

DREAM

SCIENCE FICTION



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No. 25

SEPTEMBER 1990

LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE by Mark D. Haw
plus more great stories by writers new to 'DREAM'



DREAM SCIENCE FICTION
(A member of the New SF Alliance)

No. 25

SEPTEMBER 1990

EDITORS:

GEORGE P. TOWNSEND
TREVOR JONES

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EDITORIAL

Trevor Jones



Reading the latest (as I write this) issue of 'INTERZONE' (June 1990) was an interesting experience. In the 'Interface' section, 'INTERZONE's editor, David Pringle, lists some of the authors that 'INTERZONE' has discovered. It is an interesting and, in many ways, impressive list of new British writers: Keith Brooke, William King, Charles Stross, Lyle Hopwood, Simon Ings and many more. Oh, but hang on a minute.. isn't there something familiar about that list of names? There certainly is! Any reader of the New SF Alliance magazines will be familiar with them all, and not from their 'INTERZONE' stories either. The fact is that **all** those listed above were contributing to various Alliance magazines ('DREAM', 'BBR', 'AUGURIES', etc.) long before they appeared in 'INTERZONE' as discoveries of that magazine.

Well, okay, perhaps David Pringle meant to say that IZ published their first 'professional' stories (i.e. stories paid for at IZ's rates) but he didn't say that. The plain truth is that the *true* breeding ground for the best new authors has, in the last few years, been the small presses. There are other names appearing in the small presses at present who will, I am sure, be equally well known in the so-called 'professional' markets in a few years' time. This issue of 'DREAM', for example, features half-a-dozen writers new to our pages, but at least a couple of them, I am certain, will be featuring in the top-paying SF 'zines in the next couple of years. You will also be seeing more of them in our pages. With the advent of ever more new magazines paying good rates the way is open for a new breed of British pro.; one who doesn't write material suitable for 'INTERZONE', but whose work is well worthy of professional publication. You'll be seeing them coming through and don't be at all surprised if the names are familiar as contributors to Alliance magazines.

The advent of all these new markets has convinced us here at 'DREAM' that we must move with the times. Therefore, over the next twelve months we will be introducing a number of changes. With this issue we go bi-monthly and, even with the number of pages reduced to 68 this represents an annual increase in the amount of fiction published of 20%. By issue 30 we will be paying 'professional' rates for our fiction. More on this later, but our design and layout (already the subject of much praise) will remain top notch to give a fully professional package. Furthermore, subscriptions will remain at the present rates until Issue 29, giving you the opportunity to subscribe to the post-Issue 30 'DREAM' at current rates. Take my word, that will prove to be a real bargain. All past contributors to 'DREAM' will be getting a letter giving more details of our requirements, but if *you* want details, send an s.a.e. (or 2 IRC's) to our editorial address.

One more change: effective from this issue John Townsend has relinquished his post as Assistant editor to concentrate on his writing. George Townsend and I will therefore be acting as joint editors for the time being, 'though because of my continuing poor health George will be undertaking the bulk of the donkey work. Our editorial address will remain unchanged.

We are excited about the changes we are planning for 'DREAM'. We hope all our friends of the past five years will continue to support us as they have done and that we can look forward to a vastly expanded readership who will continue to help make 'DREAM' an essential element in the vanguard of British SF for the nineties. ●

BODYWORK

P.F.HAMILTON



DAMIAN waited long after there was any point to it; not even Father Blanchard would venture into the Springfields estate after nightfall. With his frustration tempered with a stubbornly lingering hope he stayed home, shelving the lone alternative of an evening getting slowly sozzled with the lads at the Red Dragon. Missing a night wouldn't hurt; besides, his Dignity Deal beer allowance was almost spent.

He stared at the city beyond the estate's boundary, dreaming idly of the day when he would walk along its teeming, colourful boulevards, mingling with happy, fulfilled, purposeful people. Squat, ruggedly-built cyberfoundries encircled Springfields, forming an unbroken moat which kept the Shareholder and Taxpayer citizens comfortably isolated from the Welfare district.

In the darkness of night the city was cloaked in a hazy pearl corona of its own making. Directly outside the cyberfoundry ring were the Shareholder condominiums, huge independent commercial complexes whose subterranean industrial units insured each one was self-sufficient. Above ground, their accommodation modules were stacked like the tiers of an amphitheatre around a central park. Tall cliff-like outer walls shone with the light from thousands of windows. The streets between them were continuous streaks of colour as hologram ads oscillated for pedestrians' attention.

Past the condominiums he could see a row of Taxpayer skyscrapers, standing like sentries around the city. Brilliant white spires stabbing into the sky. To be so prominent they must've been over a kilometre high.

Blanchard promised, he kept repeating to himself, as if that alone would summon the old man. If any of the music companies were interested in my demo he'd come straight back. For the first time he allowed his doubts to surface. Blanchard, for all his innate kindness, hardly knew the ins and outs of the music industry. Suppose...

It was a fruitless line of speculation. He strummed a few chords on his guitar. One of his better compositions. In his melancholic mood it sounded pitiful in comparison to the sophisticated harmonies the radio played.

He started a different chord sequence; maybe the night would give inspiration.

That was how Rebecca found him when she came home, hunched over the battered old instrument, oblivious to the world.

He looked up at the interruption, frowning at her unexpected return. "You're early."

"I wasn't picked. I didn't like to stay on at the parlour, there weren't many of us left, and I didn't know any of them."

His crystal eye zoomed-in for a close-up of her face. The muscles around her mouth were taut, and there was an accumulation of moisture in her eyes, although not enough to produce tears. He suspected something had happened at the parlour, but wasn't about to ask.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to see you. In fact we'll go down to the Red Dragon to celebrate."

She attempted a smile, a quick twitch of her lips, then nodded eagerly. "I'll get changed."

Damian returned to the guitar, whilst keeping a surreptitious eye on Rebecca. He never tired of looking at her. She was strikingly pretty. They had been together five months, ever since she was old enough for the Dignity Deal Welfare Corporation to loan her out.

Theirs was the usual partnership within Springfields, a seller with a leaser; he gave her life a degree of stability. The corporation had found its leasers becoming

unreliable, especially the younger ones, so it offered increased allowances to any man who'd care for them while they weren't on loan.

Rebecca took off her light cotton dress, hanging it neatly in the wardrobe next to the other two she used when she was on loan. Her body was wafer-thin, although not undernourished, the corporation made quite sure of that. Rebecca was just naturally slender; even in the room's half-light Damian could see the outline of her ribcage as she stretched up to pull on an old sweatshirt. She had frizzy chestnut hair that fell almost to her hips, and a narrow sprightly face that made her look even younger than her fifteen years. Usually, it was a combination that kept her in high demand. Perhaps there hadn't been any Taxpayer who wanted a daughter figure tonight.

Don't pry, he chided himself. Rebecca never talked about what she had to do. Their unspoken arrangement worked well. She smiled a lot when she was with him, which was more than most of her peers did. And she enjoyed his songs too, without being sycophantic about them. The short period they'd spent together was the happiest of his life.

There weren't many people abroad outside. And the three storey apartment blocks that composed Springfields' residential quarter could've been deserted for all the life they displayed. A few windows were illuminated with the dim sulphur-yellow emission from a solarstore cube.

A gang of boiler-suited Clone Drones was sweeping the street. Dwarfish humanoids, a metre twenty in height, with vaguely Mongoloid features. They were used for any simple mundane task.

Damian wondered why the corporation bothered. Streetcleaning was doubtless included in their franchise agreement with the city council. But who'd check?

He'd been told that when the first Ceedies appeared on the estate they'd been stoned. The corporation had retaliated by turning off the water for a week. True or not, nobody disturbed the Ceedies now.

Curiously, given the lateness of the hour, the Red Dragon seemed lively; there were plenty of jovial people inside, even spilling onto the pavement.

An over-loud whoop went up when they walked in. A woman was standing on a table, waving frantically at them. Damian recognized her; Gaynor, a leaser, paired up with Vincent.

"Get yourself a drink," she yelled out gleefully. "My treat. I've bought out."

They collected a couple of watery beers and went over. Gaynor and Rebecca embraced like long lost sisters. Now he thought about it, Damian couldn't remember seeing Gaynor around for a while.

"How?" breathed Rebecca.

"I got lucky," Gaynor replied. "A party of Taxpayers wanted some girls to take on holiday with them. I got chosen. We spent a fortnight on this absolutely gorgeous tropical island. One old boy really took a fancy to me. I got a whopping great bonus."

"They must've been well off," Rebecca said.

"God, yes. I'll tell you how rich: they even had their own clones."

High-bracket Taxpayers, Damian decided. Nobody else could afford to grow a clone of their entire body and keep it alive for spares as insurance against disease or accident. Low-bracket Taxpayers used transplants, while Shareholders obtained prosthetics under their condominium medical cover schemes. He glanced involuntarily at his own legs. They looked perfect, the warm plastic skin even had hairs, and they never tired. It'd surprised him.

The first time he'd gone to the Dignity Deal's clinic he'd been petrified. It'd only

been for one foot. That was seven years ago. He was twenty at the time, and didn't have a solitary sharecredit to his name. A foot wasn't much, he'd reasoned, and he had to get started one day. If he left it too long he'd never get out of Springfields. The clinic had taken two days to perform the exchange. There hadn't been the slightest discomfort, the food was fabulous, and he'd walked out unaided.

The corporation paid him five thousand sharecredits for the foot. But you needed two-hundred-thousand to own a condominium Share. After selling two legs an arm and an eye, Damian's account stood at ninety thousand. To reach the magic figure it'd mean selling his heart and either the last arm or a major organ.

It'd taken time, but he'd gradually worked out their pricing policy. It was deliberate exploitation, designed to extract the full value of each Welfare citizen before allowing them to graduate up to Shareholder status.

Sellers got the highest prices when they were in the prime of their health, putting them under immense pressure. If they hadn't bought a Share before they were thirty they probably never would — not without abdicating their whole body. It was the same situation for leasers, except that the corporation stopped loaning them out at twenty five, by which time the golden years of their youth and beauty had been wrung from them. If they still fell short they could begin selling; most did. One limb or organ was the norm.

After his momentous discovery he'd thought to organize protests, maybe a strike. But the people of Springfields would shake their heads when he told them, unperturbed, uncaring. Deprived of his crusade he'd turned to protesting through his songs. They'd listen to them enthusiastically enough, singing along, applauding, buying him beers. And if his music did turn out to be any good he never would have to return to the clinic.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," said Gaynor. "Imagine it, everything you could want provided by your dividend; decent food, new clothes. A Shareholder." She said it almost reverentially.

Damian wished she could be more tactful. Vincent's face was totally impassive, but Damian could tell how badly he was suffering inside. He was fond of Gaynor, and she was only twenty. He must've expected to be with her for another five years before this bolt from the blue. Vincent had only sold one leg so far. There was no chance he could leave with her.

Gaynor started prattling on about her tropical island, describing white sandy beaches and drooping palms. It was meaningless to Damian, he couldn't relate the words to anything he'd experienced. Whereas Rebecca and the other leasers hung on to every word she uttered.

They know what it's like outside Springfields, Damian realized. A daily sight of the crock of gold. He wasn't sure if he approved of that. It seemed like subtle blackmail on the corporation's part. Addictive, a dangled prize.

His attention wandered. Most of the men were huddled over their drinks, as unenlightened as him, some women too. Bernadette was one, sitting opposite him, her placid moon-face strangely tranquil. She was a mother, not nearly pretty enough to be a leaser. Her only option, apart from selling, was children. She'd already had five, only one of which had an IQ high enough for the corporation to buy for adoption, the others had all gone to the Springfields orphanage.

Damian suddenly visualized her sitting in the same seat year after year, getting increasingly heavier, watching her contemporaries throwing their buy-out parties. The same as him if he didn't raise the necessary credits fairly soon. What had

happened to Blanchard!?

They left the pub two hours later. Rebecca was slightly tipsy. She held on to his arm as they made their way home.

"If my songs do make the grade, I'll buy you out," he heard himself mumble. He couldn't put Vincent's desolation out of his mind. "I shan't abandon you here."

"Do you mean that?" Her eyes were wide and trusting.

"Of course. That's if they ever come to anything, I doubt they will."

"Oh they will, Damian, they will. Nobody else in Springfields is half as clever as you. They all like your songs, so they can't be bad, can they?"

"Doesn't mean anything. Welfare citizens are hardly likely to have the same tastes as Shareholders or Taxpayers."

"Please, Damian, believe in yourself. We all look up to you. If you can buy-out with your music it'll give everyone hope. You'll prove there is an alternative to Dignity Deal; it'll make you the inspiration for a whole generation."

"They're only songs."

"Important songs, brilliant songs."

He remembered Father Blanchard using an equally effusive phrase when he'd heard them. It had been difficult to convince the priest at first that he'd actually written them himself. But then Blanchard had accessed his medical records. "It's a crying shame," the old man had said. "You aren't here because you're stupid, it's an affliction known as dyslexia. It stops you from being computer literate, so the only way you can buy-in to a condominium is through the Dignity Deal. There's no middle course left, not since manual labour became obsolete, courtesy of the Ceedies."

Damian looked down at the adulation on Rebecca's young face. "Don't know what I'd do without you," he said. "So even if the ones Blanchard's hawking aren't up to scratch, I'll write some more, and then others after that, however many it takes."

She stood on tiptoe to kiss him.

Light and sound woke Damian. He blinked blurry eyes in confusion. The open window revealed what looked like a faint tangerine dawn, but one that flickered erratically. The noise was a high-pitched roaring that was growing louder.

Rebecca was lying sprawled on top of Damian. She raised her head. "What is it?" she croaked.

"No idea." The tangerine light was becoming brighter, he could clearly see nearby rooftops. He shoved the bedclothes back and they padded over the bare boards to the window. Outside, the buildings' shadows were moving. Glass began to rattle in the window frames.

The appalling sound ascended to a painful crescendo. They both jammed their hands over their ears.

A large delta shape slid into view overhead. It was jet black. Damian couldn't even begin to guess at its true size, there was nothing to give it any scale. A turbulent stream of misty vapour was spewing out of its trailing edge, blazing a vivid amber. Incandescent static discharges ricocheted down the plume. Damian's natural eye was dazzled with intense purple after-images.

The craft cleared Springfields, going on to illuminate the condominiums with its lurid radiance. Mercifully the white noise its passage generated began to abate. Fast, powerful gusts of wind whipped along the streets below. Rooftiles clattered

downwards.

Damian followed the craft's course with his crystal eye. It was losing height steadily. But even so it might still have reached the city boundaries if it hadn't been for the Taxpayer skyscraper. Whatever was controlling it realized it's lethal heading. It began to bank, attempting to slide past the giant obstacle.

A wingtip caught the side of the skyscraper, a third of the way up. The craft flipped up, tumbling out of the air in a lazy sideways somersault; a swarm of debris accompanied it, flaring like a meteor shower. It smashed into the base of the skyscraper, detonating in a colossal fireball that raced up for the heavens.

Damian watched the skyscraper rock in the blast, a slow undulation which sent its tip waving back and forth. The motion was too much for the damaged structure to withstand. After the third sway, the tip kept going.

Rebecca wailed in horror and clutched at Damian, burying her head against his chest. He observed the scene unfold, immured from emotion. It didn't seem real, too remote, too vast to fully comprehend.

Thanks to its phenomenal height, the skyscraper took an age to fall. He wondered what it could possibly be like for its residents. Were they even now looking out of their windows, watching the ground approaching as the floor tilted away from under them? Those at the top certainly had time to indulge such fatalism.

The tower shrank as the lower storeys buckled, sending up a veiling sheet of thick black clouds from its base. All the lights died, but Damian could still see it, a wraith-like shadow of its former self as a million dark window panes reflected the city's corona. Some back-up power source kept the rooftop landing pad strobes going. He caught a brief glimpse of them flashing wildly. Then they too sank into the waiting clouds.

He was hugging Rebecca when the sound arrived, blotting out her sobs. A deep stentorian rumble that set his sternum vibrating, it went on and on.

The clouds dissipated, occasionally torn by small explosions. Flames took hold along the remains of the tower and the wrecked buildings that it had crushed. Torn and twisted structural girders were silhouetted against the pale orange horizon.

They watched the rescue operation for over an hour. A fleet of emergency service flyers converged on the disaster zone, swirling above it like a miniature galaxy. Individual vehicles would break away from the peripheries, swooping down to pick up survivors, then streaking off to one of the city's Taxpayer medical centres.

Eventually the air grew cold, cajoling them back to bed. Damian pulled the thin blankets over them. Rebecca was shivering. He stroked her back, offering gentle reassurance. The fires outside began to dim, leaving them in darkness. Rebecca fell into a restless sleep. Strangely enough, all he could think of was the song he'd have to compose in order to enshrine the night's events. Surely that was a theme which would appeal to any class? He'd just conjured up a suitably mournful melody when he finally dropped off.

Motion woke Damian. Once his eyes prised open he struggled to make sense of what he was seeing. Recognition was slow in coming. He was on the stairs outside the room he shared with Rebecca. He couldn't ever remember sleepwalking before.

Startled, he tried to stop. There was no response from his legs. He carried on walking.

Fully alert now, he wondered if he was dreaming. But if he was dreaming would he be alert? Skip it... There was a tangible difference between dreaming and full

consciousness. He knew he was awake.

He descended to the bottom of the stairs, and headed towards the apartment block's open door. In desperation he reached for the doorpost. Only his natural arm responded. And even that was sluggish, unwilling to obey. His hand closed around the doorpost, gripping as tight as possible. It barely slowed him down. His feet kept plodding onwards. He watched in astonishment as his hand was pulled free. Finger-nails scraped across the paint, gouging five jagged trails, tiny white flakes fluttered to the floor.

And then he was out in the street. It was just before dawn, the time of absolute tranquillity. But today there was movement. People were spilling out of the apartment blocks. He gazed round wildly. Some of them were obviously still asleep, others were like him — eyes wide, terrified incomprehension frozen on their faces.

Damian tried to scream. His throat constricted, allowing only a choked rasp to escape. There were similar muted sounds all along the street.

He merged into the throng. Every one of them marching at the same measured pace, in the same direction.

The Dignity Deal Welfare Corporation's clinic formed an entire side of the estate's main square. A gloomy unembellished five storey building, with seamless grey walls, and few windows.

Six transplant division freighters had landed on the roof. Flattened ellipsoids a monotonous muddy-brown in colour, poised on their long stilt-like undercarriage legs. Their noses peeked over the edge of the roof. Vultures watching their approaching prey.

Damian was among the leaders as they emerged out of Springfields' winding streets into the square. His vision wavered, he was crying.

For Rebecca who'd never know.

For all the songs that would now remain un-sung.

For Rebecca who was far, far too young to be left alone.

For Rebecca who he loved.

For Rebecca...

Ahead of him the clinic doors swung open, bright welcoming light splashed out onto the pavement.

His flawless legs walked him across the threshold. ●

COMING IN DREAM 26

The next issue leads off with a new story by Keith Brooke 'AWAY ON OLD DUSTY'. We agree with INTERZONE' that Brooke is likely to be one of the 90s top new writers and this story can only enhance his growing reputation.

Also present will be favourites such as Graham Andrews, Gerry Connelly and David Gomm. All the usual features, naturally, plus more information regarding our forthcoming improvements. Don't miss it!

THE GIFT OF LIFE

Fragments of lost forgotten stories
float back in dreams like allegories.
And my thoughts of late have been much of these,
of rocks
and chains
and foaming seas,
of brazen towers and golden keys,
the sleep bewitched, the kiss that frees,
and the dragon but one may slay.

There could have been no withstanding.
The dykes were swept away.
He spoke and spoke and all he said
was clear as the light of the day.
For speaking he brought into being
that which had lain till then
dumb and dim, like a pledge within
of all that I now become through him,
as out from shifting shadows
I walk where Love may lead,
in the light of a clear and lucent sky,
no cloud-bound wanderer more, but I --
become myself indeed.

As if I had traversed a threshold,
and come through the arch of a door,
where a thousand years had slipped away
in the seeming space of a single day,
and endless all about me lay
a world undreamt before.
Or as if, at the hour he spoke to me,
time itself had ceased to be,
and begun were the reign of eternity,
and into it I awaken.

And, come what may, I still can say,
may his name be blessed for the night and day
he gave that can not be reft away
and the gift of life partaken!

Ann Keith

BUGS



CHRIS AMIES

He leaned on the rusted steel rail and looked down. The courtyard of the house was full of broken crockery, smashed wooden furniture, cats asleep or dead. Half a ladder stood still propped against a wall, in a parody of its one-time use, like a soldier dead on parade but still standing to attention as the flesh dripped from his bones. The paint on the walls, once white, was brown and flaky, peeling away and falling as a thin dust on the debris. In winter he had used the timber for firewood. It was now late spring, and by nine the day would grow too hot to go outside.

The furnishings were dust and sometimes jazz. The only occupant of this room apart from Michael Turner was the terminal; or he was the only inhabitant apart from the terminal. He wasn't sure which way round it should be. He was more movable and had spent many nights on other floors and even on the streets. You did, in Oran. You hit town and you kept falling until something stopped you.

Home was really the Net. He felt more at ease there, and didn't mind who knew it. The entire city wired as a biological computer.

Oran had flourished again in the years since the Red Sahel had left, finally driven out by world opinion and a combined European-Arabian task force and the biological mutagens it had brought with it. The mosques had been rebuilt or new ones put up, and in order to bring in enough money the Oranese had welcomed foreign workers and developers. Beyond the ruined outlines of the old city the Maghreb littoral urban development stretched from Tunis to Tangier and was already looking at Casablanca.

It became a convenient drop zone for those who wanted a quick buck or other pleasures. For the disaffected of the Union of European States and of America. For the eternal dropouts who in earlier decades had gone to teach English in Greece or Turkey. Now they were going to Oran and becoming computer hacks in the most hotly-wired environment in history. Nobody was learning English now.

Turner had spent his first weeks there expecting to find dead rats on the verandah. The concierge told him there were no more rats. Even they couldn't handle the wave of mutated typhus, cholera and bubonic plague that had swept over the city in the last days of the War.

Michael Turner went into the Bar al-Kbira in the Rue Sidi Benhmad that evening, among the iron tables and the neon tubes and advertisements for half the beers and tisanes of the known world. None of his usual companions were in there, but he wasn't looking for them. The man he was looking for was sitting at a corner table; one hand on his beer glass, the other on the bare thigh of the girl next to him. Turner was getting used to seeing 'Papa' Joe Korzyk there but it didn't mean he liked him. He didn't like Papa Joe's white suits, his carefully trimmed Van Dyck beard, his brass-topped cane, or his perfumed 22-year-old mistress. For that matter, Turner didn't like going out in daylight. It felt grubby and unnatural, and too many people could see you coming. But he had business to do.

He unplugged the stereophones in his ears and walked up to the bar, ordered a Tsingtao Prime.

Papa Joe's mistress gave him an insulted look. Turner gave her a look that said nothing except the concept of a world without people like her.

But he wasn't interested in the mistress. He levered himself into a space next to the entrepreneur himself. Korzyk shot him a keen look.

"Could you build something for me, Papa Joe?" Turner asked. Korzyk handed Turner the business card.

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. Bioforms International is pleased to announce its Rare And Extinct Species service. Any rare or extinct animal considered, no request too bizarre for discussion. Whatever it is: WE CAN BUILD IT FOR YOU! Bioforms International, proprietor Josef Korzyk, DSc.

Turner slipped it into his pocket.

"You can pay?" Papa Joe said.

"I wouldn't be asking if I couldn't."

"We are — ah — talking about a special commission?"

Turner nodded. This would come expensive. Even though what he had in mind was probably going to be extremely small.

"Something extinct?"

"Something that I don't think ever existed. Not so far anyway."

"You're getting into bioforms yourself, Mr. Turner?"

"No. This is strictly work-related."

"I don't build biocomputers."

"Nor do I. I'm not asking you to." Turner was beginning to gain confidence; not just the confidence of Amstel Gold. He knew he was on his own ground.,

"I think" said Papa Joe, "it might be a good idea if we discussed this privately." He looked around him with an Olympian contempt Turner found himself trying to emulate.

"Take a taxi home," Korzyk told the mistress. She pouted but kept quiet, shooting a final look of loathing at Turner, who just admired the shape of her breasts under the simple dress.

Turner sank into the broad leather upholstery of the Mercedes and breathed in the smell of plenty of money. Papa Joe gunned the turbine to take them out of the city. Through the still-wasted heart of Oran, the marble public buildings of the French Colonial Administration, down the Boulevard de l'Afrique with some of its signs still showing the name 'Boulevard Jules Ferry.' In a way, Turner thought, it must be a bit like it was in the great colonial days: no traffic and very few people.

Korzyk's endeavours in the field of tailor-made bioengineering for the well-heeled had made him pretty rich within a couple of years, and he bought a house. In fact he bought an entire island in the Sebkra that just happened to have a house upon it. One of the mansions built by the French in the last century and left to decay slowly or quickly by the new inhabitants. Turner, like most people, had seen it through the trees, but never close to. It stood low and white across the water, guarded by a drawbridge, dogs, and camera eyes mounted on aluminium rods stuck into the shoreline mud like totem poles. A sudden atavistic vision of South-east Asia in the days before the Indochinese Union. Or for that matter of Algeria before the Sahel War. They had arrived at the river's edge, at the end of a narrow gravel track. Papa Joe flicked a switch beneath the dashboard and the drawbridge creaked down into place. A blackclad guard watched from the island side, his rifle at the ready. Two of the camera eyes turned to watch. As the bridge locked into place, the guard walked forward. Turner guessed that he couldn't legally take that rifle ashore with him but the bridge was part of Papa Joe's property.

"You'll have to get out," Korzyk said. Turner submitted to a frisking and the

guard appeared satisfied.

"Can I get back in now?"

"Sure."

Once over the ramp, Korzyk drove the car up a twisting concrete road edged by exquisite gardens, bordered by dense stands of trees.

A grey shape caught Turner's eye and he turned with a sharp indrawing of breath. Something that looked like an enormous sheepdog was propped up on its hind legs chewing at a tree. It must have been all of two metres high.

"It's a Giant ground sloth," Korzyk said. "He's impressive, don't you think? He took us a while to figure out as well. Pulling in genes from three-toed sloths and the like. He moves very slowly so it's easy to keep an eye on him."

"That's prehistoric, surely?"

"Of course. I'm working on a dinotherium at the moment. Most impressive. Like a cross between a camel and an elephant. Were you after anything of that sort, Mr. Turner?"

"Now where would I keep a beast the size of a house? And I don't like to imagine the fuel bills, I mean, food bills."

Korzyk stopped the Mercedes by the front door.

"Welcome to my humble abode," he said.

Humble it wasn't. The study alone was the size of Turner's flat. Sitting or really smothering in a clubland armchair, Turner sipped Vermouth and listened. Much of it about Papa Joe's rise from the slums of Warsaw — I wonder, Turner thought, and remembered from somewhere that they all used to claim to be counts and princes — to fame and fortune in what used to be called the West. And then to a double exile as one of the first Westerners to return to Oran after it was declared safe again.

"This project you have for me," Joe Korzyk began. "You said something very small."

"A bug."

"A bug?"

"An icebreaking bug. To go into the Net."

Papa Joe sat back in his chair and closed his eyes for a few moments.

Then a broad smile spread across his bearded face.

"Very clever," he said, "and as you told me, very small."

"But do you think you could do it?"

"Me? Do it?" Theatrically. "I am Josef Korzyk, of Bioforms International. Could I do it?" He hesitated. "Bullshit apart, I think I probably could." He named a price. Turner felt it was expensive but what he had expected, and after all if you wanted quality you had to pay the price.

It was Korzyk's turn to consider. A tiny organism capable of entering the Net, breaking down its defences, and relaying what it found to a controller?

