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## Letters of Comment

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### Abstract

Letters from readers in *The Mythic Circle* #9

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Mythic Circle; Mythopoeic; Letters of Comment

### Authors

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sented in.

Magazines fold every day from lack of support -- that is undeniable. Yet, I think that I would rather go out with a flourish, striving for the best, than fade away like a shriveled balloon. Simply put, don't circle the wagons until the arrows start flying...

If the avowed aim of MC is to be a writer's workshop, then professionals should be kept as far away as possible from the inner workings of this magazine. I, for one, have always maintained that writing is something which you teach yourself, and have never found much value in articles on writing by 'real writers.'

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Some of these questions are hard to answer if you like the way things are going.

I'm not too picky about quality of printing...The content is the most important thing...there are a lot of boring slick magazines out there.

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More interviews!

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Mythic Circle is unique - it stands between and above the regular fantasy mags and the pagan publications that want readers to BELIEVE any mythology they publish. Keep up the good work!

This is sort of by way of a LOC, but I have only a general comment to make. I, too, dislike "free verse." To me it seems rather like a cop-out. Several years ago, as a teenager, I sent in a poem that, looking back, had several forced rhymes. I forget which mag I sent it to but I remember this: instead of "work on it" or some such thing the editor advised me to recast it in free verse. Is this what free verse is? The scribblings of those who feel real poetry is too difficult to write?



## LETTERS OF COMMENT

Thanks for the latest MYTHIC CIRCLE. What I enjoyed the most was the workshop interview with P.C. Hodgell. I love this woman's work and this is the first piece I've seen on her by way of profile/interview/etc., so it was much appreciated. I've filled out the "cirvay", but if you want my vote for what I'd like to see more of, it's that kind of thing.

I was never involved in workshops as an aspiring writer, but have been to a few since. Two points came up in that interview that I can think are of the utmost importance. The one is how attacks can completely discourage a sensitive writer (imagine if Hodgell's first workshop had been like that) and the second is that long-lasting closed workshop groups really do tend to sound like one another after a time--enough so that one would almost wish the by line on their work to read by "such and such collective." The solution to the latter was brought out in the discussion--bring in new blood. The solution to the former is more difficult: you have to believe in yourself.

Much as I have sympathy with anyone treated poorly in a workshop, or getting some vitriolic rejection letter, if that person really wants to be a writer, they're simply going to go ahead and be one. The ones that fall by the wayside...I hate to say it--but they just couldn't have wanted it badly enough. The stories didn't NEED to come out of them; they weren't DRIVEN. Those latter two points are what separate the professionals from the aspiring writers and I'm not talking about sales.

Wish I had time to say more, but them old deadlines keep zooming up on me.

Charles de Lint  
Ottawa, Canada

*Even if Charles weren't a prolific pro fantasy author, he would still be an incredible correspondent. I can't figure out how he manages with the same 24-hour days all the rest of us have, but if I could, I'd sell it and become rich!*

Recently I have become quite involved in non-linear mathematics at UCSD. You've probably seen the fringes of this science in the mandalic fractal geometry pictures several magazines have published. This mathematics is an evolution in human abstraction which quantifies the tangible and intangible using the same language. In essence, there is now proof of the Jungian concept of archetypes. It's called the "butterfly effect", better known as: sensitive dependence on initial conditions. Supposedly, a butterfly flapping its waif wings in Peking can have the ultimate effect of causing a catastrophic storm a month later, irrespective of dramatic events.

Years ago, when I first began writing fairy tales, I was afraid to learn its mechanics. The thought being that by understanding it, I'd lose it. That's never been the case. And now, after having quantified fairy tales in the same way a scientist scrutinizes chemical reactions, I'm even more in awe of the underlying, interactive components to the universe that cradles me.

Joseph Campbell, just before he died, postulated that the reason there's so much violence in the inner cities is due to a lack of a viable folklore. Humans living in close proximity irrevocably need an underlying mythology to enable them to interact with a stressful environment. Traditional mythologies (and the other components of folklore) is like booting a computer with DOS (IBM). It gives the human mind an unconscious way of dealing with life. Without it we're maladaptive; often creating patterns of being aimed at immediate gratification but which do not help the long range survivability of the group. That's why clearly ecological motifs are often found in many Native American and other world aborigine cultures. There is an unconscious wisdom to these myths which promotes long range survival. The stories are rich and enthralling to listen to such that children will be imprinted with them. It's really nice to see a publication which promotes this tradition....Again, good luck with MYTHIC CIRCLE.

Bent Lorentzen  
El Cajon, CA

*CL--With all due respect to Campbell's memory, attributing inner city violence to a lack of folklore is a rather disingenuous way of overlooking economic (and demographic) realities. Humans living in close proximity need space, they need food, they need something to do with their time. Gangs have plenty of folklore among them (why do you think "The Crips" are so widespread?) -- which glorifies violence, We vs. Them, and magic talismans that provide "invincibility" against the enemy's guns.*

I have some things to say about the comments my story A HARPY'S LOVE drew in issue eight.

First of all I'm rather surprised that such a simple tale with such a simple style would draw so much fire? It was only meant to be a bed-time story, not some pedantic, over-blown epic of moral fantasy.

I'd like to address those who commented on my use of the term "Dena". Would it have been more of a clue if it were spelled DeNA? It's an anagram for DNA, with an 'e' stuck in for the sake of pronunciation. I'm really sorry, and feel like a dreadful failure because I didn't communicate this to my readers.

I know Miranda's explanation of this was far from complete, but I was trying to keep it in the context of her character. I suppose the narrator could have filled in the gaps, but the story was already too long, and I had to cut something.

Those who didn't like my style were perhaps closest to the true mark. I compress so much that it makes it jerky and halting in nature. But it does have one compensation, I manage to fit quite a lot of story into small spaces. Though A HARPY'S LOVE was the longest contribution in issue seven, it also had the most events that were given in detail.

Now, I come to the ending, and the fact that Bryon knew about Nardia from the start. OK. Here goes: I generally don't like tragic endings in fantasy, because I've been lead to understand that a good writer gets his characters into impossible situations and then devises a clever way to get them out. A sad ending only does half of this. And though I'm not saying there are no situations for the down-beat finally, I don't think A HARPY'S LOVE was the stuff of grand tragedy. I could have had Nardia drown in the tar pit, but I just didn't want to. And, in order for Bryon to know that he would have to sink the rope so that she could grab it with her claws, he had to know about her avian qualities.

I will not say anything about anyone else's work in this letter. After all my cry-baby belly-aching any positive comments would appear sarcastic and negative ones as spite, so I'll just say that I think MYTHIC CIRCLE is the best publication of its kind, and leave it at that.

#### MY REVIEW

Some die from lack of wealth  
Others from lack of love  
If one dies from lack of publishers  
Then his words soar within but not above

And what I got  
Is that heshe is not  
One for poetry,  
If my words abound  
on the common ground  
Then I ask but forgiveness of thee

Tales unadorned with metaphor and lace  
Stripped to set a faster pace  
Don't seem to appeal to many a taste  
Except one

We all have saviors, they keep us from ill  
And mine-came like cavalry charging from Brook-ville

With 'Mother Waters' I'm traced, to a loftier place  
So that for one moment my fable seems fair,  
And it does seem odd,  
Larry gave not a nod  
To the much praised 'Cinnamon Beare'

C.R. Schabel  
Knightdale, NC

*One of life's realities is that different people respond differently to the same stimuli. "A Harpy's Love" merited both praise and criticism in the LOCs column but it seems to me you heard only the critical voices and, for that, I'm sorry. I think one of Mythic Circle's best features is our LOCs column: giving every reader and opportunity to respond and every author a chance to see what his/her readers liked and didn't like about the work. Christine and I are quite aware of the sensitivity of authors and we're very careful not to print or encourage LOCs that are cruel. At the same time, the authors need to consider the criticism and weigh whether it's valid or not. If you feel that your work is beyond criticism then Mythic Circle is not the market for you.*

*As for Dena/DeNA, obviously nobody "got" it. That tells you, as the author, something valuable.*

I'd like to respond to several of the points brought up in the LOCs by Angelee Anderson and Joe Christopher in issue eight concerning the folktale feel of "The Tobacco Seekers." Both that story and "The Finishing Place" are faithful to the Cherokee myths in plot outlines (though I had to work with three different versions of the story of the origin of tobacco to come up with what I considered to be the most dramatically satisfying combination). What we have left of the original stories is, I suspect, pretty bare bones compared to what the listeners were able to enjoy in the days when these takes were fresh and new. I have not changed the content of them so much as I have fleshed them out with details and some character development. In doing so, however, I have felt constrained--out of respect for the Cherokee people--to retain the flavor and spirit of the originals as best I could.

Much as I enjoy visiting the world of Cherokee mythology, however, I have always felt as if I were a privileged guest in someone else's culture. The Nine Worlds of Norse mythology, on the other hand, truly feel like home to me and, since I am of Northern European stock, I have not felt a constraint against elaborating on tantalizingly incomplete stories in the Eddas or even creating altogether new ones. The Cherokee stories clearly are retellings,

but I'm not sure that label can be applied properly to any of the Nine Worlds tales. "The Troll Boy" and "The Blood Red Rune" certainly are not, and the only hint I had for the Freyja-Odin love story was a cryptic reference in the Eddas to Freyja weeping golden tears for her husband, Od, who often goes away on long journeys. "Loki Bound" uses the least new material, but the vents he refers to are drawn from any different myths, and letting Loki tell his own story in a "stream-of-consciousness" mode presents a new and different perspective. Is "Loki Bound" a retelling? I really don't know.

The lack of female characters in the Cherokee stories reflects the originals. Female characters are active participants in all the Nine Worlds stories--some nasty, some spunky, some wise, some beloved, some exploited. They continue to play important parts in the other Nine Worlds stories that are as yet unpublished--in one of them the two principal characters are both female, with the males assuming secondary roles.

