

MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

Vol. 43 No. 7

July 2006

Whole No. 292



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Illustrations

Cover: "Celebrindor in Eregion" © Gail Barton

Incidental art: "Gargoyle" © Sue Dawe (p. 7)

Editorial Address:

(Send materials for
publication, letters,
comments, etc.)

Eleanor M. Farrell, Editor

[Redacted]

E-mail: [Redacted]

Subscriptions & Back Order Information:

See inside back cover

Mythopoeic Society Information:

Edith Crowe, Corresponding Secretary

[Redacted]

E-mail: [Redacted]

Web site: www.mythsoc.org

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

Mythcon 37 Announcement

August 4–7, 2006

University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

Theme: The Map and the Territory: Maps and Landscapes in Fantasy

(with a track on Native American Fantasy/Native Americans in Fantasy)

Author Guest of Honor: Lois McMaster Bujold

Scholar Guest of Honor: Amy H. Sturgis

The Site

The Thurman J. White Forum Building
on the OU campus.

Housing

The Sooner Hotel & Suites (standard hotel
rooms and two-bedroom cottage suites).
Breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the Commons
Restaurant on-site.

Events

- Book signing and reception at the University
of Oklahoma main campus bookstore.
- Annual Banquet in the Sam Noble Oklahoma
Museum of Natural History.

Campus Amenities

- Special exhibit on Native American authors at
the Western History Collections
- Special exhibit on maps in the History of
Science Collection in Bizzell Library

Maps and brochures are available for self-guiding
walking tours of the campus, with a focus on our
wonderful sculptures, architecture, and gardens.

Transportation

Fly into Will Rogers International Airport in
Oklahoma City (about 45 minutes) or the
nearby hub airports at Dallas/Fort Worth (a
three-hour drive by rental car).

Registration

\$150 Mythopoeic Society members

\$175 non-Society members

\$110 students

Single day rate: \$45 per day

(Children under 12 are free)

Meals and Accommodations

\$53 full meal package (not including banquet)

\$50 Sunday banquet

Accommodation reservations will be made
directly with the hotel. Standard room rate is
\$53/night (up to 4 persons); suite is \$88/night
(up to 6 persons).

Checks or money orders for registration and
meals should be made payable to "Burning Hill
Farm." You may register through the Society's
web site, using our Paypal shopping cart feature.
Check the Mythopoeic Society web site for
details, updates, and links.

To receive a flyer and registration form, ask ques-
tions, or obtain more information about the
conference, contact:

Burning Hill Farm, Inc.

c/o Janet Brennan Croft

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

e-mail [REDACTED]

Book Reviews

ELIZABETH BEAR, *Blood and Iron*. New York: Roc, 2006. ISBN 0-451-46092-8, tp, 432 pp., \$14.00.

If anyone had told me that there was a new book out which featured Faerie (both the Seelie and Unseelie courts), King Arthur, dragons, and werewolves, I would have gleefully waited for them to then tell me how bad it was. When you consider it also has numerous references to Tam Lin, Thomas the Rhymer, and Dracula, you'd think it's got to be a candidate for the book toss. (The book toss is a quaint custom in which the reader hurls particularly bad books against a convenient, sturdy wall.) Imagine my surprise at finding how well these work in Elizabeth Bear's first novel of the Promethean Age, *Blood and Iron*.

The Promethean Age seems to correspond with or slightly pre-date the Industrial Age. It is the rise to prominence of the Prometheus Club, an organization of modern mages opposed to the magic of Faerie and actively working against it. *Blood and Iron* features Matthew the Mage who has a personal vendetta against Faerie. His brother Kelly was taken to Faerie one night and danced his life away, returning the next day with both mind and body shattered. Matthew is sent to find the new Merlin, a task which puts him in competition with the Seekers of the Seelie and Unseelie courts.

Seeker of the Seelie court is Elaine Andraste. Half mortal and half fae, it's her job to seek out others like herself to help swell the dwindling population of Faerie. Her queen sends her also to seek out the new Merlin, the one-in-a-generation successor to that famous guy. She is to seduce him and persuade the Merlin that his interests lay with the Seelie court rather than with the Unseelie or with the Prometheus Club. Well, that's swell, but what do you do when he's a she?

