



# WisCon

The gathering of the Feminist SF Community



# WisCon 22

Madison Wisconsin • May 22-25, 1998  
Welcome!

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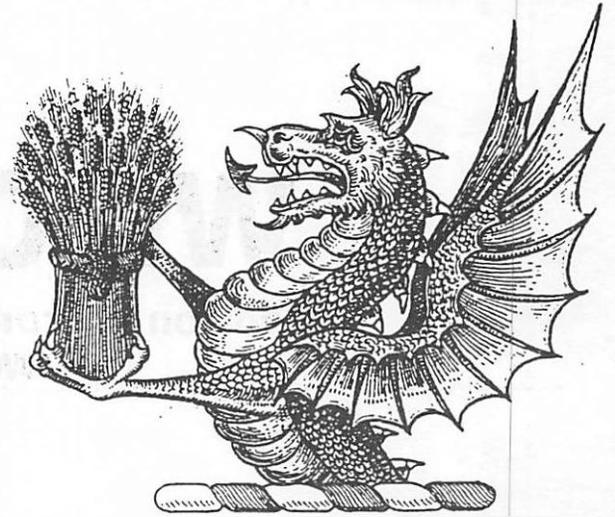
### About the Contributors

- ◆ Georgie Schnobrich is a frequent contributor of artwork to the WisCon Program books.
- ◆ Beth Plutchak is a huge Sheri Tepper fan and editor of the 1997 and 1998 WisCon Souvenir Books.
- ◆ Alice Turner is the fiction editor of *Playboy* and the author of *The History of Hell*. Her anthology *The Playboy Book of Science Fiction* has just been published by HarperCollins.
- ◆ Terri Windling is an author and the award winning editor of numerous anthologies: *The Year's Best Fantasy and Science Fiction*, a series of adult fairy tales, and with WisCon Guest of Honor Delia Sherman, *The Essential Borderlands* which has just been published by Tor.
- ◆ Jeanne Gommoll has been involved with WisCon since its inception in February of 1977. She has also played various roles in the Madison SF scene as a writer, editor, and graphic designer. She is also the editor of the Pocket Program Guide.

### Cover Art by Georgie Schnobrich

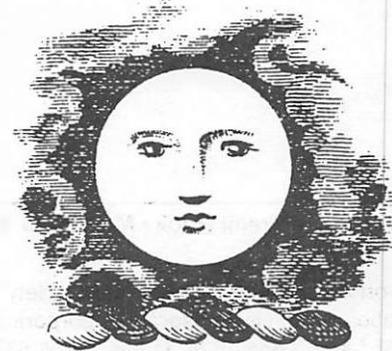
One of the descendants of sentient dinosaurs, from Sheri S. Tepper's *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*.

A note about publications. All programming information, descriptions of panels, the daily schedule, and other important at-the-con info like rules and maps are contained in one handy publication: the Unsurpassed Perfectly Organized Granddaughter-of-the-Mother-of-All-Pocket-Program, for WisCon 22. Articles about the Guests of Honor, bibliographies, the James Tiptree, Jr. Award sections, and the first chapter of Sheri S. Tepper's *Six Moon Dance*, due to be published by Avon Eos in July of 1998 are in this book, the Souvenir Book. Watch for the daily at-the-con newsletter, available around the Concourse hotel. That will contain all the current news and program changes, so be sure to pick one up every day.



"Those who refuse to listen to dragons are probably doomed to spend their lives acting out the nightmares of politicians. We like to think we live in the daylight, but half the world is always dark; and fantasy, like poetry, speaks the language of the night."

Ursula K. Le Guin,  
*Language of the Night* (1979)



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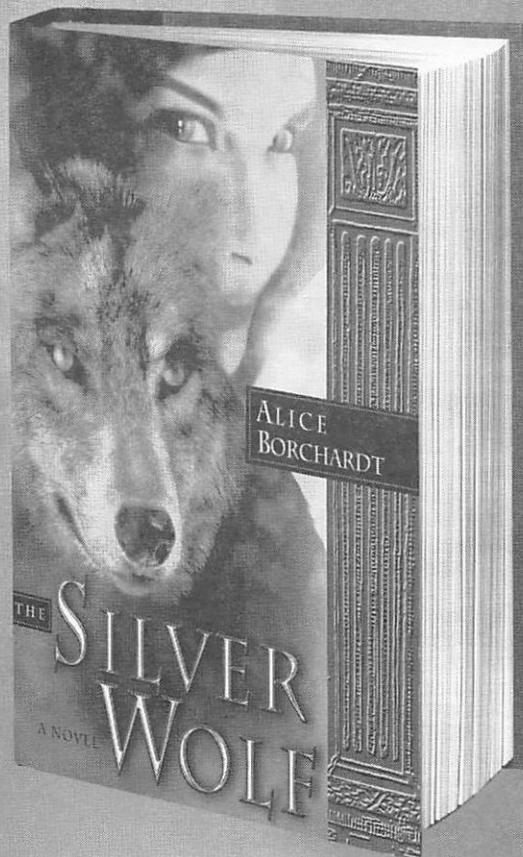
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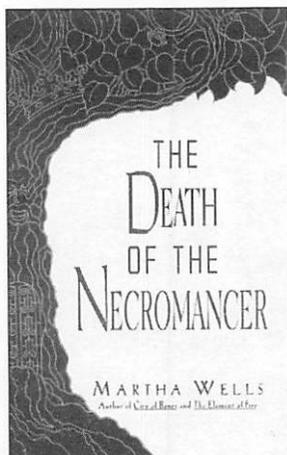
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# E O S



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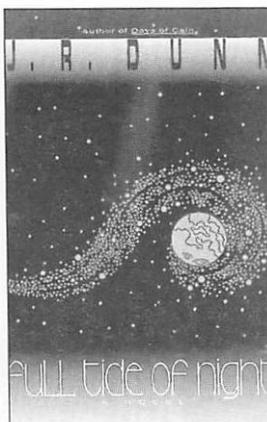
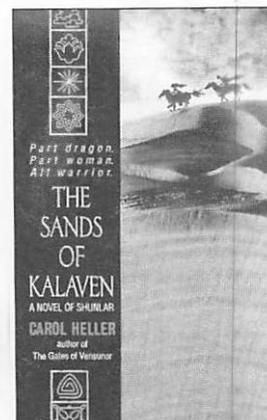


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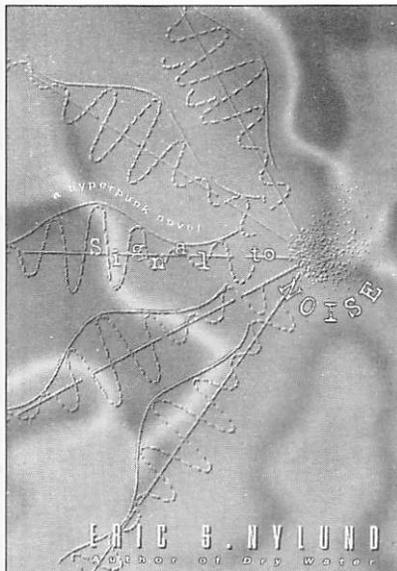
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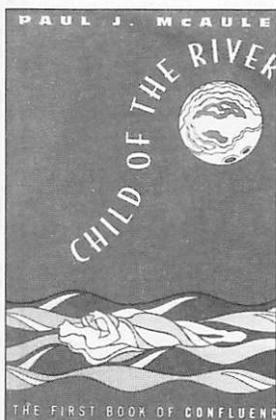
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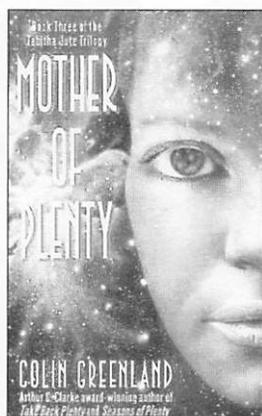
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**SHERI S. TEPPER**

and looks forward  
to the July release  
of her latest novel  
**SIX MOON DANCE**



## WisCon 22 Guest of Honor ♦ Sheri S. Tepper

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### Sheri Tepper is my hero...

Beth Plutchak

---

I say this even though I resisted reading *A Gate to Women's Country*, when it first came out. It seemed like it must be another formulaic, post-apocalyptic, dystopian, SF/Fantasy, with a feminist twist. This was before I was familiar enough with Tepper to realize that she likes to give her readers something more than a little twist.

The first book of hers I read was *Raising the Stones*; this was when I first realized that she does something a little unique with the tropes of science fiction and fantasy. First of all, she is always ignoring the guidelines. She writes pure fantasies that take place in outer space, and then her characters travel to other planets and she doesn't even *try* to solve the problem of faster than light drive. But, she does stay true to the feel of adventure and heroism which is the hallmark of good space opera. At the same time, she does not shy away from asking (and answering) the big human questions; the questions that literature is uniquely capable of dealing with.

In *Raising the Stones* she grapples with the question of human responsibility versus free will. The thing I like best about the Hobbs Land Gods is that they *work*. They work in the way we have come to expect things to work. When I turn on the radio and don't get any sound I say to myself, "Why doesn't this work?" When I turn on the faucet and no water comes out I say, "Now, why isn't this working?" When I read in the paper that the governor is pouring more money than ever into



Sheri S. Tepper • photograph © Charles N. Brown

child-care subsidies, but many parents still cannot afford the co-pays I wonder, "Now, why doesn't that work?"

The Hobbs Land Gods *work* in the way one would expect God to work, if you thought about it. When they are present there is no hatred, jealousy, cruelty, selfishness, or poverty. Why hasn't humanity invented gods like these before? Why have our gods always seemed vindictive or capricious? And if god is benevolent *and* all powerful how can the world's many daily horrors be allowed to exist? Ah, yes, free will. Maybe, its not god after all, who wants things both ways, good and bad and the power to choose between them. Maybe its just us. Incredibly difficult questions for space opera.

This is the basic theme, however, which

underscores most of Tepper's work which I have had the pleasure to read. In *Sideshow* she repeatedly asks the question "What is the ultimate purpose of mankind"? And she does not shy away from the answer. She tells us in half-a-dozen words. And I find I can't help but concur with her answer.

Ah, this brings us to the other Tepper question. Am I such an avid fan because I already agree with her message? Sheri Tepper is nothing short of polemic. I haven't read any of her crime fiction, but in her SF her opinions are resoundingly clear. On the other hand it is such a *relief* to escape, however briefly, to a world where it is safe to express such unpopular opinions as: anti-abortion activists should be consigned to an endless hell of being pregnant and giving birth, or there are some things that are worse than death. And, somehow, just before these issues can become too heavy or too poignant, Tepper brings in her wonderfully self-conscious sense of humor.

But, I haven't gotten around to telling you why she is my hero, which has less, I think, to do with her body of work than with her as a person. I have to warn you, however, that most of what I know of her as a person I have made up. I read on a book jacket, somewhere, sometime, that she didn't start publishing until she had retired. (See, I'm changing the facts already. I'm sure it said "didn't start *writing*", but she *must* have been creating those wonderful stories all along.) I have this picture of her in my mind sitting across her desk at Planned Parenthood, talking with some very young, very scared girl. The girl is saying something like, "But, my parents would just kill me if they ever found out".

When Sheri is most adamant in her work about the consequences of choices it's because she has watched certain events play themselves out time and time again. I have found myself too often in life in situations where the only choices I had were bad choices. Too many kids, too young, and married to an alcoholic. I'm not whining. I just want you to know that the old saying - "anything which doesn't kill you, only makes you stronger" - is a bunch of bunk. Unfortunately, there are events which do destroy people, events from which people never recover. I was one of the lucky ones. I had people to believe in me, to root for me, when I most needed it.

I can picture Sheri sitting at that imaginary desk telling me sternly, "You have to do what's best for those kids", and then a little more gently, "Of

course you're afraid. But, I'll stand by you." I searched for that message daily when my children were young. Some sign, that I could take care of them, raise them, make a good life for them. Make a life for myself. And we did. Because, we were never entirely alone. I'm terrified by a current wisdom which blames all of societies problems on lack of individual responsibility, conveniently absolving society of any responsibility for each other.

But, this still isn't enough to tell you why Sheri is my hero. I have always wanted to write. When I was in my twenties I was busy trying to overcome years of conditioning which said, "You made your bed now lie in it", or "Home is the place where they always have to take you in" (applied to my alcoholic this meant - if I didn't take care of him who would, besides he was my husband, my family). I read that Virginia Woolf had said "Anybody can have babies, but only I can write my books." But, I knew that only I could care for *my* babies, and books would have to wait.

By my thirties I was raising the kids on my own, on and off welfare and back in school. Any writing I did was working towards that degree, which I hoped would land me more than a minimum wage job. (I was an econ major. I could pretty well figure that with day-care costs of \$2.50 an hour/ 3 kids/ and a wages of \$5.00 an hour, we weren't going to make it.) I read Joanna Russ's "How to Suppress Women's Writing" and found a long list of women writers who were unable to begin their careers until after their children were grown. I couldn't imagine putting it off that long. The need to write is daily, but sometimes it is just not paramount. I was depressed for days.

Shortly before turning forty I discovered Sheri Tepper. She has done two things for me. First, she surprised me. Maybe it was a trick, but *Gate to Women's Country* took a few turns I wasn't expecting. Oh, my expectations had been set up by Sheri's use of dystopian tropes. But, its not just that she did something unexpected. Sheri preys on the human desire to be complacent and tells us - "not a chance, buddy". I love this. I've never had the luxury of becoming complacent. I have not mellowed as I've gotten older. Like Sheri, I hope, I've become stronger and more irascible.

Secondly, she's proven that the stories don't have to be told right away. A writer can hang on to them, and they can grow and mature as the writer grows and matures. And then, when you finally have the time, when you finally can put the writing

first, there they are. And they come tumbling out, everything you've had to say, all these years. And one after the other they get better and stronger, because they have that kernel of truth, which cannot be invented. They haven't just come whole, made up, out of the writer's head, they come from

the writer's life. And now they are a part of that dialogue between writer and reader that is informed not just by the opinions of both, but by the experience of both. So hang on Sheri, I've seen you do it. And I'm following right behind you.

## The Triumph of Menopause ♦

Alice K. Turner reviews Tepper's body of work from *The Awakener's* (1987) through *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* (1996)

Alice K. Turner

---

Sheri S. Tepper, the writer, is a phenomenon. Many wage-earners dream of a second life as an author, specifically as a novelist, once they have retired and have time to pursue their real interests. Very few publish, or even write, a single book. This isn't simply from a failure of resolve or ideas. The work habits of writing are demanding in a way that few "regular" jobs require, and most people don't have the stamina. Moreover, the elementary but essential tricks of writerly technique do not come easily or naturally - I speak from observation as a long-time editor with an enormous slush-pile of shorter fiction - and, like those of other crafts, are probably best acquired young. Yet Tepper, as a retired senior citizen, careened into science fiction, notoriously a field directed at young people in such a breakneck manner as to confound all predictions; the ten books listed here are only half her output, and do not include many of her juveniles, or her mysteries written under a pseudonym. She appears to have the energy of a teenager. And she has been a popular success, which, in a domain with a still mostly male readership, assumes that, despite her frequent feminist slant, not all her readers are female.

Most of her books are probably best described as space opera, which is to say adventure novels with more action than art. That's not meant as a put-down; space opera has a long and fairly honored history in science fiction. What's more, the bookshelves could use more space opera for girls, which Tepper often delivers. But three of the novels are more distinguished than that, and I'll even append a fourth, not because it's so distinguished but, well, just because.

The first is, of course, *The Gate to Women's Country*, which put her on the map as a feminist writer. I don't care for the novel myself - it seems to

me to be simplistic and contrived - but it came along at a good time for such books and it obviously hit a nerve; it's made the curriculum in many women's studies courses, which guarantees it a long shelf life.

The second is *Grass*. Luckily for me *Grass* was the first Tepper novel I read, and my sincere admiration for it has not abated; I still think it is one of the very best adventure stories I have read as an adult. The reasons it is superior to her other novels are several. It is exceptionally disciplined. Tepper often has a fatal weakness for excess, which leads to caricature and comic-strip effects all too often, but here extravagance is handled with the sure strokes of a Daumier, and there is a lean, clean, well-thought-out storyline. Uncharacteristically, she slows down to allow time for visual effects: the long scene of a grotesque Hunt breakfast with its mesmerized local aristocrats confronting their ghastly Hounds and Mounts, all seen through the disbelieving eyes of a stranger, is wonderfully creepy, and there are four or five other, equally vivid scenes. The Hippae, semi-horse-like creatures of almost pure malevolence, make first class alien villains, and, wisely, Tepper has not allowed them to talk (perhaps she learned her lesson from the ridiculous squawking vultures of *The Awakeners*), in Marjorie Westriding, she created her only fully realized three-dimensional character (other readers might argue for Stavia in *The Gate to Women's Country* or even the eponymous *Beauty*, but I can't concur).

And what an extraordinary character for a genre novel - a mid-fortyish wife and mother, a repressed Catholic with an overdeveloped sense of duty and more understanding of horses than of her own family. Marjorie's spiritual development is just as interesting as the plot development, and that's saying quite a lot, for it's a fine plot.

The third, *Beauty*, is an ambitious book, a "hard fantasy," to use Michael Swanwick's term. His own hard fantasy, *The Iron Dragon's Daughter*, published in 1993, more nearly resembles *Beauty* than it does any of the books cited in his celebrated 1994 essay on fantasy, "In the Tradition of ..." though, since he doesn't mention it, he may not have read it. Both books rely on genre miscegenation, the often startling application of fantasy's familiar tropes to realism, or the reverse, as when Swanwick's heroine, bonded with a carnivorous mechanical dragon's memories (!), finds herself "flying low over Lyoness on a napalm run" and makes "a tight roll to avoid the guns of an antidragon emplacement." *Beauty* explores six fixtional traditions: that of Perraultt-cum Disney fairy tales set in a magical Middle Ages; that of Celtic Faery; that of Latin-American magic realism; that of the futuristic dystopia; that of a cross-cultural Hades/Hell; and, as in Swanwick's novel, that of the slightly skewed present. It's a flawed but absorbing, even moving, effort that perfectly captures the "flavor of regret" Swanwick claims for the genre. I think it will be read for a long time.

As for *Sideshow*, furtively added as a fourth, it's an authentic example of straw spun into gold. The form is that of a Jack Vance novel in which a little band of travelers explores a series of planetary oddities, *Big Planet* for example, but it has enough action to fuel at least a dozen Vance novels. In it, Tepper has taken all her worst faults as a writer - excessiveness, preposterous plotting, melodramatic violence, disregard for logic, flimsy characterization and motivation, haste and waste - and pushed them so comically far as to go beyond criticism. The book itself is a sideshow, or perhaps a three-ring circus starring the sideshow freaks. How can you not weaken, confronted by an alien who resembles a celery stalk? Did she know what she was doing? I hope so. There's a hint that it might eventually have a sequel. I hope so.

*Sideshow* is, by the way, the third in a very loosely connected Marjorie Westriding trilogy, set in the same universe, though far apart in time, space, and tone. *Grass* I have described. In the middle is *Raising the Stones*, where Marjorie is entirely offstage, though referred to. In *Sideshow*, otherwise a farce (Swanwick might call it a "hard farce"), she is featured as an annoyingly smug Wise Old Woman, a mere simulacrum, one might say, of her former intriguing self. If there is a sequel, she won't be back, which is just as well.

Tepper's latest book, awkwardly titled *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* (even the publisher's press releases don't seem to know where to put the apostrophe, or whether there should be one; the text allows for at least two possibilities, maybe three, since apes make a brief appearance), is a near-future millennial adventure, in which seven best friends from college, now in their late fifties, meet the Forces of Evil: the Group vs. the Apocalypse. The women comprise the usual melting-pot stew: one African-American (she is also the requisite lesbian, and a sculptor), one Asian-American (a scientist), one nun, one doctor, one bulimic southern belle, one happily married woman (that's a novelty for Tepper) who's also a lawyer-farmer, and, since this is science fiction, one alien.

In true Tepper style, there's lots of plot. In one thread, six of the women search for their missing friend; another deals with the court trial of a teenage "baby-killer"; then there's the sinister plot to take over the world. These (and much, much more) are loosely related, but at the same time a seemingly unrelated plague - causing impotence in men - is also mysteriously invading the world.

What's interesting about the novel for Tepper-watchers is that it brings together in a new context some of the ideas she's been tinkering with in earlier books. There's religion, of course. Tepper is a lapsed Roman Catholic who has profitably mined her early teaching for ideas and imagery in book after book. Her distaste for organized religion and contempt for religious fanaticism of any kind are increasing - her treatment of the mental struggles of the nun, Agnes, here is brutally crude compared to the skill with which she handled Marjorie Westriding's growing doubts in *Grass* - but she's far from finished with Catholic tradition. I deduce that she is planning, perhaps not in an organized way, a series of books based on the nine angelic orders; there are, starting from the top: seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations (or dominions), virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels. I'm not sure where or when she consciously started to do this. The foxen, or Great Dragons, of the Westriding books seem to be portrayed as angelic beings; they might rate as high as cherubim, but they might also be virtues or even ordinary angels; perhaps the lizard-like Arbai, whom they admire and try to emulate, are the cherubim. *A Plague of Angels* (confusingly, given the title) quite specifically deals with thrones, in the angelic sense. Behemoth, of

*Shadow's End*, might be a seraph, though he might also be God, or the Demiurge. The current novel is, also specifically, about dominations, with a somewhat negative twist. "You are dominion," says a god(dess)-like voice to the worst of the bad guys. "You are dominance. You are lust and terror. You are pain and persecution." Etc. The twist is only somewhat negative because the (lizard-like) angelic beings win, and thus dominate dominance. Or something like that.

Tepper is also concerned with environmental issues, especially with overpopulation, and with women's issues, especially with the arrogance, violence, and cruelty of men toward women, which directly and frequently leads to enforced childbearing. Her fiction takes various steps to redress these. Sometimes the approach is blunt, memorably in *The Gate to Women's Country*, where she solves them with a selective breeding program, and by sending uppity men off to be killed by the thousands in glorious warfare. She has also experimented with metamorphic rather than simple sexual reproduction (*The Awakeners*, *Grass*, *Shadow's End*); in her reproductive patterns the demonic is usually transformed into the angelic, an idea that in Catholic thought goes back to Origen in the third century - though the less esoteric transmutation of caterpillar into butterfly is equally instructive.

But the solution to both planetary and human problems that seems to have pleased her most to date is the Hobbs Land Gods.

The Hobbs Land Gods, a.k.a. the Arbai Device, a.k.a. the empathetometer, is/are a fibrous fungus that first bred in the corpses of mortal alien deities, then in any handy human corpse (it is not to be confused with the nasty fungus of *The Awakeners* that turns human corpses into zombies) on an obscure planet, then, fairly rapidly, infiltrated living humans on first one, then many worlds. People who have been assimilated (or been enslaved") by the tiny tendrils of this fungus into a greater whole become friendly, cooperative, creative, peace-loving, prudent, and courteous in social, sexual, and reproductive matters. Conflict disappears. All the women become strong, all the men good-looking, and all the children-though sparse-above average.

Tepper came up with this answer to humanity's persistent ills in *Raising the Stones* and pursued it at length in *Sideshow* on a planet where "individuality" is revered, at great cost to the individual, and the mere rumor of the Hobbs Land Gods almost pathologically feared. The Gods clearly wouldn't do

for a near-future novel, however - hence the impotence plague.

Ah, that plague. In the hands of any male writer, and many females, such an affliction would be treated as a calamity. In Tepper's practical hands, it's . . . well, it's a solution. No, it's more than that, it's - let's lower our voices - it's maybe not such a bad idea. When you get down to examining the evils of the world, the demands of testosterone seem to be the prime cause in an appalling majority of cases. War and war atrocities, murder, rape, incest, child prostitution, wife-beating, bullying, persuading young girls to bear inappropriate children, the entire strutting lexicon of machismo - "Cock-a-doodle - crouch you hens!" (that's from *A Plague of Angels*, but examples from other books are rife) - as well as the devastating effects of overpopulation could be solved pretty quickly if men were not so hormonally challenged. If they were to become, in effect, more like women.

But not just any women. In this novel, the classmates are all about 57 years old, exactly a decade younger than the author, and unmistakably post-menopausal - to have made them even a few years younger might have raised doubts. It has been often remarked that after menopause many women experience a surge of energy, creativity and self-confidence, and that certainly seems to be the case with Tepper's feisty ladies. It has also been remarked that aging men and women come to resemble one another; for example, in interviews of successful men contemplating their late second (or third!) families, it is a modern cliché for them to note how much better, i.e. more nurturing, they are as fathers this time around, and even how much nicer and less driven they are, just as guys. Tepper seems to want to accelerate this apparently common process by decreeing a menopause for men - not just aging men, but all of them!

Given her own career, no wonder she sees menopause as a positive thing. (I'm assuming that her retirement from fertility and from the work force were more or less synchronous.) What I wish, mischievously, is that she had come out with a manifesto in this novel - that certainly would have been a first for science fiction! The implication is right there and not even very subtle, but caution, and perhaps her editor, must have ruled against a direct pitch to a youthful median audience (is the golden age of science fiction still twelve?) that might have been puzzled, at best, and possibly antagonized.

World wide wilting, so to speak - or a global penile decline and fall - promises no future at all for the human race, so Tepper contrives an out, or, more accurately, a choice of outs. Technically, this lady- or-the-tiger multiple-choice ending is a disgraceful dea-ex-machina cop-out, forgivable only

because she does want the reader to think seriously for a moment about what might make a better world. I dutifully thought about it, and, among five proffered futures, chose one. I wouldn't for anything tell which one. Read the book and choose for yourself.

## **Bibliography ♦ Sheri S. Tepper**

Compiled by Sheri S. Tepper

Tepper works have been published in England, Spain, Holland, Germany, Italy, France, Finland, Poland, Estonia, Israel, and Japan

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(*Locus*: Best Fantasy of the Year)

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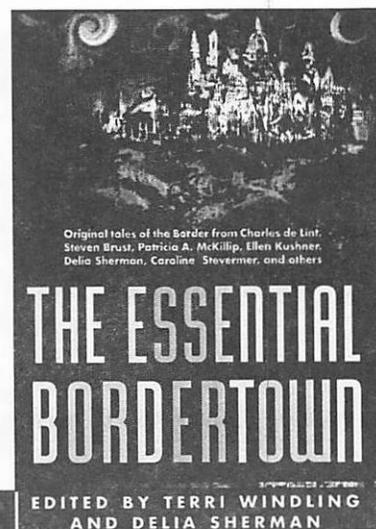
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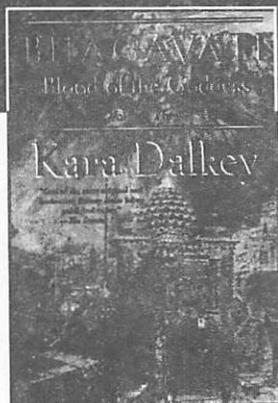
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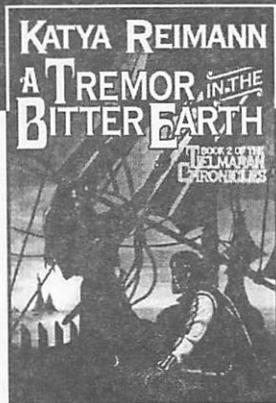
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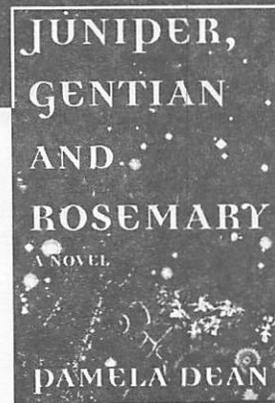
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## WisCon 22 Guests of Honor ♦ Delia Sherman and Ellen Kushner

### Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman ♦ An Appreciation

Terri Windling

I must confess that I feel completely unequal to the task of writing about the two most extraordinary people I know. No words of mine can adequately describe two women who, if there's any justice, ought go down in the history books alongside Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, Duncan Bell and Vanessa Grant, Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, Alfred Steiglitz and Georgia O'Keefe, Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon - all friends or lovers famed for partnerships entwining life and art. Like their predecessors, Ellen and Delia not only inspire the best in each other's work, but extend this enthusiasm and support to an international circle of friends in a wide variety of disciplines. They have become the eloquent champions of a gender-bending, genre-blending form of art - extending from works of the pen or brush to the craft of shaping one's life.

I first met Ellen many years ago, as I was entering the New York publishing field just as she was leaving it - bravely quitting an editorial job at Simon

& Schuster in order to write. She locked herself away in a rambling old apartment on the Upper West Side (with a crumbling Renaissance

atmosphere that would not be out of place in "Riverside"), and emerged with *Swordspoint* - a novel which is now a modern classic of the speculative fiction field. Our friendship grew over several years as we discovered we shared a taste not only for old folk tales, folk music and myths, but for black leather jackets, David Bowie and Prince, and the gam street culture of Eighties-era New York. When I left a long-term relationship and found myself with nowhere to live, Ellen invited me into that Riverside-like apartment of hers for a period of time that proved to be enormously creative for us both. Many of the projects I've worked on since began with our kitchen table conversations -

lounging about in vintage-store lingerie; drinking endless cups of coffee, or scotch; spinning dreams, ideas and fantasies to be captured



Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman photograph © Audrie Lerat, 1997

upon the page. The seeds for Ellen's award-winning novel *Thomas the Rhymer* were planted there; and my "adult fairy tale" anthology series; and other stories and projects that would emerge in the years to come. *Borderland* came out of that kitchen: punky stories for teenagers, inspired by the new music video form and the flash street culture outside the front door. Under the name Bellamy Bach (a pseudonym used at various times by a group of New York writers), I co-wrote the story "Mockery" with Ellen - a wickedly fun experience. I'm a morning writer; Ellen, by contrast, writes into the midnight hours; so I'd wake up to find her next installment waiting for me on the kitchen table...and, like Hale (my character in the story), I never knew what the dazzling, infuriating Linny (Ellen's character) would do next. I read Linny's last scene when I was on a plane heading to Europe. I remember crying, somewhere over the Atlantic, as Linny rode out of Bordertown and out of my...er, out of Hale's life.

In actual fact, I was the one who found myself riding out of town, moving up to Boston and starting up my "Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts". Despite many train journeys back and forth between the two cities, I missed my partner-in-crime... and so I was thrilled when Ellen, desiring a change in direction, decided to return to radio (with which she'd been involved in her college years) and landed the overnight d.j. spot on Boston's famous WGBH. Within a year of arriving in Boston, Ellen had become a legend in that town for her iconoclastic mix of music; her literate, insouciant talk; and her velvet voice, keeping company with night owls across New England. Her literary agent, back in New York, looked on with pride but a certain dismay as Ellen's success meant her writing time was all but cancelled out by radio work: hosting an international classical music series, covering Early Music festivals in Europe, producing award-winning Jewish holiday specials, and eventually co-creating her current series, *Sound and Spirit*: a brilliant mix of myth and music played on stations all across the country. Nonetheless, she managed to find the time to complete *Thomas the Rhymer* (winning the Mythopoeic and World Fantasy awards), a children's picture book, and short stories... squeezed between writing radio scripts, travel, and on-air work. This was also the time she began her partnership with fellow writer and soul-mate Delia Sherman, allowing her to weave many disparate threads (radio, music, fantasy, folklore, friendships, and a lust for travel) into the

intricate tapestry of a creative and magical life.

I first met Cordelia Sherman when I lived with Ellen in New York. I was the Senior Editor of the Ace Books fantasy line back then, and Jane Yolen recommended Delia as a new writer with great promise. Delia rather shyly submitted the manuscript that would become *Through a Brazen Mirror* - and like Jane, I was thoroughly captivated. The beautiful prose, the complex theme, the author's bone-deep knowledge of folklore combined to indicate that a major new talent had just entered the field. The book was published (as an Ace Fantasy Special) in 1989, while Delia's exquisite short fiction began to appear in genre magazines. Like Ellen, she made a name for herself among the cognoscenti quite rapidly, demonstrating a maturity and mastery of craft in her very first published works. Her second novel was *The Porcelain Dove* - a sensual, magical *tour de force* exploring gender issues and sexual mores during the French Revolution. Published by Dutton as mainstream fiction, it nonetheless found its way to genre readers and won the Mythopoeic Award for best fantasy novel of 1993. Since then Delia has written numerous short stories (which ought to be collected one of these days) and a children's time travel novel set in Louisiana (not yet released). She is at work on what promises to be a wonderful historical novel about artists' lives, and two collaborative books with Ellen - one set in the world of *Swordspoint*, and one a modern murder mystery. In addition to writing, Delia has been a literary scholar, a teacher (at Boston University), and currently works as a Consulting Editor for SF/Fantasy line at Tor Books.

At the time Delia came into my life, just over ten years ago, she lived in an enchanted house like something from an English children's story, filled with stained glass windows, William Morris fabrics, walls lined with paintings, shelves of books, and backed by the extensive gardens which were her pride and joy. As with Ellen years before, I got to know Delia best during a period of time when I lived in her house (located on the outskirts of Boston) - and I was soon bowled over by her quiet dry wit, sharp intelligence and bold imagination; her beautiful sense of aesthetics and the warm, warm heart for which she is famed. Even back then, as I've since confessed to them both, it seemed quite obvious that Ellen and Delia belonged together. I would watch them discuss their manuscripts, their wardrobes, their lives, and sing together; Delia took

Ellen's garden in hand, and Ellen took Delia to the French countryside; and it seemed they were already partners long before they recognized it themselves. Thus it was with great emotion that I attended the wedding of these two friends in the fall of 1996. The hall was packed with family and friends and colleagues from the radio and publishing worlds. The atmosphere was magically medieval, with velvets, candles, ivy vines, Morris prints and tapestries; the brides were radiant in dresses that might have been painted by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. At the conclusion of the exchange of vows, they turned, hand in hand, to look at the crowd. "Do you, our family and friends," they asked, "now pronounce us partners for life?" "We do!" hundreds of voices shouted. . . and I'd be much surprised if there was a dry eye in the house.

Being an incorrigible vagabond, I no longer live in Boston, and no longer have the comfort of knowing that Ellen and Delia are just a subway ride away. Fortunately they are also vagabonds, just as incorrigible as me, hitting the road whenever radio

and publishing deadlines permit. These days we meet in the English countryside, in London or New York cafes, in the desert hills of Arizona and the dusty streets of Mexico, on the Internet and on the telephone. . . we're never really all that far apart. Whenever I begin a new story, new painting, new love affair or new life adventure, their friendship sustains me, colors the journey, and is the place I always come home to.

Can you now see why I feel inadequate to the task of writing this Appreciation? These are not just publishing colleagues I've been asked to talk about, but friends, family, sisters, and artists for whom I have the highest respect. Read their books. Talk to them this weekend. Become part of that wide network of people inspired to do their best creative work by watching Ellen and Delia do theirs. Sit around a table, talking and dreaming and scheming over coffee and single malt scotch. . .

And drink one for me.

## Bibliography ♦ Ellen Kushner

Compiled by Ellen Kushner

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Foreign translations: Japanese (Hayakawa)

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\* = Currently in print & available

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## Bibliography Delia Sherman

### Compiled by Delia Sherman

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**James Tiptree, Jr. ♦  
Seventh Annual Award**

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**Winners**

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Candas Jane Dorsey  
*Black Wine*

Tor, 1997

*Black Wine* is a slippery book, neither science fiction nor fantasy; instead it stakes out territory all its own. It is an intricate, fierce and lyrical examination of gender and identity. Teeming with ideas made flesh, *Black Wine* gazes unflinching at the wonder and horror of humanity. [JPK]

In *Black Wine*, Candas Dorsey took on the whole question of gender, shook it out till it suited her, cut, stitched, and fitted till she came up with a wondrous garment I had never seen before. Then she showed me it was reversible and just as wondrous on the inside, which was now the outside. This is a book well worth reading and I hope lots and lots of people do. [TG]

Kelly Link  
"Travels With The Snow Queen,"

*Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*,  
Winter, volume 1, issue 1

This is a story that puts its arm around the reader and leads him back to places he's been but hasn't really seen. A clever, often funny, conflation of deconstructed fairy tales with a modern relationship going sour, it's about a young woman's journey through gender stereotypes to self-acceptance. Link makes us understand that, in this story, the traditional "happy ending" would be very silly indeed. [JPK]

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## Short List ♦ Short Fiction

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### Storm Constantine "The Oracle Lips"

*The Fortune Teller*, ed. Lawrence Schimel & Martin H. Greenberg, Daw Books, 1997

I liked the imagery, particularly the recurring and faintly threatening tube of red lipstick. The image of the unremarkable woman envying the glam one resonated. We've all been there in one way or the other. But at the end of the story, I'm not sure what I was supposed to have taken away from it. [NH]

"Oracle Lips" explores the idea that, just as the fashion and advertising industries tell us, makeup and accessories make the woman, and does so in the context of an original method of fortune-telling. [JK]

### Paul Di Filippo "Alice, Alfie, Ted and the Aliens,"

*Interzone*, March 1997

I found myself uncomfortable with the way DiFilippo diddles so many genre icons in this gonzo alternate history, attributing to them (and Alice Sheldon especially) outrageous histories and cartoonish behaviors. But I wonder whether the point here is that this is the harvest we reap in a field that churns out alternate history anthologies by the yard. I had the sense that he was aiming this story at the Tiptree jury. Nice shot, Paul! [JPK]

Like some of my fellow jurors, I got the impression that this story was aimed and fired deliberately at the Tiptree Award. It's abrasive and it's presumptuous - and it's well-written. I laughed out loud in parts. A bracing dissenting voice. It's not about gender, it's about our favorite writers who write about gender; a meta-fictional in-joke that skillfully parodies the writing styles of those authors. It lampoons the lives of very real people in ways that I found more cruel than pointed, and for that reason less effective as satire. [NH]

### L. Timmel Duchamp "The Apprenticeship of Isabetta di Pietro Cavazzi"

*Asimov's*, September 1997

One of the great pleasures of this novelette presented as excerpts from a diary is the effortless way in which Duchamp recreates the Italy of 1629. This historicity helps put over the story of a young woman coming to understand her supernatural

powers in the wake of an unhappy love affair. Duchamp convinces me that if witches existed, this is what they'd be like. [JPK]

So, how d'you suppose women treated yeast infections in the days before Canesten? Seems quite reasonable that the infestation could get so extreme that it would turn a woman raving mad. I had a sardonic giggle over this as one cause of women's 'shrewishness.' I can't speak for the historic accuracy of the story. I enjoyed it (in fact, I think I've enjoyed every story of Duchamp's that I've ever read), though I found the healer too all-knowing and Isabetta's conversion to wisdom and forgiveness a bit too pat. [NH]

### Gwyneth Jones "Balinese Dancer,"

*Asimov's*, September 1997

"Balinese Dancer" is an elliptical look at the end of the world as we know it. As human sexual differentiation erodes in the background, a well-realized couple works through their marital tensions in the foreground. A gender apocalypse is hinted at in this subtle and disturbing story. [JPK]

The opening line of this story continues to take my breath away, as do some of the author's insights into human behavior. But ultimately the plot elements didn't quite gel for me and the news that humanity is beginning to evolve beyond gender seemed more like a plot device than the topic which the story wanted to explore. Nevertheless a very readable story. [NH]

### Salman Rushdie "The Firebird's Nest,"

*New Yorker*, June 23 and 30, 1997

Brilliant writing that pointedly references and critiques the practice of suttee and a system in which women are chattel. Good to read writing from within a particular culture, albeit from a privileged place in that culture. I wasn't keen on a subtext that seemed to pit the "primitive" East against the "enlightened" West, but that may be just my reading of it. I remain blown away by the craft and style. [NH]

## Short List ♦ Novels

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### Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*

HarperCollins, 1997

Like Angela Carter and A.S. Byatt before her, Emma Donoghue puts a distaff spin on traditional fairy tales. But Donoghue doesn't deconstruct Perrault and the Brothers Grimm so much as she reconstructs them in a series of interlocking stories, letting the heroine of one tale grow into the villainess of the next, who then becomes the benign crone of the next, and so on. Her stories are ribald and often harsh in their assessments of male/female relations, and damning of the ways in which women - in fairy tales and real life - too often give in to what seems to be a preordained fate, rather than struggling for independence. Donoghue's tales also have a bracingly, and unapologetic, gynocentrism: in *her book*, it's the witch who gets the girl, not the prince. And *Kissing the Witch* makes a nice companion piece to Kelly Link's revisionist "Travels With The Snow Queen." [EH]

*Kissing the Witch* took my normal expectations of fairy tales, un-normal as they are, and shook them around again. The writing was beautiful. [TG]

### Molly Gloss *The Dazzle of Day*

Tor, 1997

*The Dazzle of Day* is a rigorous examination of a monoculture under mortal stress, as a rickety ship of Quaker colonists arrives at a planet that would seem to be inhospitable. Although not particularly flashy, this is a deep book. I was particularly taken by Gloss's bold narrative strategy in opening and especially in closing. She delivers what seems to me to be exactly the right ending without telling me anything of what I thought I wanted to know. [JPK]

### John M. Harrison *Signs of Life*

St. Martin's Press, 1997

A spare, beautifully written, utterly haunting novel about the human desire for transcendence, and its limits. In the ruins of contemporary Europe, a young woman who longs to fly mutilates herself in a doomed effort to become more birdlike. A tormented con man endures the knowledge that the single moment of sexual and spiritual transcendence he experienced in his youth has destroyed his life. And the man who loves them both can do nothing

to save them, or himself. There's no false sense of redemption here, only the protagonist's final realization that our struggle for meaning - however futile - may be all we have, and the only thing worth living (or dying) for. [EH]

### Ian McDonald *Sacrifice of Fools*

Victor Gonzallencz, 1996

I was sorry to have finished *Sacrifice Of Fools* because it is such a great read. I like how McDonald has bent to police procedural to his devious ends. The familiarity of the mystery tropes helps us navigate through the strangeness of his alien Shians. I found the characters - human and Shian - complex and wonderfully unpredictable. I loved the way this book deals with the clash of cultures, so that its imaginary surface reflects and refracts real world flash points. And most of all, I like what this book is saying about the diversity and perversity of the human sexual response, especially in its often withering portrayal of the male id. [JPK]

Ian McDonald's *Sacrifice of Fools* is a rough, scary book that looks at gender from a blue collar futuristic point of view. If genderless aliens were to visit earth, this is exactly what might happen, right on the streets, right in your face. It should be read. [TG]

### Vonda N. McIntyre *The Moon and the Sun*

Pocket Books, 1997

I read *The Sun and the Moon* with a delicious sense that I had just stepped off the alternate world platform and caught a train to another time and place. The two female protagonists are creatures misplaced out of their elements in ways not of their own choosing. McIntyre explores the meanings of alien and gender in a way I've not seen it done before. This is a sensual book rich in detail that kept me intrigued through the end. [TG]

### Shani Mootoo *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Press Gang Publishers, 1996

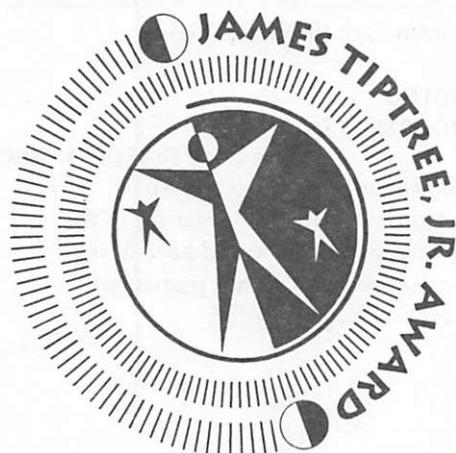
*Cereus Blooms at Night* offers superb characterizations of people we never see in the genre, each with stories we would have never thought to tell. Even though not particularly fantastic, *Cereus* is magical. [JPK]

My highest priority is this novel by Canadian Shani Mootoo. A Caribbean-based exploration of queerness, gender and preference written defiantly from within, given that in some Caribbean countries, being openly queer can invite societally condoned bashing. This novel is a radical act. It's well-written and compelling. The invented tropical island of Lantanacamara is an evocative, faintly unreal setting that is clearly meant to echo aspects of Trinidad. A gay male nurse with a fondness for women's clothing is the buffoon of his community, until he's given the care of an old mad woman who may or may not have committed a horrible crime. A love story in which neither gender nor sexual preference are absolute. The SF content of *Cereus Blooms at Night* is nebulous, but it is in every way a book most worth reading. [NH]

Paul Witcover  
*Waking Beauty*

HarperPrism, 1997

*Waking Beauty* is like a poke in the soul with a sharp stick, which is one reason why I'll never forget it. In terms of ingenious world-building, I don't think I've read anything better this year. *Waking Beauty* has a labyrinthine plot, but it certainly comes together enough to satisfy this reader. Its obsessions are its own; they made me feel exceedingly icky without making me feel exploited. As to whether it's misogynist, of course the Hierarchate is misogynist, in the same way that the state of *The Handmaid's Tale* is misogynist. But so what? The author's intentions are always between the lines in dystopian novels. [JPK]



**The 1997 James Tiptree, Jr. Award Judges**

Terry Garey (chair) [TG]  
Nalo Hopkinson [NH]  
James Patrick Kelly [JPK]  
Jerry Kaufman [JK]  
Liz Hand [EH]

Enjoy *Karen Joy Fowler* with a cup of Kenya AA, read *Joan Vinge* while sipping a double cappuccino, and be engrossed by *Ursula Leguin* over herbal peppermint tea. (Scones, muffins, or tasty soups make any book a better read!) Great java and a pastry with a side of feminism...for here or to go!

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## THE JAMES TIPTREE JR. MEMORIAL AWARD

Are any of your 1998 fiction titles possible contenders for the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award?

The Tiptree Award is presented annually to a science fiction or fantasy work that explores and expands on contemporary ideas of gender. The aim of the award organizers is not to look for work that falls into some narrow definition of political correctness, but rather to seek out work that is thought-provoking, imaginative, and perhaps even infuriating. All too often, futuristic views of human society are limited to the social structures of the present. The Tiptree Award is intended to reward writers of either gender who are bold enough to contemplate shifts and changes in those structures, specifically in gender roles. Both novels and short stories are eligible for the award. On several occasions, the award has gone to both a novel and a short story.

The James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award was created in 1991 to honor Alice Sheldon, who wrote under the pseudonym James Tiptree Jr. By publishing under a masculine pen name, Sheldon challenged the imaginary barrier between "women's writing" and "men's writing." Her short stories "The Women Men Don't See," "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?," "The Screwfly Solution," and "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" were notable for their thoughtful examination of the roles of men and women in our society.

The winner (or winners) of the Tiptree Award will receive a cash prize, as well as transportation and expenses at the science fiction convention hosting the awards ceremony. In addition, winners are given a work of art inspired by their fiction. There is also an annotated short list of recommended fiction published in widely-distributed science fiction and fantasy publications. Avid readers of fantasy and science fiction, readers who traditionally buy hundreds of books a year, use these lists to determine what they'll be reading (and buying) in the coming year.

Previous winners of the Tiptree Award include:

Eleanor Arnason: *A Woman of the Iron People*, William Morrow, 1991

Gwyneth Jones: *The White Queen*, Gollancz, 1991

Maureen McHugh: *China Mountain Zhang*, Tor, 1992

Nicola Griffith: *Ammonite*, Del Rey, 1993

Ursula K. Leguin: "The Matter of Seggri," *Crank!* #3, 1994

Nancy Springer: *Larque on the Wing*, AvoNova, 1994

Theodore Roszak: *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, andom House, 1995

Elizabeth Hand: *Waking the Moon*, HarperPrism, 1995

Ursula K. Le Guin: "Mountain Ways", *Asimov's Science Fiction*, August 1996

Mary Doria Russel: *The Sparrow*, Villiard, 1996

The James T. Tiptree Memorial Award is a grassroots organization, funded by bakesales and auctions, which has recently been organized as a non-profit corporation.

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## Six Moon Dance

Sheri S. Tepper, due out from Avon/Eos in July, 1998

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### (1) On Newholme: Mouche

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"It's all right," Mouche's mother said. "Next time we'll have a girl."

Mouche knew of this because his father told him. "She said it was all right. She said next time . . ."

But there had been no next time. Why the inscrutable Hagions decided such things was unknown. Some persons profited in life, producing daughter after daughter; some lost in life, producing son after son; some hung in the balance as Eline and Darbos did, having one son at the Temple, and then a daughter born dead at the Temple, and then no other child.

It was neither a profit nor a great loss, but still a loss. Even a small loss sustained over time can bleed a family: so theirs bled. Only a smutch of blood, a mere nick of a vein, a bit more out than in, this year and then the next, and the one after that, a gradual anemia, more weakening than deadly - the heifer calves sold instead of kept, the ewe lambs sold, the repairs to the water mill deferred, then deferred again. Darbos had taken all he had inherited and added to that what he could borrow as his dowry to a wife who would help him establish a family line, to let him wear the honorable cockade, to be known as g'Darbos and be addressed as "Family Man." He had planned to repay the loan with advances against his share of the dowries paid for his own daughters. Instead, he had paid for Eline with the price of the heifer calves, with the ruin of the mill. Her family had profited, and though families lucky enough to have several daughters often gave those daughters a share of the dowry they brought in (a generosity Darbos had rather counted on), Eline's parents had not seen fit to do so. Still, Eline's daughters would have made it all worth while, if there had been daughters.

Their lack made for a life not precisely sad, but not joyous, either. There was no absence of care, certainly. Eline was not a savage. There was no personal blame. Darbos had created the sperm, he was the one responsible, everyone knew that. But then, some receptacles were said to reject the female, so perhaps Eline shared the fault. No matter. Blaming, as the Hags opined, was a futile exercise

engaged in only by fools. What one did was bow, bow again, and get on.

So, each New Year at the Temple, while g'Darbos waited outside with the other Family Men, all of them sneaking chaff under their veils and whispering with one another in defiance of propriety, Eline bowed and bowed again. Then she got on, though the getting did not halt the slow leaking away of substance by just so much as it took to feed and clothe one boy, one boy with a boy's appetite and a boy's habit of unceasing growth. As for shoes, well, forget shoes. If he had had sisters, then perhaps Eline would have bought him shoes. In time, she might even have provided the money for him to dower in a wife. If he had had sisters.

*If bought no wife*, so the saying went, so forget the wife. More urgent than the need for a wife was the need for daily grain, for a coat against the wind, for fire on the winter's hearth and tight roof against the storm, none of which came free. Eline and Darbos were likely to lose all. After nine barren years, it was unlikely there would be more children, and the couple had themselves to think of. *Who can not fatten on daughters must fatten on labor*, so it was said, and the little farm would barely fatten two. It would not stretch to three.

On the day Mouche was twelve, when the festive breakfast was over and the new shirt admired and put on, Papa walked with him into the lower pasture where an old stump made a pleasant sungather for conversation, and there Papa told Mouche what the choices were. Mouche might be cut, and if he survived it, sold to some wealthy family as a chatron playmate for their children, a safe servant for the daughters, someone to fetch and carry and neaten up. The fee would be large if he lived, but if he died, there would be no fee at all.

Or, an alternative. Madame Genevois - who had a House in Sendoph - had seen Mouche in the marketplace, and she'd made an offer for him. While the fee was less than for a chatron, it would be paid in advance, no matter how he turned out.

Mama had followed them down to the field and she stood leaning on the fence, taking no part in the conversation. It was not a woman's place, after all, to enlighten her son to the facts of life. Still, she was

near enough to hear him when he cried:

"Trained for a Hunk, Papa? A Hunk?"

"Where did you learn that word?" said Mama, spinning around and glaring at him. "We do not talk filth in this family . . ."

"Shh, shh," said Darbos, tears in the corners of his eyes. "The word is the right word, Madam. When we are driven to this dirty end, let us not quibble about calling it what it is."

At which point Mama grew very angry and went swiftly away toward the house. Papa followed her a little way, and Mouche heard him saying, "Oh, I know he's only a boy, Eline, but I've grown fond of him . . ."

Mouche had seen Hunks, of course - who had not? - riding through the market place, their faces barely veiled behind gauzy stuff, their clothing all aglitter with gold lace and gems, their hats full of plumes, the swords they fenced with sparkling like rippled water. Even through the veils one could see their hair was curled and flowing upon their shoulders, not bound back as a common man would need it to be, out of the way of the work. Their shirts were open, too, and in the gap their skin glowed and their muscles throbbed. Hunks did not work. They smiled, they dimpled, they complimented, they dueled and rode and wrestled, they talked of wonderful things that ordinary people knew little or nothing of. Poetry. And theater. And wine.

Mouche wondered if they talked of the sea, which is what Mouche talked of, to himself when there was no one else by to speak to, or to Papa, when Papa was in the mood. Not to Mama. Mama did not understand such things, even though it was she who had given him the book of sea stories, and she who had told him about going to Gilesmarsh when she was a girl, and how the shore had looked and smelled, and now the little boats came in full of the fishes that swam there, and how the ships sailed out and away into wonderful places. The seamen didn't even wear veils, except in port. Mama didn't mention that, but the book did. Of course, out at sea, there were no women to be tempted and corrupted by the sight of wanton hairs sprouting on a male face, so veils weren't really needed.

Mouche's dream of going to sea when he was old enough was not pure foolishness. The books were full of stories about boys who ran away to sea and ships that took them, sometimes with no apprenticeship fee. Poor as Mouche's family was, he knew it would have to be without a fee. He would

have to have something else to recommend him, like knowing things about ropes and nets and repairs and suchlike. He asked his teacher if he could get Mouche a book about all that - which he did, and followed it with others when Mouche was through with the first one. Mouche practiced knots in his bed at night, and learned all the words for the parts of the ship and the pieces of the rigging and how it all worked. "Seaman Mouche," he said to himself on the edge of sleep. "Captain Mouche". And he dreamed.

But now it seemed he was not to go to sea. Not even without a fee. He was to be a Hunk. Hunks did not go to sea, did not pull at nets, did not look out to far horizons and distant ports, did not smell of fish. They smelled of perfume. They pranced like ponies. And they fucked, of course. Everyone knew that. That's what they were for. Though they did not father, they fucked.

Some very wealthy women were known to have several of them. When a woman accepted a dowry from some man she did not know - might never have seen, might grow to detest - thereby making him the sole begetter of her future children, it was her right to include in the contract a provision that after five or seven or ten years, whether she had any daughters or not, she was to have at least one Hunk. This was common knowledge. It was also common knowledge that many of the best-trained Hunks came from House Genevois in Sendoph. Polite people didn't call them Hunks, of course, Mama was right about that. They called them "Consorts," but it meant the same thing.

"Consort Mouche," he said to himself, seeing how it sounded. It sounded dirty, no matter what word he used. It sounded like a teacher saying, "Take your hands out of your pants. What do you think you're doing? Practicing to be a Consort?"

It sounded like teasing on the school ground, Fenarde saying, "Mouche can't ever get married. Mouche will have to be a Hunky-monkey." Which was very dirty talk indeed. All the girls stood and giggled and twitched their bottoms at Mouche and said, "You can be *my* Hunky-monkey, Mouche. *I'll* put you in my contract." And then they started kissing Mouche and touching him on his behind. Such evil behavior got the girls talking to about courtesy and treating males respectfully, because they were not as resilient as girls and their minds weren't as flexible, and Fenarde got a mouthful of ashes from the schoolroom hearth for starting the whole thing. Mouche merely got a brief lecture.

Though the teacher was patient, he didn't have much time to waste on boys.

"Girls always talk that way," he said. "They have no masculine modesty. You must behave demurely and simply ignore it, pretend not to hear it. When they pinch you or rub up against you, get away from them as soon as possible. And take no notice! That's the proper way to behave, and it's time you learned it." Though how you could feel those intrusive hands on you and take no notice, the teacher did not say.

The night after Papa had told him about House Genevois, Mouche heard a tap at his door, so soft and so late he almost thought he had dreamed it until Papa slipped in and sat on the edge of his cot.

"My boy," he said, "a man's life is never easy. We are the weaker sex, as everyone knows, though sometimes at the end of a long, hard day loading hay I think our weakness is more a matter of fable than reality. Still, this is the world we live in, and we must live, as the Hags say, either with it or against it. I've come to say some things to you that I didn't want to say with your mama there." He stroked Mouche's hair away from his forehead, looking at him sadly.

"Yes, Papa."

"This decision is much against my inclination, Mouche. You were to be the son of g'Darbos, our unique line. I had such plans for you, for us . . ." His voice trailed off sadly, and he stared out the small window at two of the littler moons just rising above the horizon to join a third, bigger one in the sky.

"But seemingly it is not to be. There will be no g'Darbos lineage, no immortality of the family, no descendants to remember me and honor the name. Even so, I would not make this decision lightly; I had to find out what kind of life we'd be sending you to. I didn't tell your Mama, but when I was last in Sendoph, I went into House Genevois, by the back door, and when I explained myself, I was allowed to talk to some of the . . . young men."

Mouche wriggle uncomfortably.

"I found out, for example, that they eat very well indeed. Far better than we do. I found out that the maximum contract for a Hu - a Consort is about twenty years, beginning as soon as schooling is completed, somewhere between the eighteenth and twenty-fourth year. The standard contract for men from House Genevois provides one third the original payment set aside for your retirement, plus one third of the downpayment on your contract, plus half the payments to House Genevois every

year of service, all invested at interest to provide you an annuity. All Consorts receive wages from their patronesses, plus tips, many of them, and even after they're retired, ex-Consorts can freelance for additional profit. There are ex-Consorts in the city who are almost as well respected as Family Men."

"But it isn't the sea," said Mouche, feeling tears, blinking rapidly to keep them from running over. "If I go to sea and make my fortune, I could send you money."

"No, Mouche. It isn't the sea, but it's now, when we have need, not years from now when it's too late. If you can set aside your dream of the sea, being a Consort has few drawbacks. Well, there's the possibility of being killed or scarred in a duel, but any farmer might be killed or scarred. The men I spoke with said Consort dueling can be avoided by a fast tongue and a ready wit, neither of which can help farmers avoid accidents. And, so far as I can tell, the shame that attaches to the candidate's family goes away after a time. One grows used to saying, 'My son? Oh, he's gone to work for a contractor in the city.'" Papa sighed, having put the best face on it he could.

"How much will you get for me, Papa?"

"I won't get it. Your Mama will. It's twenty gold vobati, my boy, after deducting your annuity share, but Mama has agreed to use it on the farm. That's the only way I'd give permission for her to sell you, you being my eldest." Eldest sons, as everyone knew, were exempt from sale unless the father agreed, though younger ones, being supernumerary, could be sold by their mothers - if she could find a buyer - as soon as they turned seven. Supernumes were miners and haulers and sailors; they were the ones who worked as farmhands or wood cutters or ran away to become Wilderneers.

Still, twenty vobati was a large sum of money. More than he could make as a seaman in a long, long time. "Is it as much a daughter would bring in?" Mouche whispered.

"Not if she were a healthy, good-looking and intelligent girl, but it isn't bad. It's enough to guarantee Mama and Papa food for their age."

Mouche took a deep breath and tried to be brave. He would have had to be brave to be a seaman, so let him be brave anyhow. "I would rather be a Consort than a playmate, Papa."

"I thought you might," said Papa with a weepy smile.

Papa had a tender heart. He was always shedding a tear for this thing or that thing. Every time the

earth shook and the great fire mounts of the scarp belched into the sky, Papa worried about the people in the way of it. Not Mama, who just snorted that people who built in the path of pyroclastic flow must eat ashes and like it, and with all the old lava about, one could not mistake where that was likely to be.

Papa went on, "Tell you true, Mouche - but if you tell your Mama, I'll say you lie - many a time when the work is hard and the sun is hot, and I'm covered with bites from jiggers and fleas, and my back hurts from loading hay . . . well, I've thought what it would be like, being a Hunk. Warm baths, boy. And veils light enough to really see through. It would be fun to see the city rather than mere shadows of it. And there's wine. We had wine at our wedding, your mama and me. They tell me one gets to like it." He sighed again, lost in his own foundered dream, then came to himself with a start.

"Well, words enough! if you are agreeable, we will go to Sendoph tomorrow, for the interview."

Considering the choices, Mouche agreed. It was Papa who took him. Mama could not lower herself to go into House Genevois as a seller rather than a buyer. That would be shameful indeed.

Sendoph was as Sendoph always was, noisy and smelly and full of invisible people everywhere one looked. Though the city had sewers, they were always clogging up, particularly in the dry season when the streams were low, and the irregular cobbles magnified the sound of every hoof and every wooden or iron-rimmed wheel to make clattering canyons between the tall houses and under the overhanging balconies. The drivers were all Supernumes who had to work at whatever was available, and they could not see clearly through their veils. The vendors were equally handicapped. Veils, as the men often said, were the very devil. They could not go without, however, or they'd be thought loose or promiscuous or, worse, disrespectful of women. There were always many Hagers standing about, servants of the Hags, who were servants of the Hagions, the Goddesses, and they were swift to punish bad behavior.

The town was split in two by ancient lava tubes, now eroded into troughs, that guided the northward flow of the River Giles. Genevois House stood on the street nearest west and parallel to the river, its proud western facade decked with tall shuttered windows and bronze double doors graven with images of dueling men. The south side, along Bridge

Street all the way to Brewer's Bridge, was less imposing, merely a line of grilled windows interrupted in the middle by one stout provisioner's gate opening into the service courtyard. The east side, on the bank of the river itself, showed only a blank wall bracketed at each end by a stubby tower of ornamental brickwork around fretted windows set with colored glass. This wall was pierced by an ancient gate through which a rotting tongue of wharf was thrust into the river, a tongue all slimed with filth and ribboned with long festoons of algae. Parts of House Genevois plus the courtyard walls, the wharf, and the bronze doors, dated back to the lost settlement, the colony from Thor that had vanished, along with its ship, long before the second settlers arrived.

The door where Mouche and his papa were admitted was an inconspicuous entrance off Bridge Street, near the front corner. Inside was the parlor of the welcome suite, where Madame Genevois kept them waiting a good hour. Through the closed door Mouche and Papa could hear her voice, now from here, then from there, admonishing, encouraging. When she came into the interview room at last, her sleeves were turned up to her elbows and her forehead was beaded with perspiration. She rolled the sleeves down and buttoned them, took a linen handkerchief from the cache-box on her worktable, and patted her forehead dry.

"Well, Family Man; well, Mouche," she said.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but we have a new fencing master who is inclined to be too rigorous with the beginners and too lax with the advanced class. It is easier to bully novices than it is to test competent swordsmen, but I have told him I will not tolerate it. He is paid to exert himself, and exert himself he shall." She patted her forehead once again, saying in a matter-of-fact voice: "Take off your clothes, boy, and let me look at you."

Papa had warned Mouche about this, but he still turned red from embarrassment. He took everything off but his crotcher and his sandals, which seemed to make him bare enough for her purposes when she came poking at him, like a farmer judging a pig.

"Your hands and feet are in terrible condition," she said. "Your hair is marvelous in color and fairly good in shape. Your eyes and face are good. The leg and back muscles are all wrong, of course. Farm work does not create a balanced body."

"As Madame says," Papa murmured, while Mouche shifted from foot to foot and tried to figure

out what to do with his hands.

Madame jerked her head, a quick nod. "Well, all in all, I will stick to my bargain. The hands and feet will be soaked and scrubbed and brought into good appearance. The muscles will yield to proper exercise. A score ten vobati, I said, did I not? A score for the wife, ten in keeping for the boy."

"As Madame recalls," Papa murmured again.

"And is his mother prepared to leave him now?"

Papa looked up then, his eyes filling. He had not planned on this, and Mouche pitied him even more than he pitied himself.

"Can I not have time to say good-bye, Madame?" he begged.

"If your mother allows, of course, boy. Take two days. Be here first thing in the morning on fifthday. First thing, now."

She unbuttoned her wrists and rolled up her sleeves once more, giving him a look that was almost kindly as he struggled into his clothes.

"You're coming into good hands, Mouche. We honor our annuities, which some Houses only claim to provide. We don't sell to sadists. And you won't hate the life. You'll miss Mama and Papa, yes, but you'll get on." She turned away, then back, to add, "No pets, boy. You know that."

"Yes, Madame." He gulped a little. He no longer had a pet, though the thought of Duster could still make him cry.

She asked, almost as an afterthought, "Can you read, Mouche?"

"Yes, Madame." The village school wasn't much, but he had gone every evening after chores, for five long years. That was when he was expected to be the heir, of course. Heirs went to school, though Supernumes often didn't. Mouche could read and print a good hand and do his numbers well enough not to mistake four vibela for a vobati.

"Good. That will shorten your training by a good deal."

Then she was gone from them, and they too were gone from her, and soon they were alone and Papa had dropped his veil and the dust of the road was puffing up between their toes as they walked the long way south, on the west side of River Giles, to the tributary stream that tumbled down from the western terraces through their own farm. All the long valley of the Giles was farmland. On the east, where the grain and pasture farmers held the land, ancient lava tubes lay side by side, lined up north and south like straws in a broom, their tops worn away, their sides rasped into mere welts by the

windblown soil, each tube eastward a bit higher than the last, making a shallow flight that climbed all the way to the Ratback Range at the foot of the scarp. On the west, where the g'Darbos fields were small and flinty, good for olives and grapes.

"Why are girls worth so much, Papa?" asked Mouche, who had always known they were but had never wondered over the whys of it until now.

"Because they are more capable than men," said Papa.

"Why are they?"

"It's their hormones. They have hormones that change, day to day, so that for some parts of every month they are emotional and for some parts they are coldly logical, and for some parts they are intuitive, and they may bring all these sensitivities to meet any problem. We poor fellows, Mouche, we have hormones that are pretty much the same all the time. We push along steadily enough, often in a fine frenzy, but we haven't the flexibility of women."

"But why is that, Papa?"

"It's our genetics, boy. All a Family Man has to do is one act, taking only a few moments if the mama is willing and a little longer if she is not." Papa flushed. "So our hormones are what might be called simple-minded. They equip us to do *that thing*, and that's all. Used to be men attached a lot of importance to *that thing*, though it's something every mouse can do just as well. Women, though, they have to bear, and birth, and suckle, and - except among the monied folk - they also have to work alongside the Family Man in the business, tending and rearing. They have to work and plan, morn till night. So, their hormones are more complex, as they have to be."

"And men get in more trouble, too." Mouche was quoting his teacher.

"Well, yes, sometimes, in some men, our fine frenzy begets a lustful or murderous violence, and we tend to become contentious over little or nothing. But, as the Hags teach, 'If you would have breathing space, stay out of one another's face,' which is one reason we wear veils, not to threaten one another, so we may stay out of trouble and under control."

"I thought it was so the women couldn't see us."

"The *reason* they mustn't see us, Mouche, is that we must not tempt females, or stir their insatiable lusts, for that leads to disorder and mis-mothering. We are the weaker sex, my boy. It is why we must bid high for wives to take us, to show we have

learned discipline and self-control."

"Darn ol' hormones," sulked Mouche. "Girls get all the luck."

"Well, hormones aren't the only reason," Papa comforted him.

"Women are also valuable because they're fewer than men. Only one girl is born alive for every two boys, as we know to our sorrow."

"Then not every man may have a wife, may he, Papa?" Mouche knew this was so, but at this juncture, he thought it wise to have the information verified. "Even if he has a dowry?"

"Only about half, my boy. The oldest sons, usually. The younger ones must keep handmaids." Which was an old joke among men, one Mouche already understood. Papa wiped his face with the tail of his veil and went on, "Once, long ago, I heard a story teller's tale about the world from which our people originally came, that was Old Earth, where men were fewer than women . . ."

"That's impossible."

"The story-teller said it was because many males died young, in wars and gang fights and in dangerous explorations. Anyhow, in his tale, men were worth much more than women. Women sought men as chickens seek grain, gathering around them. A man could father children on several women, if he liked, without even dowering for them."

"Fairy stories," said Mouche. "That's what that is. Who would want a woman you didn't dower for?" Everyone knew what such women would be like. Old or ugly or both. And probably infertile. And sickly. And certainly stupid, if they didn't even bother to get a good dowry first. Or even maybe invisible. "Are there more invisible men than there are women?" he asked, the words slipping out before he thought.

Papa stopped in his tracks, and his hand went back to slap, though it did not descend on Mouche's evil mouth. "Which only a fool would say," Papa grated instead, thrusting his head forward in warning. "You're too old to tell stories of invisible people or see such fairies and bug-a-boos as babies do, Mouche. You could be blue-bodied for it." Mouche ducked his head and flushed, not having to ask what blue-bodying was. When a Supernume was incorrigible and his father or master or boss or commander could do nothing with him, he was dyed blue all over and cast naked into the streets for the dogs to bite and the flies to crawl upon, and no man might feed him or help him or employ him

thereafter. People who died foolishly were said to be "independent as a blue body."

Papa hadn't finished with him. "Such talk could bring the Questioner down on us! Do you want Newholme to end up like Roquamb III? Do you?"

Stung, Mouche cried, "I don't know how it ended up, Papa. I don't know anything about the Questioner."

"Well, boy, let me tell you, you'd be sorry if words of yours reached *her* ears! As for Roquamb III, well, *she* took care of those poor souls. Imagine what that would be like. The whole world dying around you, and you knowing it was your fault!" Papa glared at him for a moment, then started down the road again, leaving Mouche thoroughly confused and not much enlightened. He'd been told something about the Questioner at school, but at the moment, Mouche couldn't remember what.

He decided to talk about something else during the rest of the trip, something with no danger to it. The dust puffing up between his toes gave him inspiration.

"Why do we have to walk everywhere, Papa? Or go behind a horse? Why don't we have engines? Like in the books?"