As for the simplicity of style, I think it reflects as much as anything the fact that I have come to literary storytelling from my experience as an oral storyteller. Of necessity, the latter must paint her/his word pictures with broad strokes and let the audience fill in the details from their own experiences. Is this such a bad thing to do either in storytelling or literature? I think not, for it frees the listener/reader from being a passive spectator in someone else's world and permits him/her to share in the experience of co-creating a new world. Therein, hopefully, we can help each other to stretch our imaginations.

Douglas Rossman  
Baton Rouge, LA

*Thanks for the insight into the Cherokee tales. Style is clearly one of the critical bugaboos. Some people like floral, some people like sleek, some people like choppy. Personally, I've always had a hard time with Flannery O'Connor but I know lots of folks who are simply riveted by her style. I figure you do what you do and hopefully find your audience.*

"Temple" by Tom Raley: I like this story because Tom avoided the temptation to overstate his point. The writing is smooth and conducive to easy reading.

"Love for Emily" by John Patrick Wall: The story is well presented. John creates the situation with care and makes sure that we knew the rules. I laughed at the ending, but I'm not sure whether I think it's cheating. I was expecting a solution arising

out of the rules laid down by John. I have this feeling that the maze was solved by putting in an extra door. That of course may have been John's intention. If I can suspend disbelief to accept Emily as a medusa, why can't I accept Owen as a dwarf?

"Stones of Mordus" by Paul Nolan Hyde: I agree with Christopher, I'm mystified. Perhaps "The Pillar, Seat of the Seer" will illuminate me. I look forward to finding out.

Poems by John Grey: I found the first two poems both struck a chord somewhere. In 'Predictions' I'm not sure but that I agree with the kings.

"Opaque Crystal" by Patrick McGinn: On the whole I enjoyed the story. There are some problems with paragraphing which chop up the flow of the writing a bit. The first time I read the story I thought the protagonist's name was "Regret," which I felt was nicely ironic.

"Death Deceived" by Joyce Rattray: I found that while the elements were there, the mood was lacking. I'm not sure how to deal with this, perhaps more foreshadowing or more description. I found the ending somewhat abrupt. It left me hanging, wondering "What next?"

"Leopard Face" by Walter Lide: It is certainly true that the western Christ has left many non-western peoples hanging in limbo or worse. I like the use of the totem animal, but I wondered whether the end justified the means. The ending carried no hints of the perhaps dangerous obsession which gripped Sangara in the beginning. The last paragraph is a gem.

"The Cause and Effect of Daydreaming" by Lawrence Weiner: I found this story to be depressing. Joe was afraid to grow into his wings, and allowed a recalcitrant kid to destroy his dreams, such as they were. I would like to have seen the dream a bit dreamier, or the bracketing portion a bit more real.

"The Sage and the Tiger" by Marjorie Maxwell: I am curious about the antecedents of the story. I thought that Buddhism was a path drawing one away from the world and action. In which case the tiger would have been left to work out his own salvation, or not. If I am wrong, well then I have been edified. I did enjoy the story, especially the irony that conscientiousness carried the burden of continuing conscientiousness.

On the whole I enjoyed issue eight thoroughly and look forward to the next. My wife, who also enjoys the magazine, but hasn't read this one yet, was especially impressed with the handcoloured cover. Bravo!

Alex McGilvery  
Stephenville, Newfoundland

The MYTHIC CIRCLE #8 was an exceptionally impressive issue. The fiction was consistently excellent and the artwork striking.

A few more specific comments: I enjoyed reading "The Opaque Crystal" by Patrick McGinn. The character Reget was well-developed and the confrontations between the demon and him were interesting. I found the writing itself to be very skillful. I would have liked to learn more about Frin and the demon, but this did not take away from my enjoyment of the story. What I did have a problem with was the crystal in Reget's boot. Aside from the unreasonableness of this requirement, which I can't judge, I couldn't accept a stone of that size being able to fit in his boot. And if the boot was large enough, wouldn't he position the crystal on the top of his foot, where it would do less damage than underneath? Could some other device be used to suggest that Reget must suffer, such as a greater emphasis on the difficult environment in the wasteland?

I thought "The Leopard Face" by Walter Lide was well done. Although Sangara's transformation to she-cat was predictable, I especially liked one description of the change, which was very effective.

I know nothing about the mechanics of publishing, but the print in my copy of #8 was poor in quite a few places. Many thanks to all who commented on "Another Point of View."

F. Harris  
Westfield, NJ

I was distressed when I saw the outside of the new issue, first with the new format and secondly with the hand-colored white cover. From the inside the new format is great but please go back to a color cover. Also for art it would be helpful for reproducing if the drawings could be inked over. If the artist doesn't want to ink the original and erase the pencil marks a tracing paper overlay can be inked and then photocopied giving the same results.

I was very pleased to find Elizabeth Hillman's work in this issue. I had first read her work in Janet [Reedman]'s SILVER APPLE BRANCH and was suitably impressed. I've kept a look out for other pieces of hers.

I'm happy to announce something for the Brag Page. I've recently made my first professional sale to Marion Zimmer Bradley's SWORD AND SORCERESS VII anthology. It was a short short entitled "The Thorny Path." She also expressed interest in another story of mine...I was surprised that there

were no deLint brags. He has plenty, including one piece which mentions you, Chris...

I echo Joe's suggestions to send free copies to the editors of the Year's Best anthologies. Terri Windling's address is given in Scavenger's Newsletter as one of the anthologies. *[This has been done already. CLJ SCAV's also reviews publications and is refreshingly consistent with timely news (and it's a monthly!). Also a listing is gratis...*

I dislike Cirvays in general but I'll answer part of yours in this informal way. Rather than articles on writing by professionals maybe we can get LOCs from them commenting on stories...If we get some pros connected with the magazine it could help with publicity...By the way appearing every four months is called tri-quarterly, as the Northwestern publication.

Please keep the magazine straight fantasy. It is sad how few fantasy places there are. But no book reviews please other than short brag blurbs.

Lawrence Schimel  
Brookville, NY

*So one is thrilled with the handcolored cover and one put off and one general complaint about the quality of print... I suppose I should explain here that MC#8 was copied xerographically onto 11x17 paper, which is problematic for two-sided copying of a large job: the build up of static electricity makes it quite difficult to get good, unwrinkled copies. We had originally arranged for a color cover on heavier stock but the copy shop backed down on us, due to the difficulty they were having with the white stock. It also took a week to reproduce, not to mention that Christine and I did all the collation by hand. I colored the covers because it was better than sending them out plain white. Needless to say, we won't do that again! For more on details like printing, etc., read the editorial!*

I just finished reading the stories, article, poems and letters of comment in #8 and was left with an impression of "heaviness" -- almost gloom -- that I didn't find in the other issues of THE MYTHIC CIRCLE that I've read. Even the interview (roundtable) seemed to center around P.C. Hodgell's bad experience with a poor writers' workshop. But this is not to say the stories and poems were poorly written.

Tom Raley's "Temple of Bougledesh" was one of my favorites. The mood and pace seemed well handled. One small (picky) complaint. For some reason the phrase "as she could not believe..." jarred me both times I read it. It didn't fit the mood

of the story. "Could not believe her eyes" would seem to indicate that Katherine saw something more startling or unexpected than a plushly furnished room.

I also liked "The Stones of Mordus." It was another good introduction to a novel and definitely kept me reading and has me interested. Is the song of the Pillar coming up?

My favorite poem was John Grey's "Horse and Rider." I liked the sense of wonder -- his contrasting myth with science. His other two poems, "Predictions" and "Swan Song" were also good. I enjoyed "Predictions" ending. "...kings breathe more easily, relieved that there is no future."

Patrick McGinn's "The Opaque Crystal" and Marjorie Maxwell's "The Sage and the Tiger" were both well told, but I felt they were a little too "preachy." I realize this is subjective criticism but I would rather a story stressed the STORY and the message came more naturally from it. I DID like the stories, however, the mood and description were handled in both of them.

A story that I had mixed emotions about was "The Leopard Face" by Walter Lide. I liked the way the story started -- the scene was set well and the characters were well defined -- but the ending came too suddenly. Where Misha says, "Not so fast..." the story seems to quit being a story and becomes a journal of events (though I DID like the last line). I also had a problem with the language in a couple places. When Tanato says, "Looked like a pagan idol from the old religion, it did," it sounds like an Englishman talking rather than an African. It jarred me. Also, Misha's line I mentioned earlier, "Not so fast," seemed a little out of place -- I felt she would be a little more proper. (This is where the story seems to get too "business-like.") I also had a problem with the talk about the strangers and their White God. I kept wondering "What happened to them?" "Why aren't they helping fight the Olambromen?"

"Death Deceived," Dwight E. Humphries' three poems, "The Gift of Sibyl," Elizabeth Hillman's poems and "The Cause and Effect of Daydreaming" all added to the "gloom and doom" impression that I mentioned earlier. "Death Deceived" was well written but was morbid (personal taste again). Elizabeth Hillman's "The Man in the Machine" was stark determinism, which is about as gloomy as you can get. This poem could be contrasted with Grey's "Horse and Rider."

Douglas A. Rossman's two stories presented me with another problem. He obviously knows more about the Norse mythology than I do. I've always considered the Norse gods to be cold-hearted but with a kind of fatalistic nobility. Rossman succeeds in humanizing them (makes them warmer-hearted) but it seems he loses their nobility in the process.

It's almost as if he trivializes them. I like the characters, especially in "Freya's Tears," but I have trouble reconciling them with the Norse gods.

As far as the layout in #8 goes, I like the 11" x 17" paper and staples in the center but the other way was fine too. I DID like the columns being justified to the right in the other MYTHIC CIRCLES better -- it gave the pages a "fuller" look. But that's also not that big of a deal.

My favorite illustrations in #8 were the horse on page 18 and the "Journeyqueen of Cups" illustration on page 53. I was also glad to see Bonnie Callahan and Cindy Rako return. Tim Callahan's art was good as usual, but I'm beginning to look for a really dark, solid line in one of his illustrations.

Sorry to sound so critical, there was a lot I liked about #8, even if it doesn't sound like it here. Looking forward to #9.

Ron Blizzard  
Ventura, CA

I liked this issue as usual, but my long silence was caused by a problem I was half-hoping would be solved by the appearance of another issue. Cowardly as ever, I wondered if someone else would notice/deal with a possible -- dare I ever say it? Visions of lawyers making hundred buck-an-hour phone calls rise to haunt me -- plagiarism. Lawrence Schimel's delightful poem in issue #7, "Camelot Station," garnered well-deserved praise. The poem stuck in my mind -- so much so, in fact, that when I purchased a book this summer (INVITATION TO CAMELOT, ED. Parke Godwin, Ace 1988) and read John M. Ford's remarkable poem "Winter Solstice, Camelot Station," I experienced distinct *deja vu*.

Going back and rereading Mr. Schimel's poem, I wondered if he might have read the Ford poem and was perhaps unconsciously inspired by it. The Ford poem is also a train/Round Table analogy. True it is much longer, and more playful in tone, but right at the beginning is contains the line: "Where all knights, regardless of their station of origin or class accommodation, are equal." This sounds very like Schimel's line "The Roundhouse makes all knights, regardless of their station of origin or classes of accommodation, equal." Ford's poem, by the way, has been nominated for the World Fantasy Award -- a first for a poem, I believe. *[It won, too -- I was there! -CL]*

That aside, I enjoyed the issue as I said above. I loved Tim Callahan's cover; the man has an incredible sense for the grace of the human body. My favorite was the "Freya's Tears/Loki Bound" pair. I was delighted with the way the two were placed

together -- quite a contrast in both content and tone. Rossman has a consistently clean style yet it rarely goes flat. And the illos were superlative.

I would have liked "The Cause and Effect of Daydreaming" if the story hadn't fallen apart at the end. Maybe it's just me, but the man arguing with the kid so long, then allowing the kid to have final authority before he wimped out gave me a "So what?" reaction. Too much like Life in the 80's, I guess. So my second favorite was "The Opaque Crystal," which despite some unevenness in plotting and style, had so much energy I raced right through it. Next I liked "The Leopard Face." The popular and simplistic twaddle about the Evil Palefaces and their Terrible White God aside, at least the author was trying for something new and different -- not a glowing-eyed elf or magic sword anywhere in sight. Some of the poetry was interesting; the Hillman pieces, though technically competent, left me cold. I guess I look for joy, or hope, or at least a thought-provoking question in a poem; the "squashed bug" effect might be better stated in another form. Nice artwork throughout, though light. I was glad to see Bonnie Callahan back. Her work intrigues me because she seems uniquely able to convey humor, or pathos, in her figures without getting mawkish.

Mary-Edith Bridges  
Seattle, WA

*CL- As it happens, another reader also wrote to apprise us of the similarity of Lawrence Schimel's and John Ford's poems. We wrote to Mr. Schimel, and here is his response:*

I was waiting for someone to cry plagiarism ever since I had read John M. Ford's poem in the anthology. However I had not read his poem until after mine was already written and I believe you already had it when I read his poem. The idea for mine came while reading a book by Parke Godwin on the way to visit a friend of mine in Philly. The Philadelphia train station was so clean compared to New York's Penn Station and it looks like the inside of a castle. They also had a huge diorama set up with various historical scenes and on the way home I wrote my notes and first draft for the poem. I knew very little about trains, though, and had to take out a few library books to learn more. I also had to re-search the Arthurian legends for more specifics.

It was the first time I had bought my own ticket for a train ride and the AMTRAK had different classes of accommodation to choose from. Class then appeared a few times in the Arthurian matter and it just clicked. The same thing for station, since they announce each station coming up beforehand.

Having read John M. Ford's poem I can see how



far I have to come as a writer. The same idea can be played out in entirely different ways. Although in mine the trains are themselves the knights, while in Mr. Ford's the knights ride in the trains. I would love to have written his but I would not steal his work. Since then I have tried to find as much of his work since I can since it is wonderful. WEIRD TALES recently had another Camelot poem of his in the same style.

I am sorry if this incident has thrown any bad light on you. I did not copy his poem and I thank you for waiting before making accusations...

Lawrence Schimel  
Brookville, NY

*Well, folks - amazing coincidence or unintentional borrowing? What do you think?*

Forgive this letter if it is not as well thought out as usual, but in July I became the joyful mother of an adopted son, Greyson Benedict, who insists in language not to be misunderstood that entertaining him is more important than writing LOCs.

Of the poetry in Issue 8, I most enjoyed "Horse and Rider" and "Predictions" by John Grey for both their imagery and sentiment, and "She of the Lake" by Ann Schwader (by now your readers know how partial I am to sonnets). The poems by Dwight Humphries certainly are unrelievedly grim -- is this person still in his teens by any chance?

"Temple of Bougledesh" by Tom Raley was so intent on preaching that it failed to really tell a story; theme needs to bloom naturally from plot, characters, and images, not overpower them. John Patrick Wall's "Love for Emily" was an amusing tale based on an idea I liked very much, but it read more like a synopsis than a fully developed and detailed piece. It is worth expanding.

"The Stones of Mordus" contained some *really* nice writing stylistically. I especially liked, "His mounting distress welled within him, flooding the lowlands of his soul, inundating reason, a rushing unimpeded tide, drowning all but the most enduring and, thus, highest in him." And also, "Many were the legends of the mighty and of Mordus, the center of all Salasia, glittering in the wrap of the Buckler of Timas like adamant, a city without parallel, a dwelling of lights and perfections..." The image of the opening of the well seen as an eye was powerful. On the negative side, I found the style of the Prologue and Epilogue too affected for my taste; cliché-alarms go off in my brain whenever I see too many capitalizations of words not normally capitalized ("Become," "Finding," etc.), and especially

when they run two normally separated words together, as in "Eversong." The "All there is to be feared is the betrayal of one's self" theme also marked the story as being too pantheistic for my sympathies. This same "finding oneself" tripe (forgive me, but it's my religious prejudice to think that most of us have the quite the opposite problem -- "He that findeth his life shall lose it," etc.) also marred "The Opaque Crystal" for me, and I thought the descriptive passages in the latter story tried a little too hard.

While I'm on the subject of prejudice (I hate to criticize yet a third story for philosophical/theological reasons, but --), "The Leopard Face" thoroughly enthralled me until it reached the part about the "White God and his pale faced Son" (I guess it's not just the Celts). In case Walter Lide is geographically and racially unaware, Jesus was Semitic and hence Oriental, *not* Caucasian; hence also the inappropriateness of labelling Christianity a "Western" religion, though admittedly it has taken firmest root in the West. The moral of "The Leopard Face" seems to be that that we should most decidedly not turn the other cheek, but return evil for evil. (The story complained that the "white man's religion" had made the Umbaya tribesmen soft and thus vulnerable to their enemies; an interesting charge, in light of the contradictory view of some feminists that Judeo-Christianity and its "war-mongering patriarchy" must be forsaken for Goddess worship that there may be peace on earth.)

"The Cause and Effect of Daydreaming" was perhaps the most entirely enjoyable to me of the stories in Issue 8 -- humorously charming, with a rather tragic ending. I'm not sure I understand the moral of it, if it is meant to have one. Is daydreaming really nothing but self-wounding self-deception? Of course it can be that, but many a great work of art too has its genesis in dreams, whether waking or sleeping.

"The Sage and the Tiger" does well to attempt a folk-tale atmosphere, but it needs help stylistically to keep it from falling flat. I would suggest that Marjorie try reading a lot of Lord Dunsany, who spun marvelous yarns set in the East. In the first sentence, "far off remote land" is redundant. The contractions in some places conflict in style with the "thy's" in others.

I enjoyed Douglas Rossman's retelling of Norse myths much better than his Cherokee legends; I'm not sure if this is because they are better done, or because I simply prefer Norse stories to Cherokee ones however they are told. "Loki Bound" gives us an intriguing look into the interior of a character we normally see only from without. As in the last story I discussed, I find modern contractions inconsistent in style with the usage of such poeticisms as "'twas" and "whene'er." I also thought portions of "Loki Bound" a little too expository; therein lies the danger of telling a story entirely through internal monologue.

Regarding comments on my piece in Issue 6, "Ye Cinnamon Beare": Nancy Martsch should try reading the line, "not only because that is the colour his fur was," aloud, and perhaps it would not then sound like a "clunker." The story was deliberately written in an exuberant oral style rather than a literary one. Notice also the slangy verb in the sentence, "'Poof, poof,' went his paws." I would not use this in a more adult and serious story. In response to Gwenyth's inquiries about YCB being published as a children's book, I have had it rejected by numerous American publishers and am now trying it in England.

Thank you to those readers who praised my "Sonnet for a Mystical Son," especially Mary-Edith Bridges. To convey sorrow and joy in words that enable others to experience them as we do, even in part, is surely one important measure of a writer's success.

Angelee Sailer Anderson  
Westminster, CA

*Addendum to Angelee's letter:*

On September 6th, the son Stan and I brought home on one day's notice fell victim to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and bade farewell to the shadowlands of earth. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

*This is one of those situations which stun and stagger. If you're the praying type, please remember Stan & Angelee in this time. We always appreciate Angelee's LOCs, of whatever length, and that she can even think about Mythic Circle these days is pretty remarkable. We hope writing is a balm to her soul; she has written another sonnet for Greyson, her second son lost to this world, and shares it with us in this issue.*

Just received my sample copy (#3) of your magazine. Thank you, thank you, thank you! I absolutely must subscribe to it. ASAP.

I enjoyed the stories and I'm especially impressed by the Letters of Comment. The criticism is concrete, specific, usable, and not at all "touchie-feelie" (used to get the "t-f" sort of feedback in college writing classes in the late '70s and early '80s. Always felt left in the dark after a class).

I love Bonnie Callahan's cover illustration on #3 and *all* of Tim Callahan's-- very professional, and in the style I remember from my "Story Trails" volumes when I was a child. All the illustrations are

volumes when I was a child. All the illustrations are well done.

I'm glad you've got this magazine going. It's the best of its kind I've seen so far, and I've sent for a lot of samples.

*Karen was as good as her word, subscribed immediately, and wrote another LOC on Mythic Circle #8, which follows:*

In reply to your editorial, I think the price of \$11 to subscribe to your magazine is a bargain for what it offers. Those who subscribe get some good reads, a chance to contribute, and good critiques for submitted stories. If you were to belong to a writers' association (as I do) you would have to pay far more to get similar stuff.

As for issue #8:

I hope you continue with such things as the P.C. Hodgell interview. I'm constantly struggling between appreciation for my writing group's comments, and the horrible feeling that my style and "voice" are not sounding like me any more. It's good to know that someone else has experienced this, and that I'm just not imagining it.

"Temple of Bougledesh"-- I enjoy stories--like this one--that are circular (or is it helical?), where the hero or heroine end up where he/she started, but changed in some manner ("There's no place like home...There's no place like home..."). One question though: would Skidbladnir not understand and be frustrated at Katherine's refusal to choose a canister? Especially since he seems to be rather omniscient at the beginning of the story and then smiles knowingly at the end of it.

"Love for Emily"-- a nice chuckle. Although, if I were a remote (especially male) relative, I'd risk a look at poor lovely Em through a mirror...

"The Opaque Crystal"-- another circular story, but Reget's a little too unsympathetic a character for me. He's apparently old enough to be weathered, and--I assume--intelligent enough to be taken on as an apprentice. Yet, he is petulant and foolish in his use of magic as if he were much, much younger and less experienced in life. I understand Reget does have to be a disagreeable sort, but I think I can suffer a young arrogant fool better than an old one. Of course, this is only my opinion. Good theme, though.

"The Stones of Mordus"-- Yes, yes, yes! But, like Christopher, I don't know what becomes of Brint. More to come? Please? I'd like a bit more background on the Betrayer, also, perhaps.

"The Leopard Face"-- Another YES! The only thing that held me up were some modern colloquialisms: "...she made for her secret palm tree..." and "...some distant sound from deep in the jungle latched onto her ears..." They don't go with the rest

of the more traditional- sounding language. Other than that--GOOD story!

"The Cause and Effect..."-- O.K., except I don't think the first paragraph contributes much to the story. It also seems to me that the humor might be a little over-done. Relating the conversation with the little boy is humorous enough. Perhaps the rest could be told in a more matter-of-fact way? I dunno. I do like the ending.

"The Sage and the Tiger"-- Nice. I think I would like it better if he went back to meditating upon flowers and butterflies. That's personal preference only, however; the ending is fine as is.

"Loki Bound"-- O.K., but I felt a bit overwhelmed by the scholarship even though I'm already conversant with Norse mythology.

As for the poetry, most of it I liked. I was especially struck by Elizabeth Hillman's "Sky-Toy." At the risk of being touchy-feelie, I'll say the poem felt like a spider-web. But then, I only read poetry once in a great while, and I rarely write any.

As usual, the illustrations are great!

Thanks for a good issue!

Karen Harbaugh  
Auburn, Washington

*We shall have to see if we can twist Paul Nolan Hyde's arm and get more of his tale out of him. I hope folks notice and enjoy the fact that "Cause and Effect of Daydreaming" has been getting a wide assortment of responses, many of which reverse each other. Criticism is no exact science!*

I really enjoyed issue #8. I also enjoyed #7, and this letter will make a few (belated) comments about that issue too. Thanks for all the hard work you do.

Issue #7: In general very good, and the prose, poetry and illustrations all show excellent quality. I liked some stories better than others but I think that is a matter of taste.

Loved The Swan Chariot. The strong beginning pulls the reader into the story immediately, and the story itself is fascinating and fully detailed, although it does not resolve completely. (The LOC's in Issue #8 indicate that this may be part of a novel. If so, I certainly hope the novel is published!) The writing style is exquisite - almost musical - and perfectly suited to the material.

I enjoyed Ye Cinnamon Beare too. A nice balance between the sweetly chivalric story and the whimsical setting and style. The illustrations have the same balance.

Considering the response in the LOC's of

Issue #8 I say this with some trepidation, but I liked Gary Barwin's two - Poem and Poem. This doesn't mean I liked everything about them. I believe a writer has something approaching an obligation to title his work with something other than a generic name such as 'Poem'. The generic word, for me, indicates a failure to take the work seriously, and I have trouble, then, taking it seriously myself. Also, I think the refusal to capitalize is overdone in modern literature. Nonetheless, the concepts behind the poems were fresh and intriguing. I loved the twist back into 'spring as another world' in the first Poem, and the story implicit in the second poem was fascinating.

Thanks, Lynn, for the illustration for my story, Song of the Mother of Waters. You captured my vision of the arid valley perfectly.

And a side comment - the issue with the double dactyls must have been fun. I loved the one Mary McDermott Shideler included with her letter. Such deft wordplay induces a delirious giddiness. More! More!

Now to Issue #8:

I thought the fiction in this issue was excellent, much of it as good or better as the material in commercial magazines. Some of the poetry was very impressive.

Temple of Bougledesh's twist on the choice-of-container fable was creative and fun. I would have liked to see more support in the plot, though, for Katharine's apparent shift from seeking the Temple at the story's beginning to declining its (apparent) offerings at the end. I love seeing a character deepen, but I like to see the reason for it, too.

The Opaque Crystal was very well written - I like Patrick McGinn's style. The characters are subtly rounded, and the story is interesting. I would like to read more about the flawed adept Reget (nice choice of name, incidentally, with reverberations both of regent and regret).

The poem Predictions was compact, original and provocative. I liked the choice of words, except the word "pokes" in the first line, which jarred me. It seemed inappropriately colloquial given the elevated language of the poem.

The Leopard Face was also very good. For me it works on several levels - there is the surface story, and then a layer of ethnic tradition, and, last, an underlying metaphor of the power of authentic creativity. (I may be overanalyzing this, and I certainly wasn't thinking all those things as I read the story - just that I really liked it and it had depth.) All these elements work together beautifully. I thought the ending was artful, too - so much left implicit. The accompanying illustration had an untamed quality which fitted the story perfectly.

The Cause and Effect of Daydreaming left me somewhat confused. I liked Laurence Weiner's point

of view and writing style very much - it has a wonderful deadpan charm, and metaphors like "a cat in a rinse cycle" are embedded like nuggets of laughter throughout. I liked the establishment of Joe Smith's character and situation at the story's beginning and I liked the way the story developed. But the ending - i.e. Joe's stepping back through his window in anguish that it's all fake - I just don't get it. As a trauma, it doesn't seem to relate to his character as established in the story's opening. On another level, if it really is a fake, how does Joe get back through the window: if it were a fake, wouldn't he complete his jump, plummeting to the ground? Maybe I'm missing something here.

The Sage and the Tiger was great. It's tough to write a story with explicit spiritual content without becoming too earnest. This story has wonderful humor and a warmly realistic appreciation of human fallibility.

Thanks for the interview with P. C. Hodgell, who has been one of my favorite writers since I discovered God Stalk so these many years ago. Speaking as a complete beginner, it's nice to hear someone talk about the practicalities of the business.

A final, general comment (with apologies for the burgeoning length of this letter). I enjoy, and get a lot from, the LOC section. Thanks to all who were kind enough to comment on The Song of the Mother of Waters. I am especially grateful to Angelee Sailer Anderson; I have a one-sentence-paragraph habit, and it is good for me to question each one.

Evelyn Cooper  
Pasadena, California

*I should explain that Gary Barwin's poems came with no titles and I chose to simply label them poems (and get slightly more creative with "another poem"). Thanks for pointing out the "regret/regent" resonations with the name "Reget" - that all happened for me at the subconscious level; it's nice that someone consciously noticed.*

*You guys can stop apologizing for the length of your LOCs now because, frankly, we don't care how long they are if you're making observations that might be helpful to the authors. If anybody gets out of control, we'll edit you - but so far it hasn't been necessary.*

## • THE PLANET OF SCIENTISTS: A FABLE

by Joe R. Christopher

Once upon a time, in the future when mankind was settling some uninhabited planets (not that they all were), a spaceship load of scientists settled one planet, having decided not to bring to their new world any person whose thinking was muddled with religious passions. This was despite the reference in an ancient text -- *The Legacy of Heorot* -- to the barrenness of rationalistic funerals. "We'll write some hymns about death being inevitable for all animals," said one official. (But references to Newton's and Einstein's beliefs in God survived, and puzzled the next generation).

The scientists knew that they needed recreations; and, since many of them were musical (especially the mathematicians), they -- after a number of years -- organized a regular cycle of concerts. They had much fun (and extended disagreements) working out the exact calendar of Earth, taking into allowance their near-the-speed-of-light travel to their new world, with modifications for acceleration and deceleration and -- a particularly tricky matter -- the slowing of the ship due to space dust. The purpose of the calendar was so that they could choose appropriate music for appropriate festivals.

The results over the next several generations were not entirely what the organizers expected, although there were substantial participation and substantial attendance. A performance of parts of the *Tao Te Ching* in Chinese, set to music by an obscure twenty-first century composer and performed at the Earth's spring equinox, led to the conversion of several intuitive types to Taoism. Since they tended to disagree with each other about what Taoism implied for their lives, the organizers did not consider the matter too significant. (Besides, the *Tao Te Ching*, the converts had a second sacred text: an ancient history called *The Left Hand of Darkness*; they also disagreed about what it implied for their lives.)

But the performance of Handel's *Messiah*, on the equivalent of one 25 December, was a more serious matter. One woman was converted during the Alto's *recitativo*, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." ("Always a flighty type," commented a colleague later of the converted.) And a second person, a man, found himself singing in the Spirit during the Hallelujah Chorus.

What made this more serious than the Taoism was that the woman, in trying to find what she could about her new faith in the carefully edited, anti-religiously-biased general computer's memory, ran