Bear is a careful craftsman and artisan with

words. Her text is poetic and painful and true. She doesn't promise us any happy endings because life, like the old ballads, isn't like that. When you mix with Faerie, you risk all.

Reviewed by Berni Phillips Bratman



LYLE W. DORSETT, *Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C.S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004. ISBN 1-58743-122-X, tp, 182 pp., \$12.99.

Lyle Dorsett, one-time director of the Wade Center and author of the biography of Joy Davidman (*And God Came In*, 1983; rev. *A Love Observed*, 1998), here offers a book on the titular topic that appropriately ties to his current work as a professor of Christian formation and ministry at Wheaton College. His preface asks the question form of his topic: "How did C.S. Lewis mature spiritually after his conversion to Christianity in 1931?" The majority of members of The Mythopoeic Society, concerned with Lewis as a fantasy writer, will not be greatly interested, but a minority will—and it's a good book on its topic. (The volume shows no interest in Lewis's fiction and poetry.)

The first chapter is primarily biographical—about Lewis and about Dorsett's interest in his post-conversion "spiritual formation." The next three chapters are obvious from their titles: "Prayer," "Scripture," and "The Church." Dorsett uses a substantial number of quotations from the interviews he did (when director of the Wade) of people who had known Lewis, which gives the material freshness. The "formation" is fairly obvious in the first two—Lewis prayed (and only finally learned to appreciate praise as a type of prayer); Lewis read the Bible regularly as well as other religious works (Dorsett gives a

list). By the way, this reviewer is bothered by Dorsett's description of Michael Christensen's *C.S. Lewis on Scripture* (1979) as "the standard work on this topic." Christensen's may be the best available, but it does not take into account, for example, Lewis's occasional recommendation of James Moffatt's translation of the Bible—which recommendation implies, among other things, an acceptance of the JEDP theory of composition of the Pentateuch.

The chapter on "The Church" gets into a discussion of Lewis's Anglicanism. Dorsett is good on the aspects of Calvinism and Puritanism that Lewis disagreed with (teetotalism, predestination, complete depravity, etc.), but his treatment of the Anglican traditional "three-legged stool" here gets a fourth leg: Dorsett accepts an addition of Experience to the threesome: Scripture, Reason, and Tradition. Lewis does not seem to have recognized the four-fold version, unless this reviewer's memory misleads him. And, though Dorsett's language is not completely clear, he seems to believe that, unless Scripture is made primary, if each of the three or four bases is considered equal, the result leads to the Broad Church (or Liberal) side of Anglicanism (see p. 72)—a side of which he is correct Lewis did not approve. Either Scripture or Liberalism, says Dorsett. (Hooker, at least, accepts that Scripture may not answer all questions, and then one turns to Reason—and if that fails, then Tradition. The approach avoids the horns of Dorsett's dilemma.)

Chapter 5, "Spiritual Friends and Guides," is, biographically, the most valuable treatment in the book, for it discusses at length Lewis's spiritual director, Fr. Walter Frederick Adams of the Society of St. John the Evangelist ("the Cowley Fathers"). Dorsett traces Adams' beliefs and emphases, including one that Lewis rejected (veneration of Mary); this discussion also involves the Anglo-Catholic beliefs of the order's

founder. The main point, for Dorsett, is that a spiritual director helped Lewis's religious practices and Lewis's own spiritual advice given to others. Dorsett also discusses Lewis's beliefs about the liturgy in this chapter.

Chapters 6 and 7, "Reluctant Guide" and "Steering through Troubled Waters," discuss Lewis as a spiritual guide in his letter writing. Dorsett's recounted meeting with one correspondent adds to the interest. (Some of the specific persons are disguised by Dorsett, in order to avoid revealing personal problems; but they are given by correct name in Lewis's *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2—presumably Walter Hooper thought their deaths had ended the need for secrecy. Both books appeared in 2004.) Dorsett ends with a brief chapter on how Lewis did not think his works would last much beyond his death, but (Dorsett says) the letters' Biblically based advice is universal.

