

MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

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Illustrations

Cover: *Horus*

(Dover Electronic Clip Art Series)

Strider's Screening Room logo by Patrick Wynne © 1997 (p. 10)

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See inside back cover

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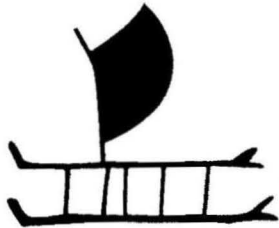


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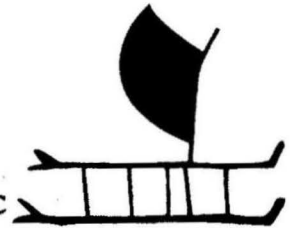
DEADLINES for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1st of the preceding month (eg, December 1st for the January issue).

Mythcon XXXI

The 31st Annual Mythopoeic Conference



Dates: August 18–21, 2000
Location: Kilauea Military Camp
Island of Hawaii, Hawaii
Theme: Myth and Legend of the Pacific



The first Mythopoeic Conference in a year beginning with a “2” promises to be a unique event and a definite change of pace. Belying its name, our site—Kilauea Military Camp (KMC)—is a luxurious private resort located at the edge of Kilauea Crater adjacent to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island of Hawaii. (You can’t get much closer to the Crack of Doom!) The local Society discussion group, Sammath Naur, invites everyone to help celebrate their 25th anniversary at a Mythcon focusing on Pacific Island mythology.

The conference site is accessible via Hilo airport, and some direct flights are available from the mainland to the island of Hawaii. Of course, we urge you all to spend time before or after Mythcon exploring the many beautiful locations and rich cultural heritage of the Hawaiian Islands.

Specifics on room and board rates, travel suggestions, recommended background reading, and other pertinent information, as well as a call for papers, will be available shortly. Please check the Mythopoeic Society web site for updates and relevant links, such as the KMC web site.

Registration

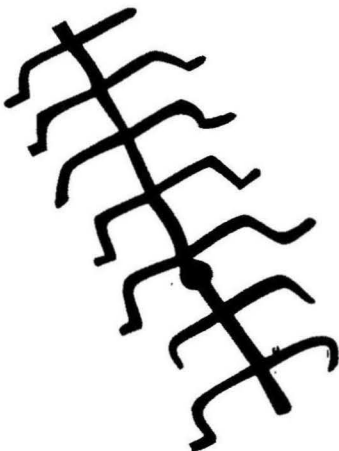
Conference registration is \$35 until November 30th, and will increase after that date. Please make checks out to Mythcon 31 and send to:

Eleanor M. Farrell, Treasurer

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

E-mail: [Redacted]

[Redacted]



Discussion Group Report

Rivendell, Minneapolis/St. Paul

October 16, 1999

The Fathergod Experiment by L.A. Taylor

Plot summary: Bondservant Lilz is suspected of murder when a member of the aristocracy dies under mysterious circumstances.

Attending: David Lenander, Deborah Jones, Margaret Howes, Ruth Berman, Eric Heideman, Joan Marie Verba

Margaret thought the book was splendid, though she found the opening segments a bit difficult, since they switched between “current time” and flashbacks. Nonetheless, she was able to get into the story fairly quickly. Without the fantastic or science fictional elements, Margaret thought it could be a Jacobean story—the social system was similar but not quite the same. She felt the story worked as a whole.

Eric thought that the electronic bugs (“whizzers”) flying around in a pre-industrial society was a memorable image. Deb enjoyed the whizzers, also, but felt they weren’t essential to the story. She thought it was ironic that the devices were for anthropological (scientific observation) purposes rather than political—the king was thought to be spying on his subjects, but he wasn’t. She felt the response to the technology was interesting. The characters knew the whizzers could be “killed,” but weren’t quite sure how much force to use. Margaret agreed that a superstitious reaction developed: the characters felt that not only were the whizzers observing them, but that even the birds and insects could be spying for the king.

Deb thought the cover art was well done. David thought the painting was wonderful, and captured the novel. He felt that it showed that the character shines through the events, and shows what is happening with her life. In addition, the cover illustrated a scene in the early part

of the book, where Lilz, the protagonist, hits a whizzer with a broom. Deb added that at first glance, the book appears to be one of those books students have to read for a required class, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, or a book on the Salem witch trials.

Deb loved the names: Treadwell, Makeready, Greencrags. The first names also had a unique flavor to her. Joan observed that the titles—Iarl, Iarlana, Dych—also added flavor to the novel.

