MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of The Mythopoeic Society

Whole No. 108 *May, 1989* *Vol.26 No.5*

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Willy Silver from Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks*
reprinted from the Mythcon XIX Program Book

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-- STAFF --

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ISSN 0146-9347

Book Review

Sword-Dancer and *Sword-Singer* by Jennifer Robeson. Daw paperbacks, $3.50 and $3.95. Reviewed by Melanie A. Rawls.

Sword-Dancer by Jennifer Robeson is what I call a "big-eyed" book: you read it with your eyes getting bigger and bigger, hastening from page to page.

The protagonists of *Sword-Dancer* and *Sword-Singer*, the Sandtiger and Del, debuted in short stories appearing in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress* anthologies. The pair are sword-dancers, masters of the blade who display their skills in elaborately ritualized bouts within a circle. *Sword-Dancer* tells how the pair met and of their subsequent adventures.

Del has come to the lands of the south in search of a younger brother kidnapped by raiders. She approaches the Sandtiger in a cantina, having been told that he is acquainted with a slavetrader specializing in blond, blue-eyed, fair-skinned northeners. The Sandtiger is immediately captivated by the beautiful woman who wields a man's weapon as expertly as anyone he has ever encountered (himself excluded, he insists). He undertakes to guide Del across the deadly Punja desert and through the multitude of southern perils--and they go from one hair-raising adventure to the next. There are encounters with the Sandtiger's ferocious namesake, with bandits, cannibals, blinding desert storms--you name it.

The Sandtiger is a likeable hero. He's the best sword dancer in the south and knows it--but isn't obnoxiously vain about it. He knows he is appealing to women, but doesn't carry his brains below his belt. He also has a nice, occasionally wry sense of humor.

Del is more complex, but makes a satisfactory sorcerous swordswoman. She and the Sandtiger are well-matched, in and out of the circle.

Roberson's prose is vigorous, with plot and characterization blending seamlessly. There is plenty of headlong action and color, reminding me of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* for momentum and atmosphere. The sword magic is used sparingly and to excellent effect.

Sword-Singer, the sequel, is a darker story--still a series of headlong adventures, but with graver issues under consideration. In this tale, the sword-dancers have left Sandtiger's hot, southern desert home for Del's cold, mountainous North. Del, outlawed for the slaying of her own teacher, must face judgement at the place of her training or remain forever exiled and in danger from other northern sword-dancers sworn to avenge her teacher's death. Sandtiger voluntarily accompanies her to this confrontation.

Tiger finds the North radically different from the South, and not just in climate and terrain. The North is riddled with magic, all of it powerful and much of it malign. Tiger's skepticism about magic is severely tested and his life and sanity continually threatened. His relationship with Del is strained until, caught up in a net of conflict and treachery, he is forced to choose between the woman he loves and the freedom he values more than his life, in the sword-dancer's circle.

Once again Roberson is strong on suspense, characterization, and atmosphere. Among other perils, Del and Tiger encounter the *loki*, powerful spirits of evil who seek to possess humans; They're also pursued by ensorcelled hounds, another especially harrowing adventure. But Del's obsessions are the most dangerous, obsessions resulting from the massacre of her family and the deeds she has subsequently done in her quest to avenge their deaths.

All together, *Sword-Dancer* and *Sword-Singer* are rousing good stories and fine additions to the sword and sorcery genre. If Roberson writes a third volume about her sword-dancers, I will promptly purchase it.

Letter to the Editor

Mary V. Borhek, [redacted]

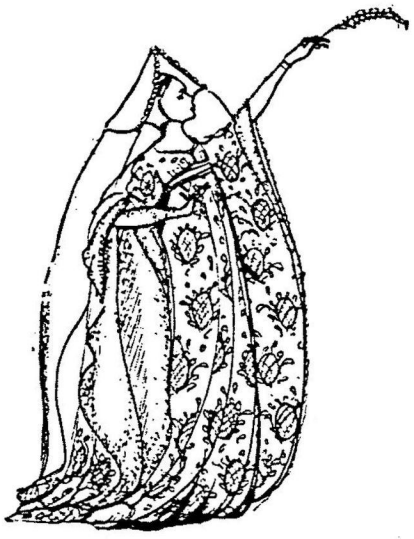
In his review (February 1989 *Mythprint*) of Kathryn Lindskoog's *The C.S. Lewis Hoax* and Douglas Gresham's *Lenten Lands*, David Bratman says, "One could conclude that Gresham is the more talented and experienced writer than Lindskoog." He characterises Gresham's book as "well- written", and finds Lindskoog's book poorly organized and confusing.