Dorsett's book shows some signs of haste: chapters of *Beyond Personality* confused as separate essays (113); omission of Lewis's *Collected Poems* from the bibliography (169); listing of two non-anthologies as "anthologies" of Lewis's writings (170); listing of Lewis's *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (2000), as a secondary work (175); and some of the "Major Secondary Works" being hardly major (170-175). But, despite these flaws, on its topic this is the best available book, and on Lewis's spiritual guide it is biographically excellent.

Reviewed by Joe R. Christopher



CLARE DUNKLE, *By These Ten Bones*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005. ISBN 0-8050-7496-1, hc, 229 pp., \$16.95.

Read this book when you have time to stay up all night and finish it, because once you start, you

may not want to put it down. The novel begins with a teaser, an episode removed in time and place from the plot that follows it: "Best if you was dead," an old man tells a little boy, neither of them named. For a long time, the reader is left wondering why. The answer unfolds throughout a story filled with suspense and horror, but also romance, idealism, warmth, and spirituality.

The rest of the story unfolds through the point of view of Maddie, a teenaged girl in an isolated Scottish village whose one source of discontent in life is the dim prospect of marriage among a tiny community thinned by war and hard times. When a handsome boy with a genius for wood-carving visits the village among a group of traveling peddlers, he seems the answer to her prayers. When he stays on for a lengthy job, Maddie is overjoyed.

But even from the first, dark mysteries hang about the carver boy: What is his bond to the drunken old peddler who does no work, but claims all the profits of the boy's carvings? Why do they travel together without speaking to each other? Why is the boy distraught when the peddler is chained up for drunkenness? And why have Maddie's dreams turned ominous since this strange pair appeared in the village?

As ill fortune assails the village, the inhabitants try to make sense of it through old stories and folk beliefs of witches, werewolves, spirits of the dead, and monsters in the loch. While I'm no expert in Highland folklore, these old tales have an air of authenticity to them. Dunkle has either done some impressive research, or attained a high degree of excellence in the fine art of creative fakery. Either way, the complex web of beliefs and folkways shared by the villagers gave their society the texture too often lacking in portrayals of distant times and faraway places. Dunkle's highland village feels real.

The villagers also felt very believable. Even the

most reprehensible characters—and those most frustrating to the heroine—have their virtues, and their essential place in the tight-knit village community.

But best of all is Maddie herself, every inch a heroine—or perhaps I should say a hero, not a damsel waiting for rescue but a brave young woman willing to put herself at risk for justice, for love, and for the safety of her community. The story is fully hers. Without stepping outside the traditional roles of girls in the time of the story (never specified, but probably somewhere from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries, near the beginning of the great witch hunts), Maddie fully emerges as a warrior in a great struggle against the evils that threaten her society.

If I find one flaw in Dunkle's writing, it is a tendency to over-explain, common among authors who've spent a lot of time on research. For example, we don't need to be told that spinning is an important task for women in the village; if we see them constantly doing it, we'll figure out that it's their job. Also, one of Maddie's significant dreams seems to me to explain too much. It would be stronger, in my opinion, if it were more honestly dreamlike. But these are trifling complaints in a book I found both compelling and beautiful.

By These Ten Bones is marketed as Young Adult fiction, but should please adult fans of fantasy as well. There are some creepy passages which may be too disturbing for younger children, and the romance plot may be simply uninteresting. Non-Christian readers may tire of the perfections of the village priest; on the other hand, fans of C.S. Lewis or Madeleine L'Engle may find this sympathetic view of Christianity one of the book's attractions. Aside from these limitations, I heartily recommend this story to all lovers of mythopoeic fantasy.

Reviewed by Pauline J. Alama

CD Review: “In Elven Lands”

THE FELLOWSHIP, “In Elven Lands.” UK: Voiceprint Records, 2005. United States Dist VP378CD, ASIN B000BSZA9M.

This record seems to be mostly the work of one Carvin Knowles (apparently not the same Carvin Knowles who has composed music for a few Hollywood films), although since Jon Anderson (lead singer of Yes) is involved in the project as well, it is sometimes marketed under Anderson’s name. Of the 16 tracks on the CD, two are credited as music & lyrics by Jon Anderson, and he sings on two others. Aside from one cover (which I’ll get to later), all the rest are written or co-written by Knowles.