The consensus was that the setting was in a parallel universe to Earth, as opposed to an Earth settlement or Earth colony.

Dave asked whether the technology was explained. Joan said that the society providing the technology had changed the prevailing theology in Lilz’s culture from a Mothergod to a Fathergod (although Mothergod worship remained in the background) to see what might happen, and used the technological devices to observe the changes. Dave thought that this changeover was part of what precipitated the fall of Lilz’s family; otherwise, he felt the changeover was irrelevant to the story. He thought perhaps the experimenters introducing the change had had their funds cut off, since they didn’t seem to gain anything by making the changes, and were just left to observe. Deb felt that the author was using the Mothergod-Fathergod to reflect the Catholic-Protestant situation in the times of James I. She thought that by the end of the story, the protagonists had some idea of what was going on.

Deb said she knew why the story was rejected by the major publishers—it would be a difficult book to market. Margaret added that it doesn’t fit into a regular category. The author had originally titled it *The Fathergod Experiment*, though she referred to it informally as “the Lilz book.” Eric agreed that the book might be intimidating, and felt that an endorsement on the cover might have helped, such as Eleanor Arnason’s statement

Letter to *Mythprint*

(inside the front cover) which read, "A neat book, fun to read. I recommend it."

Ruth said that she felt the book had a richness in several areas, including characters, language, and structure. She said she found more in the book each time she reread it, though she found it terribly confusing at first. Once she did read it, she found it wonderful. Margaret added that it was probably too rich a book to fit neatly into a category, and said her favorite chapter was one introducing the new housemaid, who seemed to be completely lost in that culture (and who, in retrospect, seemed to be from the society sending the whizzers).

Ruth thought that the fact that L.A. Taylor was a good poet enhanced the book; as a result, the characters wrote good poetry. Deb felt that the book was further enhanced by the fact that the reader has Lilz's perspective—the aristocrats are doing things to her, or things which affect her, that she has no power over. Ruth thought it was nice that the book has a happy ending (though Eric felt the book had an element of sadness that runs through Taylor's works) without resorting to the cliché of making the character a member of the upper class aristocracy: here, Lilz rises from her status as bondservant, but does not become an Iarl or Iarlana. Deb thought it was refreshing that Lilz could have an intimate conversation with Greencrags about the sun coming up or about poetry without the two becoming lovers. Margaret felt the pre-industrial technology became real, particularly when it showed the difficulty of communication in that era. Deb agreed that the author did a wonderful job of conveying the technology, and added that the reactions of the characters to the events were realistic and believable. The consensus was that the book had a fantasy flavor and that we would highly recommend it.

Report by Joan Marie Verba

Your Editorship:

The announcement for the 2000 Mythcon describes it as "the first Mythopoeic Conference in a year beginning with a 2." I regret to inform you that this is not the case.

It is not often remembered that our Society's Mythcons are actually the third series of such conferences, preceded by earlier sets held by the Hobbits and Elves. The Baggins Centenary Conference described by John Ellison in *Mythlore* 80 was only one of many. It is often forgotten that when Bilbo and the Dwarves set off on their epic journey east, their actual goal was a Mythcon in Rivendell, of which the highlights included a paper on moon-letters read by Elrond and a lively Bardic Circle held in the trees. There are persistent rumors that among the items carried by Frodo and Sam to be dropped into the Cracks of Doom was a box of unsalable science-fiction paperbacks from earlier Mythcons, taken at the wishes of the weary auctioneer, Glen GoodElf.

Mythcons held by the Hobbits were dated according to the Shire Reckoning, of course, and all the ones we have record of were held in years beginning with a 1, but those held by the Elves were reckoned according to the years of the Third Age, and many of these were held in years beginning with a 2.

I feel sure that readers of *Mythprint* would wish to be informed of these facts.

Yours pseudo-pedantically,

David Bratman

Calendar Review

In With The Old, In With The New

THE 2000 TOLKIEN CALENDAR, illustrated by Ted Nasmith. New York: HarperEntertainment (a division of HarperCollins), 1999. ISBN 0-06-107579-5, \$14.99US/\$22.00CAN.

The trend of J.R.R. Tolkien's publishers to recycle artwork from existing sources has previously produced some calendars that have appeared tired, even when freshly removed from their cellophane wrappers. But despite the fact that half of the paintings in the new *2000 Tolkien Calendar* have been previously published, there is nothing stale about this year's edition.

