

EMERALD CITY #112

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Introduction

I'm not sure that this will get to you quite in time for Christmas, especially if you are one of those people who read *Emerald City* at work, but here anyway is the jolly fat red mistletoe-and-reindeer-poo-covered ever-so-unseasonal issue of *Emerald City*. Inside there are no elves, no pixies, not much in the way of "Ho! Ho! Ho!", but a positive plethora of present ideas for those of you who have been given a book token by Aunt Maud and are looking to head out and spend it.

Of course with it being this time of year one of the other things that should be thumping through your mailbox is the latest Interaction Progress Report, complete with the Hugo Nominating Ballot. Consequently the infamous *Emerald City* Hugo Recommendation List <http://www.emcit.com/hugo_rec.shtml> needs to swing into action once more. Time is short this year due to Worldcon being almost a month earlier than usual. You have only until March 11th to get your nominating ballot in. So we need to get on with things. Let's see those recommendations rolling in, please.

Talking of recommendations, you may well want to be promoting British writers for the Campbell Award. Before you do

so, please read the note in the Miscellany section.

To give you a little help I've listed a whole bunch of good books that I don't have space for on my Hugo ballot but some of you might consider recommending. There have been a lot of really good novels this year. My personal Best of 2004 will be in the January issue, and I can see that I'm going to have trouble whittling the list down to 10 each of SF and fantasy. Why, only in this issue...

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British Costuming Looks Forward

I think it is fair to say that British costuming is not in the best of health at the moment. Attendance at this year's Wardrobe was certainly down on last year, as was participation in the masquerades. But there are reasons for this. There is a Worldcon coming up next year. Not only will people be saving for the big event, but also a lot of the costumers will (I hope) be working on entries for the Interaction masquerade. (I got promises of 9 entries, as I recall.)

Wardrobe 2004, therefore, was a low-key affair and much of the focus of programming was on preparation for Worldcon. Amongst other thing, Maggie Percival did an excellent workshop on

presentation, and Giulia de Cesare and I were allowed to hold forth on our plans for the Big Event. But probably the best program item (which I hope we will reprise either at the next Eastercon or, even better, at Interaction) was James Steele talking about how to costume animals.

For those of you who don't know, James is very good at animal costumes. This dates way back to his fabulous griffin outfit from Conspiracy in 1987. At Wardrobe he brought along his White Rabbit costume, which I think was originally done for one of Dave Wake's plays at this year's Eastercon. There are several photos of it in amongst my other Wardrobe photos. <<http://www.emcit.com/photos.shtml>>

And talking of Dave Wake, he and James actually did a fine double-act on this particular panel. Just as James was able to tell us all about how to do animals well, Dave could tell us how to get them disastrously wrong. The classic example (which he had brought along) was his Alien costume from the 1999 Eastercon, Intuition. I was his den mom for that. The costume involved stilts. I managed to get him on stage safely, but coming off he was well into the role and rushed past me, fell off the stilts, and broke his ankle. Dave had video of the event, and sure enough there on camera was a horrified Cheryl looking on helplessly. I looked a lot thinner then too.

Talking of film, we also watched the video of the Intersection masquerade, and were enthralled once more by "The Wind's Four Quarters" and "The Return of The Hunt." I hope we get stuff that good again at Interaction. I had also forgotten how good Giulia's entry was. And of course her partner in crime that evening was Janet Johnson, who led the winning entry at the

Noreascon 4 masquerade. But the real shock of the video – something else I had completely forgotten – was that someone came on stage to announce the site selection results. It was a much younger, much thinner, and significantly less graying and balding Kevin Standlee. My, how chairing a Worldcon can age you.

There was other interesting material at the con as well. I was delighted to see Ruth and Jenny Wilcoxon come back with more Hornblower goodies and convention photos. They will be having another convention in Portsmouth next October (see <http://www.huk2005.co.uk/index2.htm>). Sadly it is the week before World Fantasy Con and I suspect I may already be in the US by then.

But to get back to the theme of this con report, I don't think that Worldcon can come soon enough for British costuming. I'm delighted that so many British costumers are excited by the opportunity (as opposed to the Eastercon community, many of whom seem to regard a visiting Worldcon as an unnecessary evil that they would prefer to avoid). But much more importantly I hope to see Interaction act as a gathering point for costumers. There are lots of them in the UK. Pratchett fandom and Anime fandom are full of them. The Hornblower folks do great costumes. And I'm sure that there are a lot of good costumers in the other various branches of media fandom too. What they don't seem to do is talk to each other. If Giulia and I can help provide a focus for British costumers from all backgrounds, and get them working together, then I shall be well pleased with Interaction.

Night Moves

"I like the space between," I said. "The space between dreaming and wakefulness. Between imagination and reality. Between no and yes. Between is and is not. That's where the interesting stuff is."

That was Peter Straub, expounding the manifesto of speculative fiction through the mouth of his viewpoint character, author Timothy Underhill. It comes quite late in the book, but it could quite easily stand as a statement of intent for *in the night room*, Straub's latest novel, which stands on the edge in more ways than one.

In his previous novel, *lost boy, lost girl*, Straub wrote about how Tim Underhill unearthed the mystery of the serial killer, Joseph Kalendar. Underhill, of course, wrote a book about his experiences. But being a horror writer, he made it a fictional story based on the facts of the case as he understood them. Unfortunately for Underhill, he got one crucial fact wrong. Given how many children Kalendar had killed, Underhill assumed that he was also responsible for the death of his vanished daughter, Lily. This was a mistake. In truth Kalendar had his daughter committed to a children's home when he realized he could not control his appetites and might kill her. It was perhaps the only good thing that he did in his life.

In the world beyond, the shade that was once Joseph Kalendar hears about Underhill's book. He is furious. So angry is he, that he is able to pierce the veil that separates the next world from our own. Somehow or other, he will gain his revenge on Timothy Underhill. But in making contact with the living, Kalendar also opens the door to any other shade

with contacts with Underhill, and those responsible for maintaining the cosmic balance are not amused. Poor Tim begins to receive a series of visitations, and slowly realizes that he has precipitated a cosmic crisis.

So far this sounds like the plot of a fairly normal horror novel. But remember that Straub is a writer writing about an author who writes horror stories. He's very much aware of the structure of what he is doing, and is not afraid to discuss it with his readers.

"Excuse me, Mr. Underhill, but what is the point of mixing genres? Doesn't combining fiction with fact merely give you license to be sloppy with the facts?"

"I think it is the other way around," Tim said. "Fiction lets me get the facts right. It's a way of reaching a kind of truth I wouldn't otherwise be able to discover."

One of these days I want to see Peter Straub and Guy Gavriel Kay on a panel talking about mixing fact with fiction.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the plot, Willy Patrick is about to walk into a whole heap of trouble. She's a successful Young Adult fiction writer and has just won the Newbery Medal for her latest novel, *In the Night Room*. But she has also recently spent time in psychiatric care after her husband and daughter were murdered. Now, suddenly, successful businessman Mitchell Faber wants to marry her, but just how far can the predatory Faber be trusted?

The sharp-eyed amongst you will have noticed that the title of Willy Patrick's award-winning YA novel, is, cute tricks with capitalization apart, identical to that

of Peter Straub's novel. You may also wish to know that "the night room" was the name given by Joseph Kalendar to the secret, windowless room in which he tortured and killed his young victims.

Inevitably Willy and Tim meet up, and travel to Millhaven (probably the most haunted town in America) to find out the truth about Lily Kalendar. Along the way they talk, as two writers must, about characters. What would happen if a writer really did meet up with one of his creations? How would the character feel about it? Would he worship the author as a god, or just be damn furious at all the stupid things he was made to do in the name of advancing the plot?

Oh, and I forgot to tell you that *in the night room* is dedicated to Gary K. Wolfe. When you see a genre novel dedicated to one of the world's greatest genre critics, you can bet that the author at least thinks that he is doing something very, very clever indeed. *In the night room* doesn't quite have the structural elegance of *Cloud Atlas*, but it is every bit as clever, and rather more concerned with debates about the art and craft of writing. It is a book that any literature professor should love.

It is also worth noting that, unlike David Mitchell, Peter Straub is a real genre writer. He has not just produced a fascinating book about writing fiction; he has also produced an unputdownable horror novel with a driving plot, truly nasty villains and lots of creepy stuff. (Including that creepy feeling that authors get when confronted by obviously disturbed fans.) You don't have to follow all the clever stuff to enjoy this book.

"I'm glad to see that you have some idea of what is at stake here. If you are going to write

about Lily Kalendar, you'd better make it the book of your life."

Well, I haven't read all of Peter Straub's books, but I would be very surprised if he has written anything better than *in the night room*. Very few people have.

in the night room - Peter Straub - Random House - hardcover

Gender Evolution

The latest novel from Gwyneth Jones is published by Aqueduct, a new-ish small press headed up by L. Timmel Duchamp. That should be enough to tell you that *Life* will not be a rip-roaring, testosterone-fueled boys' own adventure tale. As if Jones would ever produce such a thing in the first place. No, *Life* is one of those books that is almost certain to feature on the Tiptree short list next year. And it is Jones as angry as I have seen her in a long time.

Some of the reviews of *Life* will doubtless tell you that it is about genetic engineering and an end to gender, but mostly it is about no such thing. Indeed, for much of the book you could be forgiven for thinking that it is a standard mainstream novel about, well, life. It starts in a university and features all of the usual student habits of drugs, fumbling first attempts at sex, nervous and desperate relationships, accidental pregnancies, and eventually a whole bunch of hopeful marriages, many of which then fall apart in middle age as the pressures of careers, families or just simple sexual boredom begin to tell. There's nothing much science fictional there, and it is well done enough

to stand proud on mainstream fiction shelves.

But wait, this is an Aqueduct book, so where is the feminism? Well to start with our heroine, Anna Senoz, is a serious career girl, a brilliant microbiologist determined to make her mark upon the world of intellectual endeavor. But, of course, she runs into all of the usual traps that the business world sets for women: old boys clubs, sexual harassment, and the assumption that you can't have a job and a family. I can predict now which male reviewers will describe this as hopeless whining about imagined difficulties, or pathetic excuses for the fact that women just can't hack it in business. But of course Jones is right, and Anna stands little chance unless she can come up with something so amazing that the world cannot ignore her (or she starts behaving like a man herself).

Wolfgang would tell her, don't be so rational. You mustn't stop to think, Annie, if any of us stopped to think when would we ever take out knickers down! Don't you get carried away, ever? Nope, she never did.

Anna's life partner is Spence, a classic New Man raised by a feminist single mother and happy to stay at home and look after the kid, contributing as best he can to the family budget by working for Internet companies and writing children's books. He's a rather more likable character than Anna. And then there is Ramone, a plain and dumpy girl who makes up for what she lacks in looks with spirit and anger. Ramone makes it big as a political pundit, perhaps most famous for telling feminists that they are nothing but a bunch of lesbians, bitter housewives and

fat people. Ramone hates women, especially herself. It sells, but it doesn't win her Anna.

If that wasn't enough politics for you, Anna and Spence also spend sometime working in the Far East. This gives Jones the opportunity to pontificate on the subject of the Muslim state, Jakarta-style. It isn't pretty, and it has very little to do with Islam other than using religion as an excuse for political oppression.

Unusual Girl perched on a desk in front of the class, tossing her silky black bangs out of her eyes, talking bravely, and wishing that the guys she regarded as comrades would stop looking at her tits. This is how young men repress any young woman who dares to be herself, and they don't necessarily know they're doing it. Treat me like a normal human being, she pleads. Unfortunately in guy-world there is no such animal, there are only guys and dolls.

So where, exactly, is all of the science fiction in this? Jones does a fine job venting her anger about the iniquities of the world and the awfulness of men in general. She talks impressively about all of the various dead ends that the women's rights movement has created, and wisely concludes that even if we were to win the sex war we'd only do so by becoming as bad, or worse, than men. Which leaves only one question: what is at the bottom of Pandora's little box of molecular tricks?

Idea one is related to the concept of a viral driver for evolution as famously publicized by Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio*. Given the right trigger, dramatic things can happen to a species' DNA, and human beings as we know them might start to die out. Idea two is that you can take lab mice

with standard female XX chromosomes and, with the right tweaking, make them grow up as functional males; or vice versa with XY mice.

I think you can probably guess where things go from there. A whole brave new world of human gender beckons. Except that Jones doesn't go there. Of course she's honest enough to admit that there will be no Utopia. Changing the gender make-up of humans won't put an end to poverty or war, nor will it stop people wanting to dominate others. But what Jones thinks that it will do remains highly unclear.

In many ways I think I would have been happier if this book had less SF in it. After all, the non-SF parts of it are very good. The biology is also probably very good - though I don't know enough about genetics to tell. But the rest is hand waving. For starters (and being very nit-picky) I don't think that a mass disappearance of Y chromosomes would go un-noticed, if only because of the thousands of transsexuals who get their chromosomes tested in the vain hope that they'll find some medical justification for their condition.

More importantly, Jones doesn't seem to consider the psychological and sociological effects of such a change much at all. This may be because she thinks that all gender is a result of nurture, but in that case the whole idea is pointless as nothing will change. But mainly I suspect that Jones didn't want to write another book about gender ambiguity. After all, we already have the *Aleutian Trilogy*. And that makes the whole SF part of *Life* largely redundant. It is still a very good book, but I think it would have been even better as a more purely mainstream novel.

Oh, and if there is some mysterious message in the fact that Spence spends

some of his time working for an Internet company called Emerald City I'm afraid it was far too subtle for me. I'm pretty sure it is just a Seattle reference.

Life - Gwyneth Jones - Aqueduct Press - trade paperback

War and Sex

The first volume of Storm Constantine's new Wraeththu series, *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure*, concentrated very much on the personal side of Wraeththu life and on the gender questions raised by the whole Wraeththu project. Most importantly, it introduced the Kamagrian, Wraeththu made from human females rather than from human males, so as to allow Constantine to more fully question the nature of a race of male androgynes.

The new book in the series, *The Shades of Time and Memory*, is pretty much a direct sequel, but heads off in a rather different direction, exploring wider political themes. I said in my review of *The Wraiths of Will and Pleasure* that the new series appeared to be all about the Wraeththu growing up, and that continues in the new book with the Tirgon, Pellaz, having to face the consequences of wars fought by his people in the past.

Here the fact that I haven't read the first Wraeththu trilogy will probably show, but my understanding of the situation is as follows. When the Wraeththu were first created, some of them had more of a sense of social responsibility than others. The Gelaming tribe, led by the mage-scientist Thiede, who is believed to have created the first Wraeththu, attempted to found some sort of civilization. They were

opposed by the warlike Varrs and their allies. The Gelaming triumphed. Thiede banished the Varr leader, Ponclast, and his least repentant supporters, to a magical prison inside a dark, forested region called Gebaddon. Now that Thiede is dead, Ponclast has managed to find a way to escape, and the Varrs are seeking revenge. Not that, after years of confinement, they are actually up to it by themselves.

The hara that came to them were thin, sinewy creatures. Moon could see at once their history in their eyes. A har looked him over and Moon knew that he'd never basked in the sunlight stare of his own beauty, nor swapped glances in candlelight across a civilized dining table. He had surely killed with his bare hands.

If all that there was to the book was the story of how Pellaz and his Gelaming subjects learn to forgive and forget, and welcome the Varrs back into Wraeththu society, it would probably be rather thin. But something else that Constantine is doing is re-examining the origins and nature of the Wraeththu. New revelations about their ancestry, their abilities with tantric magic, and their place in the universe come thick and fast. Constantine appears to be building for the future here. She has a bunch of big ideas, well sufficient to fill another trilogy or two.

And of course, Wraeththu being Wraeththu, there are always sub-plots of sexual tension and jealousy. Cal, as ever, is in the thick of things, busily trying to do good and ending up seeming to betray everyone along the way, sometimes deliberately and sometimes not. He really is a quite wonderful anti-hero.

The thing that struck me most about this book, however, is the calm, controlled

professionalism of Constantine's prose. By now she is totally confident with the Wraeththu as a race. They are quite alien to us, and Constantine has them down pat. She also seems totally at ease with the story. It felt like she could go on talking about these strange beings and their lives and loves forever. Technically I think this might be the best book she has ever written. Most of the ideas are not new, but everything just flows, sometimes very elegantly.

When the news finally came, it was not on a windy, moaning night or a miserable morning when rain slashed the earth turning everything gray, it was on a motionless afternoon, with sunlight the color of honey splashing against the walls of Forever. A horse came galloping up the curving driveway from Galhea, its hectic sweating rush totally inappropriate on such a glorious afternoon.

As I understand it, there is one more book to come in this series. I'll be very surprised if Constantine manages to wrap up all of the loose ends that she was busily creating in the first two books. And that probably means that there will be another Wraeththu series after this one. I rather hope so. I'm starting to get hooked.

[Purchase note - in the UK the book is available both as an import of the Tor hardback edition and as a paperback from Storm's own company, Immanion Press. The Tor edition slightly cheaper, but the Amazon link below points to the Immanion edition as I'm betting that Storm makes a lot more money from those.]

The Shades of Time and Memory - Storm Constantine - Tor - hardcover

Mythic Poetry

Last month I found myself saying that I didn't really want to listen to an audiobook anthology, I'd much rather read the eBook that came with the disc. This month, much to my surprise, I found myself reading a novel that I would much prefer to have listened to. *The Labyrinth*, by Catherynne M. Valente, is a quite extraordinary book. Matthew Cheney has listed it has his most unjustly ignored book of the year. I think I can see both sides.

My body is bound with guitar strings, nipples like fawn's hooves strumming E minor chords and finger-picking a Path through resonant briars, redolent of the desert bellies of blue lizards. By now my feet are worn through, holes like mouths gaping and smacking cathedral soles, pounding, thrusting on the Path like a drum-skin stretched into incandescence, finding that old comfortable rhythm that by now I know so well, that I invented out of dust and the sweat beading prettily on my own calves.

Immediately on beginning to read *The Labyrinth* I knew that I would have to read it aloud to myself. If I could not actually speak it, then I would pronounce each word in my head, just like a child learning to read, because without speaking the words I would not hear their rhythm. Valente's writing reminded me very much of Dylan Thomas. There is a lyrical quality to it that demands that it be performed, not just read.

At the same time there is a danger in not reading aloud, in not tying yourself more

firmly to the slippery text. If you do just read this book normally you may find yourself drifting off into daydreams on a regular basis, unable to remember what you had read, or what it was that sparked your train of thought. Even if you don't lose track, Valente's use of language is so complex and colorful that you will often find yourself going back over sentences or paragraphs again and again, either trying to understand what she meant, or to work out how she got away with what she just did. Jeff Vandermeer, in his introduction to the novel, puts it far better than I could.

Valente is certainly as fearless as any of the great non-linear ur-logical Surrealists or Decadents – for her language is not a balancing act, but the equivalent of flinging oneself off a cliff, determined to sprout wings before hitting the rocks below. Most of the time, Valente does grow wings well before annihilation. Or, rather, I should say, writes herself wings.

After a few frenetically convoluted and colorful chapters, Valente does settle down and tell a story. There is a plot here. But even that is something of a strain on the reader. Valente has an MA in Classics, specializing in Ancient Greek, but also with a good grasp of various Latin dialects. It does help to have a smattering of Latin if you want to read the book. But it is much more important to know your Greek myths, otherwise you won't have a clue what is going on. (Hint: if the light doesn't dawn after the narrator's name is revealed, think about the different colors that her body takes on during the story.)

I am awake, I am asleep, I am a somnambulist who each night presses herself between Walls,

in among tiger-spiders. I eat clay and drink dust besides kings whose names I have forgotten or never knew, because we have both refused the gods and their perfumed eyes. We stare ahead and calculate the burn rates of white dwarf stars to pass the time.

I guess I wouldn't recommend *The Labyrinth* to the faint hearted, or those whose love of plot far out-reaches their love of words. But if you have a taste for poetry and the surreal then you are going to absolutely love this book. Matt Cheney is dead right; it should have got a lot more attention than it did. (Small press publishers score again – well done, Sean!)

The Labyrinth - Catherine M. Valente - Prime - hardcover

Land and Sea

So, here I am at the end of Steve Cockayne's *Legends of the Land*, and do I understand it any better? Not at all, I'm afraid.

This is a source of some distress to me. Many people whose opinions I value speak very highly of Cockayne's work. Clearly he is a very competent writer. The books are interesting, and the characters, although there isn't a likeable one amongst them, are well drawn and engaging. But as to the point of the whole thing, I am at a complete loss.

The final volume, *The Seagull Drovers*, picks up pretty much where *The Iron Chain* left off. Much of the narrative is related either by Rusty Brown's airhead daughter, Ashleigh, or by following that pompous old fool, Leonardo Pegasus. Rusty finally makes it as far as the mysterious Islands,

and Leo finally gets to grips with the Multiple Empathy Engine (thanks to a lot of help from other people whose assistance he characteristically fails to notice) and heads off in pursuit of the villainous imp, Lee. Meanwhile Charles and Sally attempt to rescue King Matt from the clutches of the usurper, Grand Master Fang.

And of course it all ends happily ever after. And it doesn't. In roughly equal measure. Which rather makes me think that maybe Cockayne is poking fun at the whole absurd fantasy edifice.

If this were a traditional fantasy series, King Matt would be restored to the throne. Ruth would suffer some terrible fate for having abandoned baby Tom and thereby precipitated the awful events of *The Iron Chain*. And the idyllic Islands would not be about to be thoroughly dug over by industrialists seeking to exploit their newly discovered energy reserves.

Despite the traditionally silly Good v Evil final battle, in which Good manages to triumph because its own forces are ever so slightly less inept than those of Evil, Cockayne's world carries on in its characteristically royally fucked up manner. It is rather like watching a soccer team of geriatric cripples triumph, though a series of absurd accidents, over Manchester United, only to be told that in fact they won't progress to the next round of the FA Cup because the referee mistakenly used the wrong color ball and the game has to be replayed. It is all very unheroic.

Of the three books I think that *The Iron Chain* is by far the best. *Wanderers and Islanders* is practically incomprehensible. And *The Seagull Drivers* plunges relentlessly towards an entirely irrelevant happy ending. *The Iron Chain* at least has

the driving horror aesthetic of the awfulness of poor Tom Slater's life, and how he takes dreadful revenge on those he thinks have wronged him. I'm sure that there is something more that Steve Cockayne wanted his readers to take away from these books, but he and I have failed utterly to connect.

The Seagull Drivers – Steve Cockayne – Orbit – mass market paperback

Horror Takes Wings

Steven Saville has a thing about angels. Which is probably a good idea. Too many horror writers content themselves with writing about ghosts, werewolves, vampires and zombies. Isn't it about time a few of them wrote about angels too? Especially rather disturbing angels.

I first encountered Saville thanks to a fascinating story about Michaelangelo's golem in the Elastic Press anthology, *The Aliso Project*. Knowing that I liked that story, Andrew Hook of Elastic Press suggested that I try their new Saville collection, *Angel Road*. It was a good suggestion.

Obviously few collections are so crammed with good stuff that you rave about all of them, and *Angel Road* is no different. It showcases both the good and not quite so good of Saville's writing, as least as far as my tastes go. For me it is important that a horror story stick closely to the threshold, at least right up until the end. After all, you do want the story to make your flesh creep, and pure nastiness doesn't do that. Thus I am a big fan of "Remember Me Yesterday", in which the narrator is never quite certain what is going on until it is

too late, and of "The Restless Dead", in which the important ghosts don't reveal themselves until the end (though there are some subtle hints along the way). I am less fond of "This Broken Land", which verges worryingly on Dennis Wheatley territory.

It seems to me that Saville is at his best when he doesn't take the supernatural too seriously. Horror is not an exercise in subcreation. Yes, you have to leave the reader with the awful suspicion that it really was all true, but you don't have to catalog the legions of Hell and explain how necromancers do their spells. (Sure I am exaggerating here – Saville is never that bad – but I wanted to make the point.)

Another point I would like to make about Saville is that he seems to have understood what was good about Lovecraft without falling into the trap of copying him. There are no slimy, tentacled beings from beyond the stars in Saville's stories. (Well, at least not the ones in *Angel Road*.) However, several of the stories feature either the writer of dark children's books, Hoke Berglund, or his famous books, *Princess Scapegoat*, *The Forgetting Wood* and *Angel Home*. The demon Tenebrion also features in more than one story. It is these subtle hints of a wider reality, rather than a Tolkienesque detailing of the fantastic, that makes horror work.

The important point here, however, is that there is a number of very good horror stories in *Angel Road*. But because it comes from a small British small press, it isn't easy to find. It isn't even on Amazon UK. I was pleased to see copies of *Alsiso* on the Speculative Literature Foundation stall at World Fantasy Con. Hopefully copies of *Angel Road* will appear at US conventions in the future. And with luck Elastic Press

will be at Worldcon in Glasgow. But in the meantime you can check out their web site. <http://www.elasticpress.com/>. Be careful of the sheep.

Angel Road – Steven Saville – Elastic Press – trade paperback

Land of Lost Dreams

America, as everyone knows, is the Land of Dreams. Most famously there is the Great American Dream, that wonderful idea that no matter who you are, no matter where you came from, if you work hard enough then you can make it in America. But of course there are multiple definitions of "making it". For a refugee fresh off the boat at Ellis Island, making it means having a roof over your head and a full belly. Yet somehow over time "making it" has come to mean "making it BIG," and "work hard enough" has transmuted into "you deserve". Consequently these days the American Dream is honored more in the breach than in the fulfillment of its promise.

There are other dreams in America too. There is the dream of the Frontier, where a man is a man and has the right to rule his own life. Until, that is, he picks a fight with a neighbor and shoots someone, at which point that old shibboleth, Government, wheedles its way back into the dream and everything turns sour. Then there is the dream of bringing peace, happiness and democracy through war. It didn't work for black people after the civil war. It didn't work in Vietnam, and it isn't working in Iraq. But America still dreams.

"He enjoys suicides and mayhem," she whispered, as much to herself as to me. "Decimation is his nature. Decimation is his right." She sat wrapped in the fur jacket, sitting in sunlight and shivering. A little slobber hung as a droplet in one corner of her mouth. "When he runs, people make fatal jumps. They destroy others, destroy things. They kill what they say they love."

Jack Cady knows these dreams well. A former truck driver, he has lived amongst the poor of America. A former winner of the Philip K. Dick, World Fantasy and Bram Stoker Awards, he is well capable of turning broken dreams into haunting stories. There is a reason why Jeremy Lassen urged me to take a review of Night Shade Books' Cady collection, *Ghosts of Yesterday*. It is a darn good book: Jeremy knew that, and he knew I'd see it.

I, and you, when you think about it, can tell whether the writer of a ghost story actually believes in ghosts. Most don't, and that is one reason why there are so many lousy ghost stories.

The best story in the book, I think, also happens to be the first. "The Lady with the Blind Dog" is about the strange people that you meet on the street in San Francisco. Anyone who has traveled the city knows that it has its fair share of street people, and a much larger quotient of people who look like they might be street people but are not. Cady, however, imagines that some of them are the ghosts of failed dreams. People who wanted to make more of their lives, should have made more of their lives, are fated to wander the City in the company of strange, decrepit-looking dogs with

terrifying names that are actually demons in disguise. Very Gaiman-esque demons. There are all sorts of reasons for becoming a ghost, but being forced to live on because you were a failure at your real life has to be one of the more horrible.

And even ghosts can make mistakes. They were, after all, only human. "The Ghost of Dive Bomber Hill" tells how a ghost, in trying to protect his family from a bunch of drunks, ends up causing far more trouble that would have occurred had he stayed out of things. But the traditional ghost story is all about atonement, and in the longest and last story in the book Cady addresses this idea as well. In the mountains of North Carolina, three former Civil War soldiers discover "The Time That Time Forgot," a mysterious region where ghosts of past and future conflicts are doomed to repeat their wars.

Science fiction lies smack-dab on an intellectual center bounded on one end by teddy bears and on the other by youthful cynicism.

The book isn't limited to ghost stories. There is also a selection of essays by Cady on a range of different subjects, including SF and writing ghost stories. These are not quite as strong as the fiction, but they make interesting reading nevertheless. They also show a welcome humorous side to Cady, especially his take on how New York blurb writers might tackle a few famous non-fiction books.

Webster's Dictionary: *"Revolutionary... Profound... Foregoing traditional devices of plot and character the author dazzles with a cacophony of words..."*

As Jeremy Lassen mentioned in the interview with him I published last month, Cady, despite a selection of awards, never quite achieved the recognition that he deserved. Doubtless being a former Louisiana truck driver rather than a New England intellectual had something to do with that. And he died in January of this year, so any fame I can bring him will be posthumous. Looking back on "The Lady with the Blind Dog", I have this terrible suspicion that Cady was writing about himself, that he expects to spend several lonely centuries walking the streets of San Francisco in the company of a dog called Regret. Hopefully I am now doing a little bit to help, and if you buy and read his books you too will be helping to reduce his sentence.

Ghosts of Yesterday – Jack Cady – Night Shade Books – trade paperback

Found in Translation

Well, Conan was never like this.

Not that we should expect a novel based on Serbian folk tales to be anything like Conan, but Boban Knežević has chosen to examine the same sort of theme: that of the brawny warrior fated to rescue his people from a dreadful, magical enemy. He can lop trees down with his sword, women throw themselves at his feet, and monsters follow him wherever he goes.

The book, *Black Blossom*, which is translated from the original Serbian by Dragana Rajkov, begins with the hero performing various tasks for the witch, Helena, in order to get the information he

needs to defeat the warrior-sorcerer who has been plaguing his country. This is chapter 9. Subsequent chapters count both back and forward in the sequence. The increasing numbers recount the progress of the quest, and the decreasing numbers do the old Banksian trick of moving back in time to explain just how our hero (who is never named) got himself into this pickle in the first place.

I lie on my back and stare into the darkness. I close my eyes, open them, close, open. There is no difference. Darkness like this I have never experienced. Castle cellars were palaces of light compared to this, the night spent in Stribbor Forest a breezy summer day, the Ordeal of the Vow mere child's play... I believe that the blind would also be terrified of this dark.

The story is essentially a meditation on the role of the muscle-bound hero in folk tales and fantasy fiction, and as such is a good deal more intelligent than the average fabricated, extruded fantasy product of which publishers are so fond these days. It is also blessedly short. At 139 pages it might even be a novella.

For the fantasy fan there will be some interest in the fact that the basis of the story comes from Serbian folk tales, an area not well known in the West. However, there is not a huge amount of difference between what you find in *Black Blossom* and what is in other European traditions, save of course that the bad guys are generally Turks or Arabs of some sort. It is rather strange to hear someone who refers to himself as a "knight" constantly talking about his "sabre".

Much more importantly, however, *Black Blossom* is not only a fantasy story that goes back to the folk tale roots of the genre

(as opposed to only as far back as Tolkien). It also takes the time to examine the role and character of its hero. That is the sort of fantasy book I want to encourage. I can't tell you much more than that without giving away the plot.

"I am a prophet," said the old man almost merrily, "an evil prophet to be true; only death and misery do I see, poverty and doom, trouble and curses... but never have I met anyone with as much evil within him as you."

Boban Knežević, by the way, is an important figure in Serbian SF. *Black Blossom* is a winner of the Lazar Komarčić Award, Serbia's premier SF prize. Knežević is also editor of the magazine, *Znak Sagite*. You can find the magazine's web site here <http://www.znaksagite.com/>. It is all in Serbian, but the little animated cartoons are just fabulous. There is more information about Knežević and his work (in English), as well as other reviews of *Black Blossom*, here <http://www.paramcijum.com/boban/reviews.html>. Thanks to Zoran Živković for the inside information.

Black Blossom - Boban Knežević - Prime - hardcover

Interview: Chris Roberson - MonkeyBrain Books

Every so often I completely blow my market research. You would have thought I would have been aware of a small press specializing in non-fiction titles about SF&F, but MonkeyBrain Books

<http://www.monkeybrainbooks.com/> only permeated slowly into my consciousness, thanks in large part to the beautiful John Picacio cover that the company is using for its re-issue of Michael Moorcock's *Wizardry & Wild Romance*. Thankfully all of this happened at World Fantasy Con, and Chris Roberson the, er, brains behind MonkeyBrain, was on hand to talk to me. My apologies to Chris for taking so long to discover his company. There will be reviews. But for now, on with the interview.

CHERYL: Chris, there are very many small presses around in the SF&F field, but very few of them choose to specialize in non-fiction. Why did you choose to do that?

CHRIS: Because there are a lot of fiction small press imprints around. I had an idea a while back to do a small press, but I didn't want to do something that other people were already doing really well. There are so many small press imprints that are doing fiction so well, but nobody seemed to be doing non-fiction. It was that lack that drove me to do it.

CHERYL: Most of the non-fiction that comes out is from academic presses. Are you looking to compete with them, or do you have another market in mind?

CHRIS: It is a case of overlapping Venn diagrams. Some of what we do does have an academic interest, but I wanted to reach a popular audience as well. Over time there have been things like encyclopedias of pulp heroes. There are guys like Clute, Nicholls and Grant producing encyclopedias. And those books do have a degree of overlap, because while they are useful to academics they are also something that people like me, as an ordinary reader, can read and enjoy.

CHERYL: Science fiction, almost uniquely amongst genre literature, seems to attract a lot of critical work. I'm sure I couldn't run a magazine like *Emerald City* for most types of literature.

CHRIS: Sure, I think that's absolutely true. And what's amazing is that people burn to do it. Even working professionals whose works command high dollar are willing to do non-fiction for a pittance because they are so eager to do it. Lou Anders' non-fiction anthology, *Projections*, which we recently published, is basically science fiction authors writing about SF film and literature. It was originally going to be all-reprint. We were going to go and get the rights to reprint essays that people had already published elsewhere. But many of the people decided to do new stuff for us, even though we were only paying reprint rates, because they really wanted to. I don't know why that is.

CHERYL: Maybe they were concerned that their original essays had become dated. The field does change very rapidly.

CHRIS: Oh, there's a lot of stuff like that. Particularly the essays about science fiction film. That becomes out of date almost immediately because every year brings new blockbusters. So a lot of the revisions were a case of bringing the material up to date. But a lot of it was just people wanted to talk about things where they didn't have other venues through which to talk about them.

CHERYL: The most high-profile book that you are doing is the Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry & Wild Romance*. I gather that has been updated for the new release.

CHRIS: Oh, substantially. That's another occasion where the author wanted to go back and update material, in this case from the original Victor Gollancz edition

from 1986. And what was interesting was that he found that his opinions hadn't changed much. The new book is much more contextualized for the present day, but the essential argument is pretty much the same.

CHRIS: There's also an appendix of reviews and essays that originally appeared elsewhere, so the book is probably about 25%-30% new material.

CHERYL: That's a pretty substantial change. Anyone who has a copy of the original book will presumably want a copy of the new one too.

CHRIS: I would hope so. It is a landmark text. Here's this guy who is one of the supporting pillars of the genre talking about the history of the genre. It was criminal, I thought, that it had been out of print essentially since it was first published.

CHERYL: It also has this fabulous John Picacio cover that any fantasy author would die to have on their book.

CHRIS: Yeah, we are immensely lucky to have John as a friend. Essentially what we do is give him complete control. We say, "John, here's the text, go crazy." That one in particular is a stellar work - really, really good.

CHERYL: Yeah, I'm distressed to see that it is in the Art Show. It is burning a large hole in my pocket.

CHERYL: Anyway, what else have you got coming up? I believe that there is a Jeff Vandermeer book.

CHRIS: Yeah, Jeff Vandermeer's *Why Should I Cut Your Throat?* It is a mix of original and reprint essays, reviews and interviews, and also convention reports. Jeff first attended a convention back in 1990 - Georgia Fantasy Convention in

Atlanta – and that opens the book. So we begin with Jeff’s entrée, as an aspiring writer, into genre circles. He talks about his first encounters with Michael Moorcock and Harlan Ellison, who were the Guests of Honor. Then we have sections on the craft of writing, of reviews, and of critical writings, broken up by convention reports along the way. And the book ends with Jeff having just won the World Fantasy Award in Minneapolis and getting his first book contract from a major publisher. It is interesting to watch his transformation as he goes along, and how his attitudes change.

CHERYL: Jeff can be a little acerbic at times. Does he get controversial at all in this one?

CHRIS: Well, I don’t think his intention or ours was to offend anyone, but if in the course of his speaking truly about his experiences he says things which other people object to I’m not going to lose any sleep over it.

CHERYL: Well yeah, people get offended by what I write all the time. It is hard to avoid it.

CHERYL: But anyway, what else have you got coming up?

CHRIS: This year we have the second companion to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* by Jess Nevins. His first book on that topic, *Heroes & Monsters*, was our breakout title from last year, which really helped fund most of what we did this year. The new book is called *The Blazing World*, and it is essentially the DVD supplementary material. If *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* were a film rather than a comic then this would be the Director’s Commentary and all of the other behind the scenes stuff that you would find on the supplementary DVD.

CHRIS: It is a really invaluable reference work. Jess is a lunatic genius who knows just about everything that there is to know about 19th Century popular literature. In fact for next year he is writing for us *The Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana*, which will be **the** reference work for fantastic literature in the 19th Century.

CHERYL: So is the goal of Jess’s existing work to tell you about all of these characters that Alan Moore has used in putting together *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*?

CHRIS: The first half of each of the books is a panel-by-panel annotation to the comics, citing every reference throughout, with glosses by Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neill, pointing out where Jess has caught things that they thought no one would ever catch. Or where once or twice he is reading too much into something. That doesn’t happen very often, but sometimes they catch him.

CHRIS: *Heroes & Monsters* also has a number of essays by Jess talking about what Alan and Kevin are doing. For example there is one about the history of “Yellow Peril” stories, looking at the inscrutable oriental as villain. Another is about the history of crossovers, which goes back to Greek mythology, showing where this idea of famous characters meeting up and having adventures together comes from. There are interviews in both with the creators as well.

CHRIS: It is funny, when Jess and Alan talk, they kind of lapse into this conversation like twins speaking their own private language. No one else can understand them. There are things that Alan is referencing, works that he has read, that I’m fairly convinced that no one else alive today except for Jess has also

read. And now Jess is finishing off his research for the Fantastic Victoriana book.

CHERYL: I know that there is a lot of good stuff about, because I have heard Marcus Rowland doing convention panels about his *Forgotten Futures* role-playing game.

CHRIS: It is great, because there is all this forgotten history, our antecedents. So much of what we think is new, or we think only goes back to the early part of the 20th Century, people were dealing with before. Maybe they weren't doing it as successfully, or in as stylistically developed a fashion. But they were dealing with it. My favorite example, which Jess found on his own and I'm pretty sure no one else knows about, is a character called *The Six-Gun Gorilla* from 19th Century American dime novels. And this character is just that, a gun-slinging horse-riding gorilla who roams the open range of the Wild West.

CHERYL: And eats bananas?

CHRIS: Sure, why not?

CHRIS: If there can be said to be an aesthetic to what we are doing then it is my obsession with pulp, my obsession with comics, my obsession with 19th Century adventure fiction; things like that.

CHRIS: But we will be muddying the waters a little bit and starting doing fiction next year. Following that aesthetic, we are going to be doing one original and one reprint anthology. The original work will be what we intend to be an annual series of anthologies called *Adventure*. I have invited a range of fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery and Western writers, and a few literary types. I've asked them to do whatever they like as long as it has adventure in it. Moorcock is going to do a

story for us, Paul di Filippo, Kim Newman, Neal Asher.

CHERYL: Kim Newman was the first person I was going to suggest. The second would be Michael Chabon. Have you asked him?

CHRIS: I wrote to him and kind of apologized, because one of the inspirations for *Adventure* was the issue of *McSweeney's* that he did. So I wrote to him and said, "Look, I've got this idea for this anthology, and it is kind of similar to what you did with *McSweeney's*, but I'd really, really love to see you contribute." Specifically what I wanted to see was more of "The Martian Agent". He wrote back and was very, very enthusiastic about what we were doing, but he has this first look deal with *The New Yorker* for all of his short fiction, so we'll have to wait and see if he does something appropriate that *The New Yorker* doesn't want before he can send anything our way. But certainly he was one of the first people on our list of people to contact.

CHERYL: The *McSweeney's* anthology looks like it is turning into a series.

CHRIS: Yeah, there's a follow-up.

CHERYL: And it doesn't have the next installment of "The Martian Agent" because he hasn't finished it yet.

CHRIS: Yeah, that's what I heard too. But I'm really, really eager to read the next part. It is really good stuff.

CHERYL: Of course Kim Newman does this stuff very well too. I'm a big fan of his.

CHRIS: When I came to start thinking about sending out invitations for *Adventure* what I did was I went to my bookshelf and made a list of all of the people that I have more than two books by, and invited each of them. Kim's stuff,

particularly the Diogenes Club stories, is I think some of the best. Hopefully he'll do one for us. We'll see what happens.

CHERYL: There was one on *Sci-Fiction* the other week, so clearly he's still interested in the idea.

CHRIS: I have also recently rediscovered Paul McAuley's ghost hunter stuff that he does. He's known primarily as a hard SF writer, but the 19th Century / early 20th Century gaslit work of his is incredible.

CHERYL: Kim and Paul know each other very well. I'm sure that they have conversations like Alan and Jess.

CHRIS: I have Stephen Jones to thank for collecting those stories in his *Best New Horror* ever year. Otherwise I'd never see them.

CHERYL: I guess it is time now for the traditional questions about the practicalities of running a small press. What is your view on the PoD versus traditional printing debate?

CHRIS: This has been a process for me. I was originally a strong adherent to the notion of the PoD revolution. I thought it was going to save us all. But I came to doubt that over time. I think that there is some really good quality material that comes out. But the market realities of the way that PoD works makes it very, very difficult for the average reader to find that good stuff; at least without a supporting mechanism of reviews and recommendations. There are standouts. People like Jeff Vandermeer are shining examples of the sort of commercial and critical success you can have with PoD. But they are rare.

CHRIS: Our model has been to go with affordable trade paperback offset, traditional printing. In our first year we

had no distribution, so we dealt directly with retailers and with distributors. One book sold very well, and the other two under-performed. I think that they are really good books, but they didn't find their audience. But we were lucky enough on the strength of those three books that we could start negotiating with distributors. Eventually we signed a deal with National Book Network. They were very excited about the line, and now they distribute us into the chain stores. And that means that the books have started showing up in Borders and Barnes & Noble as well as the good specialty stores.

CHERYL: In talking to other small presses I have found that the way they get a really good deal out of distributors is if people are actively asking for a particular book. Is it harder to get that to happen with non-fiction?

CHRIS: We haven't tried that sort of whisper campaign. Our goal has been to make as attractive a product as possible, and put it in front of people and hope that they notice it. The sales so far have been sufficiently good to justify what we are doing.

CHERYL: So you have the distribution deal now, you are available in the big bookstores.

CHRIS: Yeah, it is funny, I went into a Borders a while back looking for an issue of *Asimov's* that I had a story in, and they had copies of several of our books on the shelves. The Moorcock was there; one of Jess's books was there. But success is a moveable target. My first reaction was, "Oh no, they only have one copy of each." Once you get your books into Borders you then worry that they don't have enough, or that they aren't faced, and so on.

CHERYL: It is good to have some ambition.

CHRIS: I guess so.

CHERYL: A lot of small presses sell at conventions. I don't think I have ever seen you guys doing that. You are not in the book room here, whereas a lot of other small presses are.

CHRIS: We did do that a little bit at the very beginning, and what I learned from that is that I am very, very lazy. And I also like to drink. For the first year we only had three titles and it was kind of embarrassing trying to fill a 10-foot table with only three books. By this point we have enough to fill a table, but I find that I don't have the patience to sit behind it. I know very good retailers; they can do it and I can't. So we are talking to some people now about having them do it for us so that I can still stay in the bar.

CHERYL: That sounds like a much more civilized way of spending your convention. Maybe you should just sit in the bar with a stack of books and wait for people to come up and give you money for drinks.

CHRIS: Sure, that's not a bad idea. I'll give that a shot.

CHERYL: Now, do I recall you mentioning *Dr. Who*?

CHRIS: Not yet, but I will. I think it originally came out from the Virgin line of media tie-ins. Paul Cornell, Martin Day, and Keith Topping did a book called *The Discontinuity Guide*. We've picked it up. It is in one sense an episode guide to *Dr. Who*, from the very first episode. But what is more interesting is that they looked at the bones beneath the skin. There is a section for each of the episodes listed citing inspirations and references, or in

some cases where the scriptwriters outright stole the plot of the episodes. The guys also try really hard to reconcile the incongruities in *Dr. Who*. You had hundreds of writers and producers working on the series over time, and they were under deadlines and on a budget. They didn't have time to go back 15 years and see how Gallifrey was described back then. But in the book they try to reconcile these incongruities and explain them away so that the fan can make sense of them. It is very inventive in that way.

CHERYL: It sounds a very fannish book.

CHRIS: It is. I'm told that people who are not *Who* fans have read it and got a bit out of it. But I think it speaks most to people who have watched and enjoyed the series. And if you really, really like *Dr. Who* then it is invaluable.

CHERYL: Is it available now?

CHRIS: It is due to hit the stores in November, so any day now.

CHERYL: And hopefully people in the UK will be able to buy it at the Glasgow Worldcon if not before.

CHRIS: Absolutely. We are very lucky that our distributor does work internationally so hopefully it will be over there soon.

CHERYL: How do you go about deciding what to publish? Do you accept submissions?

CHRIS: We do accept submissions. But so far everything we have published are books that I, as a reader, I would buy if I saw them on the shelves of my local bookstore. Even the fiction that we are doing next year, these things just exist to fill holes in my library. MonkeyBrain exists just to be stuff that I like.

CHRIS: Actually I take that back about submissions. The Vandermeer book was a submission. Jess's books were more or less commissioned. And the rest falls in between. So I do take submissions, and I like reading them, but I don't often buy them.

CHERYL: So if there is someone out there who is a big fan of some aspect of Victoriana...

CHRIS: Sure. One of the books that we have coming out next year came in the form of a submission. It is called, *Creative Mythography: An Expansion of Philip Jose Farmer's Wild Newton Universe*. It is a selection of essays by Farmer, and by other writers, about his notion of this big, secret family tree in which all of the heroes of pulp fiction and adventure fiction are really related. So if someone has something that they are really passionate about, and they are a real expert on, then I'd love to see it. We might not take it, but I will at least enjoy reading it.

CHERYL: There tends to be a lot of fans out there who know an awful lot about obscure subjects.

CHRIS: And that's the great thing about fandom. It is all out there. We wouldn't have been able to do what we have done without the Internet. A huge amount of what we have published started out online. That includes most of Vandermeer's books. The *Dr. Who* book is reprinted in bits and pieces on the BBC's *Dr. Who* site. Huge chunks of the Moorcock book appeared online in various places. The Internet is great, because if you want to know something them someone, somewhere on the Internet will be an expert on it.

CHERYL: Although they are not always terribly good experts.

CHRIS: But there's this great self-correcting factor online. Someone did an experiment recently on *Wikipedia* where they published "facts" about their home town which they knew to be incorrect and then waited to see how long it would be before they were corrected. Within a day or two people were coming forward with corrections. If you are wrong or misguided online then someone will step forward and correct you.

CHERYL: John Clute has this rant about online bibliographies. He says that most of them are full of mistakes, and no matter how much he writes to the people in charge of the web sites he can't get them fixed.

CHRIS: The problem there is that they are not incorporating the feedback that they get. The information is coming in, but the person shepherding the information isn't revising it. And actually I think that is an argument in favor of what I am saying, because there are people writing in and offering corrections.

CHERYL: Any other books that you want to talk about?

CHRIS: Well I have a novel due out from Pyr.

CHERYL: Ah, yes, and Lou has given me a review copy. But I won't be looking at that until a bit nearer the publication date.

CHRIS: Yes, it isn't due out until the spring.

CHRIS: In 2006 we'll be doing Jess Nevins' *Encyclopedia of Pulp Heroes*. I'm looking forward to that one. But I can't talk about anything else as it is still being negotiated.

CHERYL: Chris Roberson, thank you for talking to *Emerald City*.

An Author's View

If I were in the happy position of being able to pay people to write for *Emerald City*, one of the first people I would ask to contribute would be Jeff Vandermeer. Many authors don't do much non-fiction work at all, and those that do are often self-constrained by feelings of camaraderie for their fellow scribblers. There are, of course, honorable exceptions. Elizabeth Hand, for example, has been known to utterly shred books in her reviews for *The Washington Post*. And Vandermeer too is not shy of expressing an opinion. What is more, there is a wide range of topics on which he is willing to pronounce.

The book in question here is *Why Should I Cut Your Throat?* a collection of Vandermeer's non-fiction writing published by MonkeyBrain Books (and briefly referred to by Chris Roberson in the interview above). It contains an eclectic mix of material, from convention reviews to the state of the horror market to teaching creative writing to a long and considered piece on the works of Angela Carter. All of it is well-argued and thought-provoking.

The title is actually a quote from the first essay in the book, a con report from Vandermeer's first ever convention, Georgia Fantasy Convention in 1990. Jeff and his friends had foolishly braved downtown Atlanta in search of food and had been accosted by various dangerous-looking beggars. One of them commented, "Why should I cut your throat when I can just ask you for the money?" Well, it is good to see that the people of Atlanta have a sense of proportion.

This was also the convention at which Jeff caught Harlan Ellison out recycling one of his funny stories about publishing, claiming it was about his latest book when in fact he'd told the same tale before about another publication. This caused poor Jeff to be on the receiving end of one of those famous Angry Harlan Phone Calls. I don't suppose it will be his last.

Some of what Vandermeer writes about is very familiar to me, especially the childish reaction of the horror community to a piece by him suggesting that the horror genre had lost its way. That sort of thing happens in fandom all the time, and wannabe writers are little better.

But what is really valuable in this book is Vandermeer's understanding of the craft of writing and how to teach it. I'm sure that there are many writers I know who study their craft intently. But Vandermeer is one of the few I know who is prepared to talk publicly about the process, and one of the best at explaining it to other people. If I were ever to sign up for a creative writing course I would want it to be one that Vandermeer is teaching.

I was particularly impressed with his essay on teaching creative writing in which he poured scorn on the British Public School theory of writing courses. Under that method, the students are treated so abominably that they either commit suicide or come out of the course so thick-skinned and selfish that they could probably succeed in politics and don't need to become writers. Of course I wish he had also had a go at the Writing Group theory of teaching writing, in which everyone is very Californian and very supportive and saying anything negative about anyone's work is liable to get you thrown out. But maybe he will one day.

I do hope that Vandermeer's commercial success as an author will not stop him writing non-fiction as well. I don't always agree with what Vandermeer says, but I always admire the way that he says it.

Why Should I Cut Your Throat? - Jeff Vandermeer - MonkeyBrain - trade paperback

Short Stuff

Interzone #195

The new *Interzone* is looking more and more like a non-fiction magazine. If I could afford to buy *Interzone* I would happily do so just for Nick Lowe's film column. I average about one movie a year (this year it will be a big, fat zero unless I get tempted by something on TV over the next few days, which is unlikely as I have seen *Mary Poppins* and *The Wizard of Oz* often enough before). But I see enough news of the movie business to know what films are on release, and Lowe's column is both accessible enough for me to understand and funny enough to be worth reading even if I didn't.

Dave Langford's column isn't news to me as I keep a close eye on SF news, but I'm sure other people look forward to it. Langford hasn't won the Best Fanwriter Hugo for 16 years on the trot for nothing. The latest issue also contains eight pages of book reviews. I'm delighted to see *Interzone* covering books from small presses such as Zoran Živković's *The Fourth Circle*, Charlie Stross's *The Atrocity Archives* and Jeff Vandermeer's *Secret Life* alongside the big sellers such as Susanna Clarke and Iain Banks.

The anime column is new, and will probably get a lot better once Andrew Osmod stops feeling that he has to apologize for what he is doing. His problem is that there is a lot less anime on British TV than there is in America. He probably thinks that the only reference points that his audience has are from movies. How do you explain anime to people who haven't even seen *Sailor Moon*, let alone *Tenchi Muyo* or *Cowboy Bebop*?

This issue sees a long and interesting interview with Ken MacLeod by Andrew Hedgecock. There are many different styles of presenting an interview to the readers. At one end of the spectrum is the *Locus* interview, in which the interviewer is completely invisible. All we see is the interviewee talking about herself. That is a philosophy you follow if your objective is to highlight the interviewee at the expense of all else.

My interviews tend to be something in the middle. They are edited to read like the transcript of a conversation (although it takes a lot of editing to convert an actual conversation into something that reads well). My purpose, as the interviewer, is to provide an introduction and to forge links between the various subjects that the conversation covers. I'm there for a purpose, but I try not to intrude.

Andrew Hedgecock is much closer to the "famous journalist interviews x" style. He talks about the process of getting the interview, he gives his own views about the person he is interviewing, and he uses quotes from the interview to support what he says. I've never felt that I was important enough to do that. People might want to read a series of "Gardner Dozois talks to...", but me? Unlikely. Hedgecock actually pulls it off fairly well, but in reading the MacLeod interview I couldn't

help wondering how selective Hedgecock had been in choosing which of Ken's comments to use in order to create the story he was writing.

Alongside this there are five rather undistinguished stories that seem like filler. I think that *Interzone* needs submissions.

The Third Alternative #40

The new *Third Alternative* is billed as a tenth anniversary special, although in numerical terms it is only the 40th issue. The most special thing about it is the dazzling cover by Vincent Chong. The non-fiction in *TTA* has always been the poor relation of the fiction. Unlike Nick Lowe's column in *Interzone*, Steven Volk writes for film aficionados, and horror film aficionados at that. Terry Frost would probably appreciate it, as would Kim Newman, but it is beyond me. John Paul Catton continues to talk about Japan as if he were some horror-struck Lovecraftian narrator describing the debauched and degenerate behavior of primitive tribesmen on a remote Pacific island. The less said about Allen Ashley's column the better. Anyone who has suffered an opinionated rant from a London taxi driver will know what to expect.

There are two interviews in this issue. Sandy Auden's brief conversation with Clive Barker is so far below Sandy's usual high standards that I suspect she got given a list of questions that she was allowed to ask. In contrast Andrew Hedgecock's interview with Bryan Talbot is much more informative (and much longer). Talbot is apparently working on a new comic series called *Alice in Sunderland*. Chaz Brenchley is mentioned as a collaborator. That sounds cool. Chaz - any comment?

The strength of *TTA* is, of course, its fiction, but now that *Interzone* has been added to the *TTA* Press stable I expect to see *TTA*'s stories moving further away from the sort of thing that interests me. That's my problem, not *TTA*'s. This issue, however, does have "Thirst", a story by Vandana Singh. It isn't one of her best, but it is still good. My favorite story, however, was "Running on Two Legs" by Eugie Foster. OK so it was cute, but it was interestingly cute, and it has a refreshingly sanguine view of serious illness.

Worlds Apart

Elsewhere in this issue is a review of *Life*, a new Gwyneth Jones novel from a new small press company, Aqueduct Press, dedicated to publishing feminist SF. Now there are a lot of small presses in the SF&F field these days, so if you want to make a go of it you had probably better have a gimmick. Being feminist is obviously a good start, but Aqueduct is also producing *Conversation Pieces*, a series of chapbooks. These will contain a range of material. So far there are three: one containing essays by L. Timmel Duchamp; one containing short stories by Nicola Griffith; and one containing a novella by Nancy Jane Moore. We are also promised things like speeches, poetry and group discussions. It could be a very interesting series.

But the focus of this review is Nancy Jane Moore's novella, *Changeling*. It is perhaps not easy to review, because the title gives much of the plot away. And we begin with a little girl in our world who is convinced that she was born in a beautiful city far away, and whose parents get unreasonably angry if she mentions this.

So far so predictable, but the value of *Changeling* is in the writing, not in the plot. In many ways it is much more interesting as a tale of a young paraplegic woman stuck in our world than it is as a story about a girl from another dimension who wants to get back there. That too, is where most of the feminist content can be found. Ultimately it is a tale about taking risks, which in modern America is a very important lesson to get across. So far so good. I look forward to further conversations.

The Conversations series is only available via the Aqueduct web site: <http://aqueductpress.com/>.

Changeling - Nancy Jane Moore - Aqueduct Press - chapbook

Out of Synch

Coo, is this a new column? Yes, it is. Sometimes books are released so far apart in the UK and US that some of you may not realize that I have already reviewed a "new" book months ago. So I figured I should put a note in the zine when something good gets a first release in a different country.

The star event in the US in January is the Bantam release of Justina Robson's *Natural History* (Emcit #92). This is a wonderful book and well worth looking out. Fabulous cover too - kudos to Bantam for using the UK original. And of course there is also K.J. Bishop's *The Etched City* (Emcit #95), which can out from Bantam in the US in November.

On the January list from Ace is Al Reynolds novella pairing, "Diamond

Dogs" (Emcit #86) and "Turquoise Days". I wonder if that is an Ace Double?

Natural History - Justina Robson - Bantam - trade paperback

The Etched City - K.J. Bishop - Bantam - trade paperback

Diamond Dogs / Turquoise Days - Al Reynolds - Ace - paperback

Miscellany

Campbell Award Nominations

There has been some discussion over the last year or so regarding the eligibility criteria for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. In order to protect writers from burning their eligibility years by writing for fanzines or very small presses, the rules say that "New Writer" means new in a fully professional sense. This in turn requires a definition of professional, and up until now the 10,000 print run requirement used to distinguish "professional" magazines from "semi-prozines" in the Hugos has been used.

However, it has become increasingly obvious that this threshold is no longer applicable. Many authors are building a career working through small presses and can even receive major awards before the Campbell rules recognize them as "professional". The classic example is K.J. Bishop, whose novel, *The Etched City*, won the Crawford Award this year, and was nominated for the *World Fantasy Award*. Its original publication was with Prime, a US small press. That certainly didn't have a 10,000 print run. But Bishop tells me that even her UK publication with Pan Macmillan is unlikely to reach 10,000

copies. Thankfully the Bantam edition of *The Etched City* came out in November 2003, so Bishop is Campbell-eligible, but many British SF novels from major publishers fall well below the 10,000 copies threshold.

There isn't anything that WSFS can do about this, because the Campbell (as we never tire of saying) is not a Hugo. It is administered by Dell Publications, specifically by Stan Schmidt in his guise as editor of *Analog*. I understand that Stan is aware of the issue. There was some discussion with the Noreascon 4 Hugo committee, and that is ongoing with the Interaction Hugo committee. The rules may be changed.

The trouble is that the issue is fraught with difficulty. Do you just reduce the threshold, or do you introduce some new definition of "professional", for example being qualified for SFWA membership? And if you do change the rules, what happens to all of those people who are newly eligible under the new definition but already have careers longer than the two years of Campbell eligibility?

The current state of affairs appears to be that most people believe that a change is needed, but no one has yet settled on a solution. In the end it will be down to Stan Schmidt to decide, but presumably he is talking to experienced Hugo Administrators (past and present) to get advice on any practical problems that may arise with whatever scheme is adopted. The problem for us as voters is that because no decision has been made we don't know who to nominate. I'd love to see the likes of Steph Swainston and K.J. Bishop on the ballot. Hopefully Bishop will be, but as things look right now Swainston will miss out on the British Worldcon because the US version of *The*

Year of Our War won't be out until next year. All I can say is, "Watch the blog." Should an announcement be made, I will try to be the first to bring you the news.

Zine Review: Meta

One of the best things that happened to UK fandom in 2004 was the emergence of Third Row Fandom. At last here was a bunch of young people coming along to an Eastercon and taking an active role in proceedings. Much to my delight, they have continued to do so, and now they have produced a fanzine. It is called *Meta*, and is edited by Geneva Melzack, but with a host of contributors.

The first thing that you notice on opening the zine (other than that someone desperately needs to buy Geneva a long-armed stapler for Christmas) is that all but one of the contributors list their LiveJournal usernames alongside their email addresses. My how the world has changed.

The first two articles are SF criticism. The first is by Dan Hartland on China Miéville and the second by Geneva on Philip K. Dick. I'm delighted to see this sort of thing being published in fanzines. These are followed by articles on *Buffy* and *Angel*. They may be just as good, but as I have seen precisely one episode of each series (thanks to a day when Roz Kaveney tied me down and forced me to watch them – which I'm glad I did because both were good) I can't really pass judgment.

Next up is a short story, which merely serves to confirm my view that generalist fanzines should not be publishing amateur fiction. There are plenty of places where budding young authors can place stories and get paid for them. I suspect that this

story would get accepted somewhere. But stories that can't get accepted in any of the existing paying markets should not be getting published at all.

The zine concludes with two articles framed as discussions between members of the editorial team. In the first Niall Harrison attempts to interview the rest of the team on the subject of "Defining Fandom". As you might expect, he gets a wide range of different answers, but the piece serves quite well as an introduction to the various members of the team and their personal attitudes to fandom. The other article is a pair of discussions, one on Steph Swainston's *The Year of Our War* and the other on the *I, Robot* movie. This is an idea that I think might work quite well, but it needs to be better structured. Someone needs to direct the conversation in the same way that Niall did for the fandom article.

All in all this is a very promising first fanzine. It won't earn any presentation awards when placed up against the likes of *Zoo Nation*, but I'm sure it will continue to be thought provoking. If you want a copy I suggest you drop into Geneva's LiveJournal. Her username is greengolux.

DUFF Race Open

Rose-Marie Lillian writes to tell me about the 2005 DUFF race:

Nominations are open for a North American delegate to the Australian Natcon June 10-13, 2005. Three North American nominators, two A/NZ, a \$25 bond, a 100-word platform and they're on the ballot, which will be distributed at the end of nominations, which I'm currently

setting for February 15th. Candidates are advised to start the process of getting their passports RIGHT NOW.

There is more information available on the DUFF web site: <http://duff2005.blogspot.com/> (gosh, they use blogs for everything these days!). And the Natcon in question is Thylacon IV <<http://www.thylacon.com/>>. Hobart is a lovely place to visit. If you don't believe me ask George Martin or Neil Gaiman who were guests there last time the Natcon was in Hobart.

Lambshead Guide Reading

Early in December various Doctors, Medical Students, and Curious Voyeurs assembled at the Old Operating Theatre <<http://www.thegarret.org.uk/>> near Guy's Hospital for an evening of instruction. The venue is one of London's smallest but finest museums. A wooden spiral staircase (not easily traversed after too much free publisher wine) leads up to The Herb Garrett, a timbered room stuffed with dead plants, preserved bits of dead humans, dead cool alchemical equipment, and the occasional notably unstuffed skeleton. Beyond is the Operating Theatre itself, where unfortunate patients can be laid out on a wooden table and dissected for the edification of watching students and voyeurs. And frequently were in days past. Oh, Neal Stephenson, how did you manage to miss this place?

Here various esteemed Doctors talked knowledgeably about various Eccentric and Discredited Diseases that they have discovered, or occasionally invented. We recorded their talks in our Pocket Books. We fortified ourselves with free wine and fine conversation. And we laughed. Lots.

I have but two regrets: firstly, that I foolishly forgot my camera; and secondly that Dr. Vandermeer could not be present. Fortunately the first problem was solved by the timely intervention of Claire Weaver who did have her camera and has kindly donated a number of images which you can now find on the Emerald city web site

<<http://www.emcit.com/photos.shtml>>. There is also a very fine picture of Dr. Liz Williams on the operating table, which I hope will appear in a future issue of *Locus*.

Elizabeth Hand Interview

I did an interview with Elizabeth Hand at Worldcon, which went up on *Strange Horizons* shortly after the last *Emerald City* was published. You can read it here: <<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2004/20041129/int-hand-a.shtml>>.

Fountain Award Nominations Open

The Speculative Literature Foundation is now accepting submissions for the 2004 Fountain Award. This is a \$1000 award for stories up to 10,000 words in length. Nominations can only be made by publishers, so if you want your story to be submitted you'll need to nag your editor. Full details are available at: <http://www.speculativeliterature.org/Awards/SLFFountainAward.php>.

Footnote

Coming up next issue, Cheryl's Best of 2004 lists, plus novels from Graham Joyce, Al Reynolds, Charlie Stross and Robert

Reed amongst others, plus short fiction from Australia and from Pamela Sargent.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl