

Local editors win three-day novel contest

C.J. Dorsey of *The Bulletin* discusses her winning book.

interview by Elaine Ostry

Writing a novel in three days would be a harrowing experience for most of us. Winning the prize of publication of the final product would probably make most of us ecstatic. But Candace Jane Dorsey, co-winner of the Ninth Annual Pulp Press Three Day Novel Contest, held each Labour Day weekend, seems to view the whole matter very calmly. Curled in an armchair, graced by her cats Ambler and Cynthia, Dorsey talked about the novel contest, the art of collaboration, and her novel, *Hardwired Angel*.

The contest, which invites people to write a novel in three days, was "an interesting challenge as a writer" which went "very smoothly". Although the contestants were allowed to have an outline written before the contest, Dorsey and her co-writer, Nora Abercrombie, did not make one. However, each writer had a character in mind which

they wished to write about (Abercrombie's was Eric, Dorsey's was Angel), and alternated chapters. Incidentally, this is the first time that a collaboration has won the contest.

An important consideration was the effect of the time limitation on the work. There are, as Dorsey points out, "limits even to how much you can type". "We had to pace ourselves in order to finish what we'd started," says Dorsey, "and therefore, certain promising sideplots had to be closed off." Originally, the authors had planned an outline of nineteen chapters, but later had to cut out four of them. Dorsey claims that, despite the short time limit, she and Abercrombie felt "no sense of doom" but entered the contest "just for experience."

Dorsey and Abercrombie are familiar with deadlines and collaboration. They are, respectively, the editor and associate editor of *The Bulletin*, an Arts and Entertainment maga-



Co-author of *Hardwired Angel*, Candace Jane Dorsey.

Photo Elaine Ostry

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zine. Dorsey helped to start this publication in order to fill the gap in reporting that focuses on the arts community in Edmonton. Abercrombie's experience is journalistic: she began writing for the *Red Deer Advocate* when she was sixteen, and started to write fiction only a year before the contest. Dorsey's experience has emphasized creative writing: she has worked as a freelance writer for eight and a half years, and has had three books of poetry published, as well as many science fiction stories. *Hardwired Angel* is the first novel of both Abercrombie and Dorsey.

Abercrombie is presently experimenting with writing fiction, while Dorsey is more interested now in writing non-fiction. She believes that work in journalism improves creative writing, as it is "constant practice of the craft," and her next project in mind is a non-fiction book.

Dorsey credits the completion and the success of the novel to the "energy of collaboration". According to Dorsey, "true collaboration is rather rare. It requires mutual respect, an ability to give and take." Dorsey believes that she and Abercrombie "challenge each other" with their different advantages and experiences.

Certainly Dorsey has applied her experience to *Hardwired Angel*. Angel, the heroine, is a computer prodigy whose inven-

tions are incredible, yet she becomes disillusioned and walks on the wild side of town. The character of Angel as well as one of her inventions, Machine Sex, were inspired by one of Dorsey's own science fiction stories. Dorsey was also a childcare worker with "delinquent" (her quotes) girls for four years, and gave Angel some of the qualities she found in her charges. She sees Angel as a survivor in a difficult situation, who reacts to it with "a mixture of defiance and acquiescence", as well as "self-punishment". Angel wants to be cared for and loved despite her tough exterior. She is "superficially corrupt but ethically clear", and as the book progresses gains a "victory over self". Dorsey also views Angel as a typical prodigy, as the girl is very advanced in her area of specialty, yet generally immature. The main themes of the novel, according to Dorsey, are that "it is never too late to give up hoping" and that "conventional morality is not always the highest ethical stance."

Dorsey doubts that she and Abercrombie will rewrite the novel to develop it further than the three days allowed them to do. However, they have been "kicking around the idea of each writing a sequel, independently." But in the meantime, the biggest project of the two writers is to take a break from the book tours and go whitewater canoeing with a friend.

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