All of the finished paintings by artist Ted Nasmith are enlivened by the addition of their preliminary color sketches at the bottom of each month's page. This rare and welcome glimpse into the artist's creative process allows a look at how a scene is initially approached, tried out for impact, and then refined into the finished product.

The paintings for February ("Finduilas is Led Past Túrin at the Sack of Nargothrond"), April ("Beren and Lúthien are Flown to Safety"), May ("Maglor Casts a Silmaril"), July ("Ulmo Appears Before Tuor"), August ("At Lake Cuiviénen") and September ("Illuin, Lamp of the Valar") have already appeared in the twentieth anniversary edition of *The Silmarillion*, illustrated by Nasmith.

The accompanying color sketches for these half-dozen paintings range from less pronounced compositional and color variations (July, August and September) to more radical changes in format (February's switch from the horizontal to the vertical), in perspective (April's repositioning of the observer's eye-in-the-sky among the Eagles), and in kinetic energy (May's Maglor progressing from a static "wind-up" to the actual "pitch" of a Silmaril into the Sea).

Nasmith's insistence that this calendar contain

new art among the old guarantees that it will become a collector's item, and not simply a reread. January's "Beleg is Slain" is one of two new paintings exhibiting the greatest change from sketch to final draft. In this scene, Túrin, in a flash of lightning, stares aghast upon Beleg, the friend he has mistakenly killed. In the sketch version, Beleg lies in relative repose against a tree trunk. Gwindor, who kneels beside Beleg, gestures forcefully toward Túrin as if to hold him at bay.

In the finished painting, however, Nasmith changes the composition to take full advantage of the drama of the moment. Gone is the pointing gesture of Gwindor's arms. Now his hands and arms are upraised in dismay. This change of position, set against the eerie flare of lightning, breaks boldly into the negative space of the scene. In this version, Beleg, his head thrown back, writhes in agony at Túrin's feet. Here the scene's powerful tension sustains across the board, whereas in the preliminary sketch it progresses quickly from horror to a sober calm as the viewer's eye moves from the slayer to the slain.

In some of the new paintings there is a give and take of pros and cons between the sketch and finished piece. March's "Tuor, Gelmir and Arminas" has, in the color sketch, a better spatial relationship between the characters and the curving cave walls. But in finished painting, the scene gains a more breathtaking surge in the frothing waters of the subterranean river.

Likewise, December's sketch version of "The Slaying of Glaurung" benefits from the viewer's ability to look up from a dread-inducing lower angle at the death throes of the fire-spewing dragon. In the final painting, the point of view is raised to a more neutral position. Still, this less dynamic view of the dragon allows the observer to better see the moment of Túrin's revenge as he

LotR Film Casting

drives home his sword into Glaurung's belly. It also allows a glimpse of the chasm below, the scope of which no other Tolkien calendar artist has managed to adequately capture, until now.

Four other new paintings grace this year's monthly pages. June's "Fingon and Gothmog" depicts, amid the smoke and reek of battle, the Balrog armed with ax and whip, bursting with flame as he bends his baleful glare upon the valiant Elven king. October's "The Incoming Sea at the Rainbow Cleft" could be a page out of a Middle-earth tourist's guidebook, so splendid is the scene. Nasmith paints the translucent green of towering, breaking waves as well as any modern master of the seascape.

In November's "Lúthien Escapes the Treehouse," Nasmith alters the house from sketch to finished painting to make it look less like a cottage. It is still, after its transformation, a house fit for an Elven princess. But its simplified design reveals it more for what it is: a prison—a beautiful one, but a prison nonetheless.

As a bonus this year, Nasmith treats us to a dazzling centerfold entitled "Eärendil Searches Tirion." With an expert eye toward detail, he captures Tirion on Túna in all of its otherworldly splendor. The elegant architecture merges fantasy with Classical and Middle Eastern influences. The end result is a shining, glorious city worthy of the Eldar of the Blessed Realm. This grand painting, and the rest of the paintings in the *2000 Tolkien Calendar*—new and old, sketch and final draft—are rare delights not to be missed. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Paula DiSante

Filming has begun on the first segment of director Peter Jackson's film trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Most of the major characters have been cast, although a few roles are either unconfirmed or not yet announced. Here's the list to date:

Elijah Wood	Frodo Baggins
Sean Astin	Samwise Gamgee
Ian McKellen	Gandalf
Ian Holm	Bilbo Baggins
Billy Boyd	Pippin Took
Viggo Mortensen	Aragorn
Christopher Lee	Saruman
Liv Tyler	Arwen
Dominic Monaghan	Merry Brandybuck
John Rhys-Davies	Gimli
Orlando Bloom.....	Legolas
Sean Bean	Boromir
Ethan Hawke	Faramir
Brian Sergent.....	Ted Sandyman
Cate Blanchett	Galadriel
Kevin Conway	Theoden
Brad Dourif.....	Wormtongue
Andy Serkis.....	Gollum (voice)

Uma Thurman..... Eowyn (not confirmed)

Updates to the list and information on the films' production can be found on a myriad of web sites, including the official film site: www.lordoftherings.net (which has some nice concept artwork but not much else yet...). Paula DiSante's article in the August issue of *Mythprint* gives URLs for several of the best web information.



Activity Calendar

David Lenander, Discussion Group Secretary
[REDACTED]

The Bird & Baby Web Page: [REDACTED]

Prospective Groups

THE PHILIPPINES

Lizanne Cua, [REDACTED]

CALIFORNIA

San Diego: *LOTHLORIEN*

Linda Sundstrom, [REDACTED]

CONNECTICUT

Southington: *FANTASTIC WORLDS*

Bill Pierce, E-mail: [REDACTED]

FLORIDA

Tampa Bay: *HOBBITON*

Paul S. Ritz, [REDACTED]

North Central Florida: *ERYN GALEN*

B.L. McCauley, NFCC English Dept., Madison, FL.
[REDACTED]

GEORGIA

Atlanta area: *CENTRAL ATLANTIS*

Irv Koch, [REDACTED]

Hoschton: *SHEEP, INDEED*

Beau Farr, Eden, [REDACTED]

ILLINOIS

Peoria: *THE FAR WESTFARTHING SMIAL*

Mike Foster, [REDACTED]

MICHIGAN

Julie Bailey, [REDACTED]

MISSOURI

St. Louis: *THE KHAZAD*

Gary & Sylvia Hunnewell, [REDACTED]

NORTH CAROLINA

Asheville: *THE WEST N. CAROLINA C.S. LEWIS SOCIETY*

Don King, e-mail: [REDACTED]

Charlotte: *THE CAROLINA TOLKIEN SOCIETY*

Matt & Renita Peeler, [REDACTED]

OHIO

Akron

David Staley, [REDACTED]

Dayton-Kettering: *THE PRANCING PONY*

Eileen Ribbler, [REDACTED]

PENNSYLVANIA

Pittsburgh area

Will Vaus, Murrsville Comm. Church, [REDACTED]

TENNESSEE

Nashville: *SPARE OOM*

Mary & Conrad Stolzenbach, [REDACTED]

Chartered Groups

CALIFORNIA

Greater Los Angeles: *NIGGLE'S PARISH*

Gracia Fay Ellwood, [REDACTED]

Los Angeles/Pasadena: *MYDGARD*

Lee Speth, [REDACTED]

San Francisco Bay Area: *KHAZAD-DUM*

Edith Crowe & Amy Wisniewski, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

<http://www.mythsoc.org/kd.html>

November: *Song for the Basilisk* by Patricia A. McKillip

December: Annual Reading & Eating Meeting

January: Charles Williams' *Masques*

COLORADO

Denver area: *FANUIDHOL ("CLOUDY HEAD")*

Patricia Yarrow, [REDACTED]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Washington & Suburbs: KNOSSOS

Mimi Stevens, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Nov: *Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling

December: Christmas party

HAWAII

Oahu: SAMMATH NAUR

Steve Brown, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Jan: *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* by Roald Dahl

LOUISIANA

Baton Rouge: ROKE

Sally Budd, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MICHIGAN

Ann Arbor-Flint: GALADHREMMIN-ENNORATH

Dave & Grace Lovelace, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MINNESOTA

Minneapolis-St. Paul: RIVENDELL

David Lenander (See above). [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

November: *The Wild Swans* by Peg Kerr

December: Readings from Rivendell

NEVADA

Reno: CRICKHOLLOW

Joanne Burnett-Bowen, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

OREGON

Portland area

Donovan Mattole, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

November: *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis

January: *That Hideous Strength* by C.S. Lewis

PENNSYLVANIA

Lancaster Area: C.S. LEWIS AND FRIENDS

Neil Gussman, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

SOUTH CAROLINA

Columbia: THE COLUMBIA C.S. LEWIS SOCIETY

Louise Grooms, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

WASHINGTON

Seattle: MITHLOND

John James, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

WISCONSIN

Milwaukee: THE BURRAHOBBITS

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Nov: *A Sorcerer and a Gentleman* by Elizabeth Willey

