

# Alorette

## The Newsletter of the Canadian Region of SFWA

Editor: Robert J. Sawyer

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SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY WRITERS OF AMERICA, INC.  
CANADIAN REGION

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### EXCLUSIVE MARKET REPORT

## Books in Canada

The March 1993 issue of *Books in Canada* will contain a special report on Canadian SF and fantasy. As part of it, the magazine wants to run several 2,500-word excerpts from works in progress by Canadian SFWA members. If the novel you wish to excerpt has already sold, it should be scheduled for publication no earlier than September 1993, but excerpts from unsold or unscheduled works will be considered, too. *Books in Canada* will pay \$250 for first serial rights to the excerpts it uses. Deadline for submissions: December 31, 1992. Send your excerpts (standard manuscript format, with SASE) to:

Paul Stuewe, editor, *Books in Canada*  
33 Draper Street, 2nd floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 2M3

\*

### CAMPBELL AWARDS

## Delaplace and Sagara

Canadian SFWAns Barbara Delaplace and Michelle Sagara have both been nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

Barbara, who lives in Vancouver, was nominated for her many short stories, including "Legends Never Die" in *The Fantastic Adventures of Robin Hood* (edited by Martin Greenberg, Signet, June 1991), "Wings" in *Horsefantastic* (also edited by Greenberg, December 1991), and "Choices" in *Alternate Presidents*, (edited by Mike Resnick, Tor, January 1992). *Locus* has called her work "lyrical," and *Dragon* says she has "a light, wry touch."

Michelle, who is manager of Toronto's Bakka SF bookstore, was nominated for her "Books of the Sundered" fantasy tetralogy from Del Rey, which began with *Into the Darklands*, published in December 1991. The second volume, *Children of the Blood*, came out in June 1992. *Quill & Quire* says "Sagara is a talent to watch." *Locus* called *Into the Darklands* "a very strong first novel — effective and compelling."

The other Campbell nominees this year are Ted Chiang, Greer Ilene Gilman, and Laura Resnick. The award will be presented at the 1992 World SF Convention in Orlando.

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### SFWA ELECTIONS

## Sawyer Elected

In its 1992 elections, Robert J. Sawyer was voted in as Canadian Regional Director of SFWA. Sawyer is the first Canadian ever to serve on SFWA's Board of Directors.

SFWA's current directors are: **Joe Haldeman**, president; **Sheila Finch**, vice-president; **Michael Capobianco**, treasurer; **Dafydd ab Hugh**, secretary; **Diana Paxson**, Western U.S.; **Robin Bailey**, South/Central U.S.; **A. C. Crispin**, Eastern U.S.; **Robert J. Sawyer**, Canada; **Pierre Barbet**, Overseas. \*

### CONGRATULATIONS!

## Aurora Winners

The 12th-Annual Canadian SF and Fantasy Awards (the "Auroras") were presented June 28, 1992, at WilfCon VIII:

English Novel: *Golden Fleece* by Robert J. Sawyer  
English Short: "A Niche" by Peter Watts and "Breaking Ball" by Michael Skeet (tie, both in *Tesseracts 3*)  
English Other: *Prisoners of Gravity*, TVOntario  
French Novel: *Ailleurs et au Japon*, Élisabeth Vonarburg  
French Short: "L'Enfant des mondes assoupis," Y. Meynard  
French Other: *Solaris*, Luc Pomerleau, réd.  
Artistic: Martin Springett  
Fanzine: *SOL Rising*, D. Larry Hancock, ed.  
Organizational: John Mansfield, Winnipeg WorldCon bid  
Fan Other: David W. New, editing *Horizons SF* \*

### ANNOUNCEMENT

## Change of Address

Robert J. Sawyer and Carolyn Clink have bought a condo. Effective immediately, their new address is:

7601 Bathurst St., Apt. 617  
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## THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

## Selling to the SFBC

by Robert J. Sawyer

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The conventional wisdom is that the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club has no direct dealings with authors or agents, but rather only buys books from publishers. But my friend John E. Stith thinks that his personal intervention — sending a self-made galley of his *Redshift Rendezvous* to SFBC editor Ellen Asher — was instrumental in his first sale to the Book Club.

My own experience makes it even clearer, I think, that the Book Club should not be viewed as a black box, the workings of which are forever hidden from authors. At the Nebula Awards weekend in April 1991, I sought out Ellen Asher and chatted her up about my first novel, *Golden Fleece* (Warner), and my then forthcoming *Far-Seer* (Ace).

She said she had received a paperback of *Golden Fleece* some months ago (a paperback which I had sent her myself on January 17, 1991), and had never officially turned it down, but thought it was too late to be thinking about a book after the paperback was already out.

I therefore thought *Golden Fleece* was a lost cause, but then told her about *Far-Seer*, which had recently sold at auction to Ace. When I said it was hard SF and 85,000 words long, she replied: “May I kiss your feet?” She’s hungry for shorter novels, and for SF as opposed to fantasy. I grabbed my Ace editor, Peter Heck, and brought him over, making sure he heard and understood that Ellen wanted to see the *Far-Seer* manuscript. She said she likes to see novels eight or nine months in advance of publication date, and so we agreed that Peter would send her a copy of *Far-Seer* in October 1991.

When I got back to Toronto I figured, what the heck, I’d send Ellen a stack of reviews for *Golden Fleece*. She was apparently impressed by them, and bought the book immediately, despite it being, by that point, an old title. (Later on, she took *Far-Seer* as well: it’s a July 1992 alternate selection in the U.S.; it’ll be offered a couple of months later in Canada.)

You won’t get rich selling to the SFBC. Both *Golden Fleece* and *Far-Seer* are “alternate selections” (which means members have to specifically order them; main selections are sent automatically unless the member sends back a form). For each of them, Ellen advanced \$1,500. Half of that goes to the original publisher, and the remaining \$750 for each book got credited to my royalty accounts at Warner and Ace. You don’t receive dime one of front money, but eventually you will likely earn some royalties (and there’s no reserve against returns, since the books are sold directly to customers).

The low advance wouldn’t be that depressing, except that Bob Eggleton tells me he got \$1,800 cash up front for the cover for the SFBC edition of *Golden Fleece*. That Eggleton cover was actually a reprint (although the SFBC paid him as if it was a new painting; reprints normally go for half as much, says Bob). His painting had originally run as the cover for the September 1988 *Amazing Stories*, which featured a novelette version of *Golden Fleece* as the cover story. As soon as I’d heard that the SFBC had bought *Golden Fleece*, I sent Ellen a copy of that issue’s cover, along with a note suggesting she use that art instead of the truly awful painting that was on the Warner paperback of *Golden Fleece*. Ellen liked my suggestion, and Bob got the job.

In that same letter to Ellen, I asked if she’d be willing to

re-typeset *Golden Fleece* from my computer disk. I had heard on CompuServe that Michael P. Kube-McDowell had gotten them to do that for *The Quiet Pools*, eliminating the typos in his original hardcover.

At last count, there were almost 40 known typos in the Warner *Golden Fleece* (including nonsense such as “smuggling” becoming “snuggling”). Now, of course, I tried to proofread the galleys myself, but you all know how difficult it is proof your own words. I’m pissed off, because it’s clear that Warner had no one proofread the typesetting at their end at all, although it was run through a computerized spelling checker, apparently, since every typo that got through was such that it turned one valid English word into another. (There is one typo that is a sort of poetic justice, though: cover artist Barclay Shaw’s name is misspelled on the copyright page.)

Anyway, I was embarrassed by the typos and wanted to get them corrected in the Book Club hardcover. The SFBC had no problem with that, and a fellow from their typesetting firm called to discuss the exact details of what they needed the disk to look like (any size or density disk, one file for the entire manuscript, in WordStar, WordPerfect, or ASCII, with open and close quotes distinguished from each other by using paired backquotes for one and paired apostrophes for the other). The transfer went flawlessly.

(Buoyed by this, I pushed hard for Ace to typeset my next book from disk, and finally got them to say okay. I’m proud to report that *Far-Seer* is the first Ace title ever typeset directly from the author’s disk. Ace’s production manager said the whole process could not have gone more smoothly.)

Anyway, the SFBC edition of *Golden Fleece* is lovely: clean text and a much nicer cover than the Warner version. And the SFBC now trims its books on all three exposed sides; they no longer have the cheap “obviously a book-club edition” look they used to have.

It’s nice to have a hardcover sitting on my shelf, and occasionally it’s useful from a business point of view, too. For instance, the Canada Council Public Readings Program pays approved Canadian writers \$200 per reading (up to 14 per two-year period), plus travel expenses to get to the reading venue (libraries, universities, and so on; the reading must be free to the public). The trick is to become an approved writer: you have to pass through a jury process the first time you apply (after that, you’re approved until you croak). Well, I was afraid the juries might look down on paperback publication, so when I applied I sent in Book Club hardcovers of *Golden Fleece* instead. Success: I’m now on the Council’s approved list.

The only potential downside I can see of being involved with the Book Club is that a book is normally considered in print so long as the principal publisher’s edition is available or so long as a licensed sub-edition, such as a Book Club edition, is still in print. My agent, Richard Curtis, suspects that he can get a reversion on *Golden Fleece* despite the Book Club edition (it was a November 1991 selection), but in theory Warner could dig in its heels and say, no, even though we’re not going to do anything further with the book, you can’t have the rights back until our licensing deal with the SFBC expires. A normal SFBC license lasts five years, apparently.

I’ve never seen the Book Club’s contract with Warner or Ace, although at my request, Richard has asked them to provide me with copies. John E. Stith tells me he’s got a provision in his contracts that requires the principal publisher to furnish the author with copies of all sub-rights contracts; I’ve asked Richard to put that into my future contracts.

The SFBC doesn’t automatically provide copies of their edition to authors, but Ellen Asher was glad to send me 25 free copies of *Golden Fleece* just for the asking. \*

## THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

# Teaching SF Writing

by James Alan Gardner

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In the fall of 1991, I found I had time on my hands (my wife Linda had moved to Saskatoon for two years to do her Master's) and I decided that one pleasant way to occupy myself would be to talk about writing. Even better would be to talk about writing and get paid for it, by teaching a course on writing SF.

The obvious place to teach such a course was our local community college, Conestoga College. It offers an extensive program of continuing education courses at half a dozen campuses around our county, and most of the courses are taught by knowledgeable people rather than professional teachers.

To get the ball rolling, I just called the nearest campus and told the switchboard person that I was interested in teaching a writing course. She switched me to the coordinator of the Communications Department and we arranged the meeting. For the meeting, I was told to bring my résumé and a course outline.

By looking at the college's course catalogue, I saw that it offered two types of course: 10-week courses with one two-hour night a week, and one-day courses with a single six-hour class. I drew up course outlines for both types; those outlines are included later in this article. I printed the outlines on a laser printer and made several copies before I went to the meeting.

The meeting was short and simple. The coordinator's basic question was, "Why should we offer an SF course when we already have a course on fiction in general?" My answer was that my experience with local writers groups suggested there were a lot of would-be SF writers in our region, particularly in the 16-30 age set, and that SF writers faced a number of problems unique to the genre. I expanded on that a bit and apparently the coordinator accepted that I knew what I was talking about.

The coordinator decided to try a one-day course to test the waters. If there proved to be enough demand, we would talk about a 10-week course later on. The standard fee for first time teachers was \$150, and I didn't see any reason to try to get more — I couldn't claim extensive teaching experience or a big name in the genre. We'll see if the money goes up after I've taught a few courses successfully.

We did all the paperwork on the spot. This consisted of writing a brief blurb for the course catalogue (I should have done that ahead of time) and writing up a formal list of objectives: what the students should have learned at the end of the course.

The college wanted a minimum enrollment of four students and I wanted a maximum of twenty. It turned out that I got twelve people, which made us all happy. I asked the college to ask the students to submit the first three to five pages of an SF story or novel they were working on, submissions to be received at least two days before the class. I wanted to keep this request low-key so that people didn't feel intimidated, but I also wanted to see what level the students were writing at. Unsurprisingly, they were all over the map: the best one was close to publishable, while the worst had absolutely no concept of what a story was or how to tell one. I wrote constructive critiques for each submission before the class, in an effort to identify specific problems for each writer and to suggest some approaches to overcoming these problems.

For the class, I prepared a hand-out that gave useful references (like *The SFWA Handbook*) and the names/addresses of the major SF magazines. I also brought in a stack of books so the students could see what they were looking for, including the *Handbook*, *Locus*, my favourite science references, *Literary Market Place*, and so on. Finally, I made copies of the first two pages of one of my own manuscripts so the students would have a sample of standard manuscript format.

The first class (February 1992) went fine. I'm scheduled to teach

the same course on another campus in a month or two, and I intend to follow the same outline, with only some fine-tuning for balance. Readers can certainly feel free to borrow/adapt any parts of my outline for their own use. Have fun with it ...

## WRITING SF STORIES

(Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror)

In the past 25 years, the SF genre has grown from gee-whiz gadget tales for adolescents into one of the most important fields of fiction today. The quality of writing has improved dramatically, the range of themes has widened, and the readership has increased. Unlike other genres, SF continues to provide a healthy market for short stories. In addition, the professional SF magazines pride themselves on being open to new writers; it is often said that it is easier for unpublished writers to "break in" with SF than with any other type of story.

However, the SF field also contains many pitfalls for the unwary. It's true that SF stories share many of the requirements of all fiction: the need for memorable characters, for engaging plots, and for a clean prose style. But SF also has requirements unlike any other type of writing: the need to develop original stories that believably portray distant places and times; the need to describe and explain unfamiliar worlds, where magic may work, monsters may roam, or alien societies may pursue strange goals; the need to create convincing non-human characters; the need to extrapolate current social or scientific trends, to understand the effects of environment on people, and to ask oneself, "What if ...?"

I have given a number of talks about SF writing to local groups (the Canadian Authors Association, the Guelph Writers' Group, Kitchener Public Library) and have found that many people in the community are interested in the subject, from high-school students (who may read nothing but SF) all the way to seniors (who fondly remember the classics of SF's "Golden Age," 1930-60). I also believe I have the credentials to teach the course:

- I'm a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America (the American organization for professional SF writers) and SF Canada
- I'm a graduate of Clarion West, a highly regarded SF writing workshop in Seattle, and have been invited to do public readings of my SF work in such places as Banff, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Niagara Falls, NY
- I'm the winner of the 1989 Writers of the Future award (an international contest for unpublished SF writers) and the 1990 Aurora award for Best English-Canadian SF Short Story, not to mention first prize in the 1990 Canadian National One-Act Playwriting Competition
- I've sold a number of SF stories to professional markets in the U.S. and Canada, and am currently at work on a fantasy novel
- I've been a professional technical writer for more than 10 years, and have published two university-level text-books on computer science plus a large number of other computer books and manuals
- Before becoming a technical writer, I made my living tutoring university students in math subjects for more than four years; I've also taught short courses on playwriting to university theatre groups

## A 10-WEEK COURSE

My preferred approach would be to run this as a 10-week course, with a maximum of 20 students. Each week will cover a different aspect of writing SF stories, and students will be given short assignments that let them explore the points made in class. In addition, students will be expected to write at least the first draft of an SF short story by the last session in the course. Some or all of

these stories will be critiqued by the class and the instructor, in order to familiarize the students with workshoping techniques. Weekly sessions are outlined below. While many of the topics are relevant to fiction writing of all kinds, we will always concentrate on how the principles can be applied to writing SF in particular.

#### Week 1: What is SF? What is a story?

- Overview of the course
- Getting to know the class and what they expect from the course
- Discussion of the nature of SF, its sub-genres, its great writers
- Aspects of a story: action, plot, tale, text
- What are we actually trying to accomplish when we write a story?
- Basics of manuscript preparation

#### Week 2: Story structure

- Examination of basic story structures and their components: characters struggling with problems
- Story components: milieu, ideas, characters, events
- How internal character development matches or conflicts with external action
- How much do we plan, how much do we discover as we are actually writing?
- Two styles of plot: leading up to a crisis vs. showing the aftermath of a crisis
- How reincorporation of story elements can provide satisfying endings

#### Week 3: Idea development — finding, construction, performing, polishing

- The stages of writing: finding, construction, performing, polishing
- How to find ideas
- How to construct stories around ideas
- Scenes and centrepieces; telling the reader to watch for High Noon
- Extrapolation of events, settings, oddities
- Creating characters who have a personal interest in the events
- Digging past clichés

#### Week 4: Good story openings

- Grabbing the reader immediately
- Techniques of opening: dialogue, action, exposition, description
- The dangers of early metaphor
- How SF readers read: abeyance and deduction

#### Week 5: Characters

- What are characters and why do we care?
- When characters shouldn't be memorable: suiting the amount of character development to the character's role in the story
- Characters and internal conflict: people trying to prove themselves, improve themselves, change themselves, find a reason to live
- Creating characters through action and attitude
- The strengths and weaknesses of stereotypes

#### Week 6: Viewpoint

- The tone of voice of the writing
- Third-person narration: omniscient, limited, sigma characters
- First-person narration and unreliable narrators
- Present tense vs. past tense
- Writing with an attitude
- Prithee, sirrah — suiting the diction to the mood

#### Week 7: World building

- How to create a world that readers will believe
- Verisimilitude

- Physics, geology, biology
- Sociology, psychology, anthropology
- Magic and the supernatural: make your rules and stick to them
- Research

#### Week 8: Subgenre survey — problems specific to fantasy, science fiction, horror

- Fantasy — magic systems, clichéd fantasy, how non-technical cultures work
- Hard science fiction — science, cultural change due to technology, feedback between technology and character attitudes, space opera, must predictions be accurate?
- Horror — splatter vs. lurking shadows, showing or not showing the monster, absolute moral stances vs. psychology vs. empty heaven, confrontation of external demons as key to confronting inner ones

#### Week 9: Putting words on paper

- Dramatizing character and exposition
- Show, don't tell (and when to tell things anyway)
- Transportation scenes
- Fight scenes
- Heart-thudding scenes
- Dialogue (naturalism vs. repartee)
- Writing descriptive passages
- Humour
- Suspense

#### Week 10: Marketing, workshoping, conventions

- The professional, semi-professional, and fan markets
- Cover letters
- Workshop pros and cons
- Fandom and SF conventions
- Where to go from here

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### ONE-DAY SEMINAR

Running this course as a one-day seminar would be less useful to students — I think it's valuable for students to be able to discuss writing techniques, try those techniques at home, then bring back their efforts and receive feedback.

However, if a ten-week course can't be arranged, a one-day seminar could be helpful with some advance preparation. I would ask each student to submit the first three pages of an original story (or novel) beforehand so I would have a chance to assess the pieces and build a seminar around them. Such a seminar would address story openings in particular, but I'm sure the openings would provide sufficient material to spark discussion of other aspects of writing such as character building, idea development, exposition, and description of setting.

### FROM IDEA TO STORY

*(Outline for One-Day Course)*

- Overview of course
- Aspects of a story: action, plot, tale, text
- What are we actually trying to accomplish when we write a story?
- The stages of writing: finding, construction, performance, polishing
- How to find ideas
- How to construct stories around ideas
- Extrapolation of events, settings, oddities
- Creating characters who have a personal interest in the events
- Digging past cliché
- Basics of manuscript preparation

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## THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

## Writers Rights Day

SFWA joined with 19 other writers organizations to declare Tuesday, June 9, 1992, as "Writers Rights Day."

"We are fed up with canceled contracts, late and poor payments, killed assignments, stolen royalties, and the host of other abuses every writer in America faces today," said Jonathan Tasini, president of the National Writers Union. "From this day on, the publishers will face an increasingly united front of writers."

A variety of events calling for the fair treatment of writers were held across the United States, with the highlight being the signing and release of the "Declaration of Writers' Economic Rights:"

## DECLARATION OF WRITERS' ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Writers have always defined civilization. We have always been the voice of society, expressing its ideas and desires and the pain and sweetness of life.

As journalists, book authors and screenwriters, we monitor and describe and enlighten the human condition. We explain the intersection of collective experience and the individual.

As novelists and poets, we are the cartographers of the psyche. We tell the stories that link people across continents and oceans.

As technical writers, we help people control and manipulate the ideas and tools of society.

But we are in economic jeopardy. Many writers' earnings place them well below the poverty line. We must bear the costs of our own health insurance and retirement plans. As publishers consolidate around the globe, our situation grows more precarious every day.

## WE DECLARE THE RIGHT TO:

**Fair Compensation:** Compensation must rise from its current level which, for most writers, has not changed in more than a decade. We demand timely payment, not at the whim of publishers who make a profit on interest earned from our money. Unfair royalty schedules must be restructured.

**Uniform Contract Standards:** Writers must have a recognized and negotiated code of minimum standards set forth in written contracts.

**Broader Protection for Uses of Writers' Work:** With the advent of new technologies, writers' control over ownership of their work is eroding. Writers must have the right to control and negotiate compensation for new uses of work, including electronic databases, CD-ROMs and software. Writers should also receive compensation for subsequent uses of their work, including library lending, as is the case in a number of other nations.

**Legal Protections:** Fair negotiations between writers and the multinational publishing industry are impossible unless writers have the right to negotiate as a group. Without restricting the right of publishers to make legitimate editorial decisions, no writer should be discriminated against on account of race, age, sex, sexual preference, disability, national origin or religion.

...

*Excerpts from Esther B. Fein's report on Writers Rights Day in The New York Times for Wednesday, June 10, 1992:*

"Forget General H. Norman Schwarzkopf and his multi-million dollar book advance ... the average writer in America earns less than \$9000 a year for writing, representatives of several writers' organizations say, and is ignored and abused by publishers.

"... Several groups representing writers declared yesterday 'Writers Rights Day' and staged a two-hour protest in Grand Central

Station, where they signed a Declaration of Writers' Economic Rights and urged writers to band together to defend themselves," Fein reports.

"You read in the papers about the multi-million-dollar book deals that a handful of writers are fortunate enough to get," Erica Jong, president of the Authors Guild, told about 200 people ... "You don't read about the canceled contracts, the writers sued to pay advances back with interest, the writers who worked 4 years or 7 years or 10 years only to have it orphaned when some fancy new Japanese or German conglomerate bought the publishing house and fired the editors who were the authors' only contact.

"The protest brought together several writers' groups that had steadfastly disagreed on how to best help authors [including] ... the Authors Guild, the National Writers Union, the Published Authors Network, the Romance Writers of America and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

"Ten years ago you couldn't have gotten all these groups together," said Susan Cheever, the author. "But the economic situation has become so bad that writers have no other choice but to work together."

Fein further notes that organizers "compared their efforts to the organizing of the Screen Writers Guild in the 1940s," saying they look forward to the day when publishers "would contribute to health insurance and pension funds for authors, the way movie studios must now do for screenwriters."

Fein points out that the NWU "addressed one of the chief complaints of its 3200 members — the difficulty of getting health insurance" by affiliating with the UAW.

She noted that WRD participants "want to establish minimum standards for writers' contracts, including higher and more timely payments, making publishers share the cost of libel insurance, and giving writers fair amount of time to return advances on canceled projects."

She quotes Barbara Raskin saying "We have a lot of work to do among writers, building their consciousness and convincing them that together we have power that we don't have individually. Many writers are afraid of alienating publishers and won't stand up for themselves." \*

*[Special thanks to Robin Rowland for submitting the information on Writers Rights Day.]*

## STATE OF THE ART

## PoMo Prophet

by Andrew Weiner

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Originally published in SF Guide

It's no longer necessary to plow through obscure academic journals to stumble upon the word "postmodern." These days, it's become part of the vocabulary of middlebrow journalists everywhere, from the home-decor magazines to the Sunday supplements to the women's glossies. Still, when our forefathers built the science fiction ghetto, they used some heavy-duty soundproofing. For all the rising babble outside our walls, "postmodern" has rarely been uttered within them.

Well, true, there was an article by Michael Swanwick in *Asimov's* magazine a few years back, billed as a "Guide to the Postmoderns." But Swanwick mostly seemed to use the word as a flashy synonym for "baby boomer." So it was good to see Kim Stanley Robinson confronting the subject head-on in a stand-up presentation for the literary wing of SF fandom at a recent Readercon.

Now, Robinson is an extremely erudite speaker. He knows a great deal about, for example, literary modernism, architectural theory, and art history. He has even made his way through Fredric Jameson's

seminal and legendarily unreadable “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (*New Left Review*, July-August 1984, for those who care about these things). He has done some very hard thinking about postmodernism, and how it relates to science fiction. I applaud his efforts. But I think he is wrong in some of his conclusions.

Put simply, Robinson sees the history of SF as a time-delayed replay of the evolution of general literary culture. Thus the mainstream novel evolved from 19th Century realism (Dickens, Zola) to 1920s Modernism (Eliot, Pound) to contemporary Postmodernism. Science fiction made a late start on realism with Campbell in the 1940s, reached Modernism with the New Wave of the 1960s, and is only now developing its own postmodernism.

It’s an elegant argument, but I think it glosses over some important details. To paraphrase one member of the Readercon audience: “What about Barry Malzberg?” (Robinson conceded that he was not that familiar with the relevant Malzberg “texts,” but stuck to his own model).

What about Barry Malzberg? I am here to tell you that the Readercon fan was right and Robinson wrong. The first true prophet of SF Postmodernism was Barry Malzberg.

To justify this statement, I will have to provide some kind of operational definition of postmodernism. So here goes. Cultural postmodernism can be identified by a number of characteristics, including:

- A sense of burn-out: the feeling that there’s no future, that everything has been done, that nothing lies ahead except repetition or degeneration. (Jameson called this “inverted millenarism.”)
- A heavy reliance on parody, irony and pastiche.
- Obsessive self-consciousness and self-reference.
- The appropriation of previous styles and props, both as an ironic strategy and as a way of avoiding commitment to the “meaning” of a new style.
- A sense of the cultural artifacts it is displacing as meaningless and exhausted.
- Loss of faith in the programs and manifestoes of the past.
- A disbelief in “progress.”
- The use of the above strategies to create apparently desirable and highly marketable artifacts.

Using this set of characteristics as a guide, it’s become clear why, for example, William Gibson is an epitomal postmodern SF writer. With his skillful use of pastiche and collage, allusion and irony, remaking and remodeling, Gibson practically defines the po-mo moment: just as his astonishing arc from would-be literary outlaw to high-fashion commodity defines the po-mo career path.

There is, it must be said, a serious problem with this type of definition, to the extent that it makes no useful distinction between serious artistic or literary intent and nearly unconscious hackery. Thus Laurie Anderson is po-mo, but so are New Kids on the Block; *Robocop* is a po-mo movie, but so is *Police Academy 5*; the AT&T building is po-mo, but so is your local shopping mall with the rococo triangular arch and the green facade; Gibson is po-mo, but so is W.T. Quick. And so on.

Indeed, the current commodification of SF, the blatant ransacking of the past in the rash of “shared world” and sharecropper novels, is very much a postmodern phenomena. Ultimately, it becomes difficult to distinguish between, say, Robert Silverberg writing *Dying Inside* (prototypical SF po-mo with undoubted literary intent) and the very same writer recycling Isaac Asimov and C.L. Moore. But that’s postmodernism for you. In the end, it all blurs together.

It’s also true that postmodernism existed long before anyone gave it a name. Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, John Fowles ... all these guys, in their different ways, were prototypical po-mos. So was David Bowie, back when he was ripping off Lou Reed riffs and Anthony Newley moves, not to mention rummaging through old Heinlein novels. And so, of course, was Andy Warhol.

Within SF, that prototypical role was filled earliest, and best, by Barry Malzberg.

It was John Fowles who made the (thoroughly po-mo) observation that, unlike the Victorians, “we can no longer believe our own fictions.” But it was Barry Malzberg who first climbed up on the wall of the ghetto to tell us that we could no longer believe our own *science* fictions.

Of course Malzberg had both precursors and important contemporaries in making this point. I think in particular of Philip K. Dick, a kind of *idiot savant* of SF postmodernism, an obsessive deconstructor of dumb SF tropes, with a genuinely visionary sense of our cultural disintegration (there is very little in, say, Jean Baudrillard that Dick did not say first). It is very hard, though, to believe that Dick did any of this self-consciously.

I should also mention Michael Moorcock’s Cornelius Chronicles; Robert Silverberg at his most experimental; Norman Spinrad, at least on occasion (if *The Iron Dream* is not postmodernist, then what is?); Zelazny’s charming early pastiches; J. G. Ballard with his shattered media landscapes, unquestionably an immediate influence on Malzberg; and no doubt many others, too.

But none said it louder or more often than Malzberg.

One could mention the obvious high points, such as *Galaxies* (as that astute Readercon fan mentioned *Galaxies*), *Beyond Apollo*, or *Herovit’s World*. Along with a handful of other titles, they are indeed among Malzberg’s best and most lucid work: obsessively self-conscious and self-referential, endlessly parodic, thoroughly exhausted. Kim Stanley Robinson should spend some time with these texts.

But in a sense Malzberg’s true po-mo genius comes through most clearly in his lesser works, in the dozens of nearly interchangeable books that he rushed on to the paperback racks in the early 1970s masquerading as “science fiction.”

Consider, for example, a book like *On A Planet Alien* (1974). Looks like science fiction. Talks like science fiction. “They came to civilize barbarians — and were made into gods” (front cover blurb); “FOLSOM’S PLANET — An Alien Land Yet So Familiar” (back cover blurb).

One imagines the innocent SF reader sidling up to it at the paperback rack. And yet one needs to read only a few pages to discover that it is not science fiction at all, but instead an initially convincing but ultimately disquieting *simulation*. Much the same could be said of nearly all Philip K. Dick’s mid-career work. The difference is that Malzberg was, one has to believe, doing it deliberately.

I do not mean to suggest that *On A Planet Alien* is a great novel (although it’s by no means a bad one). I doubt that even Barry Malzberg would suggest as much. But it is a superbly po-mo piece of commodity-making

Malzberg was far ahead of his time in this. Today the paperback racks are filled with almost nothing but simulations of science fiction (and fantasy) novels, both conscious and (largely) unconscious.

In the end, of course, Malzberg’s simulations proved a little too disquieting, or unsatisfying, for the general SF readership; and Malzberg withdrew from the field, perhaps exhausted with his own exhaustion.

None of this should be understood as a commentary on Malzberg’s “literary” merits. For the record, I should say that I admire his work greatly, although not without reservations. There were simply too many books like *On A Planet Alien*, and too few like *Galaxies*. And yet his vast output is shot through with flashes of brilliance. And when he was good he was *very* good. See, for example, if you can find it, the short story collection *The Man Who Loved the Midnight Lady* (Doubleday, 1980), much of which bears comparison with the best of literary short fiction.

Of course, the great thing about postmodernism is that one can no longer really make such comparisons. With the right packaging, one could easily imagine Barry Malzberg re-emerging as, say, the new Paul Auster or Steve Erickson. Or, for that matter, the new Elmore Leonard or Jackie Collins. These days, who the hell knows? One wishes him every success, anyway.

None of which has anything to do with what Malzberg had to tell us, so many years ago: that we can no longer believe in our own science fictions. Did we listen to him? Of course not. Was he right? Absolutely. And more so, every day that goes by. \*

## MARKET REPORT

## Canadian Small Press

by Edo van Belkom

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So you're an SF writer trying to peddle your stories in Canada. Good luck. If your not writing hip first-person present-tense mainstream stories about women finding themselves after some momentous upheaval in their lives, you haven't got a prayer placing a story in the literary magazines like *The Fiddlehead* or mass-market magazines like *Saturday Night*.

Most Canadian SF writers are aware of *On Spec*, the magazine produced in Edmonton by the Copper Pig Writers' Society. It doesn't pay enough for SFWA to consider it a professional publication — pay rate is roughly two cents per word — but it is Canada's top market for SF.

Many writers are bothered by *On Spec*'s use of an editorial board, instead of a single guiding editorial voice, and its insistence that manuscripts be submitted without bylines. My most-recent experience with the board was exasperating. A story came back with the note, "Two of our readers really liked this story." Well, what does it take for a story to get accepted, unanimity? And whose editorial slant is guiding the magazine?

If you have a story that you'd love to see published in Canada, there are alternatives. Most are fanzines paying from half a cent per word or just providing free copies. But if you've got a story that doesn't quite fit the usual genre publications in the U.S. but that you think has some merit, you can always publish it in a small zine and then shop it around in the "Best of" anthologies — more on them in the next column.

Magazines that publish horror include, *On Spec*, *Lost*, and *The Crosstime Journal*, while SF is published in *On Spec*, *The Crosstime Journal*, and *Senary*.

*Senary*, "a literary journal of the fantastic," which was introduced at Context '91, has been slow producing its second issue but it has just recently been printed. The perfect-bound once-yearly "anthology" includes work by SFWAns Charles de Lint and Mary Choo. Payment is a share of royalties.

*The Crosstime Journal* is produced in Calgary by the Imaginative Fiction Writers Association. *The Journal* recently had an update in *Scavenger's Newsletter* saying they weren't receiving enough publishable manuscripts.

*Lost* is a zine produced in New Hamburg, Ontario, that publishes horror — no SF or F — and the editor is looking for surreal, disturbing tales, with plenty of mood and atmosphere.

A magazine for writers of traditional and high fantasy is *Bardic Runes*. *Bardic Runes* pays a half-cent a word and is looking for short stories of 3,500 words or less which must be set in pre-industrial society.

Take your pick —

- *On Spec: The Canadian Magazine of Speculative Writing*, Copper Pig Writers' Society, Box 4727, Edmonton, Alberta, T6E 5G6.
- *Senary*, Ste. 105 - 9650-20 Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, T6N 1G1.
- *The Crosstime Journal*, Colin Remillard, ed.; Larry Gasper, assoc. ed.; Norman Dupuis, poetry/non-fictioned.; 4603 1233-9 Ave. SE, Calgary, Alberta, T2G 5H7.
- *Lost*, Adam Thornton, ed.; 67 Seyler St., New Hamburg, Ontario, N0B 2G0.
- *Bardic Runes*; Michael McKenny, ed.; 424 Cambridge St. South; Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 4H5. \*

## MEMBER INTERVIEW

## Karen Wehrstein

by Robert S. Hadji

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**Robert Hadji:** I'd like to start by examining the development of your first two novels, *Lion's Heart* and its sequel, *Lion's Soul* (Baen, 1991).

**Karen Wehrstein:** I've been working on various forms of this project for sixteen years. I was 13 when I had the initial idea for the character. I thought it was going to be a short story, but it got longer, and it got longer, and it got longer. And as I grew up and changed, it changed. Over the past few years I've managed to work it into something that, to my delight, I've found marketable. I was originally planning to write it as three or four books. I sent Baen the first book, and the outline, and they wanted me to jam it all into one book, as they felt at the time that this was the only way they could market it. So I did. But the final page count in print would have been 782 pages, so they split it in two. That's better than asking me to cut a third, which is what I was afraid of.

**RH:** *Lion's Heart* is a fantasy with a very realistic texture — evident in the depth of characterization and the tactile detail of the world you describe.

**KW:** I should put this world into context, because it's not just my world anymore. I merged my fictional setting with S. M. Stirling's and Shirley Meier's. While we each have distinct visions of our fantasy worlds, we all realize that the three of them fit conveniently together. That was, in part, a social thing, and also probably a marketing thing, to Baen's advantage as much as to ours. Steve and Shirley had already joined theirs when they did *The Sharpest Edge*. We were originally going to call this whole milieu the "World of the Earned Fire," but Baen prefers "Fifth Millennium." That logo is going to appear on future books in the series.

**RH:** What about the project you are currently working on?

**KW:** Well, that's *Shadow's Son*, a sequel to Steve and Shirley's *The Cage*. It's a triple collaboration between us which will come out sometime in 1991. It involves the lead characters from *The Cage* and Chevenga from *Lion Heart*.

**RH:** Would you care to discuss the actual collaborative process?

**KW:** Well, basically you lock the three writers and three computers in an isolated cottage up north and do nothing but split wood, swim, and write until it's done. We have a kind of division of labour, with each of us doing the scenes that feature a particular character. We get Steve to do descriptions because he likes doing them — and battle scenes, because he likes doing them even better. We copy all the files around on three computers. It's actually quite difficult to organize.

**RH:** Maintaining consistencies of plot and characterization, certainly, but also cultural details and such ...

**KW:** Oh, yes. For instance, we maintain the "Earned Fire Supplemental Dictionary" as an authoritative source for the foreign language words when we spellcheck. We basically use the published works for reference — *Lion's Heart*, *Lion's Soul*, *The Cage*, and *The Sharpest Edge*. Collaboration has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages in this case, with three people who have very different ideas, is that you do get the inconsistencies, the richness, the scope — particularly in characterizations, but I guess it's true in more respects

than that. Having three heads is better than one. It's great. We have arguments. A couple of times somebody has come to somebody else and said, look, I'm really frustrated. My character disagrees with another character, or feels bad about something, or frustrated, and I've said, take what you feel about the character, make the character feel it and put it in the book. And that's how it goes.

**RH:** Whereas solo work ... ?

**KW:** *Lion's Heart* was a very simple process: one person sits down at a computer and cranks it out. I had the story so set in my head, having worked with it for sixteen years, though it changed all over the place, that I didn't write it in order. I wrote it scene by scene, whatever scene I felt like writing that day.

**RH:** Are there more books waiting to emerge from that world?

**KW:** Not in Chevenga's life — I killed him off. But he's going to weave in and out as a character in other books. Sometimes as a major character, sometimes as a minor character. And there's another thing about point of view here: the final version of *Lion's Heart* was written all from Chevenga's point of view, but there are other things I want to say about him, that I can only say from other narrative points of view. So hopefully I'll get the opportunity.

**RH:** I'd like to explore your development as a writer.

**KW:** When I was a child I thought that I was going to be an artist, because I drew obsessively until I was about 12 or 13. I realize, looking back on the artwork that I did then and more recently, that they are all illustrations to stories. I was trying to express stories through drawings, because I didn't know how to write yet. At 13 or so, I got good enough at writing to satisfy myself somewhat. And then I started writing in earnest. By 14 or 15, I had a rather long novel about Chevenga. I went through high school, working on it, taking creative-writing courses. I had a creative-writing teacher called Natalie Walker and she predicted that I'd be in print someday, and she was right! So I'm going to send her a copy first. I was very closed about my writing then. When I first started out, it was hidden under a pillow when my parents came in the room. That's how I felt about it.

**RH:** That's interesting. This began as an inner world, a personal vision, yet gradually you moved from telling this story for, and to, yourself, to wanting to tell it, to share it, with others.

**KW:** Yes. I showed an excerpt from what's now *Lion's Soul* to that teacher. She loved it. She gave me a wonderful mark, encouraged me. That kept me going.

**RH:** But you chose to study journalism, rather than creative writing, at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. Do you feel this was beneficial?

**KW:** Oh, absolutely. I think it improved my stuff. I tore it all down to nothing, and built it all back up again, using the good stuff from before and the good stuff from journalism. And the result is somewhere in between. I think that having those two things has enabled me to be versatile with style. I don't have one style. I use several different ones. There's the style in which I wrote *Lion's Heart*; that's not my style, that's Chevenga's style. When I'm writing Chevenga, I'm roleplaying — I'm pretending that I'm him telling his story. Other stories mean other styles, though there'll always be a similarity.

**RH:** Your "post-graduate" studies, so to speak, have been pursued in a Toronto writers' workshop, "The Bunch of Seven." Do you feel this has supplemented your formal training?

**KW:** If anything, I would say the Bunch was my best training ground in writing fiction — fantasy fiction. Every member offers critiques of works-in-progress, and we constantly give each other encouragement, which is every bit as important. We meet somewhere between every

three weeks and monthly. We bring in submissions — a chapter, a short story. We used to read them aloud at meetings, but now we exchange manuscripts, either over the Bunch of Seven computer bulletin board system or hand to hand. We realized that what was written to be read by the eye maybe should be critiqued that way.

**RH:** The Bunch has also used less conventional techniques, at least for a writer's workshop. You do roleplaying, blocking out physical action, say, in fight scenes. But you also use this to explore emotional states of characters. Somewhat like "method" acting exercises, to make things more real.

**KW:** Yes. We do all of the above. The nice thing about roleplaying is that you end up with things that have a more plausible feel to them and a broader scope. Sometimes I've written scenes verbatim from roleplaying. More often, they get modified. As far as roleplaying collaborations go, sometimes it doesn't work that way. Steve, Shirley and I, for *Shadow's Son*, aren't roleplaying at all.

**RH:** What would you consider formative influences on your writing?

**KW:** When I was about 13, I saw a book on my mother's shelf that I knew was going to change my life: *The King Must Die* by Mary Renault, about Theseus, one of my favourite heroes in Greek Mythology. I got very fascinated with Greek Mythology when I was a kid. And Mary Renault is the number-one influence. When I was a teenager, I decided that I was going to teach myself to write by shamelessly aping her in every conceivable way. Back then, if I wrote something, I knew it was good if it sounded like Mary Renault.

**RH:** Which other writers influenced you?

**KW:** Gene Wolfe. I discovered *The Book of the New Sun* back in, oh, 1980. I was incredibly impressed by his style and his command of language. Oh yes, and his delightful strangeness. And James Joyce, and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Ursula K. Le Guin, for style, content, treatment of cultures, all of the above. I have a particular weakness for *The Left Hand of Darkness*. And Kurt Vonnegut. I've always liked him for his absurdity, his contemporary weirdness.

**RH:** What about Joseph Campbell? Specifically, *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*.

**KW:** Well, I wouldn't call it a literary influence. I mean, I've read *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* recently enough to go, okay, here's the epic format, here are the rules, how much does my story fit in. I did notice that what I've written does match up in a lot of ways. But I wasn't consciously writing a classic epic, just what I felt was right.

**RH:** You have a ghost story in the Canadian anthology, *Shivers* [Seal Books, May 1990]. What else have you got in the works?

**KW:** The next solo work I'm going to submit is a novel called *Kal*, which is sort of an urban fantasy. And what it is, which I didn't think it was going to be, is humour. I wasn't trying to write something funny, it just happened that way. A post-technological person, who is a kind of wise-ass, gets flipped through time into a contemporary person's bathroom. We did a bunch of roleplays on what happens. There's two and a half chapters so far. I've also got an idea for a hard science fiction story; I'd like to bring a certain grace to writing hard science fiction. \*

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*Robert Hadji has collected fantastic literature for almost 30 years, has worked as a specialist dealer/consultant in the field, and has had articles published in The Penguin Encyclopedia of Supernatural, Horror: 100 Best Books, Twilight Zone Magazine, and American Fantasy. He also edited the Canadian dark fantasy magazine Borderland and contributed articles to its forerunner, Miriad.*