"I shall certainly consider," he said. "You have intrigued me, Mr. Turner. May I call you Michael?"

"Certainly," without wondering how Korzyk knew his first name.

"Will you stay and have dinner with me; to celebrate a deal? I think April Mai should be back by eight. We'll eat together." He pressed a button set in the arm of the chair and his manservant appeared at the door.

"We shall be three for dinner this evening, Pooley."

"Very good, sir."

Servants, eh? Turner thought. Old world matters going on among the biotechs,

but why not?

He hadn't eaten this well in months, maybe years. Some of the things he'd never eaten: truffles, yet! Braised duck in cherry-and-ginger sauce with broccoli and black-eyed beans.

It was enough to let him take his eyes off April Mai, who had changed into a dark grey dress that was really quite demure, if such a word could ever be applied to such a woman. As he hyper-charged himself with a large swig of 1993 Salvat d'Or — a wine never designed to be swigged at all — he wondered whether maybe Papa Joe had built her as well. Wow. Daughter of Frankenstein!

"The only thing Frankenstein did wrong" Papa Joe proclaimed, his vocal chords well oiled by the Salvat d'Or, "was to fail. If he'd been succesful he'd be a hero, a god."

"Instead of a fictional creation," April Mai pointed out.

"Quite. The artist shouldn't be afraid of supplanting God, after all."

"Provided he knows what he's doing."

"Ah, he *knows*. Knowledge, the new God. Still, better than some that people have had now and again." Korzyk called for another bottle, with all the cool of a man who can't spell *lese-majeste*, much less knows what it means.

When Turner got home, he fired up the terminal and approached the interface again. He knew what the trouble was and if it were possible to get in at all, it was using the way he'd described. The Net, like any other organism, had its codes and patterns embedded deep within it. If it were possible to go beyond it and get through the corporate ice, heavens knew what treasures he might descry on the other side.

Officially it, like Turner himself, would be a fixer. A detective of the data streams, using his techniques legitimately to root out illegal use and potential danger and corruption. But there were always two sides to this work.

The only thing he wasn't about to do was put this particular tag on Papa Korzyk himself. He'd already broken into Papa Joe's data just to see if it was all Kosher and above-board. As far as he knew he hadn't been detected. Some of what he had discovered had been of immense interest and worth a few bob to certain interested parties.

But this was all low-level stuff. The Net was unnaturally well protected against the usual sort of programmed icebreaker. It was time for something new.

Slowly, its particles too small to be seen by other than the strongest microscope, the impurity settles and works in through the interface. It sidles undetected up to the almost-identical micro-organisms of the Net. Slowly, through the early hours of the morning, it adjusts itself and what it finds to its environment.

Miles away, in Oran, the first indications of the organism's movement come through on the screen belonging to the one person who knows what to look for. Michael Turner is awake and no matter how silently, exultant.

"We're in business," he breathes, to the clock that shows 3:12, to the cat that has begun to squall in the deep summer darkness of the courtyard outside. "Yes."

A toast to Papa Joe, Turner thought, buttering some on the kitchen table. He could visualise the bug making its steady progress across the surface of the Net, decoding and breaking down the ice, all the time steadfastly relaying its position to his terminal. The bug as icebreaker, a ship no longer held fast in ice, pushing through until it reached its destination.

In the next weeks he watched it, watched the hole it made in the corporate ice, pulled in data and dropped well-rewarded hints to the people of the finance houses. Some of what he discovered surprised him. Rothschild International were not above having their ice broken, nor were they above making friendly gestures at the right-wing government in Chile. All legitimate work, he would claim, the fixer. There was no real law against it so ice got harder and harder to break through. Now he had the bug he could do it, was all.

Apart from that, he was always aware of the presence of the Net. It had so much taken over the imagination, making much of the world of the last century irrelevant. There were very few cars left; nobody needed to travel. The Net allowed anyone to converse with anyone else and it was far more ecologically sound. Turner said the age of slavery was over. Human slaves were no longer needed now that we had this vast sentient organism working for us. Not everyone agreed.

"I believe in energy conservation," he assured them. "And especially my own energy."

But, what energy? The only times he ate properly now were when he went out with friends and stuffed his face with couscous or the legacy — once again — of the European past; otherwise it was scop and rye bread, and hours spent at the console, snacking occasionally or a mug of orange juice by the keyboard. He had always been like this. No sense of self-indulgence, so they said. 'They' were probably right.

He was working one afternoon, watching the figures scroll up the screen and taking careful notes, when the doorbell rang. He pressed a key and a window appeared onscreen to show him the view outside.

April Mai stood on his doorstep. Turner switched off the terminal and went to let her in.

She entered the flat cautiously, looking around with less distaste than the fixer would have expected. More curiosity, he felt.

He sat her in his one armchair and gave her tea. He sat facing her on the console chair.

"I've been asked to approach you," she said.

"Who by? Papa Joe?"

"That's right," the girl said. "I've been instructed to offer you anything."

"Anything?"

April Mai judged her moment. Then she stood up, crossed her arms in front of her, took the hem of her blouse and drew it up over her head. She was naked underneath. She drew the fixer to his feet, pulled him to her and kissed him, her tongue flickering against his. He moaned. April Mai drew back.

"This is for me," she said, unfastening her skirt and letting it fall. Then she turned her attention to the man's clothing. At last the couple found their way into the bedroom.

"Now," Turner said long afterwards, "What did your boss have in mind?"

April Mai moved to sit on the edge of the bed.

"There's a take-over bid," she began. "Had you heard?"

"Bathos Industries?"

"Right. Chemo-industrial combine, anything from scop to ice-cream to suntan oil. They want to take Bioforms over. Naturally Joe wants them checked out."

"Doesn't he employ his own data-security staff?"

"Yes, but he wants you to do it."

"Oh he does?"

"He pays well. Of course, he can afford to." April Mai smiled trustingly. "As I'm sure you've noticed. But he would really like the security of belonging in with a large company."

"So why doesn't he just go ahead?" Turner wondered.

"Like I said, he needs them checked out. And like I also said, name your price.

"What he really wants is to know what they have on him, you understand? And in case you hadn't noticed, you are the kid for that kind of thing."

Turner understood. He'd been in through Bathos' ice already but it might not be wise to let the girl know that. Even so he hadn't picked up any data relating to Korzyk, nor looked for it. There had to be some loyalty; which really meant, he did not want to be nailed to the wall of some abandoned warehouse.

"Kid, indeed!" He stroked April Mai's hair. "How old are you?"

"Old enough. Don't change the subject."

"Okay. I won't. But I'm sure you know what else I'm going to ask."

"Mm-hm." April Mai nodded. "You mean, what happens if you refuse? Well, Joe isn't the Mob, but I can't see him helping you in any way from now on if you don't go along with him. He's terribly influential, is Joe. For example, if someone were to get hot on your trail he could be a very good friend to have. I'd do it if I were you."

"Sounds like an offer I can't refuse," Turner said, and named a price.

"I knew you would," said April Mai. "Let's do it again."

It was dark when she left, the white flash of her smile in Turner's doorway. He could still think straight enough to wonder if the sex bit had really been her idea. Eventually he decided it had. Not everybody lived straight out of a Graham Greene novel.

This was the buzz he rode as he approached the interface again checking out the details the bug was sending back along the line. He already had Bathos' access codes and the rest stood a good chance of being easy. From now on it would be a single mission.

There was a sensuous feel to the data coming in that evening, pouring in onto the screen. The actual line time he kept to a minimum so as to avoid suspicion.

He wondered about Bathos' traps. They had to be there somewhere but he had seen no signs of any. Bathos certainly had some peculiar ways of operating, and parts of their op. at least had to be working the grey market too. It would be just like them to let him work in far enough to ensnare himself.

He knew a few things about them that were merely suspected by outsiders and the Press, but not everything, not by a long chalk. He had even in a moment of levity discovered the true age of Bathos' Managing Director, Anna Moriarty; a company secret if ever there was one.

He went out to a bar in the Old Town, spent six hours talking to a couple of Americans and listening to a jazz band. He got back home at three in the morning and spent the night listening to the rain belting in off the Mediterranean. Next morning he lay awake as the muezzin's call filtered in across the warming sky. There was that *fin-de-siecle* feel again, Oran full of iron staircases and big heavy brown buildings, as well as the pervasive metal and solder reek and the stink of untreated sewage. *Fin* of the nineteenth *siecle*, that was, not the twentieth, when he'd been a student in Liverpool. Maybe the two weren't that different.

Turner switched on the television. There was unrest in the streets. The Red Sahel beginning to rear its head after so many years? It seemed impossible. In the 1990s they had wrecked the entire infrastructure of society in the name of some kind of

Marxism. A third of the population dead, and the water supplies polluted even before the war started. They could not have enough influence to make any kind of comeback.

Passing by the Bar Al-Kbira this time he saw Papa Joe and April Mai at their usual table.

"Does it go well?" Korzyk asked.

"It's working perfectly."

"Do you have anything for me?" Turner looked around slowly. "It's ok, why else do you think I use this place?" An elderly dame sitting at the next table had a passenger pigeon perched on her wrist. Another one of Papa Joe's. Four youths were drinking a toast to the barmaid.

"I'm working on it." Turner was suddenly aware of April Mai's warmth directed at him. He needed to go to bed with her again. A sudden look flashed from Papa Joe to him. Turner felt he probably suspected if not actually knew, and wondered whether he cared one way or the other.

"I think you're clean," Turner said. This time the warning look went from him to April Mai. "Bathos want you in. I feel they do."

"Yes, but do I want in with them, Michael? This is what I am asking you." The old Warsaw Polish accent coming back. He was doing that for show.

"I think you do. They're offering you five hundred thousand ecus a year. And they'll give you full autonomy. I had a look at some of their internal minutes. Very silly of them to keep that kind of thing online."

"Very."

"You're beautiful."

It was late afternoon. Michael Turner and April Mai lay on the fixer's bed in filtered Oran sunlight, limbs still entwined around each other. "I could really start needing you."

"Don't, Mike. Don't do that."

"Leave him."

"He'd kill both of us. Slowly. Personally."

And what would you have here, Turner thought. Just a couple of rooms and a terminal, an old CD player and a stack of jazz disks, mostly pirated by downloading record company datastreams. Some old furniture bought from Ali Massoud on the Rue de Bonaventura.

"Besides," April Mai pointed out, "I'm more use to you where I am."

"Use?"

"Sure. We're in this together." She sat up and smoothed unruly black hair away from her eyes. "If you'll pardon the cliché. Listen — "she took him by the shoulders as he half-sat facing her — "you know more than you're letting on, right? I know you people. Some information that will only be revealed as and when advantageous."

"I'm letting you have everything."

"Precisely. Me. Not Papa Joe."

"That suggests only that Papa Joe trusts you implicitly."

"Papa Joe," the girl said precisely, "is practically a cliché himself. He is a brilliant scientist but uses Mob techniques to run his business empire. He is stupid. She raised a finger to her temple. "And the stupid who have power are very dangerous."

"But he wants to sell up to Bathos?"

"Naturally. The age of the individual entrepreneur has been over for years. Papa

Joe understands that, at least. Bathos would allow him some control. None of the other multinationals would."

Two days later he discovered the deep ice. Going through Bathos' company accounts the screen went blank. Then ever so slowly the figures began to appear again, but this time quite scrambled. He went back up the data stream and the same thing occurred. This had to be a very low-level trap, and Heavens only knew what it was designed against. Scrambled proteins. Hardly surprising given Bathos' reputation. He cut the connection and ran a probe on his disk. It appeared to be unharmed. He shut down anyway and went to bed, head spinning. The very patterns of the screen seemed to be eating in behind his eyelids. He had been overdoing it for sure.

He went out again that evening, to the same jazz club he'd been to before. Two or three of his old pals to drink beer with. A slow and unsteady walk home beneath the irongrey sky of the early morning hours. He did not notice the dark figure behind a wall until the knife was at his throat and the rasping voice demanding all his money. The blade pricked him twice though he was hardly aware of it. He fumbled for his wallet.

And never reached it. A car came round the corner, headlights blazing. The assailant sheathed his knife and ran, back into the web of alleyways. The car drew up.

"You should know better than to walk around these streets at night," the driver said. "Did the guy actually get you?" Turner showed the small wound at the throat.

"Better get it looked at, just in case. Jump in."

"You probably saved my life," Turner said, once they were headed for the American Hospital.

"I don't know," the American said. He was Bob Armitage, lately of Buffalo, NY, now of Bathos Industries. Small world, indeed.

The patient was seen immediately, given injections, a blood sample taken. It was all over in half an hour. A routine occurrence in Oran in the early hours.

Next morning Turner could hardly move. Looking at himself in the bathroom mirror he noticed the short purple scars from the mugger's knife. Without those he might have imagined the whole episode. April Mai arrived in the mid-morning. They hugged each other and kissed.

"Something wrong?" the girl wondered.

"Not much, sweetheart. I've been hit on the head, tied up, drugged, and two clients in the city morgue... I'm half dead."

"Poor baby. Come to bed."

While he was dressing again, he felt the burning on his skin. The affected patch on his left thigh looked like sunburn and felt like it, but there was no way it could have been so localised. April Mai discovered another lesion on his back, just beneath the right shoulderblade. The couple looked at one another in silence.

He telephoned the American Hospital. They had no results from the blood test but promised to contact him as soon as possible.

An hour later they did so. Something in the blood that they couldn't identify. They wanted him to come in for more tests.

Once there, he showed them the lesions. There were three of them now; and a fourth showing as a faint discolouration.

"Some kind of virus?" the consultant wondered. Turner stood there and felt an acute need to sit down.

"Whatever it is, it's moving very fast."

"And you've no idea what it is, doctor?"

"None. It's a new one on the biolab." The consultant could already see an article writing itself.

He was put in an observation room. He had a narrow but firm bed, a chair, a nondescript painting on the wall, a television with a remote control. His skin began to itch in various places, sudden itches that erupted and died down just as suddenly. He felt his joints beginning to seize up, his muscles lock themselves into spasms. His neck locked so that he could only look to the left.

April Mai came to visit him on the first and second days, wearing a gauze mask and rubber gloves. Then from the third day she wasn't there any more.

Once he saw one of the Hospital's biochemists come in, take a blood sample and pulse readings. From the anaesthetic mists he could be fairly sure it was Bob Armitage. Coincidence? There was, in his experience, no such thing.

On his next lucid day there was Papa Joe Korzyk sitting by his bed, his hands folded on the head of his brass-topped cane. A woeful countenance, behind the respirator.

"It is not I causing you this sorrow."

"Not..."

"Michael. I would not do this to you."

"Do what, Mr. Korzyk?"

"You don't know? You have my bug. It's in your system. So does April Mai, and one of my technicians."

"Your bug?"

"The tracker I designed for you. It's a biological organism like the rest, and it's crossed over."

"The knifer..."

Korzyk nodded. He looked exhausted.

"The little thug Bathos hired."

"Hired?"

"Of course. How convenient their man Armitage should happen to be passing. Bathos are trying to starve me into submission. And they know all about you and they don't like you."

"Then why don't they just..."

"Ice you? You're more use alive."

"And everybody else? April Mai?"

"Ah, sweet Mai. Don't worry. I know all about you."

"You do?"

"Sure. You're both young. I have no right to complain." Papa Joe sounded even more tired. "Besides, you have done well for me. I am not so mean as not to recognise that." He stood slowly and left.

The television again. The mob had begun to gather in the Place du Maghreb. '*Oran for the Oranese!*' It was the same on each channel. Just at the end of the telenews there was a brief reference to rumours of a new virus isolated at the American Hospital. The right sort of thing, Turner thought in the middle of the red and grey mists, to inflame the locals' passions against the foreign devils. The newscaster gave her sign-off smile and faded from the screen, to give way to some 20th century movie.

For the next week all his world came from that telescreen. The virus was spreading. The rebels were gathering in the mountains. A series of serum injections,

blood tests, x-rays comprised his daily routine. His blood was changed twice. The Westerners were leaving the city by every available train and aircraft. Old Oran was going. On one screen he glimpsed the Bar Al-Kbira, a gutted shell with dogs nosing around inside. The old community he had known was splitting up.

Then the rebels began shelling the city. Turner could hear the dull roar of explosions throughout the city and guessed where they might be. Perhaps his flat had gone. Maybe Papa Joe's colonial mansion had been destroyed. The explosions became more frequent as time went on, and as the virus continued its attack on his body.

He saw a figure in the corridor outside, robed in black and carrying a gun. This figure seemed to be arguing with one of the doctors. Now it was clear there was another with him, another rebel, blood soaking his clothes. Turner could not hear the argument but plainly the doctor was asking about the injury. Did it matter which side had inflicted it? No, but this was an American hospital. Half an hour later the rebels left, the wounded one heavily bandaged. Turner attempted a thin smile. Will there be a dreadful bloodbath when Red Sahel come to town? Surely.

The next day the television showed the rebels flooding into the city. The Boulevard de l'Afrique was already ringing with gunfire as the police and army tried to hold back the rebels. By now Turner's muscles had mostly seized up and he could scarcely move at all. There were reports of fifty or a hundred dead from the bug, but several hundred already killed by the guerrillas. He had no idea what had happened to Papa Joe nor to April Mai. The media assumed the guerrillas had somehow got hold of the bug and were spreading it through the city.

Michael Turner lay with a plastic tube down his throat and an intravenous drip taped to his left forearm. Sometimes blood leaked through the hole leaving a cold wet feeling. He felt as though his body were turning softly in space, and his soul beating against the walls of his head. Doctors Rip and Tarrieux came past sometimes to observe the patient but they had their hands full with Westerners injured by the rebels. A shell exploded in the hospital grounds, and shattered the windows on the courtyard side of the building. There would be a cure, some voice said inside his mind. For what? For everything. Maybe this was it. He gave himself up to the colours inside his head. Travelling the expanses of his mental space the way he had travelled the Net, among its vast open data spaces, navigating between cities of data. Now there were cities of memories, towns of desire, villages of regret. He migrated inwards from the wrecked body and spun outwards over Oran. He walked down the Avenue de l'Afrique early in the morning, played cards in a refuge in the Atlas Mountains during a hike, stood on the heights and looked down into the grey and green that stretched towards the Mediterranean.

He became his memories. Twenty-eight years of them. A video show that would go on for ever.

Two days later the guerrillas invaded the American hospital and evacuated everybody. Staff and patients were marched out at gunpoint. Anyone who couldn't walk was thrown out of the window, no matter how high up. They seized them beneath the armpits and chucked them out. Sometimes they watched them on the way down.

It didn't worry Michael Turner. He was no longer there. The rebels picked his body up and threw it out anyway. ●

STORY RATINGS — DREAM 23

The top four were very close in the voting all the way. In the end it came out like this:

1	The Moral Consideration	G.M. Williams	2.68
2 =	The Dinosaur	Brian Rolls	2.89
	Feminine Intuition	Lyle Hopwood	2.89
4	Love Kills	Tim Hurt	3.02
5	Murder By Magic	Sydney J. Bounds	4.45
6	The Watcher	A.J. Kerr	4.88

So — another new author does well. Incidentally, for those of you who are new to our pages, a brief explanation of our rating system: the points quoted for each story above represent the average position given by all our voters. (i.e. if there were only two voters and one voted a story first and the other third, its score would be 2.00) I make the usual plea — if you want your vote to count, send us a list of this issue's stories, in the order in which you liked them, from 1 for the best, to 5 for the one you liked least.

One more point: the more stories there are in an issue, then the higher the average point scores will, obviously, be.

To assist you in voting, there is a coupon printed in this magazine which can be used to record your preferences, if you so wish, but, of course, votes on a postcard, or in a letter are equally welcome.



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"You're not serious!" Max diverted his gaze from the advertisement and furiously threw the newspaper down onto the flat's bare floor.

"Of course I am! What's wrong with it anyway?" said Toby, stunned by his friend's anger and disbelief.

"Oh come on, Toby. I'm sure you're not that stupid. What's wrong with it? Jesus, do you realise what it entails?"

"But it's supposed to be great. The adverts have been on the T.V. for months. That actor, what's his name, promotes the thing."

"You don't really believe all that advertising crap, do you?"

Toby ignored the question. "There's Margo in the flat downstairs, as well," he said. "Her daughter had it done last month and it changed her life completely. Margo's saving up to undergo treatment herself one day."

With a look of infuriated desperation on his face, Max made towards the door. "You go ahead then, you bloody fool," he raged. "It should be illegal!" He slammed the door viciously, causing another chunk of plaster to crumble from the walls of the flat.

As usual, Max was wrong, thought Toby. The treatment was backed and recommended by the Government, so it couldn't be such a bad thing. What the hell did Max know about it anyway! He stared around at his small, dreary flat. Slight feelings of Claustrophobia and misery struck him and he decided that he had to get outside, despite the typically inclement weather. A trip to the Ankou Centre would do just fine.

Pulling a thick overcoat around his rotund body and grabbing his specially saved cash, Toby left his flat and went out onto Manchester's drizzly, over-crowded streets.

The morning air was thick with choking, polluted vapours. A taxi rumbled through a nearby puddle, showering Toby with filthy droplets of water. Crowds of melancholy people jostled him as he moved. Fine drops of rain fell soundlessly upon the grey industrial landscape, causing an unhealthy damp atmosphere.

Toby waited for a bus. He pulled his coat's sodden collar up around his face in a vain attempt to banish the November chill. After an hour of standing bored and shivering in a rag-tag queue consisting of dejected looking pensioners, wailing

toddlers, and gossiping housewives, a bus arrived.

The grimy orange vehicle squealed to a halt. Its doors hissed open and the queue slowly boarded. Toby paid the extortionate fare in return for a standing-room-only journey sandwiched between a garishly dressed woman and a rather menacing, purple haired teenager. The treatment had to improve things, he thought. After all, life couldn't get much worse.

Finally, Toby's destination came within sight. He pushed his way through the tightly packed passengers and eagerly alighted. He took several deep breaths and stared admiringly at the impressive Ankou building. Its towering, modern splendour ensured that it was easily noticeable in the midst of the other old, smoke-stained office blocks.

Toby entered through the building's heavy glass main doors and found himself in the reception area. Plush leather upholstered chairs were scattered tastefully throughout the carpeted room. The warmth of the central heating system thawed his frozen bones and he took off his overcoat, slinging it down on a chair.

He noticed that the mahogany desk was unattended. After operating the buzzer marked 'Press for attention', he sat down on one of the luxurious chairs. He didn't mind waiting. It was sheer paradise to relax in this rarely experienced comfort and enjoy the quiet serenity, which was marred only by the almost inaudible hum of the air conditioning. He closed his eyes.

Abruptly, the comforting ambience was shattered.

"Hi! my name's Cara," said a high pitched, jolly voice. "Are you asleep?"

Toby's eyes flickered open. A short, slender woman with a heavily tanned complexion stood before him. Her hair was a shimmering blonde and perfectly matched her brilliant white trouser suit. A badge on the lapel of her jacket read:

"Welcome to Ankou Limited, my name's Cara."

She peered at him through her large, round spectacles, which were perched on her petite nose. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, fine," Toby answered. "I was just relaxing. I've come about your treatment actually."

"Super! If you'd like to follow me, I'll show you the procedure."

Toby decided that he'd like to follow this woman anywhere! Such beauty and style! A pleasant change from the harsh accented, unkempt girls in the flats.

Cara moved with graceful briskness through a maze of corridors. Toby waddled behind, glancing through open doorways and getting a brief glimpse behind the scenes of lucrative business.

"Here we are," said Cara as she finally halted in front of a door. She reached into her jacket pocket and brought out a small set of keys. She unlocked the door and held it politely open for Toby. As he entered the small, intimate room, a tremor of excitement rose in the pit of his stomach as he realized that the treatment, which had once been a distant dream, was now within his grasp.

Inside the room, Toby sat on one side of a desk. Cara sat facing him. She opened one of the desk drawers and from it produced a pale green sheet.

"It's simple," she said, giving Toby a reassuring smile. "To apply for our treatment, all you have to do is fill in one of these forms." She pushed the green sheet, along with a pen, towards him.

"Apply?"

"Yes. Not everyone is allowed to receive the treatment, you know. There's legislation covering this sort of thing. All applicants have to have government

approval before we can proceed.”

“Oh, well perhaps I’d better not bother then,” he said, fearful of rejection.

“Don’t be silly,” she laughed. “It’s only a formality. I’ve never heard of anyone being refused permission, apart from an eminent economist who once applied.”

“Alright then,” he conceded. “But will I be able to undergo the treatment today?”

“Yes, of course. With our computer system, we can get government approval in a matter of minutes.”

Toby took the form and the pen and began to fill in the required details. The first few items were of the usual nature: Name, Address, Date of Birth, Employment (if any). Next came a box marked ‘Qualifications’. Embarrassed by his rudimentary education, he quickly scribbled a couple of lines.

Then came a choice: ‘Mode of Treatment’. He paused and muttered his thoughts. “Choice ‘A’ seems to be the best one. The others sound a bit too painful. Still, Option ‘J’ would be interesting.” He pondered a little while longer and then ticked box ‘A’.

“Most people opt for that one,” said Cara.

‘Post treatment arrangements’ were the next items to be considered. There were only two boxes. He ticked one without hesitation and signed the document.

Cara gently took the form and stood up. “Wait here please. I’ll be back in a moment. And don’t look so worried,” she said, glancing at the form. “I don’t think that you’ll have any problems with your application.”

Cara left and anxious minutes passed as Toby awaited the outcome. Soon, Cara returned, a beaming smile on her face.

“Everything’s O.K. You’ve been given the all-clear,” she said.

“Great!” Toby relaxed a little and reached for his wallet.

“Do I pay now?”

“Yes, certainly. With our discount offer it’ll be two hundred and seventy five pounds, please.”

He passed her the money.

“Thanks,” she said with heart-warming sincerity. “Now I’ll take you to the waiting room.”

They departed from the application office and made their way to a lift. Cara pressed the button for the seventh floor and it began its noiseless climb.

“Nervous?” asked Cara.

Toby nodded. “A little, yes.”

“Don’t worry, the option that you’ve chosen is quite painless and I’m sure that you’ll feel the benefit when it’s all over.”

The lift jolted to a stop and the doors slid open to reveal a large, pleasantly decorated waiting room. “Here we are,” said Cara. “Just take a seat and they’ll call your name when they’re ready for you. Good luck.”

“Thanks.” Toby entered the room. Cara smiled and waved as the lift’s doors closed. The other occupants of the waiting room studied Toby briefly before returning to their magazines.

Toby strode over to a table, on which lay several stacks of ragged magazines. He grabbed one at random and hastily sat down.

The room’s silence was broken at regular intervals as, one by one, the patients were called by means of a loud buzzer and a large video screen which hung over a door marked “TREATMENT (MODE A) THIS DOOR”. After what seemed to Toby like an eternity of paging through Reader’s Digests, his turn came about. The

buzzer sounded and all eyes glanced up at the screen. The name "Toby Johnson" was clearly printed upon it.

Toby shakily rose to his feet and walked over to the appropriate door, conscious of the other patients as they stared at him. His legs felt weak and an apprehensive tingle ran through his body as he opened the door and ventured beyond.

He found himself in a small, bare, clinical room with only one other door and a large black chair, similar to those used by dentists, in the room's centre. A woman's voice spoke over a tannoy: "Welcome to the treatment room, Mr. Johnson. Please sit in the chair provided. Our experts will be along very soon. Thank you."

Toby cautiously obeyed and tried to relax. The sinister, white walled treatment room brought back unhappy childhood memories of cruel-to-be-kind doctors and dentists.

Suddenly, the other door flew open and a pair of men entered. The younger of the two men was dressed in an immaculate grey suit, whilst the older man wore a white doctor's coat and pushed a trolley which was covered in jangley, glinting, medical instruments.

"Hi," said the younger man, in a confident tone. He moved over to Toby and began to roll up his shirt sleeve whilst the older man prepared a syringe filled with a clear liquid. Toby's arm was then bound tightly in order to raise up the veins.

"That strap isn't hurting your arm, is it?" inquired the young man.

"No, it's fine." Toby's voice was an anxious, dry-throated whisper as he saw the older man approaching with the large, ominous needle in his hand.

"Now this won't hurt a bit," lied the young man.

The needle pierced Toby's flesh. He grit his teeth, resisting the temptation to flinch away from the cruel needle as it slowly forced its mysterious liquid into his blood stream. He looked away from the agonizing scene. Then the pain subsided, leaving only a subtle stinging sensation. "O.K. that's it," said the young man chirpily. "All you have to do now is sit there for a few minutes and let it take effect."

The two men retreated to a corner of the room and engaged in small talk.

At first Toby felt no different. Then a slight feeling of nausea rose inside his stomach and steadily intensified. His limbs felt incredibly heavy, as if they were made from lead. His mind swiftly began to lose contact with reality and darkness enveloped his senses. Panic hit him and he decided that the treatment was not as wonderful as the beguiling faces on the television and the persuasive words of the newspaper advertisements had promised. Max had been right and he had been a fool for not paying heed. He tried to move but found it to be impossible. The two men and the treatment room had now faded from existence and only semi-consciousness remained. A myriad of images from his past scurried through his head. He tried to grasp them and fix them in his mind's eye, desperately hoping that he could hold on to them. These were the last fleeting memories of his life. Eventually, he quelled the panic, the sadness, and the regret. He no longer fought it. He died.

ANKOU — THE WORLD LEADERS

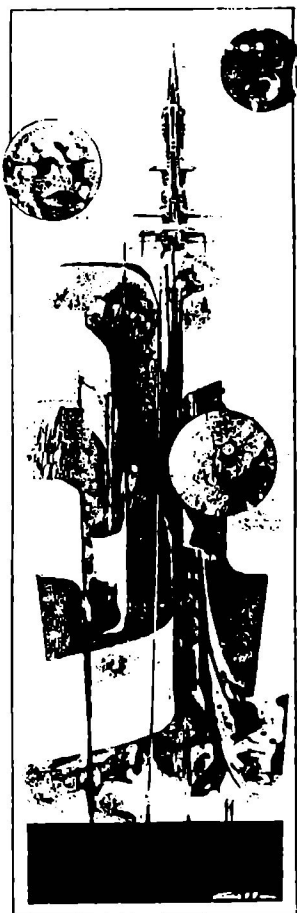
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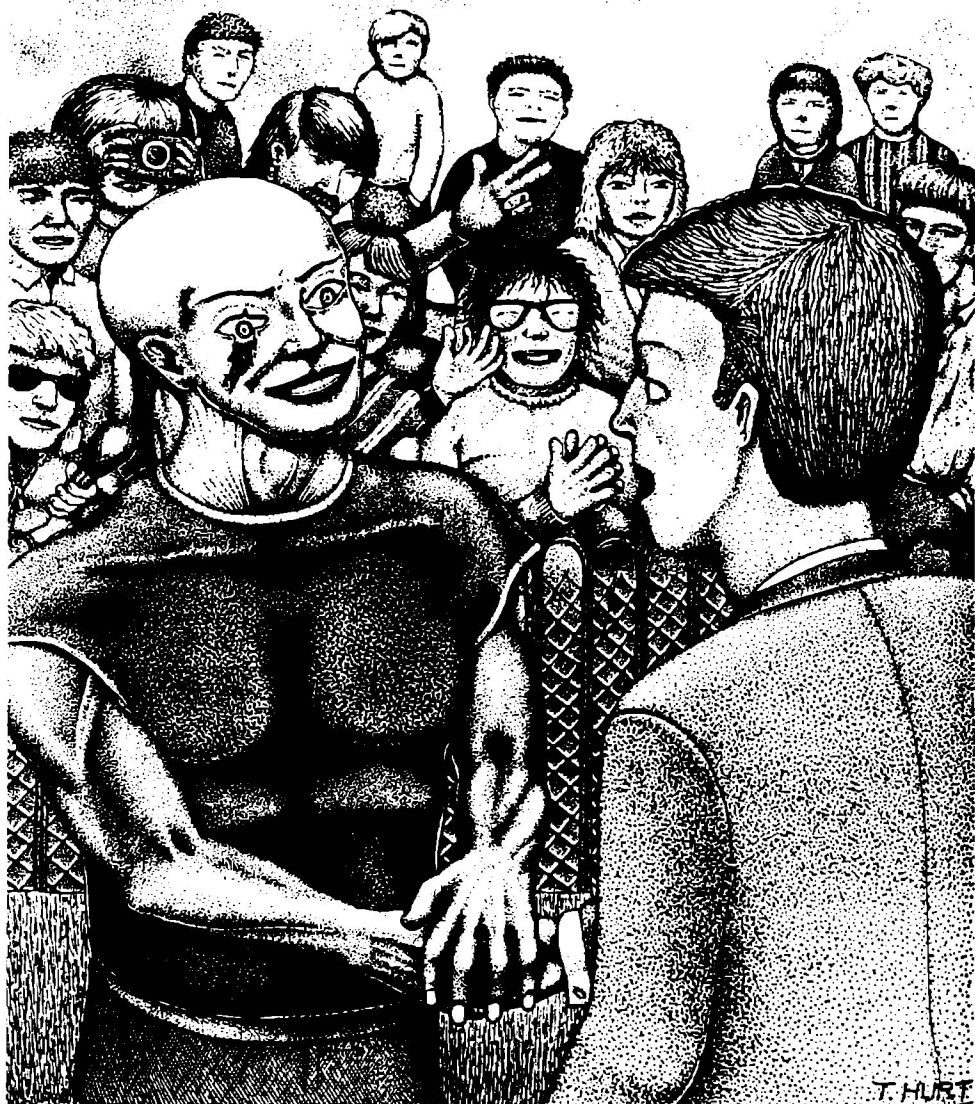
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SAN DIEGO DEADLINE

DAVID E. SLATER



THE early rain came like a breath of spring, on this already hot August morning. The sun was just about to break the horizon, as the cool precipitation revitalized the sun baked ground.

A window left open to make the most of the freshness, unleashed the sounds of the great American breakfast T.V. On a morning like this even the newscasters seemed fresher.

"Good morning San Diego! It's 4:30 am and the sun's coming up on another beautiful Californian day... It's now only twelve hours until the President's whistle stop, on this, the Western leg of his 2027 pre-election tour. Now it's over to Dominic for the rest of this morning's news..."

Ten miles outside town the first rays of daybreak fell upon a crumpled mass by the roadside.

An hour later a car pulled to a halt alongside a motionless body. The driver climbed out, and, walking round the front of the car, crossed to where the body lay.

Hit and runs were all too common in this area, and this looked like a prime example. Lieutenant Lester had been with the San Diego Police Department for ten years now and he'd seen more than his fair share. He knelt beside the body, and began to check for any I.D. It gave him quite a start when the body actually moved.

"O.K. Buddy, you just lie still, you'll be right in no time". He took off his jacket and covered the barely conscious victim, "Now lie still while I radio in for a meat wagon".

He got up and strolled back to the patrol car. He didn't consider there was much need to rush. The way he figured it, the poor guy was half dead already. "I sure hope you've got lots of medical insurance buddy!", he muttered to himself as he picked up the handset.

It was all of five or six minutes before he returned to the spot. When he did, the body had gone! Lester stood, hands on hips, the rain hitting his face. He looked all round him but the body had definitely gone. He picked up his jacket, and throwing it in the back of the car, cancelled the wagon.

7:30 am. The rain had stopped, and the temperature had started to rise. The tall, slender built man in his early thirties stumbled into one of San Diego's 24 hour bars. He slumped into a side booth, his clothes creased and soiled, his blonde hair and sharp features smeared with oil and grime.

The waitress startled him as she emerged from behind one of the screens. She didn't give him a second glance; compared with the regulars this guy was up-market! She stood for a second or two then began to tap the side of her micro-pad impatiently.

"Look pal, do you want to order, or just grow old?"

He looked confused and harrassed,

"Oh, I'm sorry, A beer, just a beer".

"Hey, big spender!", she said to herself sarcastically as she walked away; but still loud enough to be heard.

The beer splashed over the edge of the glass as she banged it down on the table. She sure wouldn't make much from this Bozo. He grabbed her wrist and gripped it tightly, staring into her eyes, as she struggled and pulled furiously to break away.

"What the hell's your game Mister?"

"The President! What time does the president get here?"

She finally broke from his grip, and shouted at him from a distance.

"Around 4, you creep!, and I hope he buys more goddam booze than you. Bozo!"

She even followed him to the door. He could hear her shouting as he crossed the street and disappeared down the alley way.

The man's pace quickened, his mind and his thoughts confused. He stopped suddenly, his hand rising to his forehead. He was in pain. The pain racked him and he staggered sideways. He sat down on the spot, his vision blurred for a minute or so, then cleared.

He sat quiet and thought for a while. He couldn't recall anything before the patrol man spoke to him that morning. He delved deeper into his thoughts and panicked as he realized that he didn't know who he was! All he knew was that the President was going to be there today. He wasn't even sure where he was, only that the President was coming, and he was in danger.

Somebody was going to try and kill the president. He was the only one who knew. It was up to him to save the President and he was certain that he was the only one who could.

The stranger climbed to his feet and continued on his way. He wound his way through the back alleys of the city, turning almost instinctively in the back street maze. Things seemed so familiar. He was sure he lived, or had lived, locally at sometime or other. Still his primary thought was to save the President, at all cost! But from who? He couldn't remember.

1:00 pm. He was now six miles outside the city centre. He stopped to look at the news on a T.V. screen in a showroom window. The sun beat down, with the temperature in the high nineties as the stranger stood rock still, watching the screen carefully. It was 45 minutes before the news of the president's visit was shown. The time was confirmed, 4.30 pm, and the place, County Hall. There would be the usual pre-election walkabout, shaking hands, kissing babies, speeches and the like. That, the stranger thought, must be the place they would try. He had to save him, even if it meant losing his own life. It was a price that he was willing to pay.

2:00 pm. Four miles to go! The heat was blistering. The sun, high above the multi-level buildings of down-town San Diego, was relentless. The early morning rain was now only a distant memory. He turned into a particularly seedy looking part of the city, and still with only one purpose in mind, strode forward, dodging the "winos" and the multitude of "bag people" who inhabited the neighbourhood.

Suddenly he felt a tightness around his throat and he was dragged unceremoniously to the ground, an automatic pistol thrust into his face. On the other end a youth from the ghetto grinned at him while his two younger companions went through the stranger's pockets. "Nothing!". His pockets were as empty as his memory.

The youths were irate, and vented their anger and frustration by kicking him hard about the head and body, before blending back into the shanty town, from whence they came.

He climbed to his feet yet again, and, clutching his side, made his way from the alley. He caught sight of a clock in a window display: 2:45 pm. I can still make it, he thought to himself, as he faultlessly picked his way towards the area of County Hall.

He hadn't gone more than three or four blocks, when a patrol car slowed up alongside. The officer, obviously suffering from the heat inside the car, shouted to the stranger, who was now looking very much the worse for wear.

"Hey Mac!, we want a word with you!"

As the man stopped, the patrol car came to a jerky halt, and the two occupants clambered out, prising their sweat soaked backs from the seats. They were hot,

uncomfortable and very irritable. The heat, now over 100 degrees, was more than a lot of men could take. This, coupled with all the chaos of a presidential visit, was too much for anyone. Both the officers had been recalled from leave, just for the event, and with the crime rate San Diego had in a heatwave, there was little enough leave as it was.

They stood either side of him, and prodded at him with the batons they carried. He was pushed against the wall and spreadeagled for searching.

"He's clean, Luke," the thinner of the two officers said, as he finished the frisk. The fatter and older officer spun him back round to face them.

"Tell me boy, what kind of a 'wacko' are you?" The man stared at him with a bewildered expression.

"You speak English don't you boy?" he was asked. He nodded in reply, and was prodded in the ribs for his troubles.

"Then tell me why, when its 100 degrees plus, are you roaming around in a shirt and sweater, and lordy be! You sure as hell ain't even got a sweat on?"

The officer stood there arrogantly, waiting for an answer. The stranger shrugged his shoulders, but remained silent.

"O.K. boy," snarled the small patrol man, "We've been patient with you long enough, ain't that right Luke?" His partner nodded in reply. "Now, what's your name?"

He couldn't tell them that he didn't know. If he did they would take him in for certain. They would never believe that he couldn't remember!

He thought quickly, and, looking across the street, saw the sign above 'Shultz's Delicatessen'.

"I'm sorry officers, I suffer from a rare disease I contracted whilst out in China..." He paused, "...The name's Shultz, John Shultz, I've just been attacked, a few blocks away, and I'm still a little shaken".

"You from round here John?" asked the older officer, watching his eyes closely for any tell tale signs of lying. Many was the time he had told his partner, "Watch the eyes!"

"No, I'm here on holiday from Denver." There was no tell-tale signs, even though every word was pure fiction. The stranger had no idea where he came from.

"You say you were attacked?" Mr. Shultz, as he was to be known, nodded.

"Do you want to report the incident?"

He looked at the watch upon the officer's wrist. It read 3:05 pm.

"The precinct, is it near County Hall?" He asked.

"Yeh, not too far away. Don't tell me you want to see the President as well?" The stranger nodded. "Yeh, you and about 4 million other people!" He opened the rear door of the patrol car, "Get in. When you've finished your statement, you can go watch the man".

The closer they came to County Hall, the greater the increase of people. It was a painfully slow drive, but the way the two patrol men looked at it, they would sooner be in an air conditioned incident room writing yet another boring report, than out on the streets frying their butts off in a mobile tin box.

The stranger sat quietly throughout the journey. He was pre-occupied. He couldn't work out how they were going to do it. High powered rifle? No! All the buildings with an overview of the area would be searched and monitored. A bomb? It seemed the most likely alternative. The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced. It had to be a bomb! The problem was how? The bomb squad would

have covered every inch of the route, manholes would have been sealed, sewers checked etc....

Undoubtedly everyone in the immediate area would have been searched, yet still at the back of his mind, he knew it had to be a bomb.

4:15 pm. The patrol car was still three blocks away from the square at County Hall. The volume of the crowd had increased dramatically. The car was now fully blocked in, and going nowhere! The rear door opened, and before either officer could move, the stranger had gone, lost amongst the milling crowd.

4:20 pm. He could now see the clock on County Hall, it was less than two blocks away. He was having to virtually fight his way through the tightly packed crowd. This was San Diego's first presidential visit in twenty four years, and everyone wanted to get a glimpse of the Nation's first man.

He was still a good ten rows from the barrier, when he heard the roar from the crowd. The Limousine had stopped in front of the steps of the Hall. The President got out, waving to the crowd. The noise was growing, reaching a deafening pitch, cheering and yelling, shouts and squeals.

He could see him now! He was within fifteen or so feet of him! His mind pulsed. "Oh God! Don't let it happen now, not when I'm this close!"

Suddenly the stranger went down, uncontrollably hitting the ground. He had tripped! He couldn't believe it! "Not now"! he shouted at himself. He struggled to his feet, not noticing the 2 inch gash that had opened on his cheek. He found the slightest of gaps in the front lines of the crowd, and with one last desperate lunge, thrust his hand through.

The president began shaking his hand, the grip of both men, strong and determined. They finally came face to face.

The president's expression changed to one of fear as he stared at the gash below the stranger's eye, then from fear to terror, as he saw the electronic circuitry it revealed. The stranger's cold blue eyes recognised and verified their objective. His steel like grip increased, his true purpose and identity emerged through the mist in his mind.

The bomb had found its target... ●

VISION

The easy way is to sit and look at boxes,
hair getting so short
it is no longer there.

All ones life staring at a box
until ones favourite cat dies and then what?

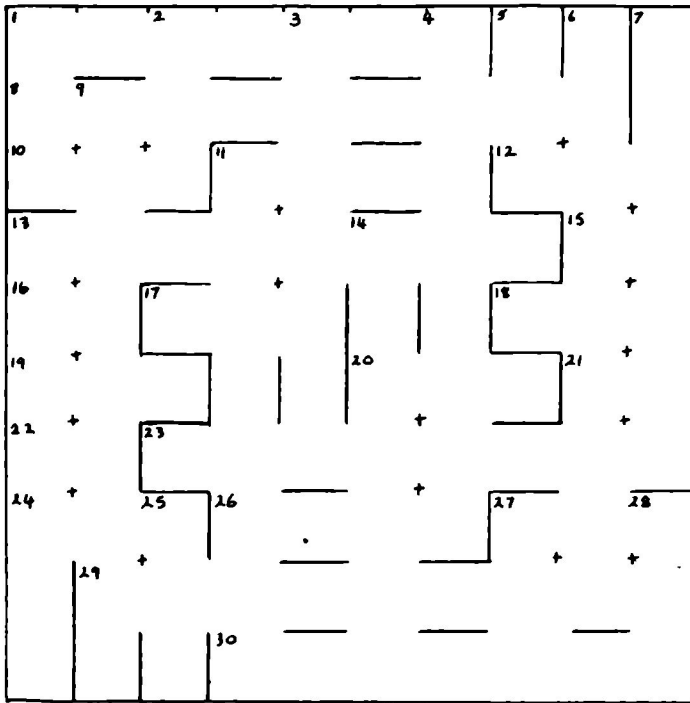
Sitting at the top of the stairs
wondering if enough of an effort
was put into just one moment.

Then dying unfulfilled
returning to the box again.

Ed Jewasinski

WORD GRID 9

John Light



ACROSS

- 1 Where Lewis Carroll's aged man sat. (2, 1, 4)
- 8 Anthony's nocturnal horse. (5, 4)
- 10 Number of the mind. (3)
- 11 Black Orchid's Sir Robert. (4)
- 12 What you should tell me about yourself, according to Busby (3)
- 13 Of Stones, perhaps. (8)
- 15 The Haldeman's Darkness. (2)
- 16 The sort of man to go with Masters of the Universe. (2)
- 17 Called The Prancing Pony in Bree. (3)
- 18 The worlds of A. Bertram Chandler. (3)
- 19 Raiders sought the lost one. (3)
- 20 What Dickson's soldier must not. (3)
- 21 Derek was Tarzan's mate! (2)
- 22 Sprague de Camp's apparently had wheels. (2)
- 23 "___ The Tree" from Cooper. (6, 2)
- 24 "___-Aiyem Krang" by Foster. (3)
- 26 Paul's sister. (4)
- 27 Burden of Z for Zachariah. (3)
- 29 Raphael's cipher. (4, 5)
- 30 Len's toy is an unpleasant green. (7)

DOWN

- 1 Oxo-omo-___. (3)
- 2 A story of the stone what? (3)
- 3 Harrison's was transatlantic. (1, 6)
- 4 Where Ursula's wizard dwelt. (8)
- 5 Air for Levin. (3)
- 6 Elric's realm. (9)
- 7 His mines were Haggard's subject. (7)
- 91 T City story. (9)
- 11 The psychics of Zanak. (8)
- 13 Herbert's Satan. (7)
- 14 A mission of seriousness? (7)
- 25 Followed by Serling perhaps. (3)
- 27 "The Stars ___ Too High". (3)
- 28 Used by Franke's to catch a mind? (3)

Answers on page 56

© John Light

LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE



MARK D. HAW

JESUS, the clouds, the way they got up into malevolent shapes above me. And they drizzled, a fine lonely kind of drizzle, the kind for fine lonely afternoons, when you pass over the bridge minutes before noon and find yourself, at the speed of light/an electric train, travelling in time, from the empty city toward Dover & the coast, and it's afternoon and always has been. They, the clouds, drizzled at me, *on* me, you know. The raindrops dragged their sliding ways sideways across the window where I leant my head. By them I could tell the force of the wind. My eyes, on the drops, slipped focus regularly down through the glass to the tracks, which moved by so fast that no real focus was possible; down further, down the embankment and the hill to small houses untidily framed by cars and grey roads, roads that could have been rivers. Nobody watched. There was no-one alive in my carriage/on my train/across, even, all of the hills. The bloody annoying thing about the war is —

Well, you know. The waveform theory, etc., applied to people (previously somebody I knew was an exponent of the original theory, applied to thoughts. Or was that original, even then? I have a feeling — anyway, this somebody explained to me why he had no opinions on anything: “Thoughts are waveforms,” he said, “uncollapsed and indeterminate. Forming an opinion is like collapsing your waveform into a determinate state. Fitting harmonics into a space —” You know. In this case the space being the head). Well, applied to people too. You’ve heard — often enough? — of that old x-space, and how lives are peaks in the waveform? Well, then. 19-when for references. These things pass in my own head/phase cavity as time and the train lurch toward the coast. What beast is this? Laughter. X-space, waves, shifting, shifting, with space — and time-varying intensities, waves all over the place. Space and time are only part of the story anyhow. I think of 19-when and my predecessors.

Did I say how relaxing it was? There is no memory like the rain, the catalytic rain, etc., oh, so on and on. The way the tracks are dirty grey and listen somehow. The way the sky breaks up like a cancerous organ fighting itself (and on and on). Occasional shafts of light. Displaying the sharp shadow-edged contours of the upper surfaces of the clouds. I spend large chunks of the trip staring upward at a neck-cracking angle through the glass. And also other chunks at the hills, when they appear, roll, and flatten. If you watch anything for long enough it slides. (Or I’m going loudly solitarily mad; or is there any difference?)

So over the Medway, through those ugly towns with their castles and cathedrals being suffocated by petrol pumps and car parks. So through other mind-towns. I try to imagine all the people living there, inside and out. I fail. The rain continues, the noise of the train hides the pounding. Christ the people are so ugly here, I should say the shadows; the ghosts. The other bloody annoying thing: Nothing has changed. Another theory about the war now: I treat it like a discontinuity. A sudden change of state, from peace/no mass death, to — well, to just emptiness. The empty city — I think of the empty city, the sun shines briefly through a cleft — and the ghosts, the ugly shadows. (Though of course I know the war isn’t everything, the war did not bring the ugliness. The Medway was never anything but ugly.) And the way the dirty grey glistens on everything, on all the lines making up those river towns. These towns — it’s like the war: these towns have fallen to the rain; life has fallen to the war. They would talk — you remember? — about invasions, but it’s the war itself that has invaded here. Maybe it and the drizzle and the dirty grey are in collusion.

And so over the Medway, and away from there.

It can be surprising when you see how few ghosts there are. My theory — I have

theories for everything — my theory is that when it dropped it dropped at night. Everyone was in bed. If I go into one of those grey houses — look, the train's stopping here, at some unidentifiable place, and if I leap off and find one of those grey blind houses and go in there and slip quietly into one of the bedrooms I'll find the ghosts. You see, ghosts can't move far from where they were — well, where they were *when*. You know? Unless they follow me. This train runs for me — isn't it something to be proud about, being the last? — when I want it to. The ghosts can't move it without me. It's nothing to be proud about, really. It's only a train. There are no memories like the trains, etc. What else can I do but ramble on? Etc., etc., etc. God, the annoying thing about the war is that I think it loosed something in my head/I can't seem to always see straight/you know? Or — Christ, get this: or maybe something in my head loosed the war!

Well, why else would I be the last?

Another theory. For my collection.

And so the countryside, and I decide there and then to get off at Canterbury. But there never is any real countryside around here. If it hadn't been for the war the city would have covered all of this. I could see it coming then, in a matter of seconds. Now the rain covers it instead — how many years can it rain? I mean, where does it all go, for God's sake? The river at Canterbury — the waveform in my head being a vision of water, all kinds of water — is a pissing little thing. Once it must have been enormous, and loud. I mean, you can tell from the valleys. Or am I forgetting glaciers? — God, I just now remember something (somehow the memory coinciding with an extended jolt over points) about glaciers. I remember they used to say, before the war, how there was going to be an ice-age any minute. Laughter. Some ghosts turn their heads. Wrong, wrong, wrong! Some ghosts grimace. I suppose they have nothing to laugh about. Do they know? Do ghosts know that they're only ghosts? Christ, who cares.

And in one eye the glimpse of the cathedral, like a stone ocean liner in a grey Atlantic disaster movie. Christ, more memories, catalytic —

...of another cathedral, a darker lead-lined stone, but at the same angle and coming in at the same speed. No rain here, only a grey sky, a timeless kind of grey. The grey of brain tissue. Coming in and getting down from the train; being followed by what I think are skeletons, corner-of-my-eye skeletons who clack in the corners of my ears. Is this memory (I'm wondering) or insanity? Soon I'm approaching the hill keeping my eye on the stone, but there are eight figures on the central reservation and they appear to be pacing me. Then I can hear, when I stop for the traffic at the crossing: "I buried him myself. I bloody filled in the bloody hole." Only a murmur.

The cathedral is majestic like the sky, and dark. I know that if I look up too long the top lines will fade and the cathedral will *be* the sky. What a way to honour God/he builds you a planet and you build him one back.

I often dream like that, and I often fall asleep on the trains. Perhaps I'm becoming old. Perhaps I go to my death at Dover. But if four thousand years of rain and empty cities won't make me old, will anything? Though there are other ways to die. Let me tell you (I'm wanting to say this to the pretty ghost who got on at the last station, who's sitting opposite me now) that time is not the real thing. Or at least not anymore.

I'm wanting to say it but I don't. There is always the possibility that — well, you know. But the train is drawing to a halt, making those peculiar electric buzzes, and the drum of the rain is beginning to take over. I used — I remember now — I used to wonder about the people on trains and in cars. You know, when you're wandering at

night near your home — when you have one — and strangers are going by in cars and maybe also in trains if there's a line near you, and you don't know any of them. They look so strange — I mean the real 'strange' in 'stranger' — in their little globes of light. You can't imagine what they are doing, you don't know them, you can't — I can't — I can't understand how they can exist without me. You know? Like they're living, they're moving & breathing and everything, without me even being aware of it. It happens too when you're on a train yourself, at night and moving into/out of the city, and kitchen windows eye you carefully in orange as you pass, and you see the housewives there. And I get — I don't know about you — but I get frightened. I mean, it's so selfish and thin, right? To be only me, when there are so many other minds I could be?

Well, like I said, that's how it used to be. Things have a way of working themselves out, they say. Now the ghosts really are there only for me. And am I proud?

Well, I'm not frightened anymore. I know that.

So I don't look at the ghost opposite when I get off. Who cares? She's going to fade — you won't make it to Dover, beautiful. Who cares?

I'm crossing the road, via the footbridge. Cars — driven by ghosts — slide under me, in both directions. I can hear the roll & crash of the water. The crumbled wall across there is already crumbling more — I remember being here before, not *before* but maybe a thousand years or so ago. I remember how the wall was already crumbling more then too. It's as if everything is on the edge; everything has been on the edge for four thousand years. Maybe it all gets desperate. Maybe everything will be so desperate to finally crash down that even I and my four thousand years won't be able to stop it. I'm holding up evolution, sure, but just how heavy does it get? Just how much can I hold? I'm no Greek giant or anything, and Christ, you know it occurs to me that I'm more like the other fella, that Hercules character, you know? Like the giant handed me the sky — and the world, don't forget the world — saying he'd only be a while and the world runs on favours, yeah? so I in my stupidity just say yes back and here I am four thousand years later, with wrinkled shoulders and the impression that I've been had, somehow. Christ, whoever made that up must have — well, maybe it was just a lucky guess. I mean, I know by experience that nobody can really tell the future.

Except that I can now, because nothing ever changes anymore. Well, how it is is that I can't *actually* tell the future; it's just that there *is* no future.

I'm walking along the wall, the top of the wall, between the crumbling edges. The concrete that they touched up the Medieval efforts with is grey like the rain. The puddles are expansive and grey too, except that at certain angles they reflect the sky, like a blind man's glasses. The world in the reflections is brighter than this one. Somewhere down there maybe there is a future, or so I think, to pass the time. My boots slap wetly and I know I should get out of the rain and I also know that there is only one place I can go. Am I frightened? There are no ghosts here. The town feels empty, full with the same emptiness as the empty city minutes before noon. Part of me is desperate for the railway, or any other form of transport. I recall suddenly how I used to justify my escapes, to myself. I recall that I was never near enough to have to justify myself to anyone else. I realise — or perhaps it's more of a postulate — that even *before* I never did anything but move. I always needed more space than there was — I realise that the feeling I have is not fear/I am *not* frightened/I am happy.

I can explain it: the waveform theory again, of course. The harmonics of emptiness match the wavelengths inside my head. The silence satisfies the boundary conditions of my skull. You don't understand? Or do you? I am blind to you. I have always been blind to you and to all others. — Like I said, it's more of a postulate.

I examine some of the ancient stones. I try to feel the past — if I can't have a future I at least deserve some past, right? I run my cold fingers over the wet angular surfaces of the stones and try to feel the past through them. Intellectually I say to myself: I wonder who built this? What were they like? How did they live? What were their cares, their joys, their grievances, their diseases, their fears, their family structures? Did they know how the sky managed to stay up there, day after day?

Intellectually I ask. Intellectually I fail to answer. Oh and so on and on, do you realise how tired I get of my own thoughts? Sometimes I really want to be one of those ghosts, that pretty one for instance, who will never reach Dover. Sometimes I want to not have to see Dover ever again. Or this thousand-year town, with its touched-up majesty and eternal reflections. Or the empty city, or any of the cathedrals. I know too many cathedrals — it occurs to me that I spend too much of my time travelling between cathedrals. Though of course it is impossible to have too much time; even four thousand years is not enough when you spend your life believing in eternity.

So what am I doing now? I'm heading for the cathedral. Ostensibly to get out of the rain.

I think I hear laughter, then decide it is only the creak of the door. Or the groan of the darkness, the sound of the light's impact. Inside dry smells live, and come out as I enter, to inspect the visitor. I find myself hoping to God that there are no ghosts in here, I'm in the right place for God, certainly, though not necessarily for hope. High on the walls around me tall candles dance in the updraft, and their brass holders (in the shapes of grasping hands) sparkle under the flames. From here, just inside the door, I can see only a small part of the stone, and the candles are tiny flickers which cannot penetrate the stooped black. So I move forward, with my footsteps making that light ancient tap against the ancient worn floor. The light slips in around me as I leave the shadow of the door. I describe it all because suddenly it is all there for me, insistently rapping against my senses. I turn to the right and the unimaginable nave stretches before me, apparently in all directions. The echoes of my lungs and feet and heartbeat define the space — more waveforms — I'm in the world's cavity — do I hear the drip of the wax? Is that it? I'm overcome by fear of approaching darkness — the stone wavers — I grasp — at logic (although the wax will never drip without me; I'm like time; nothing happens without me. It's some kind of effect, like gravity, that I have; I'm like a tiny charge, and time does not flow unless I'm there to compress the field lines. Time itself is static; only a disturbance in the field can produce the illusion of change) — and echoes — I focus at last — nothing but the soft hammer of the rain, up on the leadened roof, coming through the thinning vaults.

When I open my eyes again I find that I've walked somehow toward the first altar. From somewhere above light is falling in, and thin isolated streams of water, sparkling; there are frayed holes in the roof. The stone is worn, bearing the marks of failed attempts at repair, and in places the scorches of burning. The air is ancient. The silence is ancient and the drip of water cannot break it.

What did I say, about time?

I forget.

I forget.

I get out of there. Behind me more laughter creaks and slams closed. Outside only four thousand years have passed, not forever, the way it feels. And it happens twice again as I pace my way back toward the railway — what I said about time, what even I didn't realise is that I did not have the whole story. It may be impossible to have the whole story, about time. Here, in this wet sliding town, something is dragging the X-space cloth too far, and thin patches are appearing, the way you can see through fabric at some angles, with enough sunlight on the other side. I'm wondering — hurrying through the tiny drizzled park where the trees all lean in the same direction — what might be there, on the other side, through the shroud of X-space. More X-space? Apparently — from my glimpses, in the cathedral and passing the clock tower and here — apparently a place, a space, of age. And that seems sensible; it makes up for the four thousand years I have stolen. Well, when I say *I* — well, you know. Yes, a place of time where time accelerates, probably uncontrollably and with a maddening random glee (now I'm imagining things) and where things and buildings, even cathedrals, fall amost before they are put up, where — here, for instance, in the park behind the Medieval wall, where even the trees — in my glimpse — were denied their ageing dignity and fell down together under the weight of snow — yes, I saw snow, or anyway a white sheen to everything, as if in that fast time all surfaces were superconducting and all radiation futile. Oh God, talk about fear. I mean, I have my space here, but what if it collapses from me and I'm trapped there? What if that fast time-space is the real, the absolute, and —

Well, Christ, who cares. I'm pushing my way through the ghosts — there seems to be a crowd heading for the footbridge — maybe they know things too — maybe they know fear too, if that's possible — I push my way through and cross the road once more. For a blink of a moment, in the middle there, there is no bridge below me and no road but a swamp, and creatures, or at least suggestive wakes, but only for a moment. Then I'm back to the train, facing Dover.

And my body and mind, I suppose in defence, crashes through sleep.

* * *

Now a dream of a bay, a wide bay, and seven huge scoop-shaped inverted dunes, where figures play. And my eyes with binoculars, scanning horizontally the land/sea/scape. And the flat sound of the sea, oblivious. And white horses, you know?, and something small and sharp on the breeze. My eyes catch the town on the left arm of the bay and it is lit with tossed-up sunlight and even from here I seem to be able to hear the laughter and cries. But as I watch it becomes ruined, particles fall from it like dust and it takes on the grey air of the deserted. I see the black-green rubbery things on the shoreline dry and crumble too. I see the cliff hollowed and flattened into a soft gradient and more scoop-shaped dunes. I find myself on the beach, with my heels and ankles in the tickling thin estuary of the thin pointless river. I find myself thinking that if this is a dream then what was all of that beforehand? The river water is alarmingly cold/I want to shiver/but I'm afraid to, because I don't want to lose sight of the sea, and perhaps — you never know — a shiver would shake out my eyes, and shatter my bones — I feel as old as the sand, as the primordial things that spun while the sun itself collapsed — I am afraid to turn my head — the headland is there — or is not — there was a time when land and sea were equal — sea now rages, unfairly perhaps — it wants to be dominant — as does everything — the selfish dimensions, space/time and land/sea, spitting at each other while matter claims to be invisible, a product of gravity — and inertia, underneath, hides — Christ I know the difference now, between dreams and ghost-reality — here, the

ghosts are in control.

This is their revenge.

Defence? I haul myself awake.

Are they smiling, in some kind of triumph? I daren't look, I daren't meet their faces with mine; instead I try to make out that I'm still asleep, with my chin on my chest and my eyes slits presenting the world as a thin shadow-line. The train is jolting over endless ragged junctions. I hear the rain drumming louder than ever.

We stop. I have to look up, and I see that I am surrounded by ghosts. I'm amazed. I cannot understand why I didn't sense them all there and how could they have been so silent? — and even more are trying to get on. Christ, they're standing in the aisles already, can't you see? There are murmurs of dissent and annoyance — nothing changes on the railway, did you ever notice that? Even after everybody is killed in the drop you all still stand there and sit there moaning under your breath and making sure that you don't give away even an inch of space, because Christ once they see that you're a soft touch you're going to regret it; you're going down. Within seconds they'll be crushing you out of existence, you know it, it's creature eat creature — I want to say all of this suddenly but I don't because — well, because now I *am* afraid. Did they really get inside me when I slept? Or did they drag me out of me, perhaps, into somewhere else diabolical and ghostly like their faces? And where did they — where are they all coming from? They're *still* crushing their ways in. Isn't there a limit to the expandability of space? To the compressibility of even ghosts? God, they're all around, though certainly they're not noticing me any more than they notice anything. But don't believe that makes it any better — I'm frightened even more — don't they know they're only here because of me? And why aren't they all in bed, the way they were — the way I thought they were — when it dropped? How did they get here, to wait for the train, before me? Christ, this makes my theorising look like a crab trying to count. You get so far, and then some bastard tells you that one plus one is *not* three at all. Am I shivering? Is that me or just the sideways rumble of the train as it finally pulls out? It should be hot in here — my body tells me I'm sweating, though I know that I am not — ghosts have no metabolism. Thermodynamically speaking I'm all alone. But what is important here — I'm theorising again, you can't keep a good theorist down — is not thermodynamics but quanta, not free energy but Heisenberg. I recall that I once intended to go to Copenhagen. Like the trains, the planes will fly for me too. But Copenhagen slipped my mind somewhere within the ever-collecting years. Oh God, I wish now that I was in Copenhagen. I am suddenly fearful that I will not reach Dover today. And, Christ, I am suddenly fearful that I *will* reach Dover today. The sky is greying — noon and the empty city are too far away — I am reminded of all those dark-filtered vampire flicks where even when the German doktor gets up at *dawn* with his stake ready-sharpened it's bound to be evening before he's finished breakfast — evening draws near now. I can feel it like it's a big thing, a shroud, a blanket, something heavy and cloying and impossible to resist — another manifestation of time — I can almost hear the earth dragging its way around and around. Is this madness? Or a new kind of sanity? The train grinds on. The ghosts are voiceless, as if none of them know each other. The train grinds on.

The silence grinds on. The rain and the rumbling of the train cannot break it. Like the sky it grinds on. I feel it, abrasive, like the dragging of a wounded part of me across salt and sand. Even my teeth shiver. There is a great weight at the front of my head — pressing down — an inverted pressure, like an outside haemorrhage, as if the

air is bleeding from an artery — only it is not warm, like blood ought to be — it is a cold mindless weight. Christ, this *is* madness — Macbeth — I cannot sleep — Macbeth, and all other murderers — are they accusing me, these murdered? You seem to forget, you're not my victims, you are everybody's victims, you are your own victims — is that what it is, this weight? Guilt — or am I just tired? An excuse, an infinite exhaustion. Suddenly, "This *is* the train to Dover, I take it?" says a ghost near to me. The silence, and the force, shatters.

Dover.

Evening banishes the rain toward tomorrow. There is a figure, below, in the centre of the sloping concrete where the hovercraft come. It is dark and small but the ghosts — they're disembarking — flow around it in a familiar way. No, I'm calm now, and ready, or at least more ready, but that doesn't mean that I don't feel the stone-like presence of a large fear inside, at chest level, as I stand above and stare down. The figure stands too, stands out amidst the ghosts. I can feel my theories, all of them, all of the careful construction of four thousand years, begin to crumble, to topple. I can hear the sea, and a sympathetic echo of the waves, of the tide, somewhere inside. Dover, the concrete, does not feel solid under my feet. I want to move, I almost want to find the railway track again and jump the next train back to the empty city, but now the weight of the four thousand years has turned on me, like a spell, and holds me fast to this spot, here, staring down at the ghosts spilling from the mouth of the hovercraft, where they mill about with the uncertainty of a crowd, staring at what might prove to be my nemesis (something suggests to me). There, that figure, standing there like a pin stuck into the grey sloped expanse of the place where the hovercraft come. I can see no detail but I know it faces the sea, and I know it can see me, through the back of its head. I am obvious, after all. I am warm blooded, I am not dead like the ghosts, I am four thousand years old and I think it must show. I have the aged dust of cathedrals across my face, and the grime of railways, and the grey of grey skies. And I have my own entourage of ghosts, where my life stretches the x-space shroud, where they slip through, upward from their graves. And down there — another peak — another thin patch in the shroud — another swirling crowd of ghosts — another life.

I am not alone.

Christ, I am not alone.

Slow-time descends as it begins to turn, and to raise its head. I helplessly imagine apocalypse/and the music of apocalypse/while all I hear is the laughter and white-noise conversation of my ghosts as they pass behind me, oblivious and dead. I want to hear screams, or I externalise my own howling, or something, and I hope the figure — I hope madly the figure — that the figure, as it turns — as it turns its head — that as it turns it cannot see me —

But I must appear to it as it appears to me, at our equal distance and symmetric angles, both of us with our ghosts milling about us.

I turn away — I rip away — and find myself staring at the faces of my ghosts, where they fade in a little way along the pavement, where they pass by, where they fade out again a little further on. The faces are confused faces, made up of lines of stretched skin. Some of them — I see some of them — are glancing uneasily up at the sky.

But there will be no more rain. Now the real darkness comes. Evening is sliding — I feel it, to the left, to the West — away. At the speed of light. Even the sun is frightened. What did we do, four thousand years ago? Did I really — did I really

ever think that it was just a *war*? Christ, you know, whatever happened did not happen to us, it happened to time and space. Or to whatever it is out there. We were just in the way, in the crossfire. Is it the gods, playing? The devil, laughing? The universe, maybe, drawing to a halt and re-commencing collapse — for four thousand years it balanced motionless, at the edge of itself, and time did not pass, because the universe was no longer expanding — and now? And now it is picking up velocity once more, but in the other direction, on the inward stretch of the harmonic, starting in on the collapse. Let us anticipate the fireball. Oh Christ!

My theorising will kill me, one day. While I stand there twisting myself around barbed speculation the figure advances, rises: I sense it there, behind me, on the pavement. And my ghosts are frozen, so that their confused faces become grotesque, so that they form a surrounding theatre of exaggerated, static madnesses.

"I thought I was alone," she says.

I stop in mid-turn.

"Did you think you were alone?"

A resonant shiver builds in me.

"Were you in Canterbury, before?" she says.

My grave is visited/my shoulders tremble.

"Our ghosts are standing still all of a sudden."

That has to tempt me. I can't stop myself from explaining: "It's the interaction of our fields. In X-space. Our peaks form a contour" — without thinking now I turn fully — "which is flat at a certain radius. Where the slope is zero the ghosts —"

"Oh. I think I understand"

"You do?"