Dec: *The Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper (& bash)

Special Interest Group

THE ELVISH LINGUISTIC FELLOWSHIP

Carl Hostetter, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

www.erols.com/aelfwine/Tolkien/linguistics/ELF/
Newsletter, *Vinyar Tengwar*. Also a Journal, *Parma Eldalamberon*: Christopher Gilson, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Correspondence Groups

BUTTERBUR'S WOODSHED (general fantasy)

Diane Joy Baker, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Correspondence circular with set topic. Info:

<http://www.mythsoc.org/bw.html>

November: *Selected Fictions* by Jorge Luis Borges

Jan: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* by Salman Rushdie

ONCE UPON A TIME (children's fantasy)

Laura Krentz, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Correspondence circular. Info:
[REDACTED]

Online Discussion Group

COINHERENCE

Online discussion of Charles Williams

David Davis: E-mail: [REDACTED]

Currently discussing *Descent into Hell*

Strider's Screening Room

Return to *Return to Oz*

When Disney released the feature movie *Return to Oz*, I penned a review for *Mythprint* (September, 1985). *Return* vanished from theaters quickly (not, I'm sure, as a result of my review) and I had only seen it once. A few years later, because my niece was watching it, I sort of loitered through a chunk on a home tape made from a commercial telecast. Then, a couple of summers ago, late in the evening at an Oz convention, I queried whether *Return to Oz* had ever been released on video and someone was quite positive it had. But I don't believe I'd ever encountered a copy, for sale, rent, or in a con auction. At last, on August 14, I saw it and bought it. So may you.

This new release (or re-release) of the cassette *Return to Oz* is billed as an "Anniversary" edition, though fourteen years seems an odd interval to celebrate (the L. Frank Baum books on which *Return* is based were published in 1904 and 1907—you figure). This VHS tape is reasonably priced at \$15 and comes in a handsome white hinged box. A gaudy *Return to Oz* postcard lives inside with the tape; of course no true collector will actually use it.

It is the only tape of a Disney children's movie that I've ever watched that doesn't open with the castle logo. Instead we have a brief welcome from Fairuza Balk, selected as a child to play Dorothy after a continental search, now in her early 20s. (It is intriguing that Ms. Balk, who began as Dorothy, should have had her most commercially successful role as the teen Wicked Witch in *The Craft*.) She also gives an interview at the end of the movie, sincere, replete with "making of" anecdotes, and touchingly wistful about *Return's* box office failure (never spoken of directly).

Watching *Return to Oz* start to finish for the first time in fourteen years awakened a restless itch to write about it again. Whatever its merits

as art, it is a complex and intriguing artifact. Fairuza Balk calls it "surreal" and it certainly has that quality, especially in the transition from Kansas to Oz. But its composition is more compulsively intricate than surreal.

For those who have forgotten since 1985, *Return to Oz* blends elements of the second and third Oz books, the mix overshadowed by the classic 1939 MGM version of *Wizard*. Of the two books used, Dorothy does not appear in *The Land of Oz*, but she does, in *Ozma of Oz*, return to Oz, via the Pacific Ocean, the Land of Ev, and the Kingdom of the Nomes (Baum's spelling; he



thought the silent *g* a pointless imposition on kids). *Return to Oz*, however, begins and ends with Dorothy. Brought back to a devastated Oz, she sets off with a new array of friends (culled from *Land* and *Ozma*) to confront the evil, first of Princess Mombi, usurper in the

Emerald City, then of the Nome King himself. Oz is restored and the rightful ruler, Princess Ozma, a mysterious presence throughout the action, is freed from confinement and enthroned.

This is a brisk summary of a crowded movie. The acting is impeccable (Nome King: Nicol Williamson, Mombi: Jean Marsh), the effects state of the art. But it didn't work for audiences and, watching it again, I understand more clearly why.

1. *Land* and *Ozma* are different books. Despite its bizarre resolution (boy hero turns out to be enchanted princess), *The Land of Oz* is vaudevillian—inventive, humorous, topical and satirical, loosely plotted. *Ozma of Oz* is mythopoeic—not without its measure of playfulness; still, more focused, resonant, haunting. Trying to use both, *Return to Oz* loses, pretty much, the atmosphere of either. And having decided to mine both books, they used too much.

