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## Letters of Comment

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# Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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# LETTERS of COMMENT

Dear Tina and Christine,

Many thanks for the latest *Mythic Circle*. I was particularly taken by Richard Sharpless' "Dialogue Between the Sun and the Wind." It's everything a good story should be—evocative and rich in underlying resonances. The setting made me interested in exploring more of this culture and its mythic matter. And certain lines literally sing with their perfect phrasing.

Intellectually, I suppose I can understand what Hood is trying to say in her Columbus poem, but it irritates me all the same. I find it difficult to see anything good in all this celebration of Columbus, considering how he's the symbol of, not brave exploration and calm reason, but rather an era of genocide and repression that continues to this day. This isn't something to celebrate, but rather to mourn.

I enjoyed other parts of the magazine, of course, but the above two pieces are the ones that drew the strongest response from me. Do keep up the good work.

Until again, cheers,

Charles de Lint  
Ottawa, Canada

*But there are dangers in screening art for political correctness, which are too well known for me to belabor them here; think of the recent spats over funding from the National Endowment.--TC*

Dear Christine and Tina,

The *Mythic Circle* #12 surprised me by beginning with three stories which I would put into the horror category. This is not exactly a complaint, but I tend to think of TMC as an outlet for a different type of supernatural fiction -- the type that the larger genre magazines rarely if ever publish. I do like to see variety in TMC, but I think it is nice for it to concentrate on stories that don't stand much of a chance in more narrow-minded markets.

The stories that best exemplified the spirit of TMC for me in this issue were "The Seduction of Yahu-El Beshintav," "The Seventh Bellkeeper of Vienna," and "Dialogue Between the Sun and the Moon."

Richard Sharpless' "Dialogue" won me over immediately with its Polynesian setting, which anyone who remembers the excerpts in TMC from my novel *Voyage of the Honour Bound* will know I am partial to. "Dialogue" was very nicely executed also, with an authentic native folk-tale feel to it.

David Sparenberg's "Seduction" suffered from evil being described in too cliched and political (as opposed to moral/spiritual) a fashion, and the ending of the

story seemed somewhat incongruous with its Judeo-Christian set-up. However, both the story's basic concept and its style were a delight.

Perhaps my favourite story in the issue was Dennis Bock's "The Seventh Bellkeeper of Vienna." On the down side, I think it could use a once-more-over polishing and a little more emphatic conclusion. Short of a word change here or there, though, I thought it lovely both in its telling and in the tale it chose to tell. The entire story had for me a real (and rare) unexpectedness to it, and it was also rare in its marvellous failure to possess one of my pet bugaboos -- that oh-so-boring ultra-contemporary sensibility that most modern genre work (even that set in past eras) is riddled with. Thank you, Dennis, and keep it up.

As to the poetry in issue #12, I very much liked Janet Reedman's "The Brides of Sealmen," and in fact thought it by far the best thing I've read from her. I have seen real growth in her poetry over the years in TMC.

David Sparenberg's poetry I found semi-enjoyable and semi-frustrating. I like the Biblical allusions in "Exile and Mending," but thought portions of the poem unnecessarily obscure; it's fine to write poetry that is meaningful to oneself personally, but if the reader can't ferret out the meaning, it's kind of like speaking in tongues without an interpreter -- edifying to the speaker but not the listener. One of the problems with this poem for me, as with the first section of "Rites of Union" (the second section of which is a *wonderful* love poem), was too many abstract meanderings about the nature of life, love, etc. Concrete images or symbols are so much better at getting truths even about abstracts across, and that Sparenberg himself can do this well is evidenced by the best sections of his poems.

Sarah Beach's "Il-Lyran's Song for Midsummer" contained some beautiful word-play; if this is an example of her current writing, she is really gaining a mastery at using aural effects in language to create atmosphere. My one quibble with the poem is that because she has chosen to cast it in tetrameter, the short lines keep forcing her to leave out articles -- to say "sun" instead of "the sun," etc. This sort of thing can work, but needs to be used very sparingly; here it seemed a little overdone and therefore distracting. I might suggest to Sarah that she try recasting this poem in pentameter so she can stretch a little more.