The CD’s subtitle, “a musicological reconstruction inspired by the myths, poetry, and linguistic works of Professor J.R.R. Tolkien,” establishes The Fellowship’s aims and ambition right off the bat. To his credit, Knowles has certainly done his homework in terms of Tolkien research. There are lyrics in both Quenya and Sindarin, and one track is a musical setting of the Anglo-Saxon fragment (“Eala Earendil...”) that sparked Tolkien’s inspiration for his whole mythology. The CD package is covered with Cirth and Angerthas lettering. There are songs pertaining to First Age motifs such as the Silmarils, Beren & Luthien, the horns of Orome, and the awakening of Durin. Efforts were made to acknowledge the linguistic aspects of the different races and regions of Middle-earth. There are even footnotes (as seems to be *de rigueur* in any “serious” Tolkien-related work), some referring to *The Book of Lost Tales* and *The Lays of Beleriand*.

The music itself is performed on a variety of both ancient and modern instruments, although in this case “ancient” tends to mean “medieval”—krumhorn, sackbutt, lute, recorder, and the like—rather than an attempt to extrapolate what

musical instruments the highly sophisticated Eldar might have devised. The music, likewise, comes across as partly Celtic, partly Gregorian chant, partly English folk-song tradition. This tends to give the impression that the Elder Days took place in about 1200 AD or so.

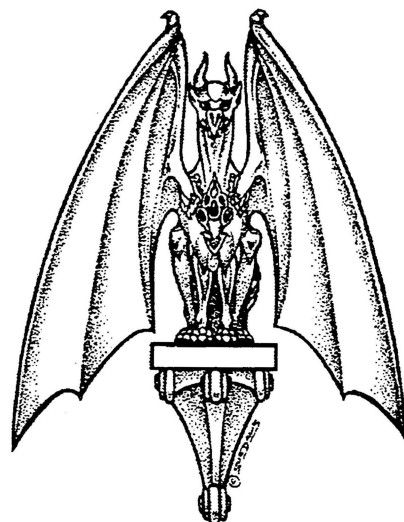
The strangest musical effect comes from their cover of Led Zeppelin’s “The Battle of Evermore.” The Fellowship’s version is almost unrecognizably different from the original, featuring a spare instrumentation and a somber vocal chant in the lower register that reminds one more of Leonard Cohen than Robert Plant.

Knowles has posted information about this project on [REDACTED] (see the news item at [REDACTED])

which may provide more information for the interested listener).

On the whole, I would give this CD high marks for research and for listenability, but the project as a whole suffers greatly from the assumption that anything farther back in time than Shakespeare must look and sound like your average Renaissance Festival.

Reviewed by David Emerson



Activity Calendar

Marion VanLoo
Membership & Discussion Group Secretary

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Prospective Groups

CALIFORNIA

[REDACTED] *LOTHLORIEN*
Linda Sundstrom, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

FLORIDA

[REDACTED]: *HOBBITON*
Paul S. Ritz, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] *ERYN GALEN*
B.L. McCauley, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]

INDIANA

[REDACTED] *CERIN AMROTH*
Ellen Denham, E-mail: [REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]

Chartered Groups

CALIFORNIA

[REDACTED] *MYDGARD*
Lee Speth, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
July: *Car's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut
August: *The Club Dumas* by Arturo Perez-Reverte
[REDACTED] *KHAZAD-DÛM*
Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
E-mail: [REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]

COLORADO

[REDACTED] *FANUIDHOL ("CLOUDY HEAD")*
Patricia Yarrow, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

[REDACTED] *KNOSSOS*
Mimi Stevens, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]
Jul: *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket
August: *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff
September: *The Place of the Lion* by Charles Williams
October: *Rough Magicke* by John Houghton

HAWAII

[REDACTED] *SAMMATH NAUR*
Steve Brown, [REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]
August: *Speed of Light* by Elizabeth Moon
September: *Magic for Beginners* by Kelly Link
October: *The Historian* by Elizabeth Kostova
Nov: *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Neffenegger

ILLINOIS

[REDACTED] *THE FAR WESTFARTHING SMIAL*
Mike Foster, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

IOWA

[REDACTED] *ALFHEIM*
Doug Rossman, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