2. "Too cheerless," a critic (me) noted in 1985. Apt. Pointed. The music by David Shire is of high quality, but, likely in reaction to the lively, well-known Harold Arlen score of '39, it is steeped in melancholy. Toto, left behind in this adventure, howls with grief as the camera dwells upon him. While this Dorothy is nowhere as lachrymose as Garland, she doesn't smile much, not having much to smile at until the end.

3. In 1939, an adult was free to see *The Wizard of Oz* because *it wasn't really a fairy tale*. The magical parts were quarantined as a dream. We have (somewhat) discarded that mindset (and good for us!), but the dream rationale that allowed an adult to disavow Baum's story (while secretly ingesting it) was the price the screenwriters had to pay for the movie to be commercially feasible. Then it outstrode its time. The MGM *Wizard* endured, filled a niche, and is for countless people the original *Wizard*. This hexed the screen chances of the subsequent books. Dreams are a common human experience, and part of that experience is that dreams don't have sequels. Disney sat for decades on the screen rights to the other thirteen Baum Oz books, and I more than suspect that, in all that time, among other problems, the studio simply couldn't work past the barrier of Judy Garland awaking in a house that hadn't flown. How "return" from there?

Return spends a deal of time, recurrently, fretting about *Wizard's* dream frame. The inception of its story is the conflict between Dorothy and Aunt Em [Piper Laurie] over whether the *Wizard* events are real or figmentary. In 1985, I wrote, "Dorothy's adventures in the new movie are *maybe* a dream and *maybe* not." On second viewing, I now believe the balance is clearly tipped in the direction of *not*. This subversion of the MGM precedent reflects a certain courage, but the ambiguity is unhelpful. At last, it is just too confusing. Director and co-writer Walter Murch wanted too many things too many ways.

I'm glad I have this tape. It contains the only

cinematic rendering of two of Baum's most haunting concepts (both from *Ozma of Oz*): the cabinet of heads, and the lonely, high stakes guessing game in the Nome King's ornament rooms. The flight of the Gump remains wonderful. Fairuza Balk was close to perfect. Besides, I truly believe it will remain the only major Oz film since 1939, until someone goes ahead and remakes *The Wizard of Oz* successfully—Baum's *Wizard*, without the dream.

If the video is reissued, I hope a fix will be made on the liner notes. The back of the box currently asserts that Dorothy leaves Kansas "in a lightening [sic] storm.... The [Emerald] City is now a *dirty slum*." [Emphasis added] There's a book title no one's used yet: *The Dirty Slums of Oz*. Wonder why not.

Reviewed by Lee Speth

Return Again to Oz

In one of those serendipitous coincidences, the Fine Arts Cinema in Berkeley, California, recently hosted a showing of the 1914 film version of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. Baum, it should be noted, had a not particularly successful career as a motion picture producer and director, creating The Oz Film Manufacturing Company in 1914. He himself directed the first film set in the fictional land, *His Majesty, the Scarecrow of Oz*, and produced the two other Oz movies, *The Magic Cloak of Oz* and *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*.

Patchwork Girl, directed by J. Farrell MacDonald, offers visuals that are a close match to the original book illustrations by John Neill, even to capturing the acrobatic technique used by the Crooked Magician to stir his life-giving potion. And the *Woozy*, in its bizarre blockiness, is both hilarious and charming.

The film presentation at Fine Arts was accompanied by live klezmer music by the Gonifs, which added nicely to the ambiance. These three early films are available on video, and are worth searching out by any fan of the wonderful Land of Oz.

Book Reviews

LISA GOLDSTEIN, *Dark Cities Underground*. New York: Tor, 1999. ISBN 0-312-86828-6, hc, 256 pp., \$22.95.

I've been reading the notes from the most recent Potlatch convention and one of the panels that caught my attention was 'The Role of Meta-Fictive Narrative in Science Fiction.' Meta-fictive narrative is described as 'the effect of building upon shared memes in our collective reading experience to create new explorations that don't require the author to re-invent the wheel.' And so, with that in the background of my mind, I turned to Lisa Goldstein's latest effort, *Dark Cities Underground*, and found a wonderful meta-fictive narrative, but a slim story.