Still no word on when my story accepted by *Pulphouse* will be coming out (the magazine is getting off to a slow start), and I haven't managed to sell anything else in the last year-plus since that piece was accepted. Your long-time readers who have followed my husband's and my saga of having and losing children might be interested to know that we have

adopted another baby boy, Gawain Roderick, who is now five months old. *One* is a handful -- I don't know how Tina does it . . .

Angelee Sailer Anderson  
Westminster, CA

*Congratulations !!! - TC*

Dear Christine, Tina, Signe, Sarah, Bonnie, Tim, Lynn, Marge, Paul, Linda, Gwenyth, Jefferson, Ramona, Iala, David, Janet, Alex, Mitchell, K.V., Amy, Richard, Dennis and Paul,

Thank you for *Mythic Circle* #12. I heartily agree that it is far easier to point out the flaws than to point out perfections. And top make it even worse, I found when I re-read my notes this time that I was pointing out the same thing as both a flaw and a perfection! The flaw was in "The Bones of Erin" by Linda Buchanan, where I noted "has that neat, satisfying completeness but CLICHES, Stereotypes!! glasses!!!" and the perfection was in "Brides of Sealmen" where I wrote "Stereotype at heart; women are there to have babies. But it all changes in that half-rhyme tides/wives. Only in the whole pattern seen that this is something other than the cliché; the half-rhyme gives a feeling of rightness (not in that it is proper than women who don't have husbands go off to the sea, but that this is what happens to those who are cast out of society). Change sexes." That last was a note to remind myself that I had tried the poem with the sexes reversed. While it is so easy to point out that the use of thick glasses to indicate scholarship in "The Bones of Erin" (or that men think while women garden, and through their instinctivity find what cannot be found my men's logical thought) is cliché, how much harder it is to say why "Brides of Sealmen" does not fall into this trap.

I thought MC #12 was going to be a bring-out-your-cliches number when I began to read Alex McGilvery's "The Rescue", so the twists of the tale were greatly appreciated. Amy Wolf's "Now I will Believe That There Are Unicorns" gave a very unusual view of unicorns. It was, I think, my favorite story in the issue.

"The Sorcerer of Darkstone Tower" is hampered by the number of names and histories which intrude. I offer three solutions -- to let the story grow so that is better proportioned, to prune it, or to remember that something similar was said about *Beowulf* and ignore this comment!

I did like "Dialogue Between the Sun and the Wind." I respect anyone who resists the temptation to over translate (putting what would, in a scholarly translation, make interesting footnotes, into the text.) Some people might not like it for precisely this reason; I detest Henry James because he uses French and German in just this way! But unlike James, I think you make sufficient allowances for those with no experience of pacific

cultures -- I only have a few days on Hawaii, and I think the language is among the most beautiful (and most instantly forgettable) in the world. Hana hou! (which, my phrase book tells me, means "Do it again!")

And because it is so much easier to criticize the flaws, I will end with Janet Reedman's "On the Walls" -- ignoring all the good poetry in this issue, including "Asphodel," which is one of the best pieces of narrative fantasy poetry I have ever read, and K.V. Skene's "Confessions of a Dragon Lady," which gives me more pleasure each time I re-read it.

When I first read "On the Walls," I was impressed by its power, especially the image of life "bursting" from death, but had great difficulty in understanding the last stanza. Is the meaning

"[I am] waiting to feel the life, which

- a) she brings and wreathes upon a written page
- b) is bursting from death like living things brought to life by touch of mage,
- c) is perpetual as spring"

But the poem so far has been descriptive of "she", and I am hesitant to put the "I am" into the final stanza, badly as it needs a verb. "She is..." would seem more natural, but how can she be "Waiting to feel the life which she (herself) brings"?

Replacing "Waiting" with "I wait" or "She waits" would solve the issue one way or another.

I admired PNH's initials.

Pat Reynolds,  
Milton Keynes, England

*Thanks for the detailed, specific comments. They are very helpful for our authors.--TC*

Enjoyed greatly *Mythic Circle* #12 and found it a particularly satisfying mix of prose and poetry with high praise, in particular, to "The Bones of Erin" - a perfectly chilling tale. "Rising In The Night" is another standout.

I appreciate "To Christopher Columbus" at a time when it seems the popular view is to apply late-twentieth century liberal values to a thirteenth century man and thereby pronounce him heinous. I don't understand the kind of reasoning which figures that if Columbus never sailed then the development of the Americas would have taken a radically different turn (i.e., the natives would have continued to live in peace and plenty, the military industrial complex would never come to exist, the slave trade wouldn't have flourished, racism and sexism would have been magically-eliminated, etc.). There is a powerfully tempting human tendency to say, "If only--!" and the "if onlys" we paint are always rosy. But life isn't an A-B test and we can no more accurately project an idyllic America

sans Columbus than we can project a worse America - and while I'm working to make it better I also know with certainty it could be worse.

"The Bike Trail" is a dramatic and powerful story replete with signs and portents but it doesn't gel for me and I have difficulty identifying why not. Maybe because it's hard for me to visualize certain key scenes, described in detail, or it may be my difficulty relating to the behaviors of the characters. Is drunken man's post-injury pronouncement an assessment or a curse? Do his words *change* the course of events or merely predict them? *What* fearful thing do Gretchen and Karin see in Max? There's an accumulation of senseless death and violence but the thread connecting it all to Max isn't comprehensible to me and, ultimately, the ending ("it was at that moment that I went insane") feels like a cheap shot. Can anybody help me out here?

Overall I enjoyed "The Sorcerer of Darkstone Tower" but a few inconsistencies glare out at me; for instance, at the end of page 26 Carik "hurried to his friend's aid" but Carik and Yorman *aren't* friends (at least not yet--) perhaps "employer" or "companion" as a substitute? Are Krollin human? A minor irritant but it isn't clear to me. I do love Tim's illo; the mid-stride captured movement of wizard, crow, and mouse is really great.

"The Seventh Bellkeeper of Vienna" seems more like a tale that should involve Beethoven rather than Mozart, but obviously that's just my personal perception of the composers and the appropriate literary fates thereof...

Lynn Maudlin  
Altadena, California

*I took "The Bike Trail" as a tale of hubris, a character-driven story in which the narrator's violence ultimately lays waste to all about him. For me, the tale would have been more tragic and more powerful had the narrator been more attractive and had he realized his own culpability before the tale's end. As it is, he seems to go insane from pure frustration.--TC*

Dear Christine and Tina,

Overall I was very impressed with *Mythic Circle* #12. My favorite stories were "The Bike Trail," by Jefferson Dukes and "Rising in the Night," by Ramona M. Czer. I have read worse stories in professional publications more than once.

"Rising in the Night" was a moving story. The revelation of the grisly accident took me completely by surprise, and I admired the way Czer managed to tell it humorously without losing the pathos. She has excellent control of her style. The only thing is, I couldn't quite visualize the way that knife would be lodged in the frame of the waterbed, so I didn't quite believe it.

I also admired Dukes' story but I had more problems with it. The central character was interesting

-- the Vietnam veteran who has learned to act swiftly and violently in his own defense regardless of the consequences to others. There is poetic justice in that he is destroyed not through direct misfortune but through misfortune to the people he cares about. (Thus we see that looking out for Number One does not bring happiness even when it works).

On the other hand, the opening scene with the mad Dobermans didn't seem realistic to me. I've never seen mad dogs and I've never seen them shot by police. Since these aren't everyday occurrences, maybe Dukes should explain how they occurred. The Doberman scene also seemed a most unconvincing setting for the beginning of a relationship between two such different people as Kalie and the protagonist. It would make much more sense if they were old friends who bumped into each other by accident.

But most of all I thought it incredible that the hospital personnel would send Gretchen home with an unrelated male who is a casual and short term acquaintance with her mother. Gretchen's hatred of the protagonist seems unmotivated and unnecessary, too; I'd prefer it if her flight to the city and consequent death were brought about by some other cause than her disobedience and mistrust of him. Since being hated by the favorite niece of the woman one loves is a defeat, that aspect wasn't consistent with the idea that "victory can be defeat" which I saw hinted at in the story. To me, it would have made more sense if Gretchen had liked and trusted the protagonist and was somehow destroyed by that trust.

But more than likely, I misunderstand Dukes' premises. I wondered if Kalie's name was meant to suggest Kali (consort of Shiva the destroyer) and whether the three women who looked so much alike (Kalie, Karin and Gretchen) were supposed to be female counterparts of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; Creator, Preserver, Destroyer). If so, I couldn't figure out who was which (beyond Kalie) and could make no further sense of the relationship either. Unless, of course, they were all manifestations of Kali, and their common intention was to destroy the narrator (a conception which would be disappointing in its shallowness.)

Personally I liked David Sparenberg's story "The Seduction of Yahu-El BetShinTav," but I thought it promised more than it delivered. I enjoyed the learned yet colloquial tone. Yahu-El's poetic manner of speech is charming, and the cynicism of the fallen angel Orric is well drawn. However, I thought there was too much telling and not enough showing. What does it mean that "today the devil isn't demonic, he's absurd"? If Yahu-El BetShinTav can make a difference, how will she make a difference? I think some human characters need to react to her spirituality and show what its

-- *LOCS* continued on page 49 --

astonished look of wonder filled his eyes. He held his hand out to her, and she knew he had 'seen,' too. For the second time that day, tears of relief spilled silently down her cheeks.

"Thank you, Connor," she whispered, as she moved to join her husband. "Thank you, my friend."

• **LOCS**, *continued from page 44*

practical implications are. Another thing: in English "Yahu-El BetShinTav" is quite a mouthful and it seems to me that if an author gives a character such a difficult name, it ought to mean something, and that meaning should appear in the story.

I liked the concept behind "The Rescue" by Alex McGilvery, but I wasn't wholly satisfied with the story. I guess I have trouble accepting the premise that characters are created by an author, yet have independent existence and can escape from him. I think I could have enjoyed the story more if the separate characters and their stories had been clearly linked to some psychological conflict in the author's mind (and the characters could thus, explicitly, bring the author into the story and argue with him). For example, if the author's reason for having Darla brutalized was to sell books, Gayle might either try to awaken some finer, nobler side of his personality, or argue about whether such scenes do sell books. On the other hand, if the author wants Darla to be brutalized in order to get revenge on someone in the real world, the characters might try to get him to recognize the unworthiness of these motives. I could accept that device; my characters argue with me all the time.

"The Sorcerer of Darkstone Tower" by Mitchell Diamond had a plot that kept moving. It didn't contain anything too surprising, but the villain was astringently villainous and the *manner* in which he was defeated was unpredictable. However, the ending, which left the incompetent duo helplessly transformed in their mouse and bird forms, did not satisfy me; it seemed more like the punchline of a joke than the close of a fantasy story. The story would have better closure, I think, if the pair either got killed or were rescued. In fact, the story could be funnier and more exciting if Yorman's smarter brother had been pursuing the two of them all along and distracting the villain at the same time. Then maybe he should free Carik but leave Yorman in his mouse-form for awhile, to teach him a lesson. Anyway, I'd rather see it end that way.

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I liked the idea behind Amy Wolf's "Now I Will Believe That There Are Unicorns." Certainly I couldn't have predicted either the middle or the ending. I liked the idea of the secret society, and the scene where the typist disappears is certainly arresting. Somehow, having the invulnerable unicorn beating up the punks didn't quite convince me, though. Imagination doesn't make one invulnerable to punks, does it? How about a situation where the protagonist's change of heart will benefit someone else? Or some explanation as to why the unicorn is working for the secret society?

That's all for now. Congratulations on another fine issue. I look forward to the next.

Gwenyth E. Hood  
Huntington, West Virginia

*Another fine letter from Gwenyth, filled with useful detail. Personally, though, I thought the Jefferson Dukes used the child Gretchen in "The Bike Trail" as someone whose reaction accurately mirrored the taint in the narrator. If everyone around the narrator were supportive, the author's perspective might be lost. Readers?--TC*