"Interstellar travel is very expensive," said Papa, grateful for the change of subject. "Our ancestors on our Motherworld saved up for centuries to send off our settlement, and the settlers had to pick and choose carefully what they would bring with them. They brought just enough rations to keep them until the first crops could be harvested. They brought seed and fertilized stock ova and an omni-uterus to grow the first calves and foals and piglets and lambs, and an incubator to hatch the first chickens.

"Our population was small and our first generations tended flocks and herds and planted crops and cut wood and quarried stone, and the next generation built up the towns, and searched for metal ores and rare biologicals to build up our trade. Then came sawmills along the river, and then the first smelter and the little railroad that runs from the mines to Naibah, and so on. Now we are almost ready to become industrial."

"It sure seems slow," mumbled Mouche.

"Well, it's been slower for us than for some, partly because we have so few women, and partly because Newholme has no coal or oil. We hadn't exactly counted on that. Every other planet that's had life form millions of years has had fossil fuels, but not Newholme."

"I know," Mouche muttered. He really did know all this; he'd learned it in school. Sometimes he thought it would be easier if the schools didn't talk about life on Old Earth or on the older settled worlds where people had replicators and transporters and all the robotic industries to support them. If he didn't know there were any such things as transporters and replicators, walking to Sendoph or working in the garden wouldn't seem so hard. It would just be natural.

That night was a good supper, better than any they'd had in a long time. The next day, too, as though Papa could not let him go without stuffing him first. Like a goose, Mouche thought. Off to the market, but fattened, first. Between these unexpectedly lavish meals, he had time to say good-bye to most everything that mattered. The pigs. The geese. The milk cow and her calf. With the money paid for Mouche, the family could get by without selling the heifer calf, and when she grew, they would have more milk to sell. With the money paid for Mouche, the mill could be repaired, and there'd be money coming in from grinding the neighbor's grain and pressing their grapes and olives. With the money paid for Mouche . . .

It was only fair, he told himself, desperately trying to be reasonable and not to cry. If he'd been a girl, he'd have brought in a great dowry to Eline and Darbos. Just as the money paid for Eline had gone to her family, so money paid for a daughter would go to this family. But that would be honorable, which this was not. Buying a Hunk was honorable enough, it was only selling one that wasn't. Still, getting a good bid for a girl was just good sense. Why should getting a good bid for a boy be different?

Mouche said farewell to pasture and woodlot and barn, farewell to the cat and her kittens, allowed the freedom of the loft and a ration of milk in return for ridding the granary of the Newholmian equivalent of mice. And finally he went to Duster's grave and knelt down to say good-bye, dropping more than a few tears on old Duster who had been his best and only friend, who had died in such a terrible way. He could have had one of Duster's pups from the neighbors - Old Duster had been an assiduous visitor next door - but there had been no food to feed another dog, said Mama. Well. Duster had left a numerous family behind. He was g'Duster, for sure, and long remembered.

Then it was farewell to Mama on the last evening and a long night listening to Papa cry in the night,

and very early on the morning of the fifth, before it was light, he and red-eyed Papa were on the road once more, back to Sendoph, Mouche carrying only a little bag with his books inside, and Duster's collar, and the picture of a sailing ship he had drawn at school. Papa didn't have to put his veils on until they were far down the road, and he spent most of the time until then wiping his eyes.

When they came to House Genevois, Mouche asked, in a kind of panic, "Can we walk down to the river, Papa?"

His papa gave him a sideways tilt of the head, but he walked on past House Genevois, down Bridge Street past the courtyard entrance, on to the corner where one of the little green-patinaed copper-domed towers topped the wall above the riverbank, and thence out over the stone arches of Brewer's Bridge itself while the invisible people moved back and forth like little mud-colored rivers running in all directions, their flow breaking around the human pedestrians without touching them, those pedestrians looking over the heads of the invisibles and never lowering their gaze. The breweries stood across the water, four of them, and on the nearest stubby tower a weathervane shifted and glittered, its head pointing north, toward the sea.

The river was low and sullen in this season, dark with ash from the firemounts to the south and east, with the islets of gray foam slipping past so slowly it was hard to believe they were moving at all. Between the water mills, the banks were thickly bristled with reed beds, green and aswarm with birdy-things, and far down the river a smoke plume rose where a wood burning sternwheel steamboat made its slow way toward them against the flow. Down there, Mouche thought, was Naibah, the capital, lost in the mists of the north, and beyond it the port of Gilesmarsh.

"The sea's down there," he whispered.

"No reason you can't go to sea after you retire," said Papa, hugging him close. "Maybe even buy a little boat of your own."

"Ship," said Mouche, imagining breakers and surf and the cry of waterkeens. "Ship."

His thoughts were interrupted by a rumble, a shivering. At first Mouche thought it was just him, shaking with sadness, but it wasn't him for the railing quivered beneath his fingers and the paving danced beneath his feet.

"Off the bridge," said Papa, breathlessly.

They ran from the bridge, standing at the end of it, waiting for the spasm to end. Far to the east, the

scarp was suddenly aglow, and great billows of gray moved up into the sky, so slowly they were like balloons rising. Down the river, one of the legs of the rotted wharf gave way, tipping it into the flow. Everything was too quiet until the shaking happened again, and yet again, with tiles falling from roofs and people screaming.

Then it stopped. The birdy-things began to cheep, people began to talk to one another, though their voices were still raised to a panicky level. Even the usually silent invisible people murmured in their flow, almost like water. The ominous cloud went on rising in the east, but the glow faded on the eastern ridge and the earth became solid once more.

Mouche remained bent over, caught in an ecstasy of grief and horror, come all at once, out of nowhere, not sure whether it was his heart or the world that was breaking apart.

"Boy?" Papa said. "Mouche? What's the matter?"

"Oh, it hurts, it hurts," he cried. It wasn't all his own feeling, from inside himself. He knew that. It was someone else's feeling, someone suffering, some huge and horrid suffering that had been let loose when the world trembled. Not his own. He told himself that. He wasn't dying. He wasn't suffering, not like that. His little pains were nothing, nothing, compared to that.

"There, there, boy, I know it does," said Papa, completely misunderstanding. "But the pain will

pass if you let it. Remember that, Mouche. The pain will pass, but you have to let it." And he looked at Mouche with the anguish he had carefully kept the boy from seeing.

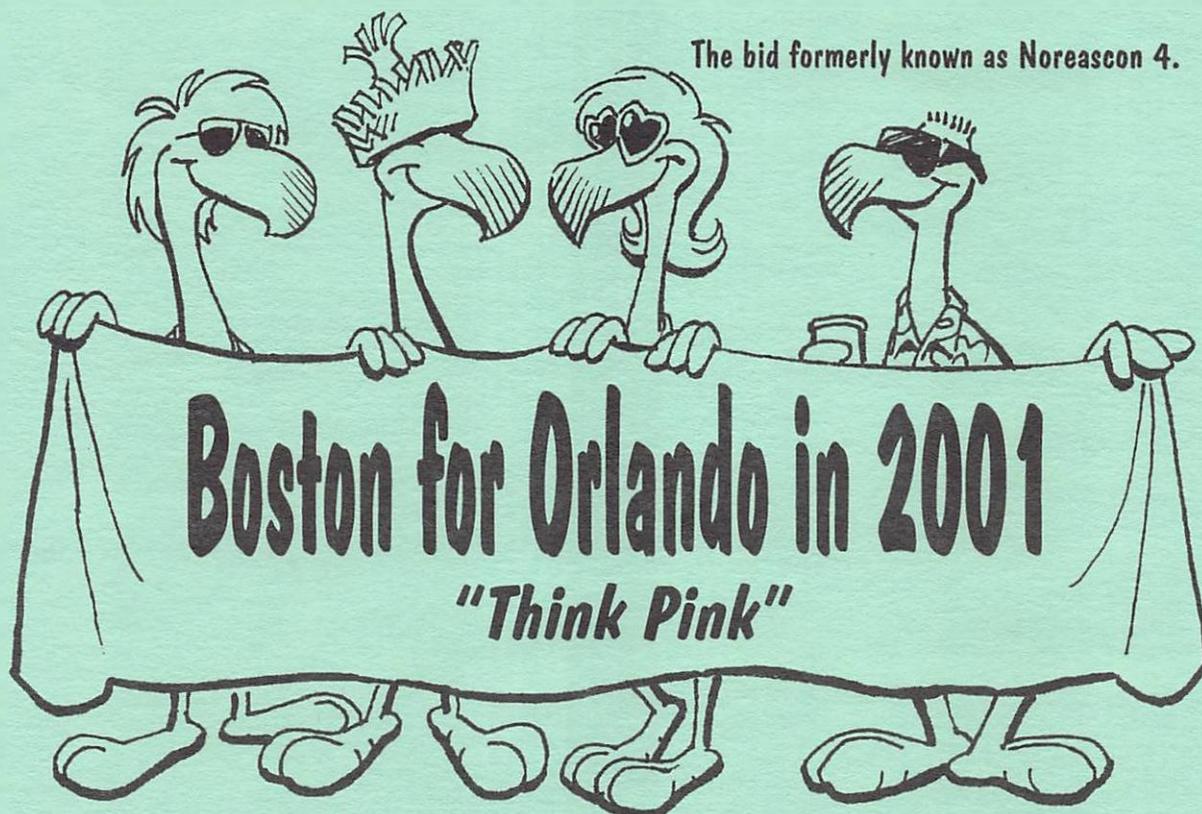
After a moment, Mouche was able to raise his head and start back to the corner, trying not to let Papa see he was crying, easy enough since Papa was resolutely keeping his own face turned away. Mouche did not know who he was anymore. It was as if his whole world was coming apart and he with it. And though Papa had said it would pass, it felt more like pain on the way than pain going away. It had an approaching feel to it. Like the whistle of the little train, rising in pitch as it approached, so the pain seemed to intensify toward the end rather than fading.

The packet of gold was waiting for Papa in the foyer of Genevois House, counted out by a stern-faced steward, some put into Papa's hands, some taken into keeping for Mouche. For later. When he was old. He signed a receipt for it in his best hand and put it back in the steward's hands, then the inner door was opened just wide enough for Mouche to enter.

"Well, come in, boy," said Madame. "Don't dawdle."

And his life as a Hunk began.

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