First of all, comparing a biography/autobiography with a book of criticism is like comparing a plant with an animal. It is trying to compare the uncomparable.

In addition, I found the organization of the two books just the reverse. Even though Lindskoog refers back a number of times to points she has made previously, she has done this because information vital to one area of the argument is of value in other areas as well. Gresham's organization of his book, on the other hand, seems to me to be a good first draft. Once he had his material down on paper, he would have done well to go back and organize it differently, so that he would not need to say frequently, "as I said before." His book is narrative. Lindskoog's is expository.

For some reason I could not explain to myself at the time, I found, when I read *Hoax*, that I could hardly put it down. For me it was like reading an intensely exciting detective novel. Perhaps that reaction stems from the fact that when I attempted to read *The Dark Tower* some years ago, I stopped well before I was done because the book was so extremely distasteful to me. At that time, I thought, "If C.S. Lewis did not see fit to publish this filthy and obscene thing in his lifetime, his friends would have done well never to let it be published after his death. Obviously, Lewis knew what he was doing, and his friends have done him a great disservice in bringing such stuff to light." I felt that they had tarnished Lewis's reputation with the publication of *Tower*.

To find in *Hoax* the suggestion that Lewis did not write such trash after all filled me with gratitude. Perhaps that is why I read on so avidly. As you can see from what I said above, my reaction to my reading of *Tower* was not based on scholarship, logic or reason. It was a visceral reaction. But it set the background against which I read Lindskoog, and I would much rather believe that *The Dark Tower* was not Lewis's work at all than to find him depraved enough to have committed the beginning of such a book to paper.



Upcoming in *Mythprint*

Appreciations of the works of the Mythcon XX Guests of Honor: Guy Gavriel Kay's Fionavar Tapestry (as seen by Christine Lowentrout) and Raymond H. Thompson's Arthurian scholarship (as seen by Eleanor Farrell).

Reviews of books by John Bellairs, Michael Bishop, George MacDonald, Patricia McKillip, and Jane Yolen.

News Notes

Bill Welden, the Mythopoeic Society's Recording Secretary and a learned linguist of the Elven tongues, and Jo Alida Wilcox, the Society's Corresponding Secretary and Mythcon XIX's Registrar, have announced their engagement, for a wedding date of August 26. The *Mythprint* staff offers all the congratulations due from very old friends.

Obituary: Kelson died in San Francisco on April 11, 1989, of liver and kidney failure complicated by AIDS. He was a member of Berkeley's Greyhaven household of fantasy folk, whose various members called him brother, lover, and friend. Kelson will be remembered for his bright and chipper personality, his achievements as costumer, cook, and artist, and his love of dogs. In recent years he produced numerous colored drawings of "puppies in history and myth", which were admired at a couple of Mythcon art shows. (Typical caption: "Poppies? I thought you said *puppies!*") -- dsb

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

New books on the rack: *The City, Not Long After* by Pat Murphy (Doubleday hc, $17.95), the City being San Francisco, not long after the great disaster, and Pat Murphy being the author of *The Falling Woman*; *Red Branch* by Morgan Llywelyn (Morrow hc, $19.95), a retelling of the Cuchulain legends by the author of *Lion of Ireland*; and *The City in the Autumn Stars* by Michael Moorcock (Ace pb, $4.50), a sequel to his *The War Hound and the World's Pain.*

Unicorn Mountain by Michael Bishop will receive its first paperback in July from Bantam.

Last month we reported (courtesy of Kimberly Hartman) that novelizations of the tv show *Beauty and the Beast*, appearing this fall, would be by Leonore Fleischer. This month we report (courtesy of *Locus*) that the pilot novelization of *B&B* will be by well-known fantasy novelist Barbara Hambly. In either case (or both), the publisher is Avon.

CONS CONS CONS CONS CONS CONS

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, May 12-14, 1989. At Mankato, MN. Theme: "Where Rivers Meet: Confluence and Concurrents". Write: Louisa Smith, [redacted]

MYTHCON XX, July 28-31, 1989. At the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. The annual conference of the Mythopoeic Society. GOH: Guy Gavriel Kay and Raymond Thompson. Membership: $25; Room and board (single occupancy) $140 (does not include banquet); total $165. All prices in U.S. dollars. Write: [redacted]

NOREASCON 3, Aug. 31-Sept. 4, 1989. The World SF Convention. At the Sheraton Hotel, Boston MA. GOHs: Andre Norton, Ian & Betty Ballantine. Memberships: $80 to July 15, 1989. Write: [redacted]

SILICON '89, Nov. 24-26, 1989. At the Red Lion Inn, San Jose, CA. GOH: Charles de Lint, David Cherry. Memberships: $20 to June 1, 1989; $25 to Nov. 1, 1989; $30 at the door. Write: [redacted]

COSTUME CON 8, Feb. 16-19, 1990. Convention for fantasy, sf, and historical costumers. At the Red Lion Inn, Ontario, CA. Memberships: $25 to June 10, 1989; $30 to Feb. 1, 1990; $40 after. Write: [redacted]

MYTHCON XXI, July 27-30, 1990. At Wheaton College, Wheaton IL. The annual conference of the Mythopoeic Society. GOH: Diana L. Paxson, Lyle Dorsett, Patrick Wynne. Write: [redacted]

Activity Calendar

Deadline for the Activity Calendar is the tenth of the month preceeding the month of publication: i.e. June issue information is due the tenth of May; July information is due the tenth of June. All calendar information should be sent directly to *Mythprint*. Thank you.

Secretary for Discussion Groups

(Please write to him about forming groups, or if you have any questions):

David Lenander
[redacted]

Prospective Groups

Here are listed people who are interested in forming groups. If you live in their areas and would like to join a group, contact the hopeful undersubscribed.

ALABAMA

Anniston/Gadsden area:
Harry D. Nuttall, [redacted]

MISSOURI

St. Louis:
Sylvia and Gary Hunnewell, [redacted]

Chartered Groups

CALIFORNIA: North

Sacramento: AVALON
Laurine White, [redacted]

South Bay: KHAZAD-DÛM
Ellie Farrell, [redacted]
*June (date and place TBD)
Guest speaker Thomas Peterson, composer of "Eaquenta" ("The History of the World"), an orchestral work based on the myths of J.R.R. Tolkien (tentative).
*July 9, 1989 (Sunday) 1 PM
The Fionavar Tapestry (*The Summer Tree, The Wandering Fire*, and *The Darkest Road*) by Guy Gavriel Kay. At Ellie Farrell's.

CALIFORNIA: South

Hollywood/San Fernando: THE GREEN DRAGON
Sarah Beach, [redacted]

Los Angeles/Pasadena: MYDGARD
Dolores Speth, [redacted]

San Diego: LOTHLORIEN
Linda Sundstrom, [redacted]

San Diego: CAIR PARAVEL
John Mulvey, [redacted]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA/MARYLAND

Washington & Maryland Suburbs: KNOSSOS
Tony Oliveri, [redacted]

HAWAII

Honolulu: SAMMATH NAUR
Stephen L. Brown, [redacted]
*May 6, 1989 (Saturday)
Floater Factor by Michaels.
*June 3, 1989 (Saturday)
Dhalgren by Samuel R. Delany.

ILLINOIS

Chicago-DuPage: THE PLACE OF THE LION
Darrell Martin, [redacted]
*May 21, 1989 (Sunday)
Orthodoxy by G.K. Chesterton.
*June 18, 1989 (Sunday)
Lilith by George MacDonald.
*July 16, 1989 (Sunday)
The Fionavar Tapestry by Guy Gavriel Kay.

LOUISIANA

Baton Rouge: ROKE
Douglas A. Rossman, [redacted]

MICHIGAN
Ann Arbor: GALADHREMMIN ENNORATH
Dave & Grace Lovelace, [redacted]

MINNESOTA
Minneapolis-St. Paul: RIVENDELL
David Lenander, [redacted]
*May 1989 (date not set)
The Return of the Shadow by J.R.R. Tolkien
*May 1989 (2nd meeting) (date not set)
The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars by Steven Brust, at John Terwillinger's art studio
*June 1989 (date not set)
The Wonderworks television productions of the Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis
Unless otherwise mentioned, meetings are tentatively scheduled at Rm. 327, Coffman Union, East Bank Campus, Univ. of Minnesota at Minneapolis.

NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY
New York City Area: RÓMENNA
Per Hollander, [redacted]
(Also a branch of the American Hobbit Association)

VIRGINIA
Washington Suburbs: SPARE OOM
Mary & Conrad Stolzenbach, [redacted]

WISCONSIN
Milwaukee: THE BURRAHOBBITS
Jeffrey M. Long, [redacted]

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS
THE ELVISH LINGUISTIC FELLOWSHIP
Jorge Quiñonez, [redacted]
*June 25, 1989 (Sunday) 10 AM
Meeting at Bill Welden's, [redacted]
(call after June 6). Papers up to 30 minutes in length are encouraged; send abstracts to Bill.

Other Groups

Other Groups are listed for the interest of Mythopoeic Society members. If you know of an interesting group that discusses mythopoeic literature and meets regularly, send us the information.

CALIFORNIA: South
Orange County: THE GOLDEN PERCH
Paul Davis, [redacted]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA/MARYLAND
Washington & Maryland Suburbs: CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT
Tony Oliveri, [redacted]
*June 23, 1989 (Friday) 8 PM
Selections from *The Avon Fantasy Reader* magazine (photocopies available in advance from the secretary)

ILLINOIS
Chicago: MINAS AEARON
Jo Ann Bagnell, [redacted]
A branch of the American Hobbit Association.

OHIO
Cincinnati: CELDUINDORIE
Renee "Arwen" Alper, [redacted]
A branch of the American Hobbit Association.

WISCONSIN
Madison: U. OF WISCONSIN TOLKIEN SOCIETY
Richard West, [redacted]
All meetings at Union South, [redacted]

Fantasy in America

by David Bratman
(reprinted from *Mythic Circle*, Spring 1988)

It was not as easy as it may sound to write a few words on the subject of American fantasy for *Mythic Circle*'s special issue on the subject. Sure, any fantasy written by an American is, in the literal sense, "American fantasy", but finding a goose in Canada doesn't make it a Canadian goose. Or to put it another way, is there anything distinctive about the fantasy that's written by Americans?

The most distinctive thing about American fantasy is that, to look at the country, you wouldn't think there'd be any at all. America is, after all, "the country where pragmatism became a philosophy and 'normalcy' a point of faith", in the words of Brian Attebery. Americans are the people whom Ursula K. Le Guin accused of being "afraid of dragons". I once gave a speech touting the imagination-stretching benefits of fantasy and science fiction to an audience of businessmen. When it was over, one man asked my opinion of C.S. Lewis, which was encouraging; but another wanted to know where to find the time to read fiction. My best suggestion was that he keep a book in the car for browsing through while stuck in one of the traffic jams that this country is so famous for.

But this go-getter, no daydreaming, no "nonsense" element in the American character is precisely the most distinctive thing about American fantasy when it appears. And it's highly pervasive. Start with perhaps the most obvious example, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain. The whole point of the joke of this quite amusing, but very unromantic book (the movie is quite another matter) is that the narrator is a perfect American stereotype. He has no time for the staid, medieval, European ways of Arthur's court, and (another American trait) nearly destroys the place while trying to save it. Twain gets a lot of humorous mileage out of this conflict between the romantic, dreamy Old World ways and the cynical, businesslike American practices.

So does James Branch Cabell, although he's more subtle about it than Twain. Most of Cabell's fantasy takes place in the kingdom of Poictesme, a picture-perfect medieval principality, except that the perfection keeps being undermined by Cabell's cynicism and satire. In Cabell you will learn that men are boobies and that beautiful princesses lose their appeal, which are not exactly the notions you'll pick up from, say, William Morris. And there's a distinct difference in style between the humor of Cabell and the pointed remarks in Lord Dunsany's miniatures. Cabell's most famous hero, Jurgen, rises to very lofty heights of eminence indeed by merely a few clever tugs on his own bootstraps and the right go-getter attitude.

These American personality traits keep showing up in the heroes of our fantasy books, even today. Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea is not an especially American place, but her hero, Ged, is a classic American type: a lone traveler through the remote regions of his country, a practical man of few words and simple tastes. Patricia A. McKillip's characters have a brisk, practical air that carries them nicely through the ornate plots they find themselves in. Indeed, an American attitude seems to be a prerequisite in any quest fantasy that aims at being more than a few meanderings. Perhaps that's why the heroes of so many British fantasies are children: British adults have lost the taste for wild exploring that children have in abundance, so the children get the fantasies. When they grow up, though, it's another story: "The Lady Susan is no longer a friend of Narnia."

Twain and Cabell milk the contrast between their characters with an American flair and their settings without it for humor, but it's certainly possible to invent an imaginary world setting with just as much American flavor to it as any of the authors I've mentioned so far have done with their characters.

The perfect example of this is L. Frank Baum's Oz. Some scholars have gotten considerable mileage out of arguing that Oz's geography or politics are simply those of turn-of-the-century America transformed into fantasy terms. Although in one sense Oz is America, in another sense only an American could tell the difference. To us, the "fields we know" in, say, a Grimm's fairy tale, full of woodcutters and wicked stepmothers, is just as quaint and odd as any of the magic, but the shock when one leaves the sparseness of Kansas and enters the prodigality of Oz is palpable.

Even without the scholars' hidden analogs, there is something so distinctively American about Oz that the books often leave European readers scratching their heads in confusion. This distinctive element is easily identified. As a fantasy, Oz is completely mechanical -- but not in the disparaging sense that critics normally use that word! Instead, I mean that Oz is a fantasy about mechanics. Its spirit is that of American technology. Tip building Jack Pumpkinhead out of sticks is just as much an American tinkerer as Thomas Edison making a light bulb or a phonograph. Critters like Jack nestled all over the place, and weird, jerky plots that depend on applying the principles of magic with remorseless logic are the essence of the Oz books. There is not a trace in them of the English tradition of magic as a fuzzy and insubstantial thing, so beloved of those of us who pine after dragons and unicorns. (But for all that such people may feel themselves alienated from their country, there is nothing more purely American than the attempt a few years ago of a counter-culture group to *build* a unicorn by fusing together the horns of a baby goat.)

L. Frank Baum's apostolic successors are a whole line of American children's fantasists whose books are as remorselessly logical as his, and are sometimes even set in the modern U.S. *Half Magic* by Edward Eager was one of my favorite books as a child (and still is). Four children living in mundane old Toledo, Ohio, in the 1920s, liven up the town when they discover an ancient magical talisman that's so old and worn out that it only grants exactly half of what you wish for. Of course, part of what makes this premise so much fun is the contrast between the coin's remorseless arithmetic and its ability as a magical object to do absolutely anything. Take the logic one step further and explain how the magic works and you're in science fiction, an entire genre built mostly by Americans -- or more precisely in its sub-genre of science fantasy, which has yielded classics from Poul Anderson's humorous *Three Hearts and Three Lions* to Marion Zimmer Bradley's serious Darkover books.

Oz is firmly in the tradition of American mythology. Jack Pumpkinhead, for instance, should remind you just a little of Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow". American mythology, though, is a tricky subject. Europeans might say -- indeed, have said -- that there is no such thing. Steeped in their own traditions of thousands of years, they find America too young a country to have developed its own mythology. But though it takes time, it is happening, and even an immature mythology is a rich source for fantasy.

Allow me a brief digression into another field of art, music. In the late 19th century composers all over Europe were developing nationalistic musical styles, often based on their own countries' folk songs. One of the best of these was a Czech named Antonin Dvorak, and when he came to the U.S. to teach in the 1890s he gave some advice to American composers who wanted to do the same thing. Do what I did, he said; use your country's distinctive folk traditions as inspiration. So these composers, who were mostly WASPs from Boston, bethought themselves of America's most distinctive folks, the Indians (and also the Blacks), and began writing Minnehaha Suites and slave-spiritual laments. Not surprisingly, these pieces didn't work very well and were soon forgotten. The cultures of Indians and Blacks were just too remote for a white American to enter into. (Dvorak's own American works have lasted much better, but they're a

Continued on Next Page

AMERICAN FANTASY-Continued from Page 8

traveller's tales rather than American nationalist music.)

But soon enough there developed native American music forms that the majority culture could appreciate fully. Cowboy songs already existed; then came jazz (a truly racially integrated music) and later rock. Classical concert music using these as inspiration has been written with much more success, by people like Aaron Copland and Philip Glass, and not long ago I heard an excellent piece based on an Iroquois chant.