In *Dark Cities Underground*, perpetually broke single mother and journalist Ruth Berry gains a contract to write a book on the popular *Adventures of Jeremy* books for children. She tracks down the now-grown Jeremy Jones to interview him about growing up the idol of millions of fans of the underground world of Neverwas. It doesn't take long before they are both unwittingly pulled into a battle among the denizens of 'down below' for control of the 'world above.'

By novel's end (and without revealing too many of the plot twists), Goldstein manages to tie Egyptian mythology, typology, numerology, children's literature, and underground rail systems together to create an Illuminati, the-world-is-being-controlled-by-an-elitist-group, meaning-is-not-what-we've-thought-it-is plot. But what makes the story rise above the standard boilerplate paranoid story is that Goldstein taps into enough 'cherished' veins to gather in many (most?) readers. She doesn't reinvent the wheel, but uses many memes from previously established narratives to move her story forward, causing the book to resonate with 'ah! that's so-and-so!' moments. And rather than undermine those moments, Goldstein capitalizes on them, using the shared meaning to further the story.

But ultimately this book is flawed in the same way that so many of her books are flawed: the sum of the parts does not add up to the whole. As in *Tourists* or *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*, the fantastical elements are brought out clearly but never explored fully, instead being left to lie around the edges while interpersonal relationships take center stage. I always enjoy reading Goldstein's books for the characters, but I always come away feeling disappointed when the plot doesn't deliver the story it promises.

Still, Goldstein deserves the various accolades she has received and *Dark Cities Underground* is well-written and enjoyable. It is definitely meta-fictive narrative, but perhaps it points out one of the problems with meta-fictive narrative: that it is a means to an end and not the end itself.

Reviewed by Matthew Scott Winslow



STEPHEN R. LAWHEAD, *Avalon: The Return of King Arthur*. New York: Avon Publishers, 1999. ISBN 03800977028, hc, \$25.00.

Avalon is a stand-alone novel by the author of the Pendragon Cycle (*Taliesin*, *Merlin*, *Arthur*, *Pendragon*, and *Grail*). The story is a modern retelling of one of our oldest and best-loved legends—the rise of King Arthur. Having written a wonderful series based on the historical legend, Lawhead now steps up to the challenge of writing about the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Arthur being the "Once and Future King." In doing so he masterfully recreates Arthurian Britain in a not so distant twenty-first century.

The novel begins with the death of Edward IX, the last King of Britain. With no heir to the throne and the public disgusted with royal scandal after scandal, it appears as the monarchy is over and Britain's Prime Minister may become the country's first president. The PM, Thomas Waring, has been preparing for this tragedy for years and has collected signed abdications from

anyone with a thread of royal legitimacy who might pose a threat to his new political order.

Admist the turmoil and crisis, a certain Mr. Embries (AKA "Merlin") appears and declares a Scottish Highlands commoner, Captain James Arthur Stuart (AKA "King Arthur"), as the legitimate and rightful heir to the throne. With the documents to support his claim, Embries convinces James that he has royal blood, but he has a much harder time convincing him that he is in fact Arthur reborn. Not yet fully convinced, James begins to speak out against the new political order and the country begins to listen.

Full of surprises and characters that will be familiar to readers of his previous books, this is a well-crafted novel that will keep you up late at night, enthralling you until the last page is turned. *Avalon* is a modern fantasy that combines Lawhead's vintage storytelling ability (*The Song of Albion* trilogy) and well-crafted language (the descriptions and characters in *Byzantium* and the poetry & songs found in all of his books) with modern suspense and mystery.

Arguably one of Lawhead's best novels to date, I found it impossible to put down. You will be hard pressed to find a better or more original retelling of this Arthurian tale. I absolutely loved it!

Reviewed by Donovan Mattole

STEPHEN MITCHELL, *The Frog Prince: A Fairy Tale for Consenting Adults*. New York: Harmony Books/Crown Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-609-60545-3, hc, 192 pp, \$18.00.

This odd little entry into the growing subgenre of fairy tale retellings was written by an author whose specialty is translations of such diverse works as the *Tao Te Ching* and *The Book of Job*. Here the well-known story of the beautiful princess and the amphibian rescue of her golden ball is shown from a different, philosophical perspective. The characters are more three-dimen-

sional, motivations and hesitations explored. For all the publishers' declarations of the book's message of "the transcendent power of love," I was most charmed by the droll peering between the cracks in the tale itself (what Mitchell calls the "Condensed Version"). Why was that stupid ball so important to someone easily able to buy another? How do the characters face the problems inherent in cross-species (cross-class, in fact) mating? My favorite is the dinner conversation between the royal personages and the frog, on his arrival at the palace. Mitchell's oblique references to Europe's cultural heritage, plus an infusion of the principles of the *Tao*, make this a refreshing addition to recent fairy and folk tale renditions.

Reviewed by Eleanor M. Farrell

MADELEINE E. ROBINS, *The Stone War*. New York: Tor Books, 1999. ISBN 0-312-85486-2, hc, 317 pp., \$23.95.

Think of New York City being as bad as you've ever imagined it could get. Then, up the ante.

Fear and dread are amply present in *The Stone War*, and the book will be too strong for some tastes. But it is not a story for those who already hate the city: rather it is for anyone who has ever loved it.

On my last visit to Manhattan, a few years ago, the city under Giuliani appeared to be perceptibly returning to more civilized norms. At the outset, one must believe that these gains will be lost and a deeper, further slide will take place. The time is early in the next century. Armed guards are everywhere, as is danger; street people have become permanent street dwellers, with their own ramshackle shelters huddled up against the barred, grated, defended apartment blocks where those marginally richer live. The police do not even go into Central Park. Despite all this, architect John Tietjen still loves New York deeply, and when things suddenly, catastrophically, become much worse even than this, his only thought is

for the City.

The Stone War unfolds as a series of surprises, of answers to the reader's insistent questions. ("But why doesn't he..." "Why can't they..." "Why is all this happening...") To reveal much would be to spoil it. The answers are, I think, satisfactory, though for me they seemed to arrive almost always a bit too late. But this is a fault of structure, not of the powerful, underlying idea.

Madeleine Robins has put a new spin on two classic sf tropes. The cracked outsider who reads thoughts: here, a homeless boy named Jit. Then, the brave little human community learning to live in a post-Apocalypse world, as John Tietjen gathers followers and helpers. First among them is a heroine many of us will welcome with delight, a gray-haired, sixtyish lady in sensible clothes, Barbara McGrath. And to these two elements, Robins has added dreadful monsters and inexplicable magic. Yes, as you will read on the cover, she "wakes the stone lions in front of the New York Public Library." I only wish they had stayed awake longer!

I had the good fortune to read Robins' fantasy at about the same time as the splendid nonfiction *Red-Tails in Love*, by Marie Winn. This is the story of a close-knit corps, the bird watchers of Central Park, and one of their main finds, a red-tailed hawk and his successive mates, nesting in the urban cliffs opposite the park. The two books together give a picture of the depth, the adaptability, the suffering and the glory in the condition of humans, of nature, of the wild and the civilized. Both create their own versions of an urban Holy Family, both send the spirit of the City aloft on wings.

Reviewed by Mary M. Stolzenbach



JANE YOLEN, *Here There Be Dragons*, illus. by David Wilgus. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1998. ISBN 0-15-201705-4, pb, 149 pp., \$10.00.

"As the dragon is mighty, yet can sail without falling through the air, so must the wood of our kite likewise be strong yet light." So speaks a hero in this book who fights a dragon with the aid of a kite. The same analogy can be made of Jane Yolen's stories: they are strong yet light. She is at her formidable best in the kind of stories found in this book.

Here there be eight dragon stories and five dragon poems, to be precise. They are of a variety of lengths (one story is a mere fifty words, others thirty pages), and in tones ranging from humorous to stark. Some are pure fairy tales, others in the style of modern YA fiction. Both stories and poems are likewise designed to depict dragons in many facets and from many points of view. There are kindly but dangerous mentor dragons and purely malignant monster dragons. There is a dragon as a fighting pet, and a dragon as a surprise ending. There are a Chinese-inspired fairy tale, an Arthurian story, and a fairy tale told by the dragons. There is a poem humorously employing scientific imagery, and a poem on a dragon in the woods written for The Mythopoeic Society when Yolen was Guest of Honor at the 1984 Mythcon.

What all the stories have in common is that the dragons are taken seriously. Even if the story is humorous, the dragon is still awesome, not a figure to belittle. Despite their variety of styles, they are all told clearly and simply, with plots no less sturdy and timeless for being original rather than retold. One may feel on reading them, though, that they must be ancient stories retold, even though one hasn't read these particular ones before. This is Jane Yolen's particular talent—to write what is strong yet light—and it is well displayed in this book.

Reviewed by David Bratman



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