Yes, and other writings, in the basement of the shop where we sold visual media, possibly at the same time as Susan Toth, Harlan Ellison's future wife worked there – she was looking after our film and TV side.

**CHERYL:** There is a theory in *A Serious Life* that the character of Lucas in Harrison's short story, "Egnaro" is based on Dave Britton. Might this carry through to the similarly named character in *The Course of the Heart*?

**JOHN:** It's not a theory; the story describes in great detail the old Bookchain shop on Peter Street where Harrison used to work. Since that shop was demolished in 1999, "Egnaro" serves as a kind of memorial for its wonderfully grungy ambience. The Lucas character in the story is superficially similar to Dave although there are considerable exaggerations as you'd expect. Lucas in *Course of the Heart* is very different. Despite references to Tib Street (location of an earlier Savoy shop) there's little other connection there at all.

**MICHAEL:** Mike once told me that a part of Michael Butterworth was in the character in *Running Down*. He warned me not to see myself, and wouldn't even tell me which part! His fictional characters are elaborate composites. Just as you would pick out bits of a real landscape to build an imaginary one, that is how he constructs his characters. Certain traits of Lucas's may be Dave's, or what Mike humorously warps from him into a neurotically interesting character. But then, in real life, Dave always had his heart set on "Orange"!

**CHERYL:** Charles Platt is best known in SF circles for his critical writings, but you published a novel by him: *The Gas*. This is a disaster novel in which an experimental gas that causes people to act out their deepest and darkest fantasies is released into Britain. Is it just sixties soft porn, or is there something more to it?

**MICHAEL:** Charles has written conventional porn novels, but *The Gas* is quite another kettle of fish. It stands alone among weird sex science fiction – the hardest of the hard in that genre to pull off convincingly. You would have to be a reader of excessive fiction to properly understand that… but you could also read Dave Mitchell's own appraisal of the book in *A Serious Life*. Charles had not heard of Dave before reading this, and thought his analysis absolutely spot on.

**JOHN:** Well for a start, anyone who reads it will find out pretty swiftly that there's nothing soft about the book at all. I don't see it as being "just porn" at all, although that's obviously its main attraction for many people. The book works very effectively as a psychopathology of the John Wyndham model of English disaster story, as well as having a large streak of satire running through it.

**CHERYL:** On the subject of sex, you have also published Samuel Delany's *The Tides of Lust*. How did you come to get hold of a novel by such a big name writer?

**MICHAEL:** We were offered other Delany titles, but we had set our hearts on *Lust*. We knew this was first-class Delany. There's a fallacy that 'big name' authors require big money for all their books. This has not been our experience. No one else in the UK would publish *The Tides of Lust*, just as they wouldn't publish *The Gas*. Another reason to have done it, of course.

**CHERYL:** Still with things that might be thought pornographic, has your relationship with Michael Moorcock suffered at all since he became a champion of Andrea Dworkin?

**MICHAEL:** *The Gas* and *Tides of Lust* were our only forays into sexual fantasy, and aren't really representative of Savoy at all. We've deliberately striven to avoid the 'sex' route. I don't know what Andrea thinks of our output (and I call her by her given name because I have been introduced to her on a few occasions). I have not been aware of disapproval, either from her, or from her through Mike. Our time selling *Razzle* is a different matter, of course. She didn't like that, and we didn't expect her to. There has been no 'cooling off' of Mike's friendship with us. It might surprise some readers, but we are great admirers of Andrea's writing. Hers is exactly the kind of writing we see ourselves as publishing. Just before Andrea's books broke here we could have made an offer for them but didn't, because at the time we were unable to follow through with the promotion and distribution. We could see they were destined to find mainstream publication, and did not need us.

**CHERYL:** You do seem to enjoy winding up the Left as well as the Right.

**JOHN:** Well this seems inevitable if you maintain a stance that encourages challenging work and doesn't let itself be dictated by other people's opinions. Picasso famously said that good taste is the enemy of creativity. One thing that becomes apparent when you look at the history of establishment or societal outrage is that taboos never go away; they merely migrate from one area to another. So in the 1960's it was the Right that used to get offended by sexual themes in art. During the 1980's the spread of academic multiculturalism made race a new area of anxiety for the Left. Finally in the 1990's we've seen increasing anxiety and even paranoia over anything involving children and sex.

**JOHN:** Something people invariably forget when challenged in this way is that good satire often works by advocating the opposite of what one believes, usually in the form of an extreme *reductio ad absurdam*. Despite satire's long and venerable history, people still insist on reading things literally, confusing the opinions of characters with those of authors.

**MICHAEL:** As I've said, I don't see our subversiveness as being solely gratuitous, but to meaningfully shake moral or artistic conventions up a bit. I'm not saying we don't get novelty out of doing that, as we patently do.

**CHERYL:** And the justification for producing a collection of Bernard Manning jokes is … ?

**JOHN:** Because they're funny, I'd have thought.

**MICHAEL:** We don't need any. Bernard Manning was the best comedian in England. He is the very last of his kind. *The Bernard Manning Blue Joke Book* is one of Savoy's rarest and hardest-to-find books. We published it, again, because no one else would do it, and because Bernard

represents a side of white working class culture that is repressed by polite society. Dave Britton and Bernard went to the same school, Mount Carmel, in Blackley, Manchester. They were in different years, but shared the same headmaster, a stern authoritarian ex-boxer called Mr. Mulligan; though they have conflicting opinions of the man. In the 1950s they lived a couple of streets from each other, in Harpurhey, one of the toughest districts in Manchester. Life was full of deprivations, and you had to be robust to survive.

**MICHAEL:** Bernard's in the direct line of descent of that other legendary northern comedian Frank Randle. He is loved by the people he represents, despised by people who have no idea what life on the real bottom of society is about. Tough, uncompromising, oblivious to disapproval, in person he is charming, non-bigoted and non-judgmental. His world is our world, in the sense that it is a dispossessed world, a world common to many of us — the world of Meng & Ecker, in fact, as it was then and is now. Try living on a council estate in Sholver, Oldham or an estate in Burnley! You'll be surrounded by novice Meng & Eckers! You need to crack jokes in order to survive in such environments, as they did in Auschwitz — a fact often obscured in reportage of the death camps. Black humor as a talisman against evil. The *Blue Joke Book* will certainly be appreciated in our prisons. I'm proselytizing …

**CHERYL:** Back with Charles Platt, you have also published one of his classic non-fiction texts, *Who Writes Science Fiction?* (known in the US as *Dreammakers*). Can you tell us a bit about it?

**MICHAEL:** After we did *The Gas* Charles told us that he was preparing a book of interviews. He is brilliant at capturing writers' personalities, and we were knocked out with what he showed us. We offered to do the UK edition, which we published under its original title. I think *Dreammakers* is the better title, but at the time we went to press we didn't know about the title change. We weren't happy with the jacket we gave it, which was done hastily not long before the bankruptcy which effectively ended our experiment in paperback publishing.

**CHERYL:** I remember reading Henry Treece when I was a kid. What was the notorious Savoy doing publishing a fantasy series by an author that my schoolteachers approved of?

**MICHAEL:** We never considered Henry Treece as any different from our other writers. He was just fabulous, and neglected in paperback — so there was a job to do! If there's one thing left that irks us, an ambition left unfulfilled, it is to produce quality hardback editions of our Treece paperbacks. Ken Reid is another whose work we would like to put into hardback. His *Fudge and Speck* adventures are up there with Tolkien. He deserves the attention of a far wider readership than he received in Manchester, which is where he was largely known.

**CHERYL:** You seem to have always teetered on the edge of wanting to be a big publisher. You printed 10,000 of the *Stormbringer* comic. Was this just a matter of learning that you were a small press and not to be so ambitious, or was it less easy to stay afloat on a 2,000 print run in those days?

**MICHAEL:** When we started we did print runs of 20,000 and 25,000 paperbacks. That's what you had to do to enter into the mass-market business, to feed the distributors who took your books out all

over the English-speaking world (excluding the USA). Around the early 80s, in the UK, when book sales slumped, that practice suddenly stopped, and publishers began doing 5,000 copies of better quality books. But after our bankruptcy we began moving into other areas, such as comics and records, doing runs of a thousand or two thousand. We now do runs of 500 or 350 hardbacks, and produce the occasional spoken word CD — we have just finished recording Fenella Fielding reading J G Ballard's *Crash*.

**MICHAEL:** We did a deluxe edition of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, with an introduction by Colin Wilson, and have plans to publish a new edition of William Hope Hodgson's *House on the Borderland* with an introduction by Alan Moore. We have reprinted Maurice Richardson's English surrealist masterpiece, *Exploits of Engelbrecht*, Antony Skene's detective noir, *Zenith the Albino* (the albino model for Elric) … and *A Tea Dance at Savoy*, an original book of essays by *New Worlds* writer Robert Meadley.

**MICHAEL:** We have never made money at publishing, nor has money ever been our motivation. We just print up in quantities that we have to, or what feels right to do.

**CHERYL:** You say in *A Serious Life* that your bookstores kept the publishing company afloat for most of its life. That wouldn't work these days, would it? Specialist bookstores are having a really hard time of it.

**MICHAEL:** Where there's a will, there is always a way …

**CHERYL:** If technology like Print-on-Demand had been available back when you started would it have made a big difference to your success?

**MICHAEL:** POD is in its infancy. It's something we would not consider doing at this point in time, because the loss of print quality and production control is so great. At the moment, it's not the way we would bring out a writer's work, although I applaud Storm Constantine's experimenting with the medium and appreciate that writers like Craig Herbertson, whose brilliant first novel she is publishing, and Adam Daly, another quirky and eccentric writer, would not otherwise get out. Which is not to say that we will never produce books in this way, because when the technology improves, as it will, we obviously would do.

**CHERYL:** It seems almost a matter of pride with you guys to be banned from the major bookstores. Where can people buy your books?

**JOHN:** Online at: http://www.savoy.abel.co.uk/1orders.html

**MICHAEL:** Over the Internet, by mail order from ourselves and through Jayde Design, our London-based 'distributor'. John Davey, who runs Jayde, specializes in imported Moorcock and related titles, handles retail orders for us and sells us to his catalogue customers.

**MICHAEL:** These days it's more likely that we're 'banned' from major stores because we're just not thought commercially focused enough. And with our choice of material I think we're more out of time than we've ever been. There is some deliberate exclusion. There are a series of books about Lord Haw-Haw coming out, but to the best of my knowledge, despite playing a significant part in the media representation of the Haw-Haw persona Savoy is not even

referenced in them. Somehow, it seems, we stand for all the wrong things, even within a chosen subject!

**CHERYL:** As well as publishing books and comics you have done a lot of record production, working with people like P.J. Proby, Joy Division and people who would later form part of bands like Primal Scream and Happy Mondays. Did this bleed through into your fiction publishing at all?

**MICHAEL:** Music – rock 'n' roll, anything eclectic from Don Van Vliet to Edgard Varèse, has had an influence on us as people. This indeed bleeds into the books we do. From Proby's influence in Nik Cohn's *Johnny Angelo* book, to Dave's novel, *Motherfuckers*, which is packed to the gills with the spirit of Roger Eagle, rhythm & blues and classic rock 'n' roll terminology. Mythological fantasy and rock 'n' roll are Savoy's heartbeat. I think we make this point in *A Serious Life* pretty clearly.

**CHERYL:** Before we get on to discussing *Lord Horror*, for the benefit of non-UK readers, can you give a brief introduction to James Anderton?

**MICHAEL:** Mr. Anderton was the police chief for Greater Manchester during the early and middle periods of Savoy, after which he retired. He was an evangelical bobby, a crusader against porn and gays. When the AIDS epidemic broke out he made a famous speech about "gays swirling about in a cess-pool of their own making" — which Dave put into Lord Horror's mouth but substituting the word "gays" with "Jews" throughout. Our intention was to highlight the absurdity and fascism of the speech. Lord Horror, of course, is a virulently anti-Semitic character, as strongly as Anderton is, in his speech, homophobic. Mr Anderton professed to hear God speaking to him, and was dubbed 'God's Cop'. Throughout the entire period we were operating our bookshops, Manchester was like Alabama in the 50's. He was the first police chief to arm his men with modern automatic weapons, a fact which was exposed by the anarchist SF bookseller Mike Don in a news story eventually picked up by *The Guardian*. Quite a few of the police were proven to be corrupt during Anderton's tenure. He had to sack them.

**CHERYL:** Is it true that Anderton's men were busting newsagents in Manchester for carrying soft porn magazines that were commonly available elsewhere in Britain?

**MICHAEL:** Absolutely – and putting long-established family-run shops out of business.

**CHERYL:** Didn't they have anything better to do?

**MICHAEL:** Officially, apparently not. But in reality individual policemen were doing very well out of it. The prohibition their chief was proscribing produced a climate of crime within the force. They were selling the magazines back onto the market, attacking our shops with sledgehammers, behaving like gangsters.

**CHERYL:** So then, *Lord Horror*, a fantasy novel whose eponymous anti-hero is based on the Nazi propagandist, Lord Haw-Haw. What else is in it?

**MICHAEL:** The soul of the whole wide marginalized world.

**CHERYL:** As I understand it from *A Serious Life*, Dave Britton's artistic argument is that you can't write nice Hollywood-style stories about the Nazis, when you write about them it has to be really horrible.

**MICHAEL:** The horror in Dave's book

derives from the fact that the reader is forced to sympathize with an unpleasant individual. One of its most unsettling aspects is the way the authorial voice sometimes becomes ambiguous, and you cross over into a visceral complicity in the killings. You have to go … "Whoa, whoa! Level up here. I am not a racist killer." But for a moment you are, and you are made to feel something of what it could be like to take delight — and pride and a sense of logic — in killing, and how the various components of an ideology, and where they come from, combine with a disenfranchised mind to produce someone such as Irma Grese or Josef Mengele. *Lord Horror* is on offer here as a possible way of understanding that, as well as being a highly wrought paranoid fantasy.

**CHERYL:** And for this Dave was put in prison?

**MICHAEL:** So it would appear.

**CHERYL:** The fact that Dave has Horror recite Anderton's anti-gay speech had nothing to do with his being jailed?

**MICHAEL:** Draw your own conclusions …

**CHERYL:** I understand that both Michael Moorcock and Brian Stableford appeared as witnesses for the defence at the *Lord Horror* appeal. What arguments did they make?

**MICHAEL:** Michael Moorcock said: "*Lord Horror* is one of the most authoritative indictments of the Holocaust and our moral responsibility for it... Britton and Butterworth are clearly working in the tradition of Hogarth, Swift, Dickens and others who were determined to examine the unpalatable realities of our lives... They wish to shock us out of any self-congratulation we might be feeling and force us to examine our own attitudes and those we accept in our society... *Lord Horror* confronts hypocrisy, violence, racialism, sexism, prejudice in all its hideous modern forms — ill-formed fears of homosexuals, people of colour and the jobless classes. Everything *Lord Horror* attacks is representative of that evil which the English pride themselves on defeating... By forcing us to confront the obscenities in our own society we are made to consider our own attitudes, perhaps even our own complicity."

**MICHAEL:** Brian Stableford said: "As a phantasmagoric satire it is both vivid and original... *Lord Horror* belongs to a tradition of imaginative fiction which extends from the Decadent and Symbolist Movement of the 1890s through Surrealist fiction to the kind of *avant garde* science fiction featured in the magazine *New Worlds* when it was edited by Michael Moorcock."

**MICHAEL:** Geoffrey Robertson, the freedom QC, who led the appeal, said the book was a "genuine work of imagination in a recognised genre of science fiction writing."

**MICHAEL:** Barrington Bayley said: "*Lord Horror* is the projected image of insane evil. The fact that satire and unrestrained 'bad taste' are among the methods of the canon might confuse some, but that is hardly a reason for censorship. One might note that the satire ceases in [the comic] *Lord Horror: Hard Core Horror No. 5*, where the text blocks are intentionally left blank over Auschwitzean scenes. It is ironical that these publications should be banned, while the Bible of anti-Semitism — *Mein Kampf* — is not."

**MICHAEL:** There are many other quotes about the novel on our web site — Douglas Winter, Colin Greenland, Ramsey Campbell, etc —not testimonials from the

trial but quotes that may be of interest.

**CHERYL:** John, I understand that you have illustrated comic versions of some of Lovecraft's stories.

**JOHN:** From 1986 to 1988 I adapted two stories, *The Haunter of the Dark* and *The Call of Cthulhu* and part of *The Dunwich Horror*. These were collected along with other material in my 1999 book, *The Haunter of the Dark and Other Grotesque Visions*.

**CHERYL:** And there is talk of a *Call of Cthulhu* movie that you might be involved in?

**JOHN:** There is, it's not *The Call of Cthulhu* but it **is** a Lovecraft film from a major studio. I'm reluctant to go into detail as things are only at the talking stage and any involvement of mine certainly hasn't been confirmed. The producer is keen on me doing some work for the film and I've spoken to the director but he isn't prepared to make a decision until the screenplay is ready.

**CHERYL:** Was this all good practice for drawing *Lord Horror* comics?

**JOHN:** In a way, I suppose. Dave asked me to work on *Lord Horror* on the strength of the Lovecraft stories. Eventually some Lovecraftian elements migrated into Lord Horror's world.

**CHERYL:** Who exactly are Meng and Ecker?

**MICHAEL:** Who they are, where they come from in literature and popular culture, is quite complicated, and once again I would point readers to *A Serious Life*, which gives a full genesis. But their names came from a famous Manchester café — the Meng & Ecker Tearooms — in one of the city's well-heeled shopping districts. The café closed down years ago, but not before its owners vengefully shopped us to United Feature Syndicate, the owners of Garfield the Cat, who we had lampooned in one of the comics. We were sued in the High Court of Justice for six or seven figure sum, but settled on five figures.

**MICHAEL:** In the novels and comics Meng and Ecker are Lord Horror's sidekicks. Being prized twins they were 'saved' by Dr Mengele from Auschwitz, before going off into the world. The comics are throwaway, slapstick — one of the scripts is a satire on Dianetics and Sci-Fi guy L. Ron Hubbard — whereas Horror is intended as a more serious Savoy vehicle.

**KRIS:** Meng & Ecker are as much a part of our leprous times as hedonism and the glorification of ignorance and stupidity: their kaleidoscopes got broken and the splinters and colors never quite seemed to fit anymore. Personally, I suspect they see things in a more accurate, if not necessarily obvious, way.

**KRIS:** Their mean ennui is never nebulous: sometimes it's actually 'easier' to become a part of what you most passionately despise; it's the only paregoric left on the shelf. It was Freud, of course, who noticed — "If we at all perceive a faulty action, we must then never perceive in ourselves the same motivations."

**KRIS:** Meng & Ecker have much of the hydra about them, but their heads are more secure. There is so much to draw about them — (not, sadly, that I've always done them justice) — for the first three or four issues, I believed the humorous, manic side of Britton's scripts were the areas to illustrate. I miss the melancholy — the demented asides and the strange jostling of word and actions. Shame on me.

**KRIS:** Over the years, inevitably perhaps, Britton's ever-quarrelling, land-locked Jack Tars, have made their unmannered — in the profoundest sense — qualities known to me: their Newgate moralities are now open to my prolonged contemplations: their vicious industry an obvious consequence at last. And now, from time to time, when he knows I am laboring with the correct mixture and ink and dissension, Britton allows me a brief Latin hexameter between his eccentric harmonics; the mildest comment on theological dogma or The Lone Ranger, perhaps.

**KRIS:** Meng & Ecker are a superstition for the 21st Century — I think I've always understood *that*, at least.

**CHERYL:** *Reverbstorm*, your most recent comics project with Dave Britton, appears to be chock full of literary and artistic references. This isn't your average pulp comic book.

**JOHN:** That's principally because we were creating the kind of comic series we'd want to see ourselves. There are enough regular comics around already; we wanted to try and do something different, something that maybe tried some new things as well as being a typical Savoy product in its blend of high art and genre themes.

**CHERYL:** Can you say a little bit about your approach to comics art: I gather that you prefer the French style to the American?

**JOHN:** American comics are very varied and there is an American influence in *Reverbstorm*, from Burne Hogarth's Tarzan strips. But generally, American comics mean superhero stories, something I've never had any time for. In the late 70's I started buying *Heavy Metal*, the American magazine that reprinted strips from the French *Metal Hurlant*. This was the first place I saw the work of Moebius, Druillet, Bilal, Liberatore, Schuiten and many others. I immediately responded to the variety of imagination and drawing styles on display and the intelligence and experimentation in the stories. Seven years later, when I started work on the Lovecraft stories, it was the Cawthorn approach to adaptation and the *Metal Hurlant* style I had in mind.

**JOHN:** One of the things I liked about Jim Cawthorn's work, the Europeans and Burne Hogarth, was the way that the art was often favored over the story. *Metal Hurlant* frequently ran stories featuring nothing but full pages of art.

**CHERYL:** Aubrey Beardsley seems to have been a big influence on Savoy, all the way from the name through to some interior art in *Reverbstorm* #6

**JOHN:** Both Dave and I are great admirers of Beardsley's work. Not only is he one of the greatest artists of the Victorian era, his work points the way to subsequent developments in 20th century art.

**MICHAEL:** Savoy takes its name from Leonard Smithers' *The Savoy* magazine, which Smithers used as a platform for Beardsley's work after the Wilde scandal.

**CHERYL:** Have Tony Blair and David Blunkett found their way into Savoy publications yet?

**MICHAEL:** No!

**JOHN:** No and they're unlikely to, now that the Meng & Ecker comics have pretty much run their course. A shame because they're both ripe for a severe tooling. I find myself frequently having to remind people surprised by Blair's apparent move to the right that he wasn't a left-winger to

begin with. When he was Shadow Home Secretary in 1994 he happily supported the Conservatives in passing yet more draconian video censorship laws. Blunkett as we know is one of the most authoritarian Home Secretaries of all time, a man that makes the previous Tory incumbents seem like lily-livered liberals. Since this government has been in power it has created 661 new criminal offences. The prison population in 1993 was 41,000, today it's 75,000. (See http://observer.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1273776,00.html for more details.) Is this ripe material for satire? Absolutely.

**CHERYL:** Can you go on shocking the world, or will there be a limit to what Savoy does?

**JOHN:** Well, shocking people is remarkably easy, so easy that one can often manage it inadvertently. The main impetus has always been producing works we'd like to see ourselves, whether those are original works or reprints of great books. If the world wants to be shocked that's the world's problem, not ours.

**MICHAEL:** You can always find something that will shock people. Every generation grows up with a new set of values and views that can be upset — which is how the shock merchant works. The real challenge, as John says, is to find relevant and meaningful things to do and say. Many will always find genuinely new things shocking, and I hope there will never be a limit to that …

# Found in Translation

My hunt for a translated novel turned up a blank this month (though I have a fine recommendation from Gavin Grant that I will order from Amazon if I can't find it at Worldcon). However, I can always rely upon the very wonderful Zoran Živković to come up with some short fiction when I need it. His latest offering, "Compartments", will feature in issue #2 of PS Publishing's magazine, *Postscripts*, so you can view this review as a taster for that as well. I, however, have been lucky enough to get sent one of the book-form versions of the story that Zoran publishes himself as part of his campaign to get noticed outside of Yugoslavia.

As you may have noticed, Živković's stories are sometimes very strange indeed. "Compartments" is no exception. It begins normally enough, with a man racing to catch a train as it pulls out of the station. But this is no ordinary train. As the overly solicitous and somewhat disturbed conductor tries to find a seat for him, our hero meets some very strange people. In one compartment he finds a woman who insists that her husband is dead, even though he is sat opposite her. In other there is a group of monks who are vowed to silence except when going through tunnels, and who play chess from the ending backwards. And throughout the train is the all-pervasive influence of Her, a woman of such powerful sexual allure, and apparent lack of concern for social niceties, that none can encounter her without being changed.

There is no charge for this journey. Indeed, it is not even clear that the train travels anywhere. Instead our hero travels through a surreal and allegorical sequence of compartments in much the same way as a mediaeval alchemist travels through the

sequence of transformations that lead him to the Philosopher's Stone. Once again, Živković has produced a thought-provoking story, and the fine translation by Alice Copple-Tošić gives no clue that the piece was not written by a native English speaker.

*Compartments* – Zoran Živković (tr. Alice Copple-Tošić) – Polaris - chapbook

## The Nun's Tale

This month my trawl through mainstream fiction has lighted upon *Holy Fools* by Joanne Harris. I picked it up because it sounded from the cover blurb as if it might be something like *The Name of the Rose*. On looking inside I found that a review from the *New Statesman* had likened it to a cross between Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudon* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. But the thing that really convinced me that I should read it was discovering that in the acknowledgements Harris gives thanks to Christopher Fowler, Charles de Lint and Juliet McKenna. Clearly Harris has at least thought about genre fiction in creating the book. Does it come through in the writing?

Intriguingly the plot of *Holy Fools* takes place in 1610, just like Mary Gentle's novel of that name. To a certain extent the events are kicked off by the assassination of Henri IV and the changes in French society that result from it. The book even includes a character who was a favorite of Baron de Sully. But there the parallels end. Our heroine, Juliette, is a gypsy girl, trained in all of the arts of the traveling player from acting and acrobatics to tarot reading and pocket picking. Once she was the star of the shows put on by the maverick impresario, Guy LeMerle. Now she is in hiding in a remote country nunnery, trying to raise her young daughter away from the alarums and excitements of courts, crowds and stardom.

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*Soeur Alfonsine was still shouting, straining to be heard above the voices of the nuns. "It's a judgement on us!" I thought she said. "A terrible judgement!"*

*Now some of the nuns looked exasperated; Alfonsine was never happier than when she was doing penance for something. "For pity's sake, Alfonsine, what now?"*

*She fixed us with her martyr's eyes. "My sisters!" she said, more in accusation than grief. "The Reverend Mother is dead!"*

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So it begins. Juliette's sanctuary is about to turn into a nest of vipers. The new Reverend Mother is an eleven-year-old girl, the daughter of an ambitious and corrupt bishop. And her confessor, Père Columbin, is none other than Guy LeMerle, playing his most ambitious role yet, for stakes that include the lives of all of the nuns.

What follows is a classic tale of hysteria in the cloisters. Harris writes very well, and does a good job of showing how LeMerle is able to play off the neuroses and jealousies of the nuns to bring chaos, suspicion and murder to their previously calm and ordered lives. Juliette is torn between aiding her old lover and protecting the nuns who are disposable pawns in his game.

While *Holy Fools* is an enjoyable book that made the 11-hour trip from Heathrow to San Francisco go much more quickly than it normally does, I was disappointed by its

lack of depth and subtlety. Le Merle has something of the air of Lymond about him, but Harris doesn't come anywhere close to Dorothy Dunnett when it comes to complexity of scheming and depth of villainy. The book does make valid points about religious obsession, and in fact is generally quite rude about Christianity, but even this is done in a light-hearted manner than is likely to offend only those who make a career out of being offended.

Harris is an extraordinarily popular writer, but it is clear from *Holy Fools* that she has achieved this popularity by writing books that are simple and entertaining rather than by stretching the envelope. Thankfully, unlike certainly other best sellers I could mention, she has not done so by sacrificing her prose. *Holy Fools* might not be challenging, but it is not dumb either. Those who enjoy the soap opera atmosphere of formula fantasy will probably enjoy this book too. And possibly more serious fantasy readers will appreciate that Harris has done her research. But lovers of speculative literature will probably come away from this book still hungry. Readers cannot live on sponge cake alone. (And as for that comparison to Angela Carter, oh dear…)

*Holy Fools* – Joanne Harris – Black Swan – mass market paperback

# Short Stuff

## Dreaming of Freedom

The featured book at the Liverpool convention was, naturally, concerned with colonialism. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan have put together an anthology of stories that they describe as "postcolonial science fiction and fantasy". Precisely what "postcolonial" means is, of course, open to debate, but one of the joys of having an anthology is that the debate is played out in fiction rather than in essays.

The book, *So Long Been Dreaming*, is published by a small Canadian company with the delightful name of Arsenal Pulp Press (http://www.arsenalpulp.com/). They have nothing to do with Thierry Henry or Arsene Wenger, and don't have much to do with SF&F either. If you are looking for the book on their web site, it is listed under "cultural studies", "native interest" and "black interest", as well as the more general "fiction" and "anthologies". It is nice to see us sneaking into the mainstream there.

As with any anthology, *So Long Been Dreaming* is a mixture of voices and views. For me some of the most interesting stories were those that used the science fiction setting to show a bit of hope for the future, or at least ask how things might develop. But there are also several stories that simply express anger and resentment, and there is a place for that too.

The book opens with what I think is the most thoughtful story in the anthology. "Deep End", by Nisi Shawl, is a tale of transportation of criminals to a new world. Naturally, this being SF, this new world is far out in space, and to get there the prisoners have to be uploaded into cyberspace. This is, to a certain extent, a rather cozy existence. On arrival the transportees have to weigh up the various risks of colonizing an alien planet and being downloaded into clones, some of which may be faulty.

The kicker, however, the thing that really makes you stop and think, is that the prisoners will not be getting clones of their

old bodies, which were black. Instead they are due to be downloaded into bodies cloned from their white masters. The idea is that the colony world will act as back-up storage for white DNA. So by opting to go down to the planet the colonists are agreeing to become very different people, and to carry their oppression with them. Then again, they have the chance to become masters of their own world. Some of them refuse to be downloaded. But in doing so they are opting to stay in a prison environment over which their captors have complete control.

One of the things that often irritates me about short stories is that they open up a bunch of ideas and do nothing with them. In "Deep End", however, that tactic works brilliantly. I'm still pondering the implications of the situation that Shawl creates. I'm hoping to see this story on some award shortlists next year.

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*Anthony clamps down his chunk of molars on a chunk of lamb and tears it from the skewer. "Things'll be different by the time we get to the stars," he says. "We'll be different. I read a story about it. If we find life out there, we'll change ourselves to be more like what we find. We'll make our bodies and brains different. We won't even have to come back home. We'll be so well adapted that we can survive wherever we land as efficiently as the native aliens."*

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Another thoughtful story is "Native Aliens" by Greg van Eekhout. It cuts between a story of a Dutch family being expelled from Indonesia after World War II and a far future tale of Earth colonists being sent home by the people of the world that they settled. In the first story the Dutch father, despite being Indonesian-born, sticks proudly to his Dutchness and looks down on the locals. In the second the humans have adapted fully to their new water-world home, and require major surgery to be able to survive back on Earth. But the "native aliens" still regard them as interlopers and send them back to a "home" that doesn't want them and in which they cannot live.

Although van Eekhout makes some very valid points in the story, I found it rather disturbing because at root it is saying that people should not travel. That they should never try to cross cultural boundaries. Certainly van Eekhout is right in saying that you can't go home. After two years in Australia and seven on-and-off in California I'm certainly no longer fully "British". Nor have I become either Australian or Californian. Not to mention the problems of dropping someone out of Australia and into California. But does that mean it was wrong for me to have that experience? In any case, in some ways I had no choice about crossing boundaries. I was brought up Welsh in an English town, and consequently never really belonged to either. Change happens.

Which brings us to "Lingua Franca" by Carole McDonnell. This is a story about the destruction of a native culture by alien incomers. McDonnell asks us to think about what is being destroyed and what might be being gained. Her heroine comes from a deaf mute culture whose language is being destroyed by a fashion for surgical implants that allow mouth-ear communication just like the Earth people. Mist finds this disgusting. Young people are abandoning traditional light shows and "listening" to that awful stuff called "music".

Another casualty of the arrival of the Earthers is the strict caste structure, and associated dress code, of Mist's society.

Mist herself was brave enough to marry out of caste for love, but she can't accept the accelerated pace of change that is causing the next generation to abandon caste altogether. Especially as it also involves abandoning family. What I like about this story is that it shows both the good and the bad of cultural change. Much of what happens to Mist and her world is very sad, and even harmful. But is it all bad? Most people would say no.

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*"The Khond," Harun said, "dream of an age that never existed. It's true your coming brought them the notion of time but they're now weaving a fantasy of their past."*

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That quote came from "Out of Synch" by Ven Begamudré. It is a tale told by a frightened colonist and her half-breed lover in the face of a burgeoning native insurrection. The story paints a beautiful picture of the insecurity of colonial rulers dependent on more numerous native servants, but I like the fact that Begamudré acknowledges the complexity of the situation. Colonization changes native culture, and creates new cultures. We can't understand it without accepting that.

Of course one of the beauties of science fiction is that it allows us to play with timescales over which vast changes can take place. One of my favorite stories from the book is "Delhi" by Vandana Singh. It is a story about a young man who can see between time streams. Consequently he can see his city in the far past when it was a great Indian capital. He can see it under the rule of the Moghul emperors and of the British. And he can see a far future city in which the very rich live in flying castles while the poor huddle underground. Through it all, as empires come and go, the city, its people, and their problems remain much the same.

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*There is one last thing I want to ask about. "And what of these aliens on this planet, the* Teotl*?"*

*"These aliens, yeah. But they belong here. The only real alien right now is you," Jami laughs. "And soon we go teach you how to belong."*

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I want to end, as the book does, with the other standout story: "Necahual" by Tobias S. Buckell. This riffs exuberantly off classic SF while telling a tale about the liberation of a colonized planet. It begins in full *Starship Troopers* mode with soldiers from the human-based League dropping down onto a planet of Caribbean settlers who have reportedly been conquered by the alien *Teotl*. On arrival, however, the liberation forces discover that they are none too welcome, and that the book they are playing out is actually *War of the Worlds*.

In addition to saluting the genre and making a sly comment on the Iraq war, Buckell asks whether well-educated, middle-class colored people from free, democratic societies might not be in danger of themselves taking up the "white man's burden" in trying to liberate their less fortunate cousins in other parts of the world. Being anti-colonial is a difficult business.

There are, of course, many other stories in the book: some good, some less so. That is the way of anthologies. I've provided my own take on this, which is of course the take of a white woman who is sympathetic to the colonized but doesn't really have much idea what it is really like to be

colonized (apart from reading rugby reports in English newspapers). Others will see the book in very different ways. And what they say about it will doubtless add further to the debate.

*So Long Been Dreaming* – Nalo Hopkinson & Uppinder Mehan (eds.) – Arsenal Pulp Press – trade paperback

### Dead Good

Following my comments in the last issue about the Locus Poll, Neil Gaiman kindly sent me a copy of his story, "Bitter Grounds". Having now read it, I have to agree with Neil and Matthew Cheney. It is the best story that Neil produced last year. Indeed it is good enough to be up there with Jeff Ford's "The Empire of Ice Cream" (and possibly Lucius Shepard's "Only Partly Here", which I haven't read but which Ellen Datlow praises very highly). Quite how this story didn't get onto more award shortlists I do not know.

What is it about? Well, it is about being dead from the inside out, it is about zombies, it is about New Orleans and as many other things as you can find in a kaleidoscope picture if you keep looking at it long enough. Those of you who would like a slightly more coherent view of the piece should check out Matthew Cheney's review from *The Mumpsimus* (http://mumpsimus.blogspot.com/2004/03/bitter-grounds-by-neil-gaiman.html). But really what you need to do is read it. To do that you need to get Nalo Hopkinson's anthology, *Mojo: Conjure Stories*. Come to think of it, if the rest of the stories in it are anywhere near as good as Gaiman's, I need to get a copy too.

*Mojo: Conjure Stories* – Nalo Hopkinson (ed.) – Warner Aspect – trade paperback

## Less is More

By Kevin Standlee

These days, we're constantly bombarded with messages that Bigger is Better. Get more, be more. Everything is super-sized. As one commercial put it: "the SUV: because one parking space isn't enough." So the message of this article may seem a little strange: I'm about to ask those of you who are attending this year's Worldcon in Boston to come and vote for Less, so you can have More.

What I'm talking about is an amendment to the WSFS Constitution that would reduce the lead-time for selecting Worldcons from three years to two years. Please don't turn away just yet! This is important, and it affects everyone who attends a Worldcon or has considered attending a Worldcon. It's not just an obscure technical issue of interest to just a handful of SMOFS. This is something that could make a fundamental difference in Worldcon, and possibly even save you some money.

Longer lead times are wasting Worldcon resources: not just time but most importantly people, the most difficult resource to replace. Not only that, they are making Worldcons more expensive. Voting to shorten the lead-time to two years would go a long way toward making it easier to get people to put in the time to organize a Worldcon, and probably will even reduce the cost by as much as 10%. I encourage you to attend at least the first Main Business Meeting at Noreascon 4, 10 AM Saturday (check the program schedule), and to vote to ratify the motion named "Back to the Future" on the agenda. It will come up pretty early, so

you're not being asked to commit to an entire day of debate; probably not more than about thirty minutes.

That's the short version. If you don't care about the background and related issues you can probably skip the rest of this article. If you want to know why the current situation is the way it is and why I think the proposal up for ratification is a good one, read on.

## From Two Years to Three

If your first Worldcon was after 1985, you won't even remember a time when Worldcons were not selected three years in advance. In 1984-5, many influential conrunners led a movement to increase the site selection lead-time from two years to three. The new rule took effect in 1986 and ever since then we've been selecting Worldcons three years in advance.

The main argument for the change was that Worldcon had grown large enough that it needed the increased lead-time to compete with non-fannish conventions. Convention space books up a few years in advance, and groups trying to book spaces that could hold Worldcons were finding that the "mundanes" were booking space out from under them, because they could make commitments more than two years ahead of time. Increasing the lead-time to three years, the SMOFS argued, would make us more competitive and lead to better Worldcons.

It didn't work. Professional groups wanting to book space will now plop down guarantees five or more years ahead of time. The 1993 Worldcon, ConFrancisco, originally had to announce itself as four days, then change main hotels, in order to go back to the now-traditional five days, because Ford Motor Company reserved the space out from under them. The 1998 Worldcon in Baltimore ended up bidding for the first weekend of August because their preferred dates were booked by groups willing to commit sooner than we were. Our increased lead-time wasn't buying us anything.

At first, a few people thought we hadn't gone far enough. I introduced a motion to the Business Meeting in the early 1990s that would have increased the lead-time to *four* years. Thankfully this proposal failed, and we have had time to find out just how wrong our thinking was back then.

This year's Worldcon, Noreascon 4, is the sixteenth Worldcon selected three years in advance. Over the past few years, more and more conrunners, including many of the people who backed the extension to three years in the first place, have come to the conclusion that not only was the longer lead-time not helping us make better Worldcons, but it was actively damaging. The feeling began to grow that we would be better off going back to two years, as was the situation from 1969 to 1986.

## A Curious Pattern

Proposals to shorten the lead-time were introduced to the Business Meeting several times in the past 10 years, but they all failed. A curious pattern emerged in the voting for such proposals. Most people with experience bidding for and running Worldcons at a high level during the three-year era agreed that the extra year wasn't doing us any good, and was actually doing active harm. People who hadn't yet run a Worldcon, whether they were still bidding or were in the first or second year of their planning cycle,

objected that of course they needed that extra time. Because of this "old SMOFs v new blood" split in the voting, attempts to shorten the lead-time were often seen as an Evil SMOF Plot to keep the virtuous New Blood Outsiders from holding Worldcons. But strangely enough, most of these New Blood Outsiders, after they had their Worldcon behind them, started thinking about it and agreeing that they didn't really need those three years after all.

It is understandable that people without a lot of Worldcon experience should think they need more time. After all, Worldcons are big, complicated events. Having three years to organize them should be better than just two, shouldn't it? Yet most (admittedly not all) of the people who have chaired Worldcons during the three-year era say no. A commonly held view is that a Worldcon needs between 18 and 24 months to plan properly and anything beyond that is wasted capacity.

During the debate on an earlier incarnation of the lead-time reduction motion, Seth Breidbart summed up the quandary of the Worldcon runner when he said approximately, "Every Worldcon needs an extra six months to plan their convention; unfortunately, they need that six months one month before their Worldcon starts." He's right. I've been there three times now as a division manager or co-chair of a Worldcon (1993, 1994, and 2002), and we were always sweating out those last few weeks.

## The Problems of the Extra Year

Okay, you're saying, "But if you needed that time, wouldn't shortening the lead time make it worse?" Not really, I say. Aside from completing negotiations on your facilities contract, getting your membership database set up, and sending out a progress report that says, substantively, "we didn't forget about you, but we have nothing more to say for the next year," there's not a lot you can do in year one. If you try and do a lot of detailed planning, you'll discover that most of the plans are so outdated by the time you try and use them that you have to scrap them and start over. If you instead decide not to fall into the trap of excessive early planning and put your committee into near-hibernation for a year, you find that a year later, it's very difficult to get people interested in working again. They have got out of the habit of working on the con, or have found other things to do with their lives.

ConFrancisco in 1993 fell into the first trap. We started planning too much, too soon, and wasted a bunch of our time on plans that we had to toss out and re-do. So when we won the bid for the 2002 Worldcon in 1999 we thought we'd be smart and avoid that trap, which we did, except that we fell into the second one. In late 2000, getting the committee started back up was a struggle, and we were behind the curve nearly all the way to the convention because of it.

## It Takes How Many Years?

While we're at this, let's look at the huge amount of time the current situation expects people to take out of their own lives if they want to participate in Worldcon running. You can expect to spend two to four years bidding, three years planning, and one to three years dealing with post-convention work. That's upwards of *ten years* you're asking someone to devote to what is, after all,

only a hobby. How do you expect to recruit people to organize these things if they have to promise a decade of their life to do so? Shortening the lead-time is an effort by us old fogey SMOFS to *increase* the ability of newcomers to enter the field, not some scheme to make it impossible for people to bid unless they have decades of experience. After all, we want someone to run conventions for us to attend when we're too old to do the work ourselves.

Many people think that extended bidding campaigns are bad. Oh, sure, they result in fun parties to attend, but they're expensive, and those expenses get loaded into the cost of the Worldcon. (The bids that lose merely have to eat the costs; the winner at least has some possibility of being able to recover some of those costs, although I should point out that ConJosé did not repay most bidding expenses.) Shorten the lead-time and I expect you'll shorten the bidding campaigns.

## The Facilities Problem

All this is fine, I hear someone saying, but doesn't this mean it's more likely that we'll lose sites? Possibly, but it's less likely than you may think. By three years out, most of the big groups have already made their commitments, so whoever is left available is starting to get nervous. There was a rash of convention center building in the 1990s, and those facilities that haven't booked by minus three years are more likely to start cutting better deals even though we're not going to commit until two years out. Convention Center rental is usually the largest single item a Worldcon has to pay. They are a huge fixed expense, and anything you can do to lower that cost is going to help your Worldcon keep membership costs down. This is known as the "bottom feeder" school of thought. SF/F conventions are not first-tier business, and we shouldn't pretend that we are. We are events that convention facilities will book if they can't fill the space with a much more profitable business conference. Rather than trying to compete with groups who we can't possibly match, we should embrace being bottom-feeders and see if we can get the best possible deal.

Incidentally, "no-zone" site selection and a shorter lead time have a useful interaction: should you get "bumped" by a group booking space out from under you, there is a good chance you can postpone your bid for just a single year. Under the old zone system, if you lost your slot, you had to wait three years for it to come around again. There are not a lot of groups that have enough depth to do that.

## Wrapping Up

So let's sum up. Shortening Worldcon site selection lead-time from three years to two would reduce the crushing time commitment the current system imposes upon individuals. It would make it easier for new groups to enter the field and increase the supply of viable bids, which most people think is a good thing. It should lower the large fixed costs of booking convention facilities due to convention centers and hotels being hungrier for the business. Based on the experiences of more than a decade of running conventions on a three-year lead-time, nothing would be sacrificed from the existing planning process. We wouldn't lose momentum coming out of the election and could get to work right away on planning a Worldcon without wasting effort.

Believe it or not, there are even more good reasons to vote for this proposal, but I've already spent 2000 words talking about it, so I'll try to wrap things up here. Nearly every person who has chaired a Worldcon held under a three-year lead-time, including Mark Olson (Noreascon 3), Tom Whitmore and me (ConJosé), Deb Geisler (Noreascon 4), Vince Docherty (Intersection and Interaction), and Christian McGuire (L.A.con IV), endorses this proposal. We all hope for your support, and if you're attending Noreascon 4, I hope we'll see you at the 10 AM Saturday morning WSFS Business Meeting, where you can cast your vote on the future of Worldcon Site Selection.

# Miscellany

### Classic Reprints

New to SF publishing is Red Jacket Press, a company that "is dedicated to bringing select out-of-print titles back into print." Their first two releases were originally published by Dave Kyle and Martin Greenberg's Gnome Press. The books are: *Judgment Night*, by C.L. Moore, and *Children of the Atom*, by Wilmar Shiras. I'm especially pleased to note that Red Jacket chose to begin their project with two of those very rare creatures, successful women SF writers from the 1950s. The books are a little expensive at $39.95 each. This is because they are aimed at a collectors' market. They are accurate facsimiles of the original publications and come with a protective slipcase. In September Red Jacket will be issuing three Lensmen books. They say that they will be at Worldcon and expect to have the new titles with them then.

One of the founders of the company is Dave Kyle's daughter, Kerry. Hmm, I wonder where they got that name "Red Jacket" from…

### Glasgow Safest Large City in UK

Yes it is. An international survey of major cities has confirmed this. And it is very good news as I'm involved in running conventions in Glasgow in 2005 and 2006.

### New Short Fiction Award

I think I missed the announcement on this while I was in Finland, so here it is now. The Irish SF magazine, *Albedo One*, has announced a new short story contest. The Aeon Award comes with a prize of €1,000, so it is well worth entering. And all six short-listed stories will get published in the magazine. Full details at: http://homepage.eircom.net/~albedo1/html/aeon_award.html.

### Mythopoeic Award Winners

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature: *Sunshine* by Robin McKinley

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature: *The Hollow Kingdom* by Clare B. Dunkle

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies: *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* by John Garth

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in General Myth and Fantasy Studies: *The Myth of the American Superhero* by John Lawrence & Robert Jewett

Hmm, OK, I'll get a copy of the McKinley when I get back to the US. But be warned,

sex-and-vampire novels are not my thing. My apologies in advance to Ms. McKinley.

## British Fantasy Awards Shortlists

**Best Novel** (The August Derleth Fantasy Award):

- Simon Clark, *Vampyrrhic Rites* (Hodder & Stoughton)
- Christopher Fowler, *Full Dark House* (Doubleday)
- Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *Felaheen: The Third Arabesk* (Earthlight)
- James Herbert, *Nobody True* (Macmillan)
- Peter Straub, *Lost Boy Lost Girl* (HarperCollins)
- Liz Williams, *The Poison Master* (Tor)

**Best Short Fiction:**

- Ramsey Campbell, "Fear the Dead" (*The Fear Within*, 3F Publications)
- Mark Chadbourn, *Wonderland* (Telos Publishing)
- Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon, "Exorcising Angels" (*Exorcising Angels*, Earthling Publications)
- Christopher Fowler, "American Waitress" (*Crimewave 7: The Last Sunset*, TTA Press)
- Mark Samuels, "The White Hands" (*The White Hands and Other Weird Tales*, Tartarus Press).

**Best Anthology:**

- Andy Cox, ed., *Crimewave 7: The Last Sunset* (TTA Press)
- Stephen Jones, ed., *By Moonlight Only* (PS Publishing)
- Stephen Jones, ed., *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror, Vol. 14* (Robinson/Carroll & Graf)
- Joel Lane, ed., *Beneath The Ground* (Alchemy Press)
- Andy W. Robertson, ed., *William Hope Hodgson's Night Lands, Volume 1: Eternal Love* (Wildside Press)
- Jeff Vandermeer & Mark Roberts, eds., *The Thackery T. Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases* (Night Shade Books).

**Best Collection:**

- Ramsey Campbell, *Told by The Dead* (PS Publishing)
- Christopher Fowler, *Demonized* (Serpent's Tail)
- M. John Harrison, *Things That Never Happen* (Night Shade Books)
- Mark Samuels, *The White Hands and Other Weird Tales* (Tartarus Press)
- Michael Marshall Smith, *More Tomorrow and Other Stories* (Earthling Publications).

**Best Artist:**

- Dave Bezzina
- Deirdre Counihan
- Bob Covington
- Les Edwards
- Dominic Harman

**Best Small Press:**

- *The Alien Online* (ed. Ariel and co.)
- Elastic Press (Andrew Hook)
- PS Publishing (Peter Crowther)
- *Scheherazade* (ed. Elizabeth Counihan)
- *The Third Alternative* (ed. Andy Cox)

I've read three of the six novels, all of which were pretty good. I'm hoping that Liz Williams wins because I loved the concept of *The Poison Master*, but Chris Fowler is very popular amongst BFS members and I suspect he might come out on top.

I'm not familiar with any of the individual short fiction, but in the collections Mike Harrison's book is awesome and in anthology I'm keeping my fingers crossed for the inestimable Dr. Lambshead. I am

deeply disappointed that Liz Hand's *Bibliomancy* didn't make it to the collection shortlist.

As for the small press list, Ariel mate, I share your pain. Langford, after all, is even more invincible than PS Publishing, and just as deserving. But you are right, it is indeed an honor to be nominated.

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## World Fantasy Awards Shortlists

**Novel:**

- *The Etched City*, K. J. Bishop (Prime Books)
- *Fudoki*, Kij Johnson (Tor)
- *The Light Ages*, Ian R. MacLeod (Ace)
- *Tooth and Claw*, Jo Walton (Tor)
- *Veniss Underground*, Jeff VanderMeer (Prime Books)

**Novella:**

- "A Crowd of Bone", Greer Gilman (*Trampoline: An Anthology* Small Beer Press)
- "Dancing Men", Glen Hirshberg (*The Dark* Tor)
- "The Empire of Ice Cream", Jeffrey Ford (*Sci Fiction* 02.26.03)
- "Exorcising Angels", Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon (*Exorcising Angels* Earthling Publications)
- "The Hortlak", Kelly Link (*The Dark* Tor)

**Short Fiction:**

- "Ancestor Money", Maureen F. McHugh (*Sci Fiction* 10.01.03)
- *Circle of Cats*, Charles de Lint (Viking)
- "Don Ysidro", Bruce Holland Rogers (*Polyphony* 3 Wheatland)
- "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman", Alex Irvine (*Trampoline* Small Beer Press)
- "O One", Chris Roberson (*Live Without a Net* Roc)

**Anthology:**

- *The Dark: New Ghost Stories*, Ellen Datlow, ed. (Tor)
- *Gathering the Bones*, Jack Dann, Ramsey Campbell & Dennis Etchison, eds. (Voyager Australia; Voyager UK; Tor US)
- *Strange Tales*, Rosalie Parker, ed. (Tartarus Press)
- *The Thackery T. Lambshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric & Discredited Diseases*, Jeff VanderMeer & Mark Roberts, eds. (Night Shade Books)
- *Trampoline: An Anthology*, Kelly Link, ed. (Small Beer Press)

**Collection:**

- *Bibliomancy*, Elizabeth Hand (PS Publishing)
- *Ghosts of Yesterday*, Jack Cady (Night Shade Books)
- *GRRM: A RRetrospective*, George R. R. Martin (Subterranean Press)
- *More Tomorrow & Other Stories*, Michael Marshall Smith (Earthling Publications)
- *The Two Sams*, Glen Hirshberg (Carroll & Graf)

**Artist:**

- Brom
- Donato Giancola
- John Jude Palencar
- John Picacio
- Jason Van Hollander

**Special Award: Professional:**

- Peter Crowther (for PS Publishing)
- John Howe & Alan Lee (for artwork in *The Lord of the Rings*)
- Kelly Link & Gavin Grant (for Small Beer Press)
- Sharyn November (for Firebird Books)
- David Pringle (for *Interzone*/service to the field)
- Sean Wallace (for Prime Books)

**Special Award: Non-Professional:**

- Deborah Layne & Jay Lake (for Wheatland Press)
- Paul Miller (for Earthling Publications)
- Ray Russell & Rosalie Parker (for Tartarus Press)
- Dave Truesdale (for *Tangent Online*)
- Rodger Turner, Neil Walsh & Wayne MacLaurin (for *SF Site.com*)

Wow, there's some really good stuff in there. It will make for some very interesting judging discussions. Still, it is my job to make prognostications, so here, with the caveat that there's a lot of the short fiction that I haven't read, are my picks:

- Novel: *The Etched City*
- Novella: "The Empire of Ice Cream"
- Short Fiction: "Gus Dreams of Biting the Mailman"
- Anthology: *The Lambshead Guide*
- Collection: *Bibliomancy*

You will note that I haven't said anything about the Special Award: Professional. This is because I want them all to win.

## Research Resource

One of the more interesting things to turn up in Liverpool was the SF Hub (http://www.sfhub.ac.uk/), an online index of SF research material being built by Liverpool University. As with all such things, what they have done is very impressive, and what they have yet to do would make Hercules blanche. There is an impressive array of semiprozines and fanzines indexed as well as the academic journals. And I was pleased to find all of the book reviews that I have written for *Foundation* listed. They don't yet index *Emerald City*, but then again *Locus* and *SF Weekly* are missing too, and if Gary Wolfe and Clute don't get in then I can have no complaints. What they probably need now is more grant money and an endless supply of destitute grad students.

## Fanzine Watch

Somewhere in my report of the Blackpool Eastercon I should have mentioned the phenomenon of Third Row Fandom. This is a group of relatively young fans who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable and just the sort of people that fandom needs to keep it going. Although they are very active on things like LiveJournal, I suspected it was only a matter of time before they produced fanzines. And now they have. Geneva Melzack has sent me a copy of *Thought Experiments*. Two things stand out. Firstly someone who has a degree in philosophy and theology but can't finish *Little Women* or *Pride and Prejudice* is the sort of person I would want to talk to. And secondly this is the first time in years that I have sat down and read a fanzine from cover to cover. Some of the material is rather in the vein of someone new to the field who doesn't know quite how thoroughly certain issues have been ploughed over, but it is very promising. If Geneva sticks at it I think she could become very good indeed.

## Concrete Castle Update

Yeah, we lost. Guess what, the winner for the southwest region was a Georgian stately home. What is worse, it is one that many a large corporation would happily have paid millions for to turn it into a conference center. The only reason it was in the *Restoration* contest at all was so that it would be "saved for the nation" rather than restored by Evil Capitalists. Gah! Saved for a bunch of art snobs, more like.

The sort of people who would happily see a rare and historic building like the Concrete Castle lost forever rather than allow it to be used by a bunch of rock musicians. I knew it was a mistake to have footage of the concert on the Restoration program.

Good news in the local media however. Julien Temple says that the quest to save the Concrete Castle is not over. The Strummerville charity is looking to arrange a number of benefit gigs in Somerset to help raise the required money. It would be hard to stage a Roxy Music concert in Bridgwater, but if Billy Bragg wants to come back that would be just wonderful.

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**Booker Long List**

The long list for this year's Booker Prize contains David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. According to the BBC, bookmakers William Hill have made *Cloud Atlas* the 3/1 favorite. Clarke's book, which has yet to be published but has been heavily promoted by publishers Bloomsbury, ties with two others for second favorite at 10/1. The short list of six titles will be announced on September 19th. If the odds are right we'll have two genre novels in the final.

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# Footnote

Next month, the now notorious *Emerald City* Worldcon report. Maybe this year I'll be able to say something nice about the convention. I sure hope so.

Not forgetting books, which means Iain Banks, Susanna Clarke, Steven Erikson, Rebecca Locksley, M.M. Buckner, and anything interesting I happen to pick up at Worldcon.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl