

## **Lecture #24 April 29, 2008: "Good Mountain"**

"Good Mountain" by Robert Reed (in *Year's Best SF*)

Synopsis: Takes place on a distant, unknown, and strange planet. The world appears to be a single ocean; all land, all continents are giant floating woody plants.

People travel in the interior of giant worms. "Mockmen" (genetically modified people) act as servants.

The protagonist is Jopale, He is traveling by worm to Port of Krauss, and from there to travel to the New Isles, to start a new life. He meets a mysterious young woman, Do-ane, going to Good Mountain. As they travel across the wooden continent, disaster follows at their heels.

Slowly, Do-ane's story comes out. She claims "Good Mountain" is actually a spaceship, buried deep in the wooden continent. She also suggests that all the animals on the planet were in fact introduced and genetically modified by the ship's crew.

As fires approach the worm, many passengers follow Do-ane towards Good Mountain. But it is revealed to Jopale that the woman is insane and has made up the story.

The setting of "Good Mountain" is a young, metal-poor system, probably around an F-class star, far out in the galaxy.

Humans (allegedly) splashed down on this ocean world, created plants and animals, including the servant mockmen.

Opening of the story: "World's Edge. Approach now...World's Edge."

Ending: "Words...they're just sounds and scribbles. It's *people* who give them meaning. Without us, the poor things wouldn't have any life at all."

Do-ane tells a story of exploration and invention. While her story has elements of truth in it, it ultimately is hollow.

Jopale's flight to the New Isles, to get a new life, may also be futile. Even so, his beautiful cousin offers to reinvent herself as his servant, to take his mockman's place.

Jopale assumes Mockmen to be barely sentient -- to be unable to invent the world -- but encounters a mockman porter who challenges this assumption.

Meaning is *invented*; we can never be sure of the "truth." The truth may be manufactured out of desperation in the same way that all life on the planet was manufactured out of desperation.. Ultimately, we do not learn if Jopale's quest for the New Isles is successful or foolish; it could be either one.