But I can't see her face; she wears a strange veil, kind of Arabian, and anyway I'm blinking so fast light can barely enter my eyes. (She wears also a flowing black skirt, in the breeze.)

"I remember X-space —"

"*You do?*"

"— from before. Yes, from before."

A small sea-backed silence. Not only a veil, she seems to have special shadows fitted behind it too. The still ghosts amplify the quiet. Her own dead backdrop is like mine, only not so grey. Perhaps not so grey.

"They look rather silly, now," she says.

Far from it.

"I was frightened of them at first," she says. "Weren't you frightened of them, when they kept appearing as you approached and disappearing as you got further away?"

I understood, then. Then I understood.

"I expect," she goes on, not apparently minding my own silence, "that you understood it, though. So that you weren't afraid."

Then, I understood.

Almost absently, her head turns, toward the sea. Still I see no face, and the veil flips in the breeze, exciting me. I stare hard, try to catch —

"You're like a bloody ghost yourself!" she suddenly shouts at me in a small, angry voice, cracking slightly, with her neck, as it whips around at me. "Not saying anything! Why don't you say anything?" Her feet move forward, carrying the rest of her until she is so close that the swirling veil brushes me. Behind her the stationary ghosts move a little, settle again at the new zero-slope radius. "If you don't say something," she says loudly, like a jealous, annoyed child, "I'll get *rid* of you, the

way I do the ghosts, when they don't please me!"

She is short, she is below me at this distance. Her neck is craned upward so that the veil is pulled onto her face by gravity, forming a half-image, rough and undefined. Like the ghosts in the distance, before they fully materialise. But there is something in her manner which suggests that she does not really agree with what she is saying. "How do you get rid of the ghosts? I ask her, at last.

She steps back, her head to the sea again, the veil straight. The breeze drops, surges, drops. There is a sound, which I cannot identify, until I see her shoulders move and I know that she is sobbing. There is suddenly an awful half-taste at the roof of my mouth, and I recognise it from the three times before, the clock tower, the cathedral, the tiny park beneath the wall. Oh, and the footbridge, christ, do I forget? I feel a desperate need to turn around, which is madness, do I expect to see time coming at me like the waves?

"I'm frightened," she says, staying fixed to the sea. "Earlier today I —"

Here it is. Again. Like the park, the clock tower, the cathedral — ...not dreaming — music, all deep — underwater? — or the sound of sobbing, filling dimensions in chaos — yes, underwater, and over, and now the sea has become victor, and shall not ever again be challenged. Written, like a scripture, written in the waves and in the final sands where I stand, is the message. I sway, in stone I sway, I am in stone as a final resistance and still I sway, perhaps flesh would have suited the drowning glory the better — I can see me, in time's eye, sinking slowly. I can see the sea bed, and in time's eye it becomes the time-bed, christ, where all prophecies, like coral, grow. And like coral, die, to fall into the sediment of future prophecies, I see it all happening in expanded fashion, as if time has stretched me all along its length — the moment has been banished, with the rain — I am together with all of my selves — and I hate — and I hate it — is the rain now acid, back on earth and in space? Why else does it burn? Is the wind acid too?

What hill is this? (I join in the laughter, but not from inside me, but from that outside figure, of self-destructive desire.) What beasts loaf down there, peering up from the grass now and then to see if I'm ready? What hideous shapes make them up? There are only five regular things, and what if all are twisted — thus dank poetry is inscribed, burning wet, in the sloping grass at my feet — well, what *if* all are twisted? The beasts look up, maybe wanting to know, or maybe wanting — well, you — music again — the hill rises, falls, rises — an ever-rhythm - the harmonic of everything — breath —

When it passes I open my eyes slowly, perhaps fearfully (but not examining my feelings) and for a moment, through the thin shadow-line, she appears as a large chess-piece, motionless and carved. Before I can identify which piece she is, my eyes are fully open. I have often speculated that we would see things much more accurately if there was less light. It blinds, this over-brilliance, and blurs the edges of everything.

"I'm frightened," she says — I think I remember her saying that before. I'm about to tell her so when I catch a blackness in the high corner of my left eye — I blink, move, gaze — the castle. Oh Christ we all should have known, the castle. "What was it?" she's saying.

"A crest," I explain absently, unable to take my eyes from the castle, the black castle, where it stands/hangs. up upon the hill, at the corner of the town, majestically/malevolently facing the sea, at the corner of the sky. "The crest of a time-wave, breaking over us." Throwing us up, tumbling, catching us and drawing

us down again. "I suppose the damped reverberations left over from the war."

After a moment, during which the sea calmly moans, as ever, she turns to me and says, sounding piqued, "The bloody annoying thing about the war is that it never ends. It never will end."

"Perhaps," I say, taking my eyes from the castle at last and peering down at her blank veil, "there is a way to end it."

To the castle we run, as the grey moves toward black, forming an impossible chessboard of the town — the sun is long down — funny how we never even noticed it go. Like a disliked interloper it slipped away. We run, dislodging shadows as we pass through alleys, blind streets, past blind ever-empty shopfronts. Now even our ghosts are too frightened to follow us — they collect at the harbour-wall, waiting for the tide — we, and they, feel the glance of the castle, like a lighthouse, or a darkhouse, sliding across our faces periodically and pinning us to the walls, motionless. That rhythm reminds me of something, from somewhere. If I allow myself I know I shall hear urgent violins, probably three of them. Images from my past, from all my thousands of delusion-years, are crowding up behind me, piling up like mad vehicles on a sliding road. I hear her footsteps, a shorter, faster stride than my own, running beside me. We turn corners incessantly, sometimes finding blank alleys and turning right around, sometimes finding places we have already seen — we are searching — and the castle, or the town, or both, or nothing, tries its best to misdirect us — but there are only so many streets, only so many turnings and roads, even in Dover, and always we keep a knowledge of the sea, so that never can we be lost, even in the darkness. Another irony: the sea, a laughing roaring thing in my dreams and in the twists of time, is now our ally, guiding us. And in the clearer streets we can see the castle itself, towering, ever higher, ever closer.

Until the streets themselves, winding, begin to climb. And a black thin breeze now guides our faces.

A path — she spies it, points, with a quivering finger that shakes with her lungs — my own lungs shake, and my own heart beats, telling me of its exhaustion — but a path. It climbs into the darkness through trees. We approach, step upon it, begin to climb. The trees are clinging all around us, to the hill. Their thin, aged trunks are black lines that stand out from the blackness. Or perhaps there *is* light — she glances up, my face follows her veil — we see the moon, sliced across its disc by the ragged winter canopy, swimming in sea-horse clouds. My eyes water. Now when I look I can see the roots of the trees too, where they grip the hill like multi-fingered hands, the hands of old men, withered but strong, almost calcified, like stone. In the black breeze that falls from the hill, the stone trees sway, like stone. Something grips me, all around, enclosing me and holding me — it is cold, and warm — it is rock, and water — it sinks into me, becoming me — I tighten —

A scream. A shout. A light hand, dry, colliding with my face. Then she, her face rustling, flowing in the wind — no, not her face, I am forgetting, her veil — in front of me, while one hand is around my wrist and another slaps me again.

"A memory," I say.

"Something —" she begins, and I drag her aside as one of the trees tips its way upward suddenly, and crashes down across the path, across and through the space where she once stood.

"Something," I agree, nodding, and we climb carefully over the fallen wood and continue upward.

The path narrows, steepens, turns. The wind becomes stronger, but is still thin. The path turns again — we are deeply within darkness — the moon is obscured now

— are those animals, growling under the wind? We see nothing, not even each other, and only our footsteps, hurrying slightly, keep us together.

The path widens, flattens, joins a black road. Out of the trees, in the centre of the road, I search for the moon. It has gone — cloud — or something else.

Her veil — I can just glimpse it — her veil is like the concrete at our feet. It seems solid, even in the wind. I blink, blink harder, with a hand I grasp her arm. For a moment it seems cold and rough and pitted — but I force it out — I open my eyes and the veil is rippling again.

“They’re trying —”

Very slowly and heavily she says, “I know.” Then, “Wait.” I see her dark fist come toward me — she tries to grasp, the way I grasp — but she cannot unclench — I take her hand, in mine, and work my own fingers between hers — and into her palm — the space in there is cold — I force out, again.

I guide her arm, so that her hand finds mine, and she clenches again. She gasps.

“Now,” she says.

I move forward, along the road, up the hill, taking her with me.

Our footsteps make that ancient sound, with its ancient echoes, as if the sky has become an infinite cathedral. Suddenly the trees are gone from the sides of the roadway, and white light falls — though I dare not look up, to see from where — and we are on a stone drawbridge. To the right a small crumbled wall guards against a giant drop, where the hill seems to fall all the way to the sea. I can see the silver coating the waves, far out and far down. Now the wind blows across, as well as down; now it buffets, turning itself around and around; now it gusts, and is it accidental that it drives us at the crumbled wall? I stand firm, breathing back at it. And now I notice, in front of us, the great blackness of the castle itself.

It pulls, as if by enormous gravity. But I sense treachery in that force — don’t ask me how — treachery is inches deep on the ground now, like the silver snow in the Canterbury park. And the way the wind roars from the mouth of the castle, as if the castle itself were roaring. And the way that not even the smallest part of the white light bounces from the stone, the way I can see it by its blackness, like an architected hole in the world. And the way that I stiffen and heavy fear bleeds through me. And the way that she stiffens too. And the way that I cannot hear the sea, or the wind even, as if there is only me, only she, and only it, the castle, here, now.

And the way that even my malevolent, ferocious past has been obliterated by this. And the way that my skin no longer seems able to contain my organs. And the way that the black wind bursts through my face and into my mind, leaving a smashed jagged hole there, to whistle soundlessly inside, inside the corners of my skull. The way I float, almost. The way her cold hand seems to burn. The way I fight to break from her, the way I spit and writhe, the way I scream and threaten and kick, the way I grab at her heart, the way I try to tear her open, the way I try to bite her bones. The red way the moon shines. The way the sun roars and explodes around the back of the globe. The fire licks, absorbs. The concrete liquefies — I sink — I sink — I sink —

to my knees, crying, everything, coming out, falling out of me.

Silently, she carries me into the castle. I am aware of being moved, I see the pale moonlight shift from object to object, I feel her arms under me. I see her feet, stepping forward and forward, over the cobbles, the ancient stones, the rough

ragged ground. If I turn my head, I might see —

But I will not turn my head, Not yet.

I see the walls, the battlements. I see the grass, silver. I see the keep. I see the arched gloomy doorway, I see it pass, I see the coiling staircase, I feel as we coil around it.

I see the walls, the battlements. I see the grass, silver. I see the keep. I see the arched gloomy doorway, I see it pass, I see the coiling staircase, I feel as we coil around it.

I see the slanted moonlight, at the top. We reach the top; I see the blinding moonlight; the grass approaches; I feel myself laid down.

I see the moon. I sleep, then, my eyeballs following the clouds, in grace.

* * *

“We want to help you”

“You’re all dead,”

“We don’t understand.”

What is it?

“We talk to you while you sleep. You must sleep, so we allow you to sleep.”

“But we have little time, so we talk to you now.”

“We want to help you.”

How?

“You’re all dead.”

“All your people.”

“Except for you.”

And she.

“— and we want to understand.”

The castle —

“A defence. An automatic mechanism. Had we seen you earlier —”

And she?

“We are not from here. But a long time ago we felt something —”

“Something happened here —”

“We located the event, that is to say,”

“And we came here. To see.”

Time and space.

“But — we don’t understand — what has happened here?”

“What has happened here?”

A silence, then.

“We want to help you.”

And she?

* * *

I awake. That is to say, sleep bows to wakefulness — two dimensions which, for once, are not at war. I expect morning — it feels that way — but it is still dark. There is stone under me, and no stars above — the black sky has a low, oppressive quality. And I realise — it is not sky.

“We need the darkness,” something says. “Your sun — is not like ours.”

I try to move. I move, and am surprised. Amazingly, my bones feel refreshed. I

look around — there is enough light, source-less, confusing light, but enough to see that I am atop the keep, still, where I remember — or where I think I remember — being laid.

I remember. “Where —?”

“Please,” something says.

“Show yourself.” I stand. “Let me see you!”

I hear a heavy flapping, above — I stare, unable to believe it — but it is only the flag, atop the flagpole, too dark to show a design, but without doubt the flag.

“You —”

“Show me!” Fear returns, slowly, like a wolf, creeping back, hungry.

In front of me something forms.

Christ.

Christ, the body of madness. The face of chaos. The limbs of destruction.

Christ.

Christ.

I dance to the battlement-wall, wanting to be sick, as it fades back — I lean over, thinking that everyone has their price, the thing that will always destroy them, whether the war or the loss of something or alien-ness — and I see her.

The confusing light makes her form stand out against the stone below.

Her body, twisted, legs and arms out, face upward at me, all of her so small from this height that I *still* cannot make out her features, even though she no longer wears the veil.

My throat forces back my stomach/I burn and spin inside/for a moment I too fall/but I cannot.

“You are distressed.”

“We said that you would be”

“But something else distresses you. Doesn’t it?”

I turn, face the voices, though there is only shadow there. I can feel my face cracking. “Why did you...?” Why did you? Why did we? Why why and on and on.

“He thinks we did it.”

“Oh, but we didn’t. She—”

“Was there when we arrived.”

“Though certainly it hadn’t been long.”

“In fact, we had been trying to contact her.”

“She was alive, and all the others were dead. Are dead.”

“So we wanted to contact her. But before we could — we did not get here quickly enough —”

“And she...”

I turn to howl. But the sky, the artificial black sky, like the burnt stone of cathedrals and the ash of four thousand years — but the sky. But the sky.

“Then — we knew that we had to find someone else —”

“I took on her form, what of it that I could, and I departed this place, to search.”

“Amazingly, you were already here.”

“It was as if something — brought you.”

“So I found you — in her form — and I guided you here — we are sorry about the defence mechