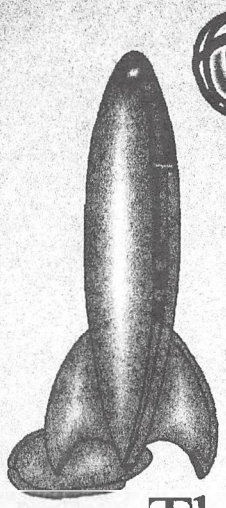

WisCon 28



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Welcome!

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WisCon
May 28-31, 2004
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Cover collage by Beth Plutchak

WisCon 28 • Guests of Honor

Eleanor Arnason

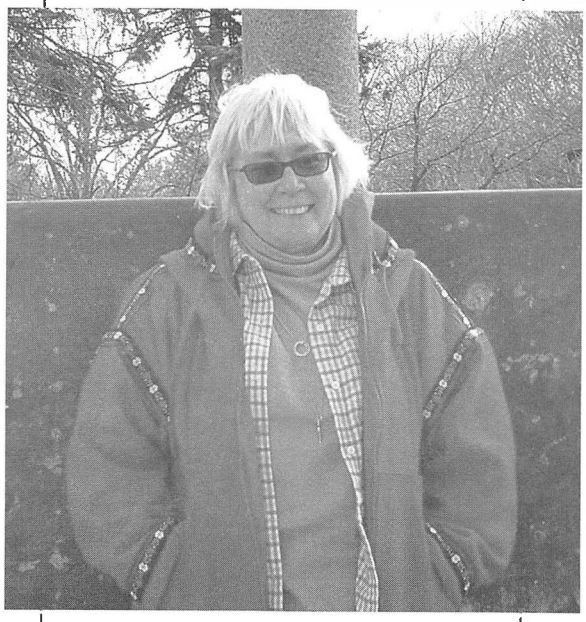
Eleanor Arnason's Brain

by Terry Garey

In 1980 when I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, Tom Whitmore was enthusing about a book and handed me his own precious copy, which I was to read respectfully by opening it very carefully and peeping at it sideways so as not to break the spine. It was out of print and already a collectors item.

Thus I was introduced to the work of Eleanor Arnason through *The Sword Smith*, her first novel. It was a simple story, unlike anything I had ever encountered before: a story about a superb sword smith who doesn't want to make weapons anymore. The language was direct and to the point and grabbed my sensa wunda by the throat. I read the book through two or three times, and went hunting for anything else she had written. At the time, it was mostly short pieces in anthologies.

Years later I moved to Minneapolis and met Eleanor at a Minicon. In a pattern that was to become familiar over the years, I sat down and was drawn into a two hour conversation with Eleanor and a few other people. The talk ranged from politics to literature to history and back again. It digressed, it had expository lumps, sharp wit, bits of poetry, dictionary definitions, opinions, examples, stories...a wonderful



experience. It was a writer's conversation of the best caliber.

Over the years I've been privileged to participate in many of these conversations. And being in a writer's group with Eleanor, I've had my eye tracks on much of her writing before it has gotten into print. None of it has ever been a dud. Imagine having a birthday where ever single present is something you never knew you wanted, but something you'll now treasure forever. Eleanor's writing is like that: you look forward to it, and you never know what you'll be getting.

There's a new idea every few hundred words, and it's always a good one, following a path you have never before followed, turning sharp corners, presenting passing vistas and lovely glades, yet making perfect sense and tying back into the main road of the story with no trouble at all. And yet her work is all solidly grounded, carefully researched, never wispy or vague. You can hear the *thunk* of pack animals' hooves, taste the water, eye the plumbing askance.

Through Eleanor's writing I've fallen in love with a giant sentient alien squid, met a cranky, willful goddess, a potter who discovers evolution, alien accountants, had my ideas about gender whacked around, and enjoyed the hell out of a space opera. Occasionally I've laughed so hard I've embarrassed myself in public. Occasionally I've cried, but usually in private.

How did all of this come about? How does this stuff get into her brain, then come out again the way it does? Well, I think she works at it, although some of it comes naturally.

Eleanor's parents weren't exactly normal. Her mother was an American who grew up in China, the daughter of missionaries. Her father came from an Icelandic immigrant family in Canada. The family lived in many places both here and abroad. Her father wrote *The History of Modern Art,* which is still in print and was the first director of the Walker modern art museum in Minneapolis.

Eleanor grew up reading Chinese literature in translation, and the Icelandic sagas, both in English and Icelandic. Her parents entertained a lot and she was used to fairly famous people wandering about the house and hearing educated, insightful conversations on a regular basis. She graduated from Swarthmore College and stepped out into the world.

She and Ruth Berman went to their first WorldCon in the early sixties (female fans were so rare that young men fought to carry their bags), and she's never looked back. Daemon Knight published some of her first stories in *Orbit* and she was on her way as a writer.

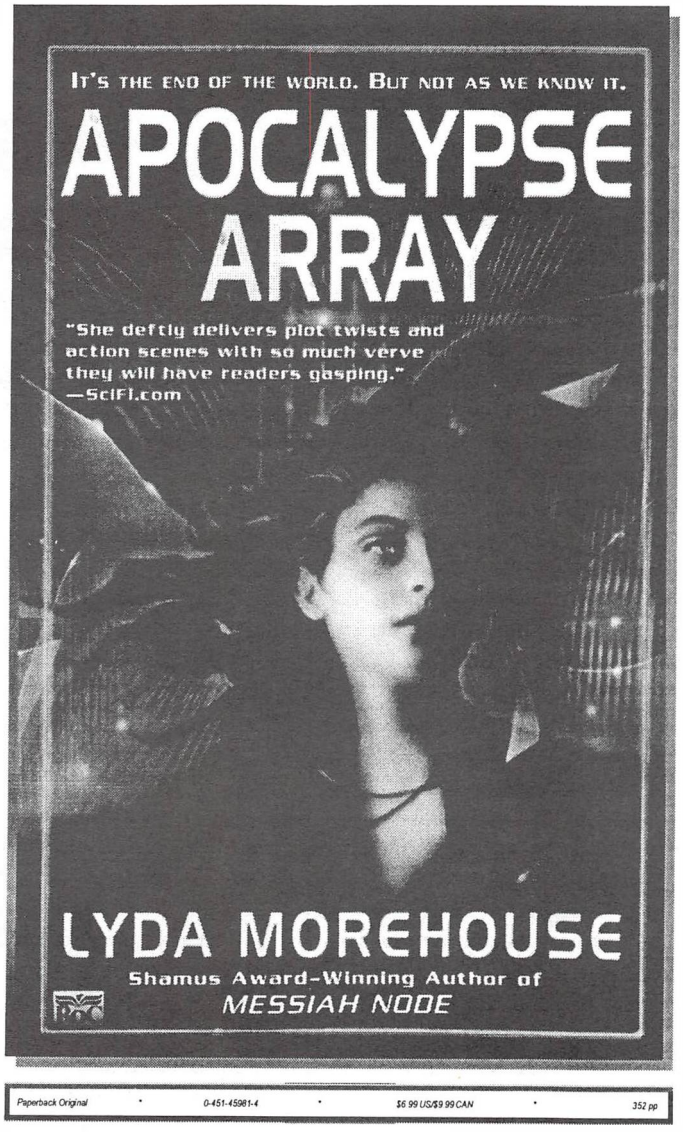
Her life as a writer has never been easy. She's struggled to get published; struggled to stay published. She's worked a regular job to support herself and stubbornly written her stories, no matter what happened, no matter what was fashionable or politically popular, and no matter what she was up against editorially. Reviewers sometimes don't realize she has a wicked, but dry sense of humor and irony. Others are puzzled or even annoyed by subject matter.

She's despaired, but she's never given up. She's a generous and practical, an indefatigable cheerleader for the people she believes in, and for the causes she believes in; little things, you know, like freedom, peace, justice, education and equality. Eleanor has never stopped reading, wondering, exploring, or thinking. I think it's one of her many strengths as a writer and as a person. My favorite image of her is finding her in a coffeehouse, squinched up in her seat, her nose stuck in a thick book, and one hand waving in the air trying to find her coffee cup as she read.

On panels she's honest about writing, brushing away any lovely visions beginning writers might have of floating through meadows spewing books right an left to adoring crowds. She knows the reality. And yet she writes. Darned well. If you get a chance to take a workshop with her, do it!

Eleanor won the first Tiptree Award, the Mythopoeic Award, and has been nominated for the Hugo and the Nebula awards many times. She's published 5 novels, and many stories, novellas, novelettes and poems. She's working on a collection of *Hwarhath* stories, and a collection of *Lydia Duluth* stories, which I hope will come out soon, because then even more people can enjoy her work and be amazed and entertained. Take a gander at her bibliography and start looking at the wonders it holds.

Enjoy Eleanor at this WisCon. Be gentle; she's kind of shy sometimes. Ask her about Jackie Chan, or puffins, or Marx, or Native American jewelry. Buy her a cup of coffee. Go to her reading and panels. Just enjoy. And look forward to the future of this original, fascinating writer.



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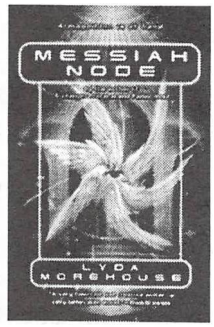

Eleanor Arnason

A Biography

By Eleanor Arnason

Eleanor Arnason was born in New York City in 1942. Her mother, Elizabeth Hickcox Yard, was a social worker who grew up in missionary communities in China. Her father, Hjorvardur Harvard Arnason, was the son of Icelandic immigrants and an art historian.

She spent her early childhood living in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., London and Paris. In 1949 her father became director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; and her family moved into a house of the future which the Walker had built as a postwar design project. Ms. Arnason lived in the house (which was named Idea House # 2) until 1960.

Ms. Arnason graduated from Swarthmore College with a B.A. in Art History in 1964 and attended graduate school at the University of Minnesota until 1967, when she left the university to find out about life outside colleges and art museums.

From 1967 to 1974 she worked as an office clerk and lived in racially-mixed, blue-collar neighborhoods, first in central Brooklyn, then in Detroit. This was the era when the American cities were burning, when black auto workers in Detroit were organizing the DRUM (the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) and when the Wayne State University student newspaper had as its masthead, "One class conscious worker is worth 10,000 students." Ms. Arnason learned a lot about the world outside art museums. She made her first professional sale, a short story, to *New Worlds,* in 1972.

In 1974 Ms. Arnason decided Detroit was looking at hard times. The American car industry was under strong pressure from foreign auto manufacturers. It seemed clear to her that the Big Three were going to need new plants in order to remain competitive; and it was unlikely the plants would be built in Detroit. The city's inhabitants were too class conscious and feisty. She moved back to Minneapolis, bringing with her Patrick Arden Wood, a fine product of the Detroit working class who has remained her close friend and comrade.

Since 1974, she has remained in the Twin Cities, working in offices, warehouses, an art museum and a county historical society from hell. She recently left the last job and is looking for new work.

Her first novel, *The Sword Smith*, was published in 1978. Other novels followed: *To the Resurrection Station* in 1986, *Daughter of the Bear King* in 1987, *A Woman of the Iron People* in 1991 and *Ring of Swords* in 1993.

Since 1994 Ms. Arnason has concentrated on short fiction, creating two series of linked stories, one about an alien species called the hwarhath, and the other about an interstellar adventurer named Lydia Duluth. She plans to collect the hwarhath stories in two books, tentatively titled *Star Burrow* and *Dapple.* The Lydia Duluth stories will be collected as *The Adventures of Lydia Duluth.*

Her hobbies are bird-watching, car trips down two-lane highways and learning about contemporary Native American art, of which there is a lot in the upper midwest. Ms. Arnason did not realize this till recently, but Minnesota is Indian Country.

She is a member of the Science Fiction and fantasy Writers of America and the National Writers Union. In 1991 the NWU became part of the UAW. Finally, years after leaving Detroit, Ms. Arnason has become an auto worker.

She has no idea why she wrote this bio in the third person, but she did.

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By Denny Lien

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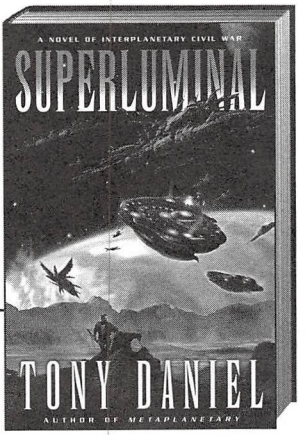

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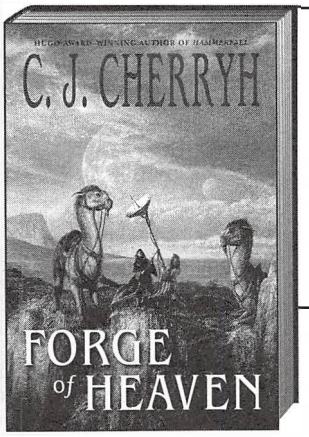

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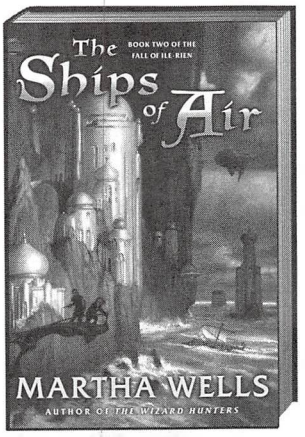

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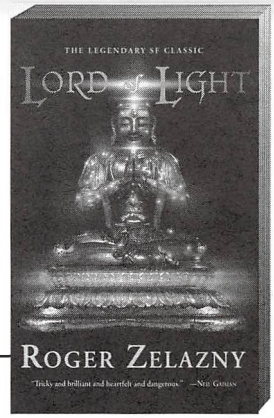

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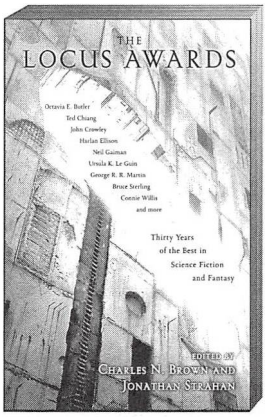

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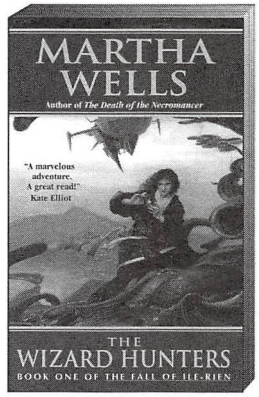

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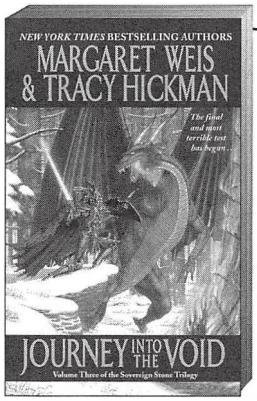

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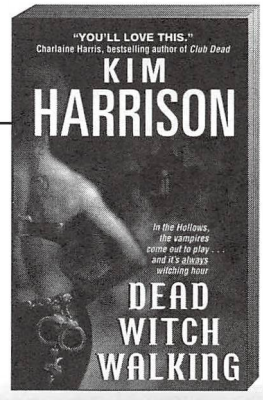

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An Appreciation

By Delia Sherman

The first time I saw Patricia McKillip was at Boskone. It was the year she won the World Fantasy Award for *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*, give or take, which would put it somewhere in the early 70's. She was wearing a long granny dress (I remember cream cotton with roses on it, but I could be mistaken) and she peered out of the protective curtain of her hair like an animal trying to hide in plain sight. I'd read *Forgotten Beasts* and loved every lyrical word of it, but I did not tell her so. I was too overawed.

Years passed. I taught *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* in a Fantasy as Literature course at Boston University, because it was not only beautiful and subtle, but also the only girl's coming-of-age story in print that wasn't primarily about getting a guy. I read everything she wrote as it came out, glorying in the prose of someone who loved language and was not afraid of beauty and emotion. And then, at the World Fantasy Convention in Memphis, Tennessee, Ellen Kushner arranged a memorable dinner comprising the authors of half of my book shelf—including Patricia McKillip.

She was still shy and I was still overawed, but, over fried catfish and collard greens, I discovered that she was also possessed of a sly sense of humor and a charming unconsciousness of what a wonderful writer she was. I finally told her how much I loved *Forgotten Beasts* and *The Riddlemaster of Hed* and her children's books, and she blushed and allowed as how she'd enjoyed writing them. And, over the course of the next ten years of con encounters, we got to be friends.

Pat is arguably one of the hardest-working women in show business. Every year, out comes another installment in the on-going meditation on personal responsibility, power, promises, love (romantic, academic, and familial), language, puzzles, and nature that is her oeuvre. Her heroines are smart, clear-eyed, more interested in beautiful patterns of words or threads than in beautiful men. Her heroes are more often thinkers than doers, dreamy-eyed scholars in quest of some piece of arcane knowledge that, often as not, is not what their researches led them to believe. Her books are intensely romantic, but they're not romances. They are, in their own way, profoundly feminist.

Now, when I see Pat at conventions, she's with her husband, the poet David Lunde, whose engagement we celebrated at yet another World Fantasy, in Providence, RI. She's still shy, but the sense of humor is more to the fore than it was. I'm glad she's finally going to be at WisCon, where her feminism as well as her romanticism can be acknowledged.

Patricia McKillip

A Biography

By Patricia McKillip

Patricia A. McKillip was born in Salem, Oregon, received an M.A. in English Lit. from San Jose State University in California, and has been a writer since then. She is primarily known for her fantasy, and has published novels both for adults and young adults. Her YA novel *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* won the first World Fantasy Award in 1975. Among other YA fantasy novels are *The Riddle-Master Trilogy*, and *The Changeling Sea*, as well as the SF duo *Moon-Flash* and *The Moon and the Face*. She also made a brief venture into adult SF with the novel *Fool's Run*. Lately she has been writing fantasy novels for adults, among them *Winter Rose* and *The Tower at Stony Wood*, which both received Nebula nominations, and *Ombria in Shadow*, which won the World Fantasy Award 2003. She has also written a number of short stories through the years, again both for adults and young adults. Her latest published novels are *In the Forests of Serre* and *alphabet of Thorn*. She and her husband, the poet David Lunde, recently moved from the wilds of upstate New York to be closer to their families in Oregon

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By Patricia McKillipNovels

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The Sorceress and the Cygnet, Ace, 1991

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In the Forests of Serre, Ace, 2003

Alphabet of Thorn, Ace, 2004

The 2003 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

The Winner

Set This House in Order: A Romance of Souls

Matt Ruff, Harper Collins 2003

Andy Gage is dead. Andrew Gage, a 26-year-old born two years ago, is in charge of Andy's body, while his father, Aaron, runs the house he built inside it ...

The truth, as *Set This House in Order*'s characters keep telling one another, is complicated. Andy, Andrew, Aaron and the house's hundred or so other inhabitants are "alters," to use a psychiatric term. They are the multiple personalities that arose after repeated incidents of childhood abuse shattered Andy's sense of self. Instead of attempting to reintegrate them all, Aaron, a dominant personality, has constructed a stable inner landscape, a common gathering spot. The various alter characters act as if it's a real place, though the concept's not a scientifically proven model for treatment either inside or outside of the novel. This leads to the book's slipstream feel.

Andrew carefully allots time in control of the body to genteel Aunt Sam, childish Jake, mall-loving Simon and others. The inclusion of both male and female alters in his community of self reflects the experience of real-life multiples and forms a solid basis for Matt Ruff's daring treatment of gender issues and expectations. – NS

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A number of books and stories this year did fascinating things with gender and several of them were extremely well written, but Matt Ruff's *Set This House in Order* combines literary quality with gender exploration in an unparalleled manner. The subtitle of the book, *A Romance of Souls,* tells the reader that what s/he's reading is fantasy-multiple personality syndrome doesn't really work this way-but everything is so well constructed, so believable, that it becomes difficult to see the book as anything other than a realistic novel concerning the way MPS actually works, or at least would work if the universe were a more remarkable place than it really is. Andy Gage and Penny Driver, the souls who spend the majority of their time as the public faces of the two multiples at the center of this story, are characters we really care about despite, or perhaps because of their various tics and eccentricities. The dozen or so other souls that we get to know over the course of the novel, some of them mere partials, are also well drawn, as are the supposedly normal secondary characters. Ruff's exploration of what the interior, virtual reality world of a multiple might be like, the "House" of the title, is particularly fascinating. This is a rich and wonderful novel that brings a truly fantastic world to vibrant life. -- MML

The 2003 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Awarded
at WisCon 28, Madison, WI

Judges
Maureen Kincaid Speller, chair
Michael Marc Levy
Vicki Rosenzweig
Lori Selke
Nisi Shawl

And the Short List

Coyote Cowgirl

Kim Antieau, Forge 2003

Jeanne Les Flambeaux is a loser: can't ignore the voices in her head; can't cook, though her mother and father run a famous restaurant; can't pick a lover without having him steal the family jewels. Her pursuit of Cousin Johnny and the Ruby Scepter becomes a fast-paced Heroine's Journey of a sort mythologist Joseph Campbell could never have dreamed up. Seeking her animus as countless heroes have sought their anima, Jeanne's path leads her

through a world in which the mundane and supernatural are inextricably linked. Completion, (according to Jung, always the goal in these stories) comes not with the aid of romance, but through introspection and reclamation of repressed history. – NS

"The Catgirl Manifesto"

Christina X (Richard Calder), in *Album Zutique*, ed. Jeff Vandermeer, Ministry of Whimsy Press.

A political missive from a world not quite our own, detailing the emergence and politicization of a new gender -- the hypersexualized "catgirl," a sort of walking anime heroine who is irresistibly cute and sexy, capriciously independent, and utterly contemptuous of the men who fall for her. A sort of new-millennium wedding of the Victorian woman-child and her deadly vampiric counterpart, the catgirl satirizes certain ideas about women and girls (not just on the part of men -- a catgirl could easily grace the next cover of *Bust*), yet discovers the hidden subversiveness of those very same tropes. Catgirls are infantilized, but they are hardly domesticated -- and they're ready to start a revolution of (not so) little girls. – LS

"The Lady of the Ice Garden"

by Kara Dalkey, in *Firebirds*, edited by Sharyn November, Firebird Books, 2003

Kara Dalkey sets her retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's "Snow Queen" in Japan's militaristic Kamakura period; as she showers us with gorgeous images written in her paradoxically spare, poetic prose, Dalkey also pierces common assumptions about gender with the sharp insights embedded in "The Lady of the Ice Garden."

Rather than being kidnapped by an overwhelming and amoral feminine power as was Kay, Andersen's hero, Keiken leaves his home and family voluntarily, driven by a desire to distance himself from all emotion (which he perceives as vulnerability) and drawn to the frigid perfection of the Lady of the Ice Garden, his ideal woman. Following in the footsteps of Andersen's Gerda, Dalkey's heroine Girida searches for her childhood friend, but her quest doesn't end in rescuing him with her tears. She has embarked on an adventure all her own in which she is the subject, the active force, reaping her own rewards. – NS

"Boys"

Carol Emshwiller, from scifi.com

Carol Emshwiller's "Boys" is instantly recognizable as feminist dystopian fiction, kin to *The Gate to Women's Country,* (Tepper) *The Wanderground,* (Gearhart) and *Walk to the End of the World,* (Charnas) but it's somewhat unusual in that it's told from a male perspective. The narrator lives up in the mountains with the rest of the men and boys. In the valley below are the villages of the women. The enemy, other men, live in the mountains on the other side of the valley and no one remembers how this state of affairs developed. Once a year the men descend to the valley to copulate with the women and steal the boys who have grown old enough to survive in the mountains. On one such raid, however, things change. The women fight back, badly defeating the men and capturing the narrator. Wounded, he knows he will never survive in the mountains, and must adjust to the idea of living in the women's world, unsure of what changes the future will bring. What makes "Boys" special is Emshwiller's decision to strip the story down to its essentials, relating what might well be a novel in another writer's hands in a brief, parable-like narrative that packs considerable power. – ML

A Fistful of Sky

Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Ace 2002

Gypsum LaZelle, the protagonist of Nina Kiriki Hoffman's *A Fistful of Sky,* lives in a family of mages and can't understand why, at twenty, she's the only one of her siblings without magic. Feeling inferior, she's grown up lacking confidence, clothing sense, or, for that matter, a steady boyfriend. Then Gypsum falls terribly ill and, recovering, discovers her magic, the ability to curse. Sounds like something you've read before, doesn't it? But this is Nina Kiriki Hoffman, remember, and Gypsum's curses turn out to be like no one else's. First of all there's the fact that she can't not curse; if she doesn't use her power, it builds up in her until curses erupt at random. Then there's the time that she curses herself with ultimate fashion sense and drives everyone crazy with her dead-on but decidedly unwanted clothing critiques. Hoffman's tale, by turns frightening and hilarious, tracks a young woman's bumpy path to magical adulthood, allowing her to try on a variety of gender roles as she attempts to find her place in her family and the world. – ML

Fudoki

Kij Johnson, Tor 2003

Fudoki interweaves two stories: the title tale-within-a-tale of an orphaned cat who takes to the road and is transformed into a human, and autobiographical reminiscences by the elderly Princess Harueme, who is writing the tortoiseshell woman's story. In doing so, she reflects on her own life and motivations, and the limitations that both gender and class have imposed on her: she has had luxury, but almost no freedom. The "fudoki" is a cat's story and her place in the world, in an imagined cat-culture that is entirely female-centered. The cat Kagaya-hime is seen as somehow strange by the humans she travels among, even those who don't realize that she isn't human. She in turn regards them as strange, in part because men are so central to family life in medieval Japan.

Most of the fantastic elements are in the cat's tale: Harueme, as she writes, gives her the tools and knowledge she needs for each part of her adventure.

The cat's tale begins in the fire that destroys her home and family. Meanwhile, Harueme is gradually burning all her old diaries, and burning each notebook of Kagaya-hime's story when she finishes it. At the end of her life, the princess is fleeing a family and structure that have trapped her, seeming glad at least to have never borne a child. Meanwhile, the cat is walking toward a home and family, though she only realizes this at the end of her journey. The female-centered fudoki is a place where motherhood gives her importance and authority, rather than being seen as a trap. – VR

"The Ghost Girls of Rumney Mill"

Sandra McDonald, in *Realms of Fantasy,* August 2003.

"The Ghost Girls of Rumney Mill" explores the persistence of gender roles and expectations. Ghosts, by definition, lack bodies; they can barely affect the living, or any other part of the physical world. What they have left is memory and desire.

MacDonald's ghosts are teens and children, believably so. They have separated themselves by gender, and take the

separation entirely for granted. Pauline, the narrator, didn't like boys when she was alive, and doesn't think death has improved them. When a new boy wants to live with the girls, she rejects him, even though Matthew wants to be Michele, and the boys want no part of a ghost who turned up in a blue dress and insists that he was supposed to be a girl.

Pauline gets to know Matthew/Michele slowly, and her developing acceptance of Michele as a girl arises believably as she learns more about Michele's life and death. In the process, she learns more about herself, and speculates about what is keeping her, and the few other dead youths, trapped in the rundown outskirts of the town. -- VR

"Looking through Lace"

Ruth Nestvold, in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, September, 2003

Toni is a young anthropologist with a sexist boss whose ego can't deal with the fact that a woman may be better equipped to learn about a women's society. The indigenous people on the planet they are studying have very distinct men's and women's cultures, and some incomprehensible and rather gruesome gendered rituals. As Toni struggles both with the hostility of Dr. Repnik and the polite distancing of the women she hopes to understand, she also discovers a growing attraction to an indigenous man, on a planet where she doesn't understand the rules and boundaries.

Nestvold develops this familiar situation in a complicated filigree not unlike the beautiful lace made by the indigenous women, until her growing understanding of her alien surroundings allow her to create an ingenious solution to an otherwise-fatal culture clash.

"Birth Days"

Geoff Ryman, in *Interzone*, April 2003

In "Birth Days", Geoff Ryman uses the diary of a gay man living in the near future to play with, and undermine, ideas of biological and gender determinism. The narrator, a gay male biologist in a future where the genes for sexual orientation have been identified and are being calmly eliminated from most gene pools in the developed world, invents a way for men to bear children. If two men can be the biological parents of a child, and one of them carry the child to term in his own body, what does gender mean?

Ryman foregrounds various attempts to find simple explanations for complicated phenomena: Ron's mother, even knowing better, talks about "the gene" for sexual orientation, and speculates that it might be an alien plot left over from the time of the trilobites. Ron, while sure there's nothing wrong with him, doesn't see any reason that eliminating the genes that made him would be a problem. Then he makes his scientific breakthrough, and turns the biological explanations on their heads. Odd myths--virgin births, Athena born from the head of Zeus--are offered as factual evidence, and a heterosexual nurse suggests that heterosexuals, rather than homosexuals, are an "endangered species."

When I first read this story, I wrote "Whatever you're doing, you find the stories to justify" on the back of the last page. Ryman shows us some of that story-telling, in the difficult area where gender and sexual orientation run into biology and ethics.—VR

Maul

Tricia Sullivan, Orbit, 2003

Maul alternates between two story lines. One unfolds in a world where most men have been wiped out in a series of "Y-plagues," and those that survive are kept penned up like the fragile endangered species they are. They are let out only to compete in large-scale competitions for sperm donor rights by engaging in extreme sports and other acts of hypermasculinity. The second story is set in a suburban shopping "maul" dominated by gangs of armed adolescent girls. Tricia Sullivan exhibits a sharp parodic wit and a healthy irreverence toward gender role expectations both traditional and feminist; her satiric tone in reminiscent of some of the best 70's feminist science fiction. Best of all, she is fearless enough to delve into the biology of sex and gender -- a territory that's been all but ceded to the evolutionary biologists for the past few years. This is a fast-paced, hugely entertaining novel with enough depth to reward the careful reader, especially those interested in the issues the Tiptree Award was founded to encourage exploration of. – LS

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