



In this issue...

- The Lammy Gay Fiction Debuts...1
- 10 More-Or-Less Firsts...6
- 4 Books, Sort Of...10
- Triangle News, and More...11
- Open Book, Closed Book...13
- Out There On the 'Net...14
- Prescient Perry Brass...16
- It's Raining Blogs...18
- Our Bestsellers...19

The Gay Men's Edition

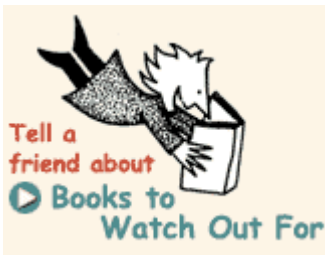
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Volume 2 Number 3



By Richard Labonte

Come Out, Come Out, Come Out, Come Out... Out

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In Marc Acito's *How I Paid for College*, the central character is a kid coming out. In Blair Mastbaum's *Clay's Way*, the central character is a kid coming out. In Aaron Krach's *Half-Life*, the central character is a kid coming out. In Damian McNicholl's *A Son Called Gabriel*, the central character is a kid coming out. And then there is Brian J. Leung's short story collection *World Famous Love Acts* – where scattered characters are already out. It's no surprise that four of the five nominees this year for the Lambda Literary Foundation's new Debut Fiction award focus on the one thing that all out gay men have in common – the process of coming out. First step. First novel. Makes sense.



These five were among eleven novels assessed by the Lammy's finalist committee (I'm a member); five of the six that didn't get a nod, frankly, were as deserving as the five that were selected. *Fruit*, by Brian Francis; *Trouble Boy*, by Tom Dolby; *Van Allen's Ecstasy*, by Jim Tushinski; *Father's Day*, by Philip Galanes; and *Someone You Know*, by Gary Zebrun – solid novels all. And the sixth, *Max & Sven*, by Tom Boulden – well, graphic novels are novels, but there is a category for stories told in pictures...

Why one set of five and not the other? The finalist committee for another literary award put it this way: "The process is arbitrary, but then so is any literary contest...arbitrariness is inherent in book awards...the way books are nominated, the judges who consider them, the division of labor as the books are assessed – arbitrary, arbitrary, arbitrary, bordering on meaningless."

Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that the process that winnows dozens of titles down to a handful of five Lammy nominees is meaningless – but it sure is arbitrary. Here's what happened with the National Book Critics Circle awards one year, and possibly most years: "*Washington Post* book review editor Margo Hammond confirms what multiple winner (and multiple juror) William H. Gass says: 'Everyone's third choice wins.' In 1998, when the

More Books for Women

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7-A Drummond St W
Perth, ON K7H 2J3
Canada.

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often-sensible NBCC award went to Penelope Fitzgerald for *The Blue Flower*, it was only because the jury was split between Don DeLillo's *Underworld* and Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. "We can say it, now that she's died," says Hammond. "It wasn't the book that people felt passionate about."

Yes, that's the kind of tradeoff that produces the Lammy finalists, for better and worse. In previous years, finalists were picked by juggling numbers – the finalist committee members ranked their top five preferences, the numbers were added up, adjusted, assessed, and finessed by the Lambda Literary Foundation, and finalists were announced. It wasn't perfect, and it was mysterious, but what is perfect, after all, and life's a mystery, anyway. The process was sensibly refined this year – for the first time, members of the finalist committee met through a phone conference, and for almost five hours over two days argued – quite politely – over the five finalists in each category. Sometimes dominant personalities prevailed; sometimes several second (or third) choices trumped a couple of first choices; not every member of the committee had even read every book; and some horse-trading happened.

In the end, however, the process was as fair as possible. Arbitrary, to be sure, and not completely perfect. Four of my favorites – *Fruit* and *Father's Day* and *Van Allen's Ecstasy* and *The Trouble Boy* – didn't make the cut... but my five other favorites did – and the quality of the five that did can't be denied.

And that's my entirely subjective defense of the Lammy-nomination process.

Since this is the first year for Debut Gay Men's Fiction, I interviewed the finalists by email, curious to gauge how much they knew about the Lammys, how much they knew about their fellow nominees, and – the great mystery – how they thought the whole nomination process actually works. Here are their – sometimes quite distinct – responses. A couple knew more about the process than the others, all agreed that the nomination matters, not many had read the work of the others...

1. How aware of the awards were you before you heard you were nominated?

Aaron Krach/*Half-Life*: I was very aware of them, but I think that's because I've been in "gay media" as either a writer or editor for many years. And as a gay reader, well, it's on the back of so many books and in so many of my favorite authors' bios that they were a nominee or a winner. So yes, I knew/know/etc...

Brian J. Leung/*World Famous Love Acts*: It seems like any responsible gay writer, whether they write gay literature or not, ought to be aware of the LLF which houses not only the awards, but also *Lambda Book Report* and the *James White Review*. I guess what I mean by "responsible" is mature or maturing. Once I was committed to the writing life, I started to look around for supportive organizations outside academia like the LLF and The Asian American Writer's Workshop.

Blair Mastbaum/*Clay's Way*: Once I found out my debut novel was being published, I researched stuff like the Lammys on the web, but before that, I was only a reader who found books in many different ways, but not through awards. I've never trusted that awards are given to the best work, that is, unless they give the award to me. (Just kidding.) For instance, the Academy Awards are always given to mainstream trash like *Million Dollar Baby* and *Titanic* and shit like that. But these awards, judging by the past years, seem to be given to works that actually have literary merit, in the way that I think merit exists, meaning passionate, true, real, honest fiction.

Damian McNicholl/*A Son Called Gabriel*: A good friend of mine told me about the Lammys a few years ago. He's in magazine publishing and is a voracious reader and regards them highly.

Marc Acito/How I Paid for College: Being nominated for a Lammy is like being invited to an oh-so-exclusive party, which, as it turns out, is entirely accurate. I've never felt like much of an A-gay – I'd say I languish somewhere around L or M – so I'm just thrilled to go to a cool shindig.

2. How do you think the nomination process works?

Krach: The nomination process seems terribly straightforward. You send in your book and a check and then it's "considered." If you wonder if we, the writers, have any idea who chooses us as a finalist? No. I have no clue who the judges are or were or are going to be. I did like the idea of people being able to nominate a book online for free at the Lambda website. I'm curious if anything that was nominated through that public forum made it into the next round of becoming a nominee/finalist.



Leung: My sense is that there are two ways. General readers can post nomination suggestions on the LLF website and those are at least considered, or a press can nominate a book. In the case of *World Famous Love Acts*, I suspect my nomination was prompted by the amazing review in *Lambda Book Report* by Alexander Chee.

Mastbaum: I'm not sure, but I'm happy to be a finalist in the nomination process. I think those are some very smart, dynamic, hilarious, witty, wonderful people who do that nominating and finalist-picking process.

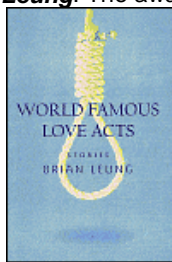
McNicholl: ... my publisher informed me that they were sending copies of my novel to Lambda Book Report for consideration for the awards nomination process.

Acito: As for the nominating process, obviously all those sexual favors I performed paid off.

3. What impact/influence do you think the Lammys have?

Krach: Less than I wish. I would prefer that the mere nomination of my magnum opus, *Half-Life*, would catapult it from obscurity to national attention. Just like the Oscars. Just becoming a nominee changes their lives. I'm hoping for that kind of an experience. So far – no dice!!! But I think their biggest impact is in the gay community. We might get some additional press out of the event/nomination process/etc... And maybe, our competitors will buy our books!?!

Leung: The awards show a terrific variety and range of writing as well as the evolution of what we value as "literature." For someone in a bookstore who may come across a "Lambda Literary Award Winner," the affect might be to draw them toward a title without a half-naked man on the cover, and which promised more than sexual titillation. Though, of course, I'm not excluding the possibility that the latter type of book can't be nominated. As for sales, because my book is from a literary press, I went into publication more concerned about having readers than getting royalties. With the nomination and possible final nod, I'm still more interested in the potential readership than any financial gain. The best moments have been when people I don't know read the book and then have written me out of the blue.



Mastbaum: Now, I would refer to the nominees and the finalists and winners to select novels that I would purchase, and I would hope that others would do the same. I would like to think that a Lammy finalist or winner would sell more because of the award, but perhaps, the awards need a bit more publicity.

McNicholl: I'm hoping significant, but admit fully to not having a clue. In addition to your site, I read Book Blog staples such as Beatrice.com, The Elegant Variation and MaudNewton.com but I'm sorry to say they've never mentioned the Lammy finalists once.

4. Are you an "awards" person – delighted to be nominated, or does it matter much?

Krach: Oh puh-lease! I am a) glad to be nominated. Very glad. And honored. The other candidates are super. And b) I want to win. And anyone who says otherwise, I wouldn't trust with a sharp knife.

Leung: At each stage a person is satisfied with the moment. Because the LBR review was so beautiful, my feelings about the nomination are probably a bit warmer than they otherwise might be. That is, this one feels more personally validating because Chee paid attention to my mixed heritage as much as, if not more than, my sexual identity. If the book receives the award, I suspect I'll float a bit... One thing that pleases me about *World Famous Love Acts* being nominated for this award is that it confirms a kind of goal I had for the collection. I hoped for something polyphonic and yet unified. As most reviewers have noted, the characters occupy a number of subject positions, Asian adult film actress, African American boy, a married man with an apartment where he brings men, a Chinese egg rancher, a pair of male lovers on an extended road trip, an old woman making biscuits with a pair of floating hands above her shoulder. The fact that I haven't been pigeonholed as a gay or Asian, or even white writer feels like a success in and of itself.

Mastbaum: I'm happy with any recognition (to be included on your year-end Best of 2004 list was quite sweet) from anyone whom I deem has some sort of intellect or experience with literature, so I'm stoked about being a Lammy finalist for sure. Literature doesn't seem to get enough recognition in any part of North American society. I wish books weren't segregated into "book review" sections in newspapers all over America. They should be more integrated with film and visual art and opera and dance and everything else.

McNicholl: As a first novelist, you can let the world know, I'm delighted, thrilled, ecstatic to be a finalist. What writer wouldn't be happy to have his or her work so acknowledged?

5. Had you read any of the other finalists? Have you sought any of them out since you heard of your nomination?

Krach: Yes, one. And I'm in the process of reading the three that I had not already read. Last thing I would like to say is, Thank Heaven they made a "debut fiction" category to share the nominees. I didn't have a chance in hell against Colm Tóibín or Alan Hollinghurst. (Did any of us?) So it's (seriously) cool that they did that. I think it's a positive step.

Leung: A funny thing happened in the creative writing class I'm teaching this semester. I asked students what contemporary fiction they'd read recently and one of them enthusiastically mentioned one of the other nominated books without knowing about the award. I laughed and turned it into a good teaching moment about the Lambda Literary Foundation, which turned out to be a point of interest for this classroom full of heterosexual students.

Mastbaum: A couple of them, but now, I won't read them because I'll hate them because they're competition. I get very jealous of others' books and fantasize about what their book deals and their agents must be doing, how much money they're getting that I'm not, etc... I'm just being honest. After, I'll read some of the winners, the ones that interest me and satisfy something about the aesthetic that I want fulfilled. I have so many books on my nightstand that I can't see the lamp anymore and the shelves in the living room are piled so high that I look sort of crazy, and even crazier because I haven't read a lot of them. I sometimes think they're just decoration, like a vase or a plant. I have to read more, and faster.

McNicholl: So far, I haven't. I think I have a good excuse, though. You see, at the moment I'm obsessed with a brand new toy – my own blog, which can be found at <http://damianm.blogspot.com>. When I first got the news my book was a finalist I did a hasty rummage of bookselling sites on the Internet. However, I do intend to read them once I'm done with my present 'to do' reading list. (P.S. to fellow finalists: If anyone wants to send me a copy of their novel, I'll be happy to send them mine in return – just email



your address and I'll send it.)

Acito: I'm particularly glad to see that there's been a debut category added this year, because, frankly, what new author wants to compete with Alan Hollinghurst? I was disappointed, however, to discover that the winner doesn't get a tiara. Will Steven Cojocarú be there asking us who we're wearing?

6. And what is the 2005 crop of Debut Fiction nominees working on next?

Krach: I'm actually working on a photography book (it's been a good palate cleanser for me to not concentrate on words so closely) that should be released in the fall – and I am working on a new novel simultaneously. A photo sampler:
http://www.aaronkrach.com/images_asbury_park.html.

Leung: I have two novels floating about: *Lost Men* and *Ivy vs. Dogg: With a Cast of Thousands!*
 "The book as container of text" – an odd but positive review:
http://thediagram.com/5_1/rev_leung.html.
 "An excellent job":
http://www.indiana.edu/~inreview/content/issue262/Thomas_review.htm.

Mastbaum: My novel, called *Exteriors*, is what I hope to publish next. It's an ensemble satire of three eco-terrorists – Elliot, the gay teenage boy who's just starting out and doing what he's told; Arbora, the tree-sitter hippie chick who acts as a mother for those lost boys and girls in the movement; and Ben, the straight guru-like sex god cult leader who leads the Earth Liberation Front. They all look for personal meaning within the eco-movement, but, of course, eventually find that being lost is being found. And that no one can be just one thing no matter how hard they try. Arbora, although committed to saving a grove of redwoods in Humboldt County, California, and living on a platform for almost a year, fantasizes about some young lumberjack coming up to her platform home to have meaningless sex. She dreams about staying in the Ritz Carlton in San Francisco, and shopping at Burberry. She thinks, "Fuck the trees." That's one example anyway.
 An *Exteriors* excerpt:
<http://blairmastbaum.com/work2.htm>.
 Mastbaum co-produced, shot, and acted in a film last year:
http://www.filmfestivaltoday.com/article_item.asp?ID=631.

McNicholl: I'm currently doing rewrites on a novel called *Unusual Steps* – a dark comedy involving a young guy who moves from Ireland to London and his roommate, an assertive lesbian working at Heathrow Airport who finds herself in a tricky work-related predicament, and their very inquisitive elderly neighbor – and have begun work on a third novel which is set in the U.S.
 The blog:
<http://damianm.blogspot.com>.
 McNicholl lunches with Toast author Nigel Slater:
<http://www.beatrice.com/archives/000957.html>.

Acito: I'm writing a twisted Christmas story. Y'know, crystal meth addicts, drag queens, the usual heartwarming stuff.
 Acito's last column (with news that film rights for *How I Paid for College* have been optioned by Columbia Pictures for producer Laura Ziskin of *Spiderman* and *Fight Club* fame):
<http://www.geocities.com/marcacito/Marriage.html>.
 An interview; he likes Isherwood:
<http://marcacito.com/wsn/page4.html>.



Firsts: You Write a Book...and These Ten Did

Not every first novel is considered for a Lammy nomination. Many, self-published, sell in the hundreds, or less. But I love the promise of first books and respect the desire of writers to tell their stories, some more eloquently, elegantly, and with better grammar than others. Here are ten books I've read this year, all with premises that are interesting from voices, younger and older, that are in some way promising; not all are fiction, some blur the line between fiction and fact, and a couple are actually second or third books. Because several are self-pubbed, print-on-demand, or from small, small presses, I've rated them (on a 10-point scale) for appearance along with commenting on their content; a good-looking book doesn't make the writing any better, but a strong cover, a clean design, and an appealing "feel" are all part of the process of getting a book into a reader's hands....

***The Phoenix*, by Ruth Sims, *The Writer's Collective*, 344 pages, \$16.95**

By far the best of the bunch is this wholly satisfying historical romance,

authored by a self-described "cookie-baking Midwestern grandma... who uses a flower pot as a chicken roaster – and who has hardly ever ventured beyond the borders of rural Illinois." The edition I read is copyright 2005, but it seems there was a 2002 printing as well, with a much different cover and a substantially different first chapter (evident by comparing the more-smoothly-written new book to an online excerpt of chapter one of the earlier edition).

Sims didn't set out to write a gay novel, but in the course of 20 years, she has said in interviews, young street urchin

Jack Rourke morphed most wonderfully into queer Kit St. Denis – the adopted son of a wealthy, closeted invert who matures into an acclaimed 19th-century stage actor and director, and becomes the lover – after many twists and turns - of a gentle, dedicated doctor to the poor.

Don't take just my word about how excellent this book is; here's what William Maltese, author of *Thai Died* and *Slovakian Boy*, has to say: "For those who have read Laura Arqiri's *God in Flight*, and hoped for more, or wanted more, Ms. Sims provides 'the more' in wondrous abundance. She has jam-packed her novel with all of the child and wife abuse, murder, mayhem, treachery, insanity, misunderstanding, conniving, love found, love lost, love regained machinations to hold the reader's attention through each and every plot twist that encompasses and follows a sterling cast of characters (heroes, heroines, and miscreants) through decades of fascinating living and dying on two continents. The research, in general, including peeks into the British and English theater scene, at the time, has been impeccably done."

Quite so. (Cover: 4/10 – dull brown sure does not stand out, and it conveys nothing about the book; thank goodness for strong back-jacket copy; design: 6/10; "feel": 6/10 – thank goodness, again, that this remarkable novel has generated good buzz.)

Chapter 1 from the 2005 edition (link on the right):

<http://www.writerscollective.org/bookDetail.php?ISBN=1932133402>.

The 2002 edition, chapter 1, pre-editing:

<http://www.writerscollective.org/authors/rsims/id4.htm>.

It's time for romance:

<http://www.useless-knowledge.com/1234/feb/article196.html>.

An interview:

<http://www.ebook-reviews.net/glb.shtml>



***Summat Else*, by Royston Tester, *Porcupine's Quill*, 175 pages, \$16.95**

In a series of thirteen linked short stories – and an epilogue of letters –



British-born (but Toronto-resident) Tester's debut collection arcs through the first 20-odd years of Birmingham working class lad Enoch Jones; adopted after his birth, he's raised rough, does jail time for juvenile delinquency, figures out that he's a pooffer, and stumbles through an amusing period as a would-be rent boy in Europe. Tester's Jones is an appealing queer character, passing through hardship with a modicum of wit and an air of charming mischief. The later stories, in which the young lad's sexual antics are the center, are gently erotic and engagingly lusty. But the stories set in the gritty Birmingham of his boyhood are a real and raw

perspective on what it's like to grow up in the sort of environment where a

clever, self-aware queer is sure to suffocate unless he escapes. All of *Summat Else* is beguiling; those early-years stories are both the grimmest and the most interesting. (Cover: 7 – its cartoonish look reflects the book's tone; design: 7; "feel": 7)

An excerpt:

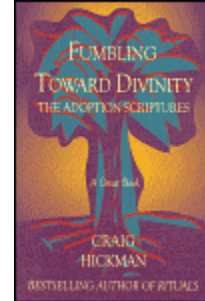
<http://www.roystontester.com/nowshowing.shtml>.

His novel *Nancy's Boy* was a Project: QueerLit finalist:

<http://www.suspectthoughts.com/nancys.html>.

***Fumbling Toward Divinity: The Adoption Scriptures*, by Craig Hickman, Annabessacook Farm, 374 pages, \$27.95**

This isn't quite a first book – Hickman's true first was *Rituals: Poems and Prose*, preceded by the poetry chapbook *The Language of Mirrors*. But it is his first book in more than a decade, and it is self-published – the press is named after the 25-acre farm where he and his partner raise livestock and run a bed and breakfast. The title is apt: the prose style is bracing, lyrical, preacherly, impressionistic, at times almost incantatory, rolling with the cadence of a compelling queer sermon. Hickman's memoir tells of his years-long search for his birth mother; what happens when they finally connect; how his strictly Seventh-Day Adventist birth mother



Jennifer blames his homosexuality on how his laissez-faire Lutheran mother raised him; how his three biological sisters feel about him; and what happens when Hickman's adoptive family – and his Dutch lover Job – join his birth family for a reunion at the Georgia home where his grandmother – the matriarch who forced his birth mother to put him up for adoption – lives. There's a lot of adoption literature around, but few such memoirs match *Fumbling Towards Divinity's* flair for examining the madness and sadness and shame and satisfaction around digging up one's roots. Woven through the story of Hickman's search is a parallel story – his romance with lover Job is threatened by the Dutch man's family and a close friend, who are trying to subvert their relationship: lots of drama, detailed with heartfelt honesty in this exquisite book. (Cover: 7 – heavy on the type, though the full-cover back jacket image of the author is stylish; design: 8; "feel": 9)

Read daily entries by an author excited at how his new book is being received – "30 advance copies sold!":

<http://craighickman.blogspot.com/>.

An excerpt:

<http://hometown.aol.com/abcfarmbooks/catalog excerpts.html>.

***Comfort and Joi: I Spent a Weekend With a Hollywood Starlet*, by Joseph Dougherty, iUniverse, 129 pages, \$11.95**

Joi Lansing had her first break in *Singin' in the Rain*, was a regular on *The Beverly Hillbillies*, appeared in an Ed Wood-penned film (*The Bride and the Beast*), had a cameo in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, was in a couple of Dean Martin flicks, and was one of Frank Sinatra's paramours – Sinatra supported her as she was dying of cancer. Hers was a career on the fringes of Hollywood; she was appreciated for her beauty, but never made it past B-actress level. Until reading *thirtysomething* writer Dougherty's remarkably mesmerizing exercise in writing about "low-grade obsession," I had never "heard" of her – though I watched *Beverly Hillbillies* regularly for any glimpse I could get as a kid of Max Baer 's (Jethro) bare



chest. Dougherty crafts a fictional narrator to write about one weekend's feverish immersion in Lansing's life – including awesomely detailed scene-by-scene dissections of her last films, *Hillbillies in a Haunted House* and *Big Foot*. The narrator, Dougherty's projection of himself, isn't gay, but he brings to this fascinating blend of memoir and myth a starstruck gay man's fixation on stardom. Along the way, he also writes amusingly about his gay friends: "There is nothing like spending time with homosexual men to make you feel frumpy, woebegone, and incapable of making anything but the worst possible choices in matters of attire and haircut. I suppose if there is a gay agenda it must be to make heterosexual men look like some hastily executed rough draft for the male of the species... Mark and David tolerate me at the edge of their circle. I often feel like a pet, or a foster child from some backward country without personal trainers or rejuvenating skin care products." (Cover: 9 – sultry, seductive, and colorful; design: 8; "feel": 9)

An interview with the author:

http://www.comfortandjoi.com/q_and_a.html.

Joi's career:

<http://www.briansdriveintheater.com/joilansing.html>.

***Heterophobia*, by Ragan Fox, Lethe Press, 110 pages, \$10**

Fox comes out of the world of performance poetry, where he's something of a star. Could be why the poems – as punchy as prose – in this first collection sizzle with the heat and ripple with the wit of good stories – short on plot, of course, and character development, but packed with passionate introspection about and investigation of queer life, queer sex, and queer essence. "Cut and paste a voodoo doll made of magazine clippings... watch as a Ouija board spells out your deepest secret... mourn the loss of your boyfriend while awaiting his ghost... listen to the ancient whisperings of a threadbare flapper dress... gamble for more than money on a Southern riverboat... renounce your citizenship to walk through a restricted area, rife with magic...": that's what Lethe Press says about this impressive debut. (Cover: 9 - you can't go wrong with a cover image of a cute author wearing angel wings; design, 7; "feel": 8)



Author info:

<http://hometown.aol.com/utcooper/tableofcontents.html>.

Lethe Press has a couple of good queer titles:

<http://www.steveberman.com/lethepress.htm>

***A Time Before Me*, by Michael Holloway Perronne, iUniverse, 180 pages, \$13.95**

Kid comes out: it's a common queer trope, the sort of story told hundreds of



times by hundreds of writers. This one, a print-on-demand title, might have found a "real" publisher a few years ago: it's sweet and imaginative, laced with enough originality of character and setting, and – though like many PoD titles could have used one good pass of an editor's pencil – pretty well-written. The kid is teenager Mason, raised in rural Mississippi, with an apparently unrequited crush on his charismatic buddy Billy, knowing he's queer but not sure what to do about it until a) a new young man in town flirts with him at the ice cream shop where he's working, and b) his black sheep aunt Savannah invites him to live with her in New Orleans,

where it happens she runs the most popular drag show in town, where it also happens that sweet 19-year-old Joey works. A blessing of the book is that, unlike many coming-out teen tales, it doesn't end with a neat happy-ever-after love; young Mason makes mistakes, like most people, and learns that taking chances is part of growing up. Perhaps you're bored by coming-out novels; consider that *A Time Before Me* laces its sentimentality with enough jagged reality to give it an interesting edge. (Cover: 6 – the boys on the cover look more yuppie than rural Southern, and the title disappears into the image; design: 6; "feel": 7)

An excerpt:

<http://www.michaelhperronne.com/Excerpt.html>.

Some nifty PR directed by the author towards an Alabama queer-book bigot:

<http://www.365gay.com/newscon05/02/021005novel.htm>.

***My Angel Hypothesis*, by LG Morton II, Xlibris, 287 pages, \$18.50**

First-person narrative novels are tricky: they scream "autobiographical," a formulation that reads awkwardly and diminishes – perhaps unfairly – the impact that "real" fiction delivers. But once I got past the format of this first novel – and the concomitant shortcomings in style and grammar that some editing might have evened out – I was gripped by the story. The narrator is Andy, on the cusp of 30, dazed and guilty but also relieved by the end of his decade-plus marriage, still close to his teenage son, and ready – at last – to come out. Yes indeed, it's another coming-out story – with a few twists. One is the setting of St. Louis – it's the first queer novel I can think of set in that city, and Morton makes its bars and neighborhoods part of the fabric of the book. Another is the doomed inevitability of the love story Morton tells – of how Andy, on one of his first forays to a gay bar, meets a 21-year-old streetwise drifter. In Andy's eyes, Tysin has the body of a god, the soul of an angel, and a free spirit that's the polar opposite to his own buttoned-down persona. Tysin draws Andy out of his sexual and emotional shell; Andy

provides Tysin short-term shelter and, for a spell, a sense of home. Tysin moves on, and so does Andy, settling into a comfortable and comforting – and well-drawn – interracial life with Marc, who – financially astute, entrepreneurially aggressive, well-educated, and always grounded – is everything Tysin was not. Andy reconnects with Tysin years later – think AIDS; it's a wrenching but entirely appropriate ending to the story. (*Cover not seen; I read the galley*)

An excerpt:

http://www.xlibris.com/bookstore/book_excerpt.asp?bookid=23104.

Sons, by Alphonso Morgan, Lane Street Press, 228 pages, \$13.95

There's a hip-hop beat to this powerful, tragic debut novel – yes, another coming-out story – set in 1990s Brooklyn, about black high school student Aaron and his sexual and emotional entanglement with the slightly older, infinitely more streetwise Sha. It's not a comfortable story; Aaron's nascent queerness is born against a backdrop of cultural, religious, and racial homophobia, where friends turn on friends when they sniff a hint of faggotry. *Sons* is relentlessly realistic about the forces arrayed against a young black kid wrestling with same-sex adolescent lust; that honesty powers a moving, haunting story. *Cover: 4 – it's about as generic as can be, alas, vastly underselling the novel, though somewhat redeemed by the back jacket copy; design: 6; "feel": 7*

Author info:

<http://www.alphonsomorgan.com/alphonso.html>.

An excerpt (scroll down):

<http://www.alphonsomorgan.com/sons.html>.

The Beginning, by Troy Ygnacio Soriano, iUniverse, 173 pages, \$13.95

Two lads fall in love. Gabriel is the one who loves sex and drama; Jason is the quiet reader. Jason becomes ill. They visit the doctor, fearing the worst. Oops: Jason is pregnant, not positive. That's the speculative gist of this sensuous first novel, an allegorical foray into the what-if world of men having babies (see also: *The Song of a Manchild*, by Durrell Owens; *The Beginning* is so much better...). Given that a major argument from the fundies for why gay sex is so wrong is that queers can't procreate – and, of course, given that more gay men than ever before are raising kids – Soriano's fantastical fiction, with its underpinnings of spirituality, is an imaginative story with some interesting resonance. *Cover: 9 – a striking image of a child in the foreground running towards a city landscape; design: 8; "feel": 8*



Author info:

<http://users.primushost.com/~mefogle/Troy/Hello!.htm>.

And:

<http://www.troysoriano.com/writings.htm>.

A Gathering of Angels, by Larry Dean Hamilton, Sigma Logo Books, 205 pages, \$19.95

Part spiritual introspection, part queer history lesson, part autobiographical love story – Hamilton's serene, smart offering is a book of many loving parts. It opens back in 1992, as Texas cops storm a gay protest at the Republican National Convention, a reminder of how harshly homophobic that state and that party have been. But much of *A Gathering of Angels* is set in the 1960s and 1970s, around Hamilton's college years – a strong, sobering lesson for younger readers on what it was like to come out and be politically (and sexually) active three decades ago, in the era before and just after Stonewall. For all that, this isn't an angry book; it's amiable, companionable, a sensitive and sensible memoir about gay life in times that were less open but no less proud. (*Cover: 3 – no matter how well drawn, or how evocative they are of their subject, in this case the author himself, pencil sketches are flat and without buy-me flair; design: 4; "feel": 3 – this book as object just doesn't convey the quality of the text*)

The author reflects:

<http://www.rldbbooks.com/Newsletter/IGW-V2-Issue9/IGW-V2-9p13.html>.

(FYI: *The Independent Gay Writer* is a good resource for information on self-

published, print-on-demand, and smaller press titles, with most reviews written by active writers rather than cranky critics. The current (April) issue includes Larry Dean Hamilton's short story "Azar, the Boy Who Was Loved"; a review by Ruth Sims of Michael Halfhill's iUniverse novel *Bought and Paid For*; and Patricia Nell Warren and Rochelle Hollander Schwab writing about gay marriage.

<http://www.rldbooks.com/Newsletter/IGW-V3-Issue4/IGW-V3-4p1.html>.)



Not Really Books, But... Watch Out!

***Black Fag*, by Shane Allison, Future Tense Books, \$3.50**

I've never met Shane. We've corresponded by email. On the screen, he comes across reserved and polite, sweetly curious and occasionally cautiously salacious. But his poetry? My lord – the man is rowdy, raw, ribald, raucous, riotous, raunchy, and real. This tiny 2004 collection of a dozen poems – dedicated to "Mrs. Kanu, my 10th grade teacher who triggered it in me" – oozes sex. Some first lines: "Junior, Connie's son, wanted to see my dick..."; "Why I'm such a slut/because I don't bother to ask their names afterward..."; "I'm told that I'm good in sucking dick..."; "Dwell between your inner thighs./Big man, soft body..."; "He's a bottom./He likes to get fucked..."; "In a dark booth of full-on lust..."; "Tried to suck my own dick once,/But couldn't bend over that far..." Sure, there seems to be a theme – sex sex sex and lots of dicks. But there's much more to Allison's profoundly intelligent poetry than the joy of, pleasure in, and stink of sex. He invests "dick" – and cock and suck and fuck and ass and cum and blowjob and so many more evocative, provocative words and phrases – with passion, wit and insight, need and release. He's a joyous poet, writing about his inner life and the outer world with equal fervor and joy, at once coldly perceptive and gently sentimental. He'll make you laugh – and think – while you're getting hard, and that's not easy. And though sex is the skeleton of the poems in this collection, it's sheathed with the muscle of a masterful wordsmith and empowered by the spirit of a poet who loves the craft.

A link to "Talking Dirty to Myself":

<http://home.flash.net/~unlikely/talkingdirtyto.html>.

A link to "I'm His Nigger":

<http://home.flash.net/~unlikely/imhisnigger.html>.

A review of Allison's first chapbook, *Ceiling of Mirrors*:

<http://www.alsopreview.com/columns/books/mmceiling.html>.

***Sticky #1*, by Dale Lazarov and Steve Maclsaac, Eros Comix, \$4.95**

One story, 23 pages, no dialogue, two men, mouths and balls and cocks and butts, arcing from nipple-nibbling and lip-locking foreplay at 2:34 to sexy sweat and sticky cum at 5:26: the first issue of this hotly graphic (but not particularly porno) comic depicts two mounds-of-muscle men who hook up at a street fair, then revel in extended sexual play rather than rush into a quickie orgasm. And thus the title: "Hold On." It's kind of refreshing – these raunchy fellows look like they're having a lot of fun having a lot of sex, a story arousingly depicted with rough, tough tenderness by Lazarov and Maclsaac. *Sticky #2* is now out, though not yet read; here's what Last Gasp had to say about it: "Unusually good art, well-done and hot... In this wordless issue, a gorgeous gay rodeo star is brutally dumped by a boyfriend who declares himself straight in front of a talk show audience. But all's well that ends well, when Rodeo Man gets picked up by the hot, burly security guy sitting front row center. Naturally, they get down to some sticky business." Sticky Notes is their Yahoo Group:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stickynotes/>.

Fleshbot hears that Sticky is pretty hot stuff:

<http://www.fleshbot.com/sex/gay/art/gay-comix-sticky-032654.php>.

***Fag School Zine #1*, edited by Brontez, \$3**

There are still 'zines, thanks goodness, even in the Internet era, where the young and the homo can write up a storm. Larry-bob of *Holy Titclamp* likes this one, and so does Last Gasp: "A radical scratchy fag zine devoted to punk rock, boning on the first date, smashing the state, arty porn, skateboarding, pink everything, interracial everything, yoga-bunnyism, carbs, sex with strangers, slut pride, and other related interests. Not exactly a smut zine, but a lot of sex talk and some dirty pictures." In this issue: Alvin Orloff interview (*Gutterboys*, *I Married an Earthling*); the life of a totally fab go-go

boy. Issue 1 was celebrated at a San Francisco club party a while back: "While *Fag School* emphatically encourages gay men to make out early and often with girls, closet cases, older men, and 'ugly people,' none of the following options are much on display tonight," Heather Smith wrote in the *SF Bay Guardian*. "Everyone is sticking to their chosen métier and immediate social circle – although, I must admit, everyone is dancing." For info or to order: bulletproofslug@hotmail.com or send \$3 to 2846 Chapman St., Oakland, CA 94601.

New York City Gay Men's Chorus 25th Anniversary Journal, compiled and edited by Jim Vivyan, 206 pages (!)

Quite a labor of love, this – and a generous hint at how fine life might have been for queer boys if we'd all had our own gay Yearbook in those difficult high school days: this marvelous effort is a kind of chronological book of many years, not just one. To mark its 25th anniversary in 2004 (its first rehearsal was September, 1979), the NYC Gay Men's Chorus set one of its veteran members loose to assemble a hefty remembrance of the organization. At first blush, the oversized, photo-stuffed history might seem a rather insular and parochial publication, of interest – as it surely is – primarily to chorus members past and present. But any gay organization with a quarter century under its belt has brushed against plenty of history, and this entirely readable journal marks many – three 2003 concerts based on the popular gay-friendly kidzbook *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, with singing by members of the Youth Pride Chorus, billed as *Pride for All Ages*; Bill Clinton serenading Hillary on the sax with "My Funny Valentine" at the *Broadway for Hillary* performance in October, 1999; in the midst of AIDS, the chorus' *Love Lives On* tour of six European cities in 1991; its September 1982 appearance at the National AIDS Memorial at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; and its early fundraisers in 1980 at bars like Spike, Mineshaft, and Badlands. Charter members reminisce about the early years; someone caught the archivist bug early on, since chorus photos, performance posters, and program book covers abound for every year; major figures are profiled with affection; there's a moving "In Memoriam" section; celebrities who have appeared with the chorus, from Roberta Alexandra and Jim Bailey to Cyndi Lauper and Greg Louganis to Joan Rivers and Jai Rodriguez to Margaret Whiting and BD Wong, are listed; and "A Brief History of Chorus Royalty" (who knew!?) recounts those anointed Chorus Queen and Chorus Bitch – when they reigned, the ones who abdicated – over the years. I can't imagine a major library system with any kind of gay collection that wouldn't want to add this journal to its holdings...

For orders and info:

Jim Vivyan, jim10010@hotmail.com.

About the Chorus:

<http://www.nycgmc.org/>.



A 'Straight' Boy / Kramer All Fired Up. Again

In the category of *meow*, Michael Musto writes in *The Village Voice*: "Definitely a gay, Boy George didn't like some things I wrote about his Broadway musical *Taboo* and he reads me for them in his new book *Straight* (a big hit in the UK). Of course he leaves out that I also used phrases like "pure dirty fun," called the show a "fascinating hybrid," and insisted that, "George can act." But he's right that I'm generally a bitch and I'll totally defer to him in this case; his breezily readable book manages to be both outspoken and compassionate, with a bright ring of gay truth to it. In fact, his views of sexual politics mixed with celebrity insight make him (along with co-writer Paul Gorman) the new Quentin Crisp, minus the self-effacing reactionary views."

Boy George on Boy George:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/digestedread/story/0,6550,1446643,00.html>.

Audio of a *Straight* reading:

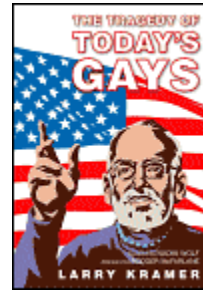
<http://web.swedevic.com/sistergeorge/main/latestnews.asp>.

The 2005 Saints and Sinners queer literary conference is taking shape; on Friday: "Questions for the Editors with Don Weise of Avalon Books and Thomas Keith of New Directions"; on Saturday: "Writing Your Novel, From Start to Finish," with Aaron Hamburger, Janet Mason, and Lauren Sanders; on Sunday: "What's Taboo: The Final Frontier," with panelists Bill Brent, Jameson Currier, Sean Meriweather, Letta Neely, and moderator Rob

Stephenson; and much more each day - here's the schedule of events:
<http://sasfest.org/article.php?story=schedule>.

It's where A Different Light Bookstore opened its first NYC store in 1982, and it's where Creative Visions closed its doors in 2004 – now 548 Hudson Street is all about mothers wearing designer clothes while they have their babies:
<http://www.nydailynews.com/business/story/293974p-251709c.html>.

It was just a few months ago that Larry Kramer's fiery Cooper Union speech lamenting gay passivity, *The Tragedy of Today's Gays*, was zipping around the Internet; now it's an instant book (\$9.95, Tarcher/Penguin), 108 pages long, the oration augmented by Naomi Wolf's foreword and Roger MacFarlane's afterword. From an interview: "The book is a very morbid view of where we are and where we're going. I think it's the most depressing speech I've ever made and it was hard to write. I don't think we are anywhere and I don't see us getting out of this rut. There are some feeble attempts being made now to get the rich people together and one can only hope that this will mushroom, but I see the forces on the right getting stronger and obliterating us even more as I see the forces on the left getting weaker and taking us down with them."



<http://www.washblade.com/2005/4-15/arts/books/ruckus.cfm>.

Andy Towle's Towleroad blog reprints the original speech, with a few dozen feedback entries; most are big kisses for Kramer, and a few are spitballs:

http://towleroad.typepad.com/towleroad/2004/11/larry_kramer_sp.html.

And Aaron at Event Horizon has his own take on the speech:

<http://theeventhorizon.blogspot.com/2004/11/victims-and-volunteers.html>.

United Stages Publishing is a new source for gay-interest plays, including *Hollywood at Sunset* and *Michelangelo's Models* by Robert Patrick, Doric Wilson's *Now She Dances!: A Fantasia on the Trial of Oscar Wilde in Two Acts*, and *The Gay Naked Play* by David Bell:

<http://www.unitedstages.com/scriptInfo.php>.

You all ought to be members of The Publishing Triangle, and receive its newsletter, and nominate books for its awards. In case not, however, here are the books in the running for honors at the PT's May 10 ceremony:

The Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction

David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (St. Martin's Press)

David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (University of Chicago Press)

Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (W.W. Norton)

The Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction

Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Life of Audre Lorde* (W.W. Norton)

Alison Smith, *Name All the Animals* (Scribner)

Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker: A Life* (W.W. Norton)

The Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction: Men

Adam Berlin, *Belmondo Style* (St. Martin's Press)

Colm Tóibín, *The Master* (Scribner)

Jim Tushinski, *Van Allen's Ecstasy* (Southern Tier Editions/Harrington Park Press)

The Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction: Women

Stacey D'Erasmus, *A Seahorse Year* (Houghton Mifflin)

Emma Donoghue, *Life Mask* (Harcourt)

Heather Lewis, *Notice* (Serpent's Tail)

The Publishing Triangle Award for Gay Male Poetry

Ron Mohring, *Survivable World* (Word Works)

Carl Phillips, *The Rest of Love* (Farrar Straus Giroux)

D. A. Powell, *Cocktails* (Graywolf)

The Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry

Adrienne Rich, *The School Among the Ruins* (W.W. Norton)

Lee Ann Roripaugh, *Year of the Snake* (Southern Illinois University Press)

Maureen Seaton, *Venus Examines Her Breast* (Carnegie Mellon University Press)

The recipient of the 2005 *Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement* is **Edward Field**. The award is named in honor of a legendary editor of the 1970s and 1980s. Field, the first male poet ever recognized by this award, is the author of *A Frieze for a Temple of Love*, *Magic Words*, *Counting Myself Lucky*, and others. Joan Larkin, one of this year's Whitehead judges, calls Field "one of the major American poets since the mid-20th century and a truly indispensable artist." Judge David Groff adds, "His poems are easily accessible, their language deceptively plainspoken." The Bill Whitehead Award is given to a man in odd-numbered years and a woman in even years.

In addition, the Publishing Triangle will present a special *Leadership Award* to **The Lesbian Herstory Archives**, the largest and oldest lesbian archive in the world. Founded in the mid-1970s by a group of women who were concerned about the failure of mainstream publishers, libraries, and research institutions to value lesbian culture, this archive houses more than 20,000 books, along with thousands of photographs, magazines, files, film and video footage, and other materials. Its headquarters in a Brooklyn (NY) brownstone preserve many publications that no other library or archive originally deemed important enough to keep. The Lesbian Herstory Archives truly deserves this leadership award.

For information – and to sign up for just \$35/year: www.publishingtriangle.org



The Open Book: 'Our Labor of Love, An Expensive Hobby'

Unable to find a buyer, the owners of The Open Book in Sacramento are closing their nine-year-old bookstore - "our labor of love - and one really expensive hobby," and, at age 65, retiring to remodel apartments, travel, and "fade into the sunset."

Larry Bailey and Ron Grantz, both 65, stocked about 11,000 titles in their shop, and also built one of the best queer-bookstore web presences at www.openbookltd.com, often spotlighting, online and in a weekly New Books email announcement, titles – particularly smaller press and print-on-demand books – that other gay (as opposed to women's) bookstores stock but don't feature as prominently online. The bookstore's affiliation with Alamo Square Distribution (ASD) – which relocated to Sacramento in 2003 when Bailey and Grantz acquired it from previous owners and then set it up as a separate business from the bookstore – of course helped The Open Book stay on top of harder-to-find titles. The distributor, with its own management, is not part of their decision to close the bookstore.

An April 14 feature on gay businesses in the *Sacramento Bee* noted their decision to shut the store:

"We're selling because there's really not the same sense of community among gays and lesbians," the bespectacled Bailey said wistfully. "There's no drive to help out gay businesses and business owners anymore."

At The Open Book, Bailey and Grantz noticed a couple of years ago that sales were falling and that "pride merchandise" sales - rainbow bumper stickers and jewelry – had slowed to a trickle.

"There's no 'us and them' attitude anymore," Grantz said. "People from around the area used to come in on the weekends and spend \$200 to \$300 in one trip. They don't do that anymore. Why should they drive all that way when you can get the same book at Barnes & Noble in Elk Grove?"

The Open Book also distributed one of the better bestseller lists every month, reflecting a wide range of sales and interests – including, occasionally among "Everyone's Favorites," non-gay science fiction/fantasy titles, a subsection of the stock that grew out of a popular reading group that met at the store. Here are the March bestsellers for men, everyone, and, with a much stronger representation of newer lesbian presses than other stores' lists, women:

Men's Favorites:

1. *Light Before Day*, by Christopher Rice, Miramax Books, \$23.95
2. *Tangled Sheets: Tales of Erotica*, by Michael Thomas Ford, Kensington, \$14
3. *Daddy Dearest: Private Collection*, by Julius, Juliustoons, \$27
4. *Handjobs: Dad's Bedtime Tales V. 4*, Avenue Services, \$20
5. *Wanna Wrestle? Erotic Fiction*, by Greg Herren, STARbooks, \$16.95
6. *The Popsicle Tree: A Dick Hardesty Mystery*, GLB Publishers, \$15.95
7. *Amuse Bouche: A Russell Quant Mystery*, by Anthony Bidulka, Insomniac Press, \$17.95
8. *Luncheonette: A Memoir*, by Steven Sorrentino, ReganBooks, \$24.95
9. *Acqua Calda*, by Keith McDermott, Carroll & Graf Publishers, \$24
10. *Serendipity: The Gay Times Books of New Stories*, edited by Peter Burton, GMP, \$16.95

Everyone's Favorites:

1. *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in San Francisco*, by Joshua Gamson, Henry Holt, \$26
2. *Sea of Time: A Novel of Time Travel*, by Will Hubbell, Ace Books, \$6.50
3. *Erick & Isabelle: Freshman Year at Foresthill High*, by Kim Wallace, Fog Light Press, \$12, Youth/PFLAG
4. *Is It A Choice: Answers to 300 of the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Gay and Lesbian People, Revised Edition*, by Eric Marcus, HarperSanFrancisco, \$14.95
5. *Time's Eye: Book One of a Time Odyssey*, by Arthur C. Clarke, Ballantine Books, \$7.99
6. *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, by C. A. Tripp, Free Press, \$27
7. *Gowns by Adrian: The MGM Years 1928-1941*, by Howard Gutner, Harry N. Abrams, \$39.95
8. *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to WWII*, by Robert Adrich, Routledge, \$14.95
9. *One Teacher in 10: LGBT Educators Share Their Stories*, edited by Kevin Jennings, \$14.95
10. *The Truth Is...My Life in Love and Music*, by Melissa Etheridge, Random House, \$13.95

Women's Favorites

1. *The House on Sandstone*, by K.G. Macgregor, BookEnds Press, \$17.95
2. *Distant Shores, Silent Thunder*, by Radclyffe, Bold Strokes Books, \$15.95
3. *Have Gun We'll Travel*, by Lori L. Lake, Quest Books, \$18.95
4. *All Our Tomorrows: Define Destiny V*, by J.M. Dragon, Dare 2 Dream Publishing, \$24.95
5. *Actions and Consequences: Define Destiny IV*, by J.M. Dragon, Dare 2 Dream Publishing, \$24.95
6. *The Sacred Shore: Book III in the Moon Island Series*, by Jennifer Fulton, Yellow Rose Books, \$15.95
7. *Unbreakable*, by Blayne Cooper, BookEnds Press, \$17.99
8. *Crystal's Heart*, by B.L. Miller, Intaglio Publications, \$18.50
9. *Emma's Journey*, by Erin O'Reilly, Dare 2 Dream Publishing, \$22.95
10. *For Every Season*, by Frankie J. Jones, Bella Books, \$12.95

**Signing Skin, Plante Praised, 'Difficult' Ashbery**

Lizzy McQuire meets *Queer as Folk*, says British reviewer Michael Rosen in his rave review for David Levithan's 2003 novel *Boy Meets Boy*:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/childrenandteens/0,6121,1460672,00.html>.

In his Powell's Bookstore Q&A, Christopher Rice names the writer everyone should read, tells about signing a 16-year-old fan's stomach, and discusses his third novel, *Light Before Day*:

<http://www.powells.com/ink/rice.html>.

The Washington Blade thinks it's a grown-up novel:

<http://www.washblade.com/2005/3-18/arts/books/books.cfm>.

A Manila daily paper looks at gay books, magazines, comics, and music:

http://news.inq7.net/lifestyle/index.php?index=1&story_id=32741.

"David Plante is a good writer. He descends from Hemingway and writes a

high American plain style with a personality all its own," writes William Corbett about Plante's new memoir, *American Ghosts*:
<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/arts/books/documents/04535695.asp>.

Meghan O'Rourke explains how to read John Ashbery ("being difficult, after all, is not the same thing as being incomprehensible"):
<http://www.slate.com/id/2114565/>.

Antonio has two mommies – and two languages – in this bilingual edition of a kids' book by Rigoberto Gonzalez about a boy who makes a Mother's Day card for both of them:
<http://www.lesbianation.com/article.cfm?section=2&id=5589>.
 Read BTWOF: The Lesbian Edition on *Antonio's Card* in [Issue #14](#).

Russian River writers are an eclectic bunch; this roundup of local writers includes nice words for Thomas Burke's story collection from Fithian Press, *Where is Home*:
<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/sonoma/04.13.05/lit-local-0515.html>.

From Brent Hartinger and Michael Jensen's Two Cheap Bastards column: "A lot of people say you should read because it will make you a 'better person,' and 'it's good for you.' To which we say, 'Bullshit!' You don't eat to get your vitamins; you eat because you're hungry and it tastes good. To us, books still taste pretty damn good."
<http://www.afterelton.com/columns/2005/4/biggaypicture.html>.

More from AfterElton - an interview with gay food writer Nigel Slater:
<http://www.afterelton.com/print/2005/1/nigelslater.html>.

Mike Fleming skips gaily through a spring season of queer books in this commendable effort at showcasing writing and writers (though forecasting titles from catalogue copy has its hazards – Kevin Bentley's *Lets Shut Out the World*, from Green Candy Press, isn't the "gay romance" he suggests; it's a collection of autobiographical essays):
<http://www.washblade.com/2005/4-1/arts/books/books.cfm>.

Margy Rochlin interviews gay noir fiction writer Jake Arnott (*The Long Firm, He Kills Coppers, truecrime*) on gangsters, mummies, and his Guy Ritchie problem:
<http://www.laweekly.com/ink/05/15/books-rochlin.php>.

Luis Alfaro – an early contributor to the *Men on Men* anthology series – believes L.A. theatre is heading for greatness:
<http://www.laweekly.com/ink/05/19/theater-morris.php>.

Novelist Jim Provenzano (*PINS, Monkey Suits*) and Don Romesburg, who writes the "From Our Pages" feature for *The Advocate*, have put together a display of gays and lesbians in sports:
<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/chronicle/archive/2005/04/02/SPGQ6C23P81.DTL>.

Jeffrey McGowan, author of the military memoir *Major Conflict*, is interviewed:
<http://planetout.com/news/feature.html?sernum=1098>.
 An excerpt:
<http://planetout.com/entertainment/books/?sernum=1002>

Ho-hum... the forthcoming book *There's a Beatle in My Closet*, by a one-time assistant to Brian Epstein, will say that the manager of the early Beatles (gasp) slept with one of them:
<http://www.123bharath.com/news/index.php?action=fullnews&id=47396>.

I Have Seen the Future...and It's Already Here

Veteran gay activist and queer novelist Perry Brass draws some fascinating parallels between his prescient fiction and the world we live in. – RAL

I Have Seen the Future... and It's Already Here by Perry Brass

Being clairvoyant, or at least having some handle on a future that is already approaching, has its pluses and minuses. On the plus side is the satisfaction of knowing that your imagination is working in a direction that is both plausible and real. On the minus side is the idea that simply guessing the future does little to change it, although it can help bring it into focus.

Part of this clairvoyance business is of course simply flexing the writer's most powerful "muscle," his imagination. Somerset Maugham said "the imagination is the only muscle that grows stronger with age," and I agree with this, although to work it, you need to keep it in practice. This means a lot of writing, reading, and thinking. It also helps to write in a field some people dub "science fiction" or speculative fiction, but which I think of as simply the fiction of what comes out of a deeper yearning. We all want to see what's ahead, see what is unseen. I had never written science fiction before, and had little interest in it until I began *Mirage*, in 1991, my first published novel, and the first book in what became a trilogy of novels.



Much of the action of *Mirage* takes place on Ki, a small, ecologically challenged planet whose population had been divided into three often conflicting but interlinked groups: "Off-Sexers," that is, warlike heterosexuals; "Same-Sexers," nature-worshipping queer men; and the "Sisters of Ki," lesbian-identified women who actually control the planet by enforcing the original "Agreement of Ki" which kept the planet in ecological balance. *Mirage* sold well, was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award, and one of its main premises was that queerness – non-heterosexual activity – was actually part of the scheme and balance of nature, a concept that several books by biologists promoted almost a decade later.

Mirage was followed by *Circles* (1993), which delved into the idea that there is a queer communication that is often non-verbal, based on shared dreams, mythologies, and extremely important aspects of recognition, that is, something that goes beyond the standard "gaydar" and into a religious concept of an awareness of, and submission towards, complicated deeper feelings. These feelings abandon the standard, often stereotyped queer reactions based on attraction and rejection patterns. (Simply put: if you are not attracted to it, it's not a part of your "gay schema," a pattern reinforced in gay slick magazines and other forms of popular media.)

Instead we have the ultimate "queerness" of leaving set ideas and patterns, and accepting new, challenging, and sometimes even frightening psychic places for oneself. Often this is the beginning of our "coming out," or recognition process, but it goes deeper, flowing into a bonding with a great pooling of human beings and feeling a psychic kinship with them, outside of the usual concentration on the "desired object." So, instead of being merely a "culture of desire," queerness becomes a much larger "culture of embrace and recognition."

At this point, although I was stuck in the science fiction niche, I was reaching more towards a genuinely gay spirituality, even if there was little established place for that kind of spirituality outside of the standard chocolate/vanilla/strawberry choices in their usual Judeo/Christian/Moslem and even Buddhist variations.

By the third book in the *Mirage* trilogy, *Albert or the Book of Man*, (1995), I was wrapping myself around a future that was edging closer, very threateningly so, even though some of the devices in the book, such as body swapping and personality transmissions, were fairly well-worn science fiction ones.

However, I did start off with a plot bang: an adult man from Ki is put into the body of a very advanced two-year-old. He then attempts to seduce his adoptive "father," Lee, who, after the child telescopes into an adult within a few short years, falls in love with him and then "mates" with him. Albert, the child, who on Ki is a deposed king, finds the future on earth, in the year 2025, pretty scary: the right wing White Christian Party, an offshoot of the old Republican party, led by the powerful evangelist Brother Bob Dobson (no relation, I'm sure, to today's James) and an almost half-wit president, controls the country. This has been divided into "gay reserves," where queer people are allowed to exist and mate, and Christian territories, where they can be arrested on sight.

These territories may be the final hardening of the present Blue and Red states. The battle cry of the White Christian Party is: "Hate in the name of Jesus is better than love in the name of anyone else!" The WCP is solidly "Pro-life." Any form of abortion, birth control, or other non-procreative sexual activity is vilified, often criminalized. Even divorce is socially taboo under the "New Conservatism." The ruling classes, who control an economy based on waste and obsolescence, of course ignore all of this. The symbol of this is the repeated sight of looted, burned out, and abandoned shopping malls along the highway.

A cop who is about to arrest Lee and Albert states it clearly, after Lee protests that he and Albert have rights to privacy and being a couple: "You talkin' old rules, feller. The New Conservatives in Congress have given White Christian areas all rights to privacy and freedom of religious preference.... That means our religion must be respected in our localities. That's our private rights." (If this cop sounds like his speech was written by Antonin Scalia, well, maybe it was.)

In 1997, I published *The Harvest*, which I called a "science-politico" novel, rather than a science fiction one. *The Harvest* is about an already-here market in human body parts and tissues, except that at present this market is more underground, and in *The Harvest*, it is a vital part of the American economy. The book deals with an ultimate triumph of our present political/economic structure, so that a "free-market," quasi-"libertarian" economic engine, in the form of one vast "Corporation," has been allowed to eat the government. The government is now a subsidiary of the "Corp" as it is called, and the Corp's "Board," which is simply the old Power/Money, controls it. Everything is done tastefully, with dignity, and with a completely controlled Corporate-sponsored news media and culture.

In fact, today's buzzword, "multi-culturism," is openly encouraged and supported, because everyone should "have a place" in the Corporation, even as a rigid agenda of social conservatism is upheld. Bush is now doing this, declaring himself America's first "multi-cultural president," because he gives his speeches in bad Spanish as well as bad English.

There is, though, in this brave new world a sexual underground of "style leaders" and creative people, which is allowed to exist, in a controlled, marginalized way, often as a way of allowing some safe, unthreatening, stop-gap release for rebellion. In other words, today's Heavy Metal, drag stars, and leather meet the Corporation, and they can still smile at each other, without any real change taking place. A certain degree of rebellion, then, is commercialized, the way that hip-hop music has been, so that the kids on the street feel that they are doing something "anti-establishment," while financially supporting it.

Within this strange stew, I threw in a love triangle with three unpredictable players: wild, impulsive, very smart Hart257043, an escaped, farm-cloned "vacco," or "corporate cadaver," about to be harvested for his organs and tissues; Chris Turner, the handsome hustler/renegade kid from the wrong side of everything who falls for Hart and tries to save him; and Joshua Morgan Devereaux, the rich closeted scion of an old money family who's adopted Chris and renamed him Edgar Devereaux. In *The Harvest* my future says that you can get away with anything as long as you control the media which will determine how it's "spun." Murder stops being murder, and celebrities are turned out like new corporate products, which is exactly what they are.

The Harvest also predicted the advent of “trade wars,” small, non-stop, controllable conflicts used to back up Corporate power and divert attention from engrained economic inequality. We are now having one of these trade wars in Iraq, and variations on it will continue indefinitely.

After *The Harvest*, I stopped doing “science fiction” novels. I never considered myself a science fiction writer, simply a teller of tales (even if they are gay ones), the way one of my idols, Robert Louis Stevenson, proclaimed himself to be. But my novel *Warlock, A Novel of Possession*, about how truly diabolical and amoral big business is, came out only a few months before the Enron scandal. The basic premise of *Warlock* is “there are people who will sell anything to anybody [with no question of how dangerous or phony it is]. We deal with those people.” One of my concepts in both *The Harvest* and *Warlock* is that there is a queer language and a business language, and now parts of both overlap. This seemed inconceivable in my youth: you could not take a moment of your gayness inside the office. Now it is (often) no longer a problem. The only issue is: how about your real self, a self that may question your success? What do you do about that? What do you do with that private self, that no matter how legitimized being gay becomes in any future (with queer marriage, for instance, eventually becoming an asset to the corporate state: linking two queers together as productive employees), still finds itself in rebellion, still wants to know what’s going on, and what place is there for any genuine humanity?

Those questions you don’t have to be a clairvoyant to ask, and I am still trying to answer them.
(Perry Brass’s latest novel is *The Substance of God, A Spiritual Thriller*. He can be reached at www.perrybrass.com.)



BLOGS: Who has the time? Do Try These Three...

Greg Herren (a busy editor and prolific author) turns up on his LiveJournal blog two or three times a week, at length; scroll through the archives to read about what happened when the fundamentalist right found out a ho-mo-sexual was scheduled to speak to a classroom of Virginia schoolchildren. More recent postings take off on Christian fanatics, report on a Saints & Sinners benefit reading he emceed, and recall the warm fuzzies of holding his own first book in his hands.

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/scottynola>.

In day-to-day life, JN (Jeff) Shaumeyer is an underemployed rocket scientist (really); he’s also Jay Neal, a popular writer of bear porn. Both personalities inhabit his thoughtful blog, with links to “Jay Neal’s” fiction, to The Pansy Forest – an online boutique of “Unusual Gifts for Unusual People,” selling, among other things, scented soaps, candles, and handcrafted rosaries – and to the Bear Castle, where Jeff and his partner Isaac write about themselves, and all things bear.

<http://bearcastle.com/blog/?m=200504>

Robert Williams has had short stories published in Karl Woeltz’s anthology *M2M* from the late and lamented publisher AttaGirl, and in Edmund White’s *Fresh Men* anthology from Carroll and Graf; he writes a lot about the process of writing in rwilliamsdotorg, which is something other writers ought to enjoy reading. Recently, he’s found quality writing time in the Brooklyn Public library, and he confesses to having a crush on [Jonathan Safran Foer](http://jonathansafranfoer.com)... “merely the musings of one writer who happens to be gay (i.e. “me”) and has a penchant for quick, boyish, immature crushes on other writers – well, ok, and actors, and singers like [Jason Mraz](http://jasonmraz.com) – of the same sex. It is not meant to imply anything about said writers or actors or singers like Jason Mraz’s sexual preferences or anything of that nature.”

<http://emptybeach.typepad.com/rwilliamsdotorg>.



Bestsellers From Our Bookstores

OutLoud Books – Nashville

Men's Fiction

1. *Murder in the Rue St. Ann*, by Greg Herren – When sexy gay PI Chase MacLeod investigates a club promoter, he discovers ties to not only the New Orleans judiciary but his own lover as well.
2. *Tangled Sheets*, by Michael Thomas Ford – These stories of heat, lust, desire, need and transformation are as incredibly hot as they are exquisitely and intelligently crafted.
3. *Firelands*, by Michael Jensen – Called an “exciting addition to gay frontier historical novels,” it’s the story of Cole Seavey, who is attacked by a creature that is neither man nor beast.
4. *The Book of Joe*, by Jonathan Tropper – Fifteen years ago, Joe Goffman wrote a novel savaging everything about his hometown. Now, in order to nurse his father, the town’s most famous pariah must return.
5. *Best Gay Love Stories 2005*, edited by Nick Street – Twenty-five of America’s leading gay writers present new stories of gay love and longing in this collection of passionately romantic original fiction.

Nonfiction

1. *The Funny Thing Is...*, by Ellen DeGeneres – Ellen continues her domination of all media (stand-up tour, HBO special, “Finding Nemo,” the talk show) with the new paperback release of the bestselling book.
2. *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, by C.A. Tripp – In this controversial biography, former Kinsey sex researcher Tripp details three homosexual liaisons from different stages of the president’s life.
3. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart Presents America the Book: A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction*, by Jon Stewart, Ben Karlin, David Javerbaum
4. *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies and Denial in Black America*, by Keith Boykin – The DL is not a problem of gay and bi-men living in the shadows. It’s an example of America’s unwillingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations about black sexuality.
5. *Mondo Homo: Your Essential Guide to Gay Pop Culture*, edited by Richard Andreoli – Eight writers offer a combination of essays, best-of lists, how-to advice and recipes designed as a guided tour of the landscape of contemporary queer culture.

OutLoud info: <http://www.outloudonline.com>

Lambda Rising Bookstore – Norfolk, Virginia

Men's Fiction

1. *So Hard to Say*, by Alex Sanchez – “It can open eyes and change lives,” said *Library Journal*; it “helps younger readers look at self-discovery, come to terms with being gay, and accept people who are different from them.”
2. *Tamburlaine Must Die*, by Louise Welsh – It’s 1593 and London is a city on edge. Playwright, poet, spy, and man of prodigious appetites, Christopher Marlowe is working on his latest literary effort and enjoying the English countryside at his patron’s estate. But this idyll is soon cut short by a message from the Queen. He must return immediately to London, for a killer has escaped from between the pages of Marlowe’s most violent play and is scandalizing the city.
3. *Tangled Sheets: Tales of Erotica*, by Michael Thomas Ford – A thrilling celebration of unbridled lust, body heat, and the transformative powers of love and hedonism. The scenes that come to life between the covers of this book – including an Olympian bacchanal, a chance meeting in the men’s room, an SM-fueled “coaching” session, a good-cop/bad-cop Q&A, and much more – are as steamy as they are exquisitely crafted.
4. *I'm Your Man*, by Timothy James Beck – Gay advertising executive Blaine Dunhill decides to take the plunge into fatherhood when his best friend Gretchen asks him to become the daddy of her baby. Now he’s about to learn everything there is to know about pregnancy, cravings, and babies.
5. *Freedom in This Village: Twenty-Five Years of Black Gay Men's Writing, 1979 to the Present*, edited by E. Lynn Harris – Charts the innovative course of black gay male literature of the past 25 years. Starting in 1979 with the publication of James Baldwin’s final novel, *Just Above My Head*, then on to the radical writings of the 1980s, the breakthrough successes of the 1990s, and up to today’s new works, this anthology collects 47 sensational stories, poems, novel excerpts, and essays.

Nonfiction

1. *Box Lunch: The Layperson's Guide to Cunnilingus*, by Diana Cage – Written by a woman experienced on both ends of the oral sex equation, this

nuts-and-bolts exploration of cunnilingus is unlike anything ever written before.

2. *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America*, by Keith Boykin – Unlike previous accounts, *Beyond the Down Low* presents the DL not merely as a problem of gay and bisexual men living in the shadows, but more as an example of America's unwillingness to engage in critical but uncomfortable conversations about black sexuality.

3. *The Funny Thing Is...*, by Ellen DeGeneres – After years of painstaking, round-the-clock research, surviving on a mere twenty minutes of sleep a night, and collaborating with lexicographers, plumbers, and mathematicians, DeGeneres has crafted a work that is both easy to use and very funny... an indispensable reference for anyone who knows how to read or wants to fool people into thinking they do.

4. *What Becomes of the Brokenhearted: A Memoir*, by E. Lynn Harris – In his most daring act yet, E. Lynn Harris writes the memoir of his life – from his childhood in Arkansas as a closeted gay boy through his struggling days as a self-published author to his rise as a *New York Times* bestselling author.

5. *Barracks Bad Boys: Authentic Accounts of Sex in the Armed Forces*, by Alex Buchman – A radical approach to an otherwise rigidly formulaic sub-genre presents true first-person narratives about criminally sexy soldiers and sailors in trouble, who cause trouble, or who just are trouble.

Store info:

<http://www.lambdarising.com>

You've seen the movie; now read the book – a compilation of titles from Lambda Rising:

<http://www.lambdarising.com/NASApp/store/IndexJsp.jsessionid=E98F22D6EC6B20CB4A512E4B07DFB855.t6?s=localauthors&page=260910>



Richard can be reached at tattyhill@gmail.com, at 613 264 5409, or at 7-A Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 2J3 Canada. Books for review, author news, interesting links - all appreciated.

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