LOUISIANA

[REDACTED]: *ROKE*
Sally Budd, [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MICHIGAN

[REDACTED] *GALADHREMMIN-ENNORATH*
Dave & Grace Lovelace, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

MINNESOTA

[REDACTED] *RIVENDELL*
David Lenander, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]

NEVADA

[REDACTED] *CRICKHOLLOW*

Joanne Burnett, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

July: *Glory Road* by Robert Heinlein

NEW YORK

[REDACTED] *HEREN ISTARION*

(*THE NEW YORK TOLKIEN SOCIETY*)

Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, The New York

Tolkien Society, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

OREGON

[REDACTED]
Donovan Mattole, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

July: *Speaker for the Dead* by Orson Scott Card

August: *The Man Who Was Thursday* by G.K.

Chesterton

Sep: *Romanticism Comes of Age* by Owen Barfield

October: *The Silver Trumpet* by Owen Barfield

November: *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis

PENNSYLVANIA

[REDACTED] *C.S. LEWIS AND FRIENDS*

Neil Gussman, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. E-mail: [REDACTED]

SOUTH CAROLINA

[REDACTED] *THE COLUMBIA C.S. LEWIS SOCIETY*

Nina Fowler, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

WASHINGTON

[REDACTED] *MITHLOND*

Matthew Winslow, [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

WISCONSIN

[REDACTED] *THE BURRAHOBBITS*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]

Special Interest Group

THE ELVISH LINGUISTIC FELLOWSHIP

Carl Hostetter, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Newsletter, *Vinyar Tengwar*. Journal, *Parma Eldalamberon*. Christopher Gilson, [REDACTED]

Correspondence Groups

BUTTERBUR'S WOODSHED (general fantasy)

Diane Joy Baker, [REDACTED]

Correspondence circular with set topic. Web: [REDACTED]

July: *Mazes and Gardens of Fantasy*

ONCE UPON A TIME (children's fantasy)

Laura Krentz, [REDACTED]

Correspondence circular. Web: [REDACTED]

Online Discussion Groups

MYTHSOC E-LIST

Society activities and general book-related discussion.

Sign up: [REDACTED] or contact

Joan Marie Verba: [REDACTED]

COINHERENCE

Online discussion of Charles Williams

David Davis: E-mail: [REDACTED]



Short Reviews: Young Adult Fiction

Reviewed by Nick Smith

PIERDOMENICO BACCALARIO, *The Door To Time*. New York: Scholastic, 2006. ISBN 0439774381, hc, 240 pp., \$12.99.

This new fantasy, translated from the Italian (and marketed as *Ulysses Moore Book: The Door To Time* edited by Michael Merryweather), is VERY strange. It takes place in England, involving a family that has just moved to a very old house. The family has twin children, who immediately make a new friend at school, so the whole adventure is about the three of them. They quickly find secret passages and various mysteries to explore, while the kindly old caretaker leaves them to their own devices. The kindly old caretaker has a side to him that could be sinister, if things don't work out well, although he seems to mean well. The problem is that he has let the kids go off on what could be a dangerous adventure involving what seems to be time travel, in the weirdest time machine ever—it's wind-powered! The parents, of course, couldn't buy a clue if you gave them a map to a clue store.

The down side is that this is a book-length introduction to the real story. The main characters have mostly been introduced, although at least one has been in the shadows for the length of the book. They quite literally start the main adventure on page 218 (out of 222). No idea how many books are planned, but this one is a bit of a cheat, since it really isn't a complete story in any way. It's a NICE story fragment, but that's what it is.

CLIVE CUSSLER, *The Adventures of Vin Fiz*. New York: Philomel Books, 2006. ISBN 0399244743, hc, 167 pp., \$15.99.

This is one of the strangest fantasies that I've read in a long time. It seems to be Clive Cussler,

the author of several adult best sellers, trying to recreate the kind of story that he would have read as a kid. It reminds me of Edward Eager and other older children's authors, anyway.

The basic premise is that Lacey and Casey, twins, are given a magical device that can turn a toy into a real object. After turning a toy tractor into a real tractor, to help their family farm, they turn a model airplane into a real airplane and have a very dreamlike adventure, as they travel cross country. At the end of the adventure, they could easily have believed it to be a dream ... but then a reward check showed up, based on a good deed they had done during their cross-country trip.

