

MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

Vol. 43 No. 8

August 2006

Whole No. 293



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Cover: "Catch of the Day" by Kevin Farrell © 2006

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

2006 Mythopoeic Award Winners

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature

Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (William Morrow)

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature

Jonathan Stroud, *The Bartimaeus Trilogy*, consisting of *The Amulet of Samarkand*,
The Golem's Eye, and *Ptolemy's Gate* (Hyperion)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies

Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*
(Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies

Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England*
(University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003)



Author Acceptance Remarks

A couple of years ago I had the honour to be your guest at Mythcon, and I wish I could be with you again tonight. I've never been to Oklahoma.

I was, pretty obviously, delighted to learn that *Anansi Boys* had won the Mythopoeic Award. It may be a bit redundant to say this, but you don't set out to write a Mythopoeic Book, or at least, I didn't. I set out to write a funny book that would say some true things about family relationships.

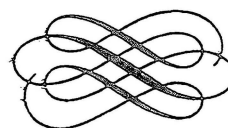
But then I started to write, and the book began with the world being sung into existence. And it wasn't long before I took Fat Charlie to a true place, where he looked down and saw the clouds like fluffy sheep far below him, in a small nod of the head to the first time I learned about

true places in fiction. I doubt it was a coincidence that the first person he talked to in that realm was a Lion.

I'm grateful to your kindness and generosity in giving me and *Anansi Boys* this lovely award, and am very aware that any of the books on this year's shortlist could have taken home the lion as proudly and with as much right as I do.

Thank you all...

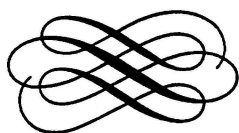
Neil Gaiman



While writing the nearly one thousand pages of *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, we came to sympathize ever more closely with Tolkien as his great work grew far beyond his and his publisher's expectations. Our own publisher wondered if the *Reader's Companion* would end up longer than the work we set out to annotate; and without a very pressing anniversary deadline, and other work demanding our attention, that might have been the case. Like *The Lord of the Rings* itself, the chief fault of the *Reader's Companion* is that it is too short: something more will always remain to be said about Tolkien's masterpiece.

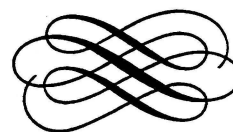
We're very grateful once again to the Mythopoeic Society for recognition of our work, and wish that we could be present to accept this award in person. Instead we must remain, for the moment, still tied to our word processors, as we complete *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* and send it at long last to the printers.

Wayne Hammond & Christina Scull



One of the questions often put to academic writers—and one of the questions we repeatedly ask ourselves—is, who is our intended audience? When I was drafting *National Dreams* I thought of my best friends, my parents, my most enthusiastic students—all smart, curious people, but not experts in my chosen field of Folklore. As I wrote and rewrote, I maintained my hope that the work might prove interesting and useful, not only to fellow academic folklorists and Victorianists, but also to readers passionate about fairy tales, folk narratives, fantasy fiction, and other contemporary genres whose 19th-century roots I tried to address in my book. I am surprised, and delighted, and truly honored to receive this award, especially from an association whose membership is as diverse and as passionate about fantasy fiction as the Mythopoeic Society. I am sorry that I cannot thank you in person, but want you all to know that I am energized, encouraged, and deeply touched by your selection of *National Dreams* for this year's award in Myth and Fantasy Studies.

Jennifer Schacker



Mythcon 37: Oklahoma or Bust!

Mythcon staked out new territory this year, being held on the Norman campus of Oklahoma University. Driving around the area, Mr. Bratman and I were struck by the redness of the land. Some might think it indicates a high iron content in the ground. My theory is that it's run-off from all the red paint used on campus.

Chaired dashing by our own Banzai librarian, Janet Croft, this year's Mythcon featured author guest of honor Lois McMaster Bujold and scholar Dr. Amy Sturgis. The theme was "The Map and the Territory: Maps and Landscapes in Fantasy," and there was a track on Native American fantasy/Native Americans in fantasy as well.

The highlight of Friday night was the reception and signing held at the OU Campus Bookstore. This was the first chance for many of us to burble at Bujold. We being as we are, we spread out to other parts of the store to see what else there was. A treasure was soon discovered in the history section: a Marie Antoinette action figure with an ejectable head. Laconic Lee Speth purchased one of these. As the Hunnewell consortium did not attend this year, there was no late-night golfimbul. Lacking anything else resembling a doll's head, I suggested to Lee that he let us use the ejectable head of the late queen. He refused, as it was to be a gift. He did, however, suggest that to do so would be to invent miniature golfimbul.

The Norman campus proved to be a wonderful venue for Mythcon. Most of us stayed in the lovely air-conditioned Sooner Hotel. (There were some guest cottages as well.) This was just a few steps from the conference center with the programming, which in turn was just a few steps more from the dining building. As we had triple-digit temperatures throughout the con, the close proximity of everything was greatly appreciated. In fact, you could say the conference center was

even mythopoeic in that it resembled a triskelion—each building seemed to have three branches.

I did not attend as many panels and papers as I normally do because there were several long sessions featuring the writer guest of honor. Bujold is enormously popular in science fiction fandom so I figured I would never have such a chance to actually talk with her and hear what she has to say again, so I just played Bujold groupie for much of the con. She read from her latest work, *The Sharing Knife: Beguilement*, the first book of a duology. (It will be out this October.) Both Bujold and Sturgis were wonderful, gracious guests of honor.

The one sad note at the conference was the absence of Mary Stolzenbach, a Mythcon regular who had died the previous day (August 3, 2006). Her dear friend, Grace Monk, arrived late at Mythcon as a result, delivered her paper ("Lucy's Sisters in the New World: The Female as Seer in Native American Fantasy," which was very good), participated in the Not-Ready-for-Mythcon Players skit, and returned home early.

The Not-Ready-for-Mythcon Players were even less ready than usual with the absence of playwright and mistress of mayhem, Ellie Farrell. Edith Crowe bravely took up the task and, in fine academic fashion, headed a committee to write the skit. Art imitating life, the plot was that in the absence of the author, Famous Writer (played by Bonnie Rauscher) and Lady Scholar (played by Grace Monk) help out by coming up with a script. They come up with the adventures of Miles Vorwhatitsworth (Autumn Rauscher) and Ivan Vorgeddaboutit (Bruce Leonard) buying a bad map at Jackson's Hole and winding up in Middle-earth by mistake. There they are mistaken for hobbits by Lobelia (Mary Kay Kare), are rushed by a gaggle of female fans (the usual gang) mistaking them for Gimli and Legolas, and are attracted to a beautiful elven maiden

(Anthony Burdge in the traditional Arden Smith role). This budding romance is soon cut short by the advent of Galadriel (Jessica Burke). The skit ended with a rousing rendition of "Mythopoeia" to the tune of "Oklahoma." (This was one of Mary Stolzenbach's last communications with several of us, suggesting this song. She wrote some of the words and Lynn Maudlin and Lee Speth wrote the rest.)

Sadly, there were neither linguists nor golfimbul this year. There were, however, two new

stewards announced at the members' meeting on Monday. That's always good news, especially as one is a new webmaster position, an increasingly important role that was never dreamed of in the society's early days.

It was a great Mythcon. I'm sorry so many of the regulars couldn't make it, but there was a fair representation of new people so it wasn't that bad. Next year in Berkeley!

Report by Berni Phillips Bratman

Mythopoeia

Mythopoeia—where a Nazgûl soars across the sky
Where a humble dork confronts an orc
Carving lazy circles in some guy.
Mythopoeia—every night the linguists and the fen
Hang out in the hall or play golfimbul
While the goblins fricassee the men!

We know we belong to a Con,
And the Con we belong to's the one!
And when we say
Oh frabjus day, calloo callay!
We're only sayin'
You're doing' fine,
Mythopoeia!
Mythopoeia, O.K.

Mythopoeia, M-Y-T-H-O-P-O-E-I-A—Mythopoeia!

2006 Clerihew Contest Winners

The Fifth Or Sixth Not Very Annual Clerihew Contest was held at Mythcon 37 this year, and in honor of the winner of the first year's prize, it was renamed the Mary Stolzenbach Memorial Clerihew Contest.

The secret panel of judges, who shall remain nameless (oh, all right, they can have their own names, but only if they don't tell anybody), met Sunday afternoon of the conference, and in a grueling marathon session lasting at least 20 minutes, winnowed the entries down to a chosen few.

Due to the nature of the submitted entries, the traditional before/during/after Tolkien cartography was re-mapped into three new categories just for this year. (The legality of this redistricting was upheld by the Texas Supreme Court.) The winners are:

(1) Best Bujold Clerihew:

Lois McMaster Bujold
Invents wonderful Gods, but struck true gold
When her theology mastered
A God who is really a bastard.

Ellen Denham

(2) Best non-Bujold Clerihew:

Hildegard of Bingen
Was always writin' and singin'.
After hundreds and hundreds of years,
Her music still draws cheers.

Jane Bigelow

(3) Best sycophantic Clerihew:

Janet Croft:
To her, our hats we've doffed.
She makes conferences supreme.
Of Mythcon she's the queen!

Maureen Thum and Frank Riga

Each winning writer was presented with the traditional prize, a jeroboam of Chateau de Porteur d'Anneau.

Reported 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: *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut

August: *The Club Dumas* by Arturo Perez-Reverte

[REDACTED] *KHAZAD-DUM*

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]

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]

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]

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]
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]
[REDACTED]
Web: [REDACTED]

WISCONSIN

[REDACTED] *THE BURRAHOBBITS*
Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Special Interest Group

THE ELVISH LINGUISTIC FELLOWSHIP

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

Correspondence Groups

BUTTERBUR'S WOODSHED (general fantasy)
Diane Joy Baker, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Correspondence circular with set topic. Web:
[REDACTED]

ONCE UPON A TIME (children's fantasy)
Laura Krentz, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Correspondence circular. Web: [REDACTED]
[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]



Book Reviews

JANE M.H. BIGELOW, *Talisman*. Greybull, WY: Antelios (Pronghorn Press), 2006. ISBN 1-932636-20-X, tp, 312 pp., \$19.95.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of reading a new period-fantasy novel, *Talisman*. This charming first novel by Denver author Jane Bigelow has both an irresistible heroine and a fascinatingly complex setting, which combine to make this a must-read book that is impossible to put down.

The setting for *Talisman* is out of the ordinary for a fantasy novel. The story takes place in a sort of mythical Mediterranean culture, reminiscent of "Scheherazade": a polytheistic pre-Islamic Middle Eastern milieu centuries (or even millennia) before Mohammed. Ms. Bigelow's gift for detailed sensory description carries the reader into the bazaars and marketplaces full of vivid colors, bustling crowds, braying donkeys, merchants and vendors of delicacies to delight the palate. Reading her descriptions of the towns and villages central to the story made me wish I could go there.

But the heart of the story is the protagonist, Layla. A young woman who has left her husband, she has taken up the unlikely combination of embroidery and jewel thievery as means of making a living. The way that she describes her methods of 'roof-running' and useful tips for would-be jewel thieves make clear that this is not a one-time act, but more a way of life for her. She enjoys being a thief, yet still comes across as a very appealing character. This dichotomy makes Layla a complex and realistic protagonist. The story is told in the first person, which in this novel is extremely effective. Layla's 'voice' as the narrator of the story is distinctive and witty; her clever and occasionally caustic comments on her world and the people around her are delightful to read.

As the book opens, Layla is in the act of stealing a rare, gorgeous, and much-venerated

emerald from a temple statue. Soon, she discovers that there is more to this precious stone than a good profit. Not only is there no way to fence the stolen jewel, but also it appears to be a conduit connecting her to an unseen entity with an agenda of its own. Carrying it around causes even her unspoken wishes to become reality: fruit trees, coins, and even a handy getaway vehicle (in the form of a large and opinionated donkey) materialize seemingly out of thin air, just for the asking. Layla is unnerved and mystified as she begins to realize what is going on: the stone apparently is the property of a nearly-forgotten goddess, Kossinli the Goddess of Mirth—who has decided to take a personal interest in Layla.

Other characters in the novel are well-drawn and appealing as well. There is Mother Rissa, a matriarch of a clan of itinerant merchants, who takes Layla under her wing and helps her get away from the city where she is no longer safe. Layla also encounters some mysterious devotees of Kossinli who hope to convince Layla to abandon her larcenous lifestyle and join them. Finally, the obstreperous donkey himself, Imchi, is sent by the goddess to help Layla, and has as much personality as any of the human characters.

Talisman is an adventure, but not only an adventure. As the story unfolds, we see Layla grow and mature as she develops a wider view of what life is about beyond simply securing her own survival. She has to make difficult decisions about the direction of her life and what she wants to do with herself, her relationships, and her future. It is this depth that makes Layla's story such a rewarding one to read.

Reviewed by Rhonda K. Hageman



HOLLY BLACK, *Valiant: A Modern Tale of Faerie*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2005. ISBN 0689868227, hc, 314 pp., \$16.95.

"People said that video games were bad because they made you numb to death, made you register entrails splattering across a screen as a sign of success.... Val thought that the real problem with games was that the player was supposed to try everything. If there was a cave, you went in it. If there was a mysterious stranger, you talked to him.... But in games, you had a hundred million billion lives and Val only had this one."

Valerie Russell is tired of being a sidekick, less beautiful than her mother, less cool than her best friend, taking her cue from others. When she catches her boyfriend cheating on her with her own mom, something snaps. Catching sight of her reflection, which looks to her like a pale image of her mother, Val shaves her head, runs away to New York City, and goes down a subway tunnel like a rabbit hole into Wonderland.

Soon she finds herself living in the subway with a group of punks who work as couriers for a strange urban subculture: exiles from the Faerie courts. Making insane decisions just to prove she's the one making the decisions, Val lands herself in a web of betrayal, dependence, and murder surrounding the magical drugs that a troll concocts to help faerie folk survive in the iron jungle of New York City. In the process, she discovers in herself both the weakness of addiction and the strength to live up to the sarcastically bestowed nickname "Valiant."

I'm not normally a fan of gritty urban fantasy (or should I call it faeriepunk?), and on a political level, I'm uncomfortable with Valiant's portrayal of homelessness as an adventure for an affluent suburban teen. It's a testimony to Black's creative power that she hooked me in spite of myself.

Part of the appeal is the style. Black's ear for dialogue is almost flawless: Val's "voice," both in

actual speech and interior monologue, always rings true. But the narrative seems almost bilingual, sliding seamlessly from street slang to glimpses of lyrical beauty, drawing on folklore without seeming to brandish its scholarship too aggressively.

Another part of the appeal, for me at least, is that Valiant is a far less cynical story than it pretends to be. Fleeing disillusionment at home, Val gradually discovers that heroism is real, and so is romance—even if it's got to be found in the most unlikely places.

Although I wouldn't recommend it for readers younger than 14, Valiant is a genuine Young Adult story, focusing on the teenaged hero's quest to prove herself, and full of quirky insights on adolescent issues like trust, identity, and the search for love. But "Not So Young Adults" like me can certainly fall under its spell. Valiant is as addictive as faerie drugs, and as hard to forget.

Reviewed by Pauline J. Alama



MATTHEW DICKERSON AND DAVID O'HARA, *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006. ISBN 1-58743-133-5, tp, 272 pp., \$19.99.

Matthew Dickerson's previous book, *Following Gandalf*, was a literary study of Tolkien. This book is broader and has a different approach. It's most akin to books by Greg Wright, Ted Baehr, and other Christian media watchdogs who are out to assure anxious parents that fantasy can be religiously acceptable. These writers can be divided into two camps: those who like and those who loathe Harry Potter. (Dickerson and O'Hara are in the likers' camp.) All these books have an intensely hearty writing style, soothing the reader with simple explanations of complex

literary concepts, occasional crass sweeping condemnations of modernism and progressivism, an assumption that the purpose of literature is moral uplift, and an equally broad assumption that the reader is Christian. That this book is not specifically packaged as a Christian's guide to fantasy (though it is from a Christian publisher) makes these characteristics in it all the more notable.

But Dickerson and O'Hara are not out to reassure anxious parents of fantasy-reading children, as most such authors are. Instead, they appear to be providing a defense and rationale of fantasy for fantasy-reading adults. They assume their readers are already familiar with Tolkien and Lewis, who are constantly referred to but whose works are never described, or discussed in detail. The major concept from both Tolkien and Lewis that our authors want to get across, and which they explain patiently, is the idea of myth as a form of literature that conveys truth. In popular discourse, "myth" can be a synonym for "lie." Like all their fellow Christian fantasy critics, Dickerson and O'Hara want to steer people away from that idea. They discuss this in a general chapter, and then provide heft by plunging into a full chapter's discussion of the Bible as myth, avoiding questions of its historicity by insisting that they are irrelevant to its mythic value. This is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book.

Three more chapters taking a Christian's-eye view of classical epic (mostly Homer), medieval literature (*Beowulf*, the *Eddas*, Arthuriana), and fairy tale (the Grimms and MacDonald) run quickly through the history of fantasy up to about 1900. The second part looks at four recent fantasists, with varying results. A sharply critical chapter on Philip Pullman is fairly incisive, and as Pullman has defined and marketed himself as an anti-Christian, he deserves every sharp word

that he gets. The chapter on J.K. Rowling nicely balances praise of the moral virtues in the Harry Potter books with note of their weaknesses, but a comparison with the similar arguments in *A Charmed Life* by Francis Bridger shows how thin and superficial Dickerson and O'Hara often are. Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea books get an overview showing the authors admiring Le Guin but failing to understand her. They give an astonishingly dim cheese-paring critique—reminiscent of C.S. Lewis's least edifying passages on naturalism and atheism—of her concept of Taoist balance. This merely demonstrates that they do not get the idea at all. *The Book of the Dun Cow* by Walter Wangerin, Jr. wins Dickerson's and O'Hara's accolades for being unimpeachably Christian. But the relative obscurity, compared to the three other topics, of this 1978 story of cardboard good and evil proves that being Christian is not enough: you also have to be a good writer, at which Wangerin has less talent.

A similar problem becomes apparent in the opening section's comparison of science fiction and fantasy. Sweeping generalizations that SF hinges on the power of technology while fantasy gives a mythic appreciation of our own world are too rigid, even if you emphasize—as the authors do—that these are generalizations with exceptions. These days the exceptions may outnumber the generalizations. The authors seem unaware of the intensely mythical apotheoses in much of the finest SF, by authors like Arthur C. Clarke and Gregory Benford, while rigidly technological and mechanistic formula fantasy dominates the bookshelves. (The authors' comment that Quidditch games are determined not by players' skill but by who has the latest brooms, *i.e.* the best technology, is a more telling critique than anything that appears in the chapter on Rowling.) In the end, the distinction they wish to draw seems to be more one between good and

bad literature than one between fantasy and SF.

Despite its flaws, this is an interesting book valiantly attempting an explanation of the meaning and purpose of fantasy from a Christian viewpoint.

Reviewed by David Bratman



MERCEDES LACKEY & ROSEMARY EDGEHILL, *Music to My Sorrow*. New York: Baen Books, 2005. ISBN 1416509178, hc, xx pp., \$26.00.

This book wraps up several plot lines left hanging from earlier books in the series. I don't know if this means the series is over, or whether it is just a break point in the story, but at least the readers who have stuck with the books aren't left hanging.

The main character in the series, Eric, is a Bard in the old sense, who can create magic in the form of music (or *vice versa*, depending on your viewpoint), and who interacts with both the magic of this world and that of the older, Elven world of Underhill. He has made enemies in both worlds over the years, being the sort of meddler who keeps doing good deeds that mess up someone else's bad deeds...

Anyway, it all comes to a head when two of his "real world" enemies interact with one the Elven ones, in a complicated mixture of Elven politics, real-world evangelists, skinhead rock and *X Files* paranoia. The cast of other characters include Eric's brother (who has to masquerade as Eric's son, for a variety of reasons), an apprentice bard with a haunted banjo, an elven steed who likes to pretend to be a motorcycle, and the daughter of a phony evangelist who herself has some very real powers....

The main theme of the book, and of the series, is the emancipation of children from

homes or circumstances that will do them harm. In this one, especially, they get to fight back in a constructive way (although some of it is sneaky and even dishonest....)

Overall, I enjoyed it.

Reviewed by Nick Smith



URSULA K. LE GUIN, *Voices*. San Diego: Harcourt Children's Books, 2006. ISBN 0-15-205678-5, hc, 352 pp., \$17.

This novel is advertised as a "companion" to *Gifts* (reviewed here in November 2004). It's a sequel of sorts; its relationship to *Gifts* is rather like that of *The Tombs of Atuan* to *A Wizard of Earthsea*. It takes place some years later, in a different part of the same lands, and includes some of the same characters, but it's not a direct follow-on, and the viewpoint character is entirely new. In each case the first book's viewpoint character is a young man and the second book's is a young woman. But both *Gifts* and *Voices* are first-person narrations as the *Earthsea* books are not.

In *Voices* the narrator is Memer, a 17-year-old girl who lives as a servant in the home of the man who was the last independent elected leader of a city that's been living under an oppressive military occupation all her life. The occupying force, the Alds, have only sent male soldiers: no women and no settlers. They let the locals go about their daily lives, but have imprisoned and tortured many of the inhabitants. They practice a harsh monotheism (unlike the natives, who are casual polytheists). The occupying general seems distant, but proves to have a sensitive soul and marries a native woman. In most of these things the Alds resemble the Condor from *Always Coming Home*, and there are occasional hints suggesting

that the author might also be thinking of the Americans in Iraq.

The one thing the Alds absolutely forbid is written language. It is against their religion. Memer's lord keeps the last hidden stash of books in the city and has taught her to read. The "voices" of the title are the silenced voices of those who formerly read from the books and spoke for the oracle that exists in the hidden library. It is clear that Memer's destiny is to be one of those readers for her people. Her conscious goal is to free her people; her unconscious one is to fulfill her destiny.

The plot gets going with the arrival of an outsider, a reader who need not use books though he loves them. He is Orrec, a renowned oral storyteller from the distant northern hills, who comes with his wife, Gry, a tamer of "half lions" (cougars, perhaps) and other animals. Orrec and Gry are the principals from *Gifts*, now married and grown to middle age. The events of that novel, and the mysterious gifts of its title, are only dimly alluded to here. Memer knows nothing about that, nor need the reader. For all his fame, Orrec is shy and withdrawn. None of his stories are included in the text. He knows nothing of the hidden library. He would like to help the people of the city, but wishes not to become too involved for fear they will take him, an outsider unfamiliar with their ways, as their leader. As Orrec is welcome among both the natives and the Alds, he acts as a bridge between them. But he is purely a catalyst, an agent who starts events without becoming involved himself.

Memer respects Orrec, and becomes friendly with Gry. But her deepest relationship is with her lord. He treats her as his daughter, and as much as anything this novel is a portrait of a truly healthy and loving father-daughter bond. It is also a portrait of mentally and morally healthy politicians. The lord was an elected official, and the people still look to him for leadership. Some

other characters are also political leaders of the city folk. They know how to lead and inspire; they hold meetings to discuss what the city as a whole should do. That makes them politicians. But they are not pompous, or crooks, or traitors. They illustrate what politicians do at their best, and show that every community needs some.

Voices is a genre fantasy only at the edges. The locales and the peoples are totally imaginary; the oracle has supernatural characteristics but has even less flashy stage magic than the Mirror of Galadriel does. There is less concern about magic than about the practical problems of a large household feeding and housing unexpected guests. (As a fantasist concerned with house-keeping, Le Guin joins hands with Patricia McKillip.) It is, simply, a novel about a maturing girl who gains her confidence and knowledge of her place in the world and who, by the end, is becoming ready to step into womanhood.

Reviewed by David Bratman



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