



1. The next book for discussion is Thomas Malory's MORTE D'ARTHUR. At a panel at Lunacon last year, Malory was described as "grossly anachronistic," but still one of the most enthralling classical retellings of the Arthurian legend. A full report on the panel is at the end of this issue. [[-ecl]

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2. A news story this morning comes from a New York prison (I don't remember which one) that has a new policy that it would be now be totally non-smoking. What makes it interesting is that it comes right on the heels of a big bruhaha in Manhattan over a new ordinance that all restaurants would be non-smoking. The restaurant association fought that one, and I am sure that the prisons used all of the same arguments to fight this one. The restaurateurs said that they thought it was an inconvenience to tell customers that they had to leave if they wanted to smoke. Well, that goes double here. How many of us are going to want to go past a prison and see killers and hardened criminals standing outside the front door smoking because smoking is anti-social behavior and they cannot go into a prison if they are going to smoke. The wardens, I am certain, think that all of their repeat business will go up in smoke, so to speak. Once their regular customers discover that they cannot smoke, they are just not going to want to come back. The whole prison business may well slack off. Wouldn't that be terrible for them? It is going to get to the point were people are not going to want to go to the prisons any more. On top of this it creates a confrontational situation. It is asking the guards to act as policemen and to enforce rules. This is the same prison system that a few years ago decided that as punishment they were going to force prisoners to turn off the TV and to read. Next they are going to insist on quiet. Won't that be inhumane? Prisons will become a quiet, smoke-free place to read. Please, oh please, don't t'row me in dat briar patch. [-mrl]

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3. Member Boris Sidyuk of the Zoryany Shlyah SF Club reports on the

## Strannik Awards:

On March 25, 1995, in Krasnoyarsk during SibCon special genre awards STRANNIK (WANDERER) found their owners:

- SWORD IN STONE - for fantasy: Mikhail Uspensky. THERE, WHERE WE ARE NOT PRESENT. Den I Noch magazine, 1994.
- MOON SWORD - for horror: Andrey Lazarchuk. MUMMY. Terra Fantastica, 1993.
- MIRROR SWORD - for alternate history: Vyacheslav Rybakov. STAR SHIP "TSESAREVICH". Neva magazine, 1993.
- SWORD OF RUMATA - for heroic-romantic SF&F: Sergey Lukyanenko. THE KNIGHTS OF THE FORTY ISLANDS. Terra Fantastica, 1992.

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The nomination years were: 1992-1994. [Information received from Sergey Berezhnoy. Translated into English by Boris Sidyuk.]

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4. QUARANTINE by Greg Egan (Harper, ISBN 0-06-105423-2, 1995 (1992c), 280pp, US\$4.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Greg Egan is the major rising star of Australian science fiction. His short fiction has appeared in the United States before, but only now is this, his first novel, being published here.

On November 15, 2034, a giant "bubble" with a radius of 12 billion kilometers appeared around the solar system. (This is described as being twice the size of Pluto's orbit, so these are American billions rather than British billions, but it's still more like three times the radius.) Private investigator Nick Stavrianos was eight years old at the time and remembers what the night sky looked like when it had stars. Now it's 2067, and Laura Andrews has disappeared from Hilgemann Institute in a sort of reverse "locked room" mystery. These two events seem unrelated, but of course they

are not.

If nothing else, QUARANTINE is unique for its excessive product placements of non-existent products. For example, the narrator writes, "The mod I use, CypherClerk (Neurocomm, \$5,999), also provides a virtual larynx option, for complete two-way security." This is cute at first, but does wear after a while. Luckily this doesn't get too much in the way of the story.

In trying to solve the mysterious disappearance, Stavrianos discovers he is also digging for deeper answers. Though the story seems to veer off into fantasy, or possibly surrealism, I think Egan wrote it as straight hard science fiction, and an argument can certainly be made that it is. Egan's depiction of New Hong Kong on the Australian continent is well-done (except maybe for the product placements, though I can understand why he included them). Stavrianos is an interesting character, perhaps a bit cleverer than seems likely, but not so prone to wildly lucky deductions as to be unconvincing. And unlike a lot of books of this sort, whose endings appear to move much faster than the pace of the rest of the book, QUARANTINE maintains a measured (albeit not necessarily sedate) pace throughout.

I suppose that the idea of the bubble reminds people of David Brin's "Crystal Spheres." They may have been the inspiration, but Egan goes in a different direction entirely, and does it very well.  
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5. The Once King: the Historical Arthur (a 1994 Lunacon panel with Nancy C. Hanger [mod], John Boardman, Marina Frants, Roberta Gellis, Debra Meskys, and Jane T. Sibley)

Two books were recommended at the start of this panel: THE ARTHURIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA by Norris J. Lacy (1986, 649 pages) and THE KING Arthur Companion by Phyllis Ann Karr (1983, 174 pages) though they are more about literature than about the historical Arthur.

(Actually, there is a 1991 revised and expanded version of the Lacy called THE NEW ARTHURIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA and having 577 pages--and, yes, I know that's \*fewer\* pages than the "unexpanded" version.) Meskys's magazine NEIKAS had a special Arthurian issue which is out of print now, but scheduled to be reprinted.

The panelists talked about their experiences with the various literary versions of the King Arthur story. Boardman said he was turned off by Tennyson's IDYLLS OF THE KING, but turned on by Malory's MORTE D'ARTHUR, even though he agrees that Malory is grossly anachronistic. Meskys liked T. H. White's ONCE AND FUTURE KING, which she described as being a sort of "alternate timeline." She also recommended Mary Stewart's trilogy CRYSTAL CAVE, THE HOLLOW HILLS, and THE LAST ENCHANTMENT. As she put it, "Stewart really makes it believable." Gellis said she liked Malory and Coleridge. (If Coleridge did something on King Arthur, I can't find it.) Silby likes them all.

Boardman sees Arthur as an archetype. When the panelists discussed why other "heroes" were not as popular, Gellis said that Arthur was more sympathetic than most, and gave the example of Charlemagne as an unsympathetic hero. (Boskone XXVI in 1989 even had a panel titled "Why Not Charlemagne?"--I will not include all my comments on that here!) Sibley notes that Arthur is also British, and hence "home-grown" to most English-speaking readers. (I suppose this displays a certain Anglocentrism in her/our view of the world. This tendency of preferring "home-grown" heroes explains why the Golem of Prague is much more popular among Jewish science fiction fans than among the fannish population at large.) Gellis thought that in addition, the Arthurian story is more cheerful than the French epics or other contenders. And the panelists noted that one of the major sources of strife in the Arthurian legend, Lancelot, was a purely literary invention, and was probably added by the French. In terms of the historical Arthur, Lancelot represents a merging of Gawain and Mordred, particularly as described in Geoffrey of Monmouth's version from the 12th Century.

Hanger sees Arthur's appeal as being a noble yet tragic hero in a story of love and betrayal. For all his virtues, Arthur also has human faults. She sees him as a "continuation" of the Irish hero Cuchulain (pronounced "koo-hoo'-lin"). (It was noted in this

discussion that Irish--Gaelic--is even less phonetic than English, and that the Norse idiom for "It's Greek to me" is "He's talking Irish." On the other hand, I am a bit sceptical of someone who pronounces Celtic as "sel'-tik.") Classic Greek tragic heroes had their fatal flaws (Oedipus had his hubris, for example), and even the gods had their fatal flaws: Achilles's heel, Baldur's susceptibility to mistletoe, etc. One of the causes of Arthur's downfall was his seduction by his half-sister, which was a literary addition, not by Malory, but some time around the 13th Century. One theory proposed was that this was added to suggest to the reader/listener that you always have the seeds of your own destruction within you. (And Galahad was added because the Church didn't want the "morally questionable" Lancelot as the hero.) Another theory was that the incest motif was added because Mordred's claim to the kingship was originally as Arthur's sister's son, a lineage valid in Celtic law but not in English law. Therefore, English readers/listeners of the Middle Ages would not be able to make sense of Mordred's claim to the throne, so a direct claim was added.

Panelists discussed the many cultures that have a sleeper or sleeping king who will return in times of trouble (the Golem again?). One person mentioned Fletcher Pratt's LAND OF UNREASON as having this theme; someone else suggested that Jesus was another "sleeping king." From this thought someone else was reminded that Arthur also ordered a slaughter of infants, which most people thought would not make a popular story (though it was claimed James Morrow was the ideal person to write it).

Hanger said one of the main problems with studying Arthur is the proliferation of badly researched books that are attempting to jump on a bandwagon rather than increase the knowledge of the subject. Even respected authors seem to have gone astray. From the beginning, William of Malmesbury's account differed from Geoffrey of Monmouth's. More recently, Norma Lorre Goodrich claimed that the French word that is translated as "bird" in most texts should really be translated as "altar" (or maybe it was the other way around). The Round Table was a 19th Century addition to the legend (I'm not sure this is correct--at least one source I read attributes it to Malory in the 15th Century), yet that is what most people know the best. The romance between Guinevere and Lancelot is from Cretien de Troyes in the 12th Century. And who knows what else people think of that was only introduced in the Lerner & Lowe musical? (Certainly the reference to stopping for a cup of tea was grossly anachronistic there!) But since even the earliest sources dispute the dates of Arthur's life and death, it is impossible to be completely accurate. One theory is that some of the events attributed to Arthur may actually have been connected with a son or nephew also named Arthur.

On the other hand, do we really want or care about historical accuracy? Gellis thinks not. What we want, according to her, is to fulfill the goal of the Society for Creative Anachronism--"to celebrate the Middle Ages as it should have been."

There was a dispute between Gellis (who claimed the sacrificial elements in the Arthur story were Christian) and Sibley (who claimed they were Celtic). As a disinterested bystander, I might claim that they are both, because the concept of sacrifice, and in particular sacrifice of/by the leader of the community, is a common thread through many religions. (I think the panelists also mentioned this, and suggested THE GOLDEN BOUGH by Sir James Frazer as a basic text about comparative religion; Frazer is best known for his theory of the sacrifice of the priest-king as archetypal across cultures.) Boardman described this as "government strong enough to protect us and just enough not to oppress us"--one can't help but feel that he has a definite political agenda here, but the concept of a "benevolent monarchy" has appealed to people in the past.

All this is similar to the tales of Robin Hood, which tend to be added to, modified, and moved around in time. Another similar hero who transcends time and space seems to be the Flying Dutchman, also found as Peter Rugg and even Charlie of the MTA.

The movie KNIGHTRIDERS was given as an updating of the Arthur legend worth seeing. Marion Zimmer Bradley's MISTS OF AVALON got favorable mention, as did William Mayne's EARTHFASTS, and also THE CHILD QUEEN by Nancy MacKenzie, due out in August. [-ec]

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In general, the art of government consists of taking  
as much money as possible from one class of the citizens  
to give to the other.

--Voltaire