If he feels like it, Cussler can continue the story with other converted toys, or even use the airplane again. It's not great literature, but for kids who have read the *Oz* books and the Edward Eager books and want something else along those lines, this might work. It's not serious literature, and the dreamlike atmosphere will not be to everyone's taste, but I thought it was a good and worthwhile little book.

MERCEDES LACKEY, *One Good Knight*. New York: Luna Books, 2006. ISBN 037380217X, hc, 368 pp., \$24.95.

This novel, part of a series [The Five Hundred Kingdoms] about a version of Europe in which the fairy tales are not only real, but an ongoing phenomenon, is being put out by an offshoot of Harlequin Books. Well, it is a romance, of sorts, but traditional romance writers will faint dead away if they read this, and not because of any sexual content.

One Good Knight skewers many of the traditions and clichés of fantasy, romance novels and, well, a bunch of other things that I can't tell you

without giving away plot points. It is suitable for teens, especially since the main character is a teenaged girl who is also not a cliché, although she will be familiar to teens who have read a lot of mythology.

The story begins as a medievalized retelling of the myth of Andromeda and the dragon, and wanders off from there into serious adventure and ... ummm ... romance of a sort.

Young Andromeda has realized that she is making no impression on her mother, the queen, and comes up with a scheme to make herself useful. She is good at academic things, and begins writing reports and analyses for the queen's advisor, Solon. This would be a good thing, except for the fact that Andromeda has failed to notice that the queen and her advisor are both rather evil, and so getting noticed was probably not the best thing to do.

In a convoluted scheme to gain wealth and power, the queen and her advisor have been doing evil things. Andromeda doesn't quite figure this out, but does notice the results, and tries to get the queen to do something about them. Then, the marauding dragon shows up, and while they're waiting for a Champion to come and save the kingdom, they begin appeasing it with a virgin a week ... and help doesn't seem to be arriving very quickly, or at least as long as there are daughters of the opposition party available

Up to this point, it sounds like a fairly normal medieval romance, right? Well, let's just say that the resolution is not what the average reader will expect, and that old-school romance readers are in for a bit of a shock.

It's a quick read, considering the thickness of the book [about 360 pages]. I think that the author wanted something a bit less dense than her Valdemar books, for the intended audience. I honestly couldn't put it down, once I got into the main plot. Dragons, unicorns, heroes, fairy

godmothers, dwarven smiths, evil sorcerers, wicked queens, trustworthy guardsmen, revolting peasants ... trust me, this book has them all!



BETTY LEVIN, *Thorn*. Asheville, NC: Front Street Press, 2005. ISBN 1932425462, hc, 176 pp., \$16.95.

This is a strange book, in that the Library of Congress cataloging information says it is fantasy, but upon reading, there are no actual elements of fantasy. The story is an interesting one, though, so I thought I would mention it here. The author certainly creates an entire world, of a sort, so it's sort of mythopoeic

On an unnamed island in an unnamed setting, a small group of people try desperately to survive. They are at a stone-age level of technology, and two generations earlier, a tsunami killed the bulk of the population and ruined the island's natural resources. So, they try to get by with too few people, too few resources, and too little information passed down from their ancestors. The gene pool is too small, and as a result birth defects and stillbirths are a problem. The people depend upon fishing and hunting seals and dolphins, but they don't even have the resources to build more than a handful of fishing boats. So, slowly they are dying out.

Into this situation comes a sailing boat from another island. A man is on board, claiming to be the child of people who came from the dying island, and he brings his own child to live there, as the place where he lives has driven the child out for being crippled (it's clear that he had something like polio which deformed one leg).

The result is a story of survival on a personal and societal level, as the people of the island depend upon omens to decide whether to keep or kill the young boy, who has skills and talents that could help them, but also the "dead" leg

that so frightens everyone.