Something similar has happened with fantasy. The few retellings of Indian legends dating from before the middle of this century are mostly either academic or condescending. But American fantasists of European ancestry have learned to do two things. One is not to be afraid of their own cultural legends and traditions. Some may say that "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" isn't a folk-tale because we know it was written by Washington Irving. But even European folk-tales were invented by *somebody*; the only differences are that we don't know who, and that the stories were polished by many retellings before being written down. One of our best native legends, that of Paul Bunyan the lumberjack, was invented whole cloth out of a few stray strands by the advertising agent for a lumber company. A more purely American way to make a folk tale cannot possibly be imagined. Our stories had the polishing hand of conscious literary artists, and in any case may still be retold *after* being written down. And so we get books like Manly Wade Wellman's *Who Fears the Devil?*, and others which either are or could be based on folk-tales of the American countryside. Or, from a slightly different angle, Orson Scott Card's *Seventh Son*, a nominee for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award this year, which rests on the author's knowledge of early 19th-century pioneer folk magic.

Then too, Americans are an urban people, who live in the modern world instead of always hearkening back to a distant past, and so there is the burgeoning sub-genre of Contemporary Urban Fantasy. Though most of its authors -- Diana L. Paxson and Emma Bull, to name two -- are American, it's somehow ironically appropriate that the two Charleses who between them define the field should both be foreigners. The pioneer urban fantasist, Charles Williams, was an Englishman, but he was also a Londoner, unlike Lewis and Tolkien who were used to small towns and the countryside. And the foremost current practitioner is a Canadian, Charles de Lint, who treats his own city of Ottawa with care and a sense of wonder.

The other thing that American fantasists have begun to do is to integrate the other American traditions with their own. This is part of the achievement of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, a book whose praises I seem never to tire of singing. Though it is set in the future, and its people's ethnic ancestry unspecified, their culture was clearly inspired by those of the American Indians, which the author has, for her purposes, entirely assimilated. There's certainly a lot more that can be done in this direction -- in particular, a few more words from the members of these other cultures themselves -- but a start is being made.

And so we have American fantasy, a thriving American industry with excellent prospects for growth. May you enjoy it.

(Note: Many of the ideas in this article were inspired by *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* by Brian Attebery (Indiana University Press), to date the definitive work on the subject, a book of insight and wit which I recommend highly -- dsb)

Mythprint is the monthly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams.

Subscriptions

The address for subscriptions and back issues of *Mythprint* and other Society publications is:
c/o Lee Speth, [redacted]

The number in the upper right corner of your mailing label is the "Whole No." of the last issue on your subscription. Subscription, including membership in the Society, is $7 for 12 issues (one year) in the U.S.A. Please add $3 if you desire first class delivery or if you live in Canada. The rate is $10 for overseas surface subsciptions; airmail is $14. Checks should be made out to the Mythopoeic Society, and may be paid in US or equivalent funds.

The Mythopoeic Society also publishes two quarterly magazines: *Mythlore*, a journal of Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, fantasy and mythic studies (subsciption is $13 per year) and *The Mythic Circle*, publishing fiction, poems, etc. ($11 per year). Send subscriptions to the Society at the address above.

Submissions

Reviews, discussion reports, news items, letters, and other submissions are always welcome. We must retype material into our computer, so any readable form is accepted.

Artwork is also always wanted, especially cover art! The maximum cover size is 6 inches high by 6 1/2 inches wide, but we can reduce or enlarge to fit.

Advertisements

The Display Ad rate is $10 for a full page (8 by 6 1/4); $5 for a half page (either 4 by 6 1/4 or 8 by 3). Let yourself be known to your fellow readers!

Submissions of material for publication only, should be sent to:
Mythprint, [redacted].

TIME VALUE

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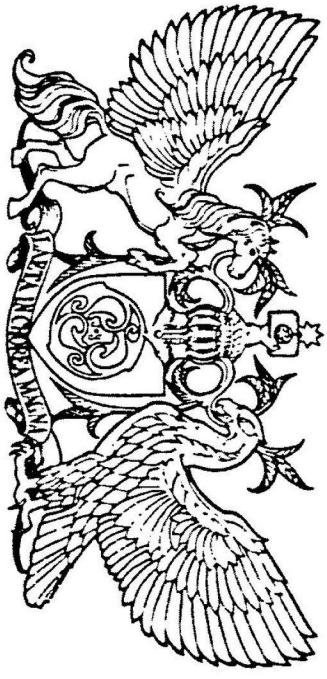

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