If Betty Levin had named the location, putting it on an island in the Pacific, I think that no one would have labeled it fantasy. By not naming the island or the time period, she left it up to the reader to imagine the location, which is fine, but that still doesn't make it fantasy. It IS an interesting "prehistorical" novel, if that's a suitable term. The interaction between the boy, Thorn, and the few surviving children his own age on the island is interesting. The story is told from the viewpoint of Thorn, and that of Willow, one of the very few girls. Willow is learning the few stories that survived, from the old woman of the island, and is being prepared to have as many children as possible, in the hopes that some of them will be healthy and strong. For some reason, she doesn't care for that part of her responsibilities

The ending is a little ambiguous, but thought-provoking in many ways. I will have no trouble recommending this to thoughtful readers, but it is not an action/adventure story.



LOIS LOWRY, *Gossamer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. ISBN 0618685502, hc, 144 pp., \$16.00.

This is a very nicely-done story, blending fairy tale dreamweavers and real world problems. It matches a young creature, whose job it is to bestow good dreams, with a very angry 8-year-old boy. The boy's father abused him and his mother in ways that he still doesn't understand or know how to deal with. As the story begins he's still at the stage where he thinks he deserved to be beaten and otherwise abused by his father for being "bad" and he takes it out on the rest of the world.

The realms of dreams and nightmares are interwoven with the touching solidity of the tale

of the boy and his tormented mother, and of the older woman who is trying to help him to heal.

I'm not a big Lois Lowry fan, oddly enough, but I couldn't put this one down. One of the things that helped is that she made the dream makers so ethereal and undefined that young ones only slowly become solid enough to cast a shadow. Never once does she attempt to describe them in concrete terms (although we know that they do have fingers but they don't have tails—you'll have to read it to find out why we know that).

The main characters, human and canine, are also not described thoroughly in physical terms. You know what they are thinking and feeling much better than you know what they look like. This seems right, since the whole story is about dreams and feelings.



ADAM OSTERWEIL, *The Lost Treasure of Talus Scree*. Asheville, NC: Front Street, 2005. ISBN 1932425306, hc, 152 pp., \$16.95.

This novel, by the author of *The Amulet of Komondor* and *The Comic Book Kid*, has what the author hoped were the elements of a humorous fantasy adventure novel. I think he misjudged either his writing skill or the entire genre.

This is a high-speed, short-attention-span, no-character-development sort of story that rapidly becomes annoying. Apparently, the reader isn't supposed to notice all the plot flaws and annoying things in the story, like the fact that the main character is an implausible twit the whole time. I felt like it was taking place in a Toontown version of a myth.

The basic premise is that there is an ongoing feud between the gods of good and evil, and this is symbolized by a lot of things, including the battle [literal] between day and night that occurs

at each dawn and dusk. The cartoony nature of this is betrayed by the very real destruction of anyone who doesn't follow all the rules and precautions.

The main character, Kiffin, at the start of the story, is an apparently spoiled 12-year-old brat with no redeeming features, and whose only claim to fame is a nearly unique magical pet. The fact that no one else except the local evil demigod seems to have one of those doesn't seem to strike anyone as odd. As the story progresses, Kiffin is forced to go on a quest to save the life of his mother. After many trials and tribulations he fails, only to be told that this wasn't the real quest, anyway, so drink this potion and ascend to godhood like a good little demigod and ... at that point I wanted to throw up.

You see, the whole story is a cheat! In an L. Sprague de Camp novel, the main character is having a riddle contest with a giant. At one point in the contest, in a fit of desperation, the hero asks: "What's green, runs around the house, and has wheels?" The giant is eventually stumped, and asks for the answer. "Grass," says the hero, "I lied about the wheels." This whole story is like that. Granted, there are clues that Kiffin is more than he seems, but the real answer is terribly forced and implausible. The comedy is at odds with the tragic parts, like the death of a character supposedly close to Kiffin [his "mourning" consists of only eating boring food], and at various points he is quite willing to make major sacrifices—of those around him, not his own of course—for the quest, which turns out to be pretty much pointless. In fact, the day is only saved by the actions of one of his faithful followers on what amounts to a flying skateboard.

Readers deserve better



TAMORA PIERCE, *The Will of the Empress*, New York: Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0439441714, hc, 560 pp., \$17.99.

This book reunites the four young mages from the *Circle of Magic* series. Sandy, Daja, Brier and Tris, now eighteen, have come back from their travels, trials and tribulations as portrayed in the quartet of books of *The Circle Opens*. The time they have spent apart has changed all of them, and each now bears emotional scars that make them feel separate from the group they once were.

As a result, they are all caught off-balance to realize that, being eighteen, they cannot go back to their familiar school environment, but must begin to make new lives for themselves. In Sandry's case, this involves long-delayed obligations in a neighboring country where she has inherited a title and large quantities of land.

As the four relearn each other and learn more about themselves, they run into a host of problems, some of which are due to culture shock and the discovery that the land of Sandry's inheritance has some customs that they find very disturbing, and which cause them a lot of trouble. Then, too, the Empress of that land doesn't want them to go home, and will go to almost any lengths to keep them in her grasp, as valuable assets to her empire. To add to their troubles, they encounter a man who has been driven mad by his own untutored magic, a form of magic disturbingly similar to Tris's.

All of this leads to a book that is a bit longer than most of Pierce's works, over 500 pages, with the various plot threads. Unlike most of her works, this one is not immediately obvious as part of a 4-part series, although it is certainly possible that the pattern will be repeated, since this one has to do with Sandry growing up. A volume each about Tris, Daja and Briar would certainly be possible, as each has a lot of potential for development.



PAUL STEWART & CHRIS RIDDELL, *Lake of Skulls*, Book 1: *A Knight's Story*. New York: Atheneum Books, 2004. ISBN 0689872399, tp, 144 pp., \$9.95.
PAUL STEWART & CHRIS RIDDELL, *Joust of Honor*, Book 2 of *A Knight's Story*. New York: Atheneum Books, 2005. ISBN 0689872402, tp, 144 pp., \$9.95.

This is an historical fantasy series, written by the authors of *The Edge Chronicles*, and each one is a quick and nifty little story. At first I thought it was just historical fiction, but there is, in fact, a bit of magic hidden away, revealed as each story progresses.

The main character is an unnamed independent knight, a “free lance.” In the first story, he has come to the end of a tournament season, his cash flow ruined by a mid-season jousting injury, so he is looking for work in the worst way—and finds it. A low-class provincial lord, a robber baron operating just under the radar of higher authorities, hires him to recover a crown from an island. The catch, of course, is that the crown is rumored to come with a curse ... and it turns out to be a doozy. The resolution involves fighting, drinking, betrayal, and a bit of poetic justice.

As the second story opens, the protagonist has finally qualified for a big-money jousting tournament, after spending time in the “minor leagues” of jousts and tournaments held by local lords. The story becomes a mixture of mystery, fantasy and film-noir intrigue all blended with the standard jousting tournament stuff, as there are mysterious doings, crooked gamblers and beautiful ladies all interfering with the fair play of the tournament.

The book is short, less than 140 pages, and the pages themselves heavily illustrated, so it would be a good choice for a young reader who doesn't want a long book. It's much more serious

than things like the *Dragonslayers' Academy* series, with violence and threats of violence, and some horrible things happening to at least one horse, so I would not recommend it for very young or very squeamish readers.



PATRICIA C. WREDE, *Book of Enchantments*. Orlando, FL: Magic Carpet/Harcourt, 2005. ISBN 0-152-05508-8, pb, 256 pp., \$5.95.

This is the paperback release of Wrede's short story collection, and it has some wonderfully twisted stories in it. “Stronger Than Time” is her version of *Sleeping Beauty*, and “Cruel Sisters” takes a traditional ballad into a wonderful set of twists, examined in a different way than it is usually sung. Many retellings of this kind depend on humor and parody, but like Tanith Lee, Wrede can see the possibilities of a different, serious and perhaps even grim version, based on different perceptions than the ones typically handed down in the fairy tale or the ballad. Her humor comes through in “The Sixty-two Curses of Caliph Arenschadd” and “Utensile Strength,” one of the few fantasy stories that comes with a recipe—you have to read the story to understand why, but it looks like a good one. (You may have to use the simplified version, unless you have an old helmet lying around your kitchen.) Her notes explain how some of the stories came to be written, and why not every story ends up published where the author first intends. A very good collection, and interesting insights for those interested in the process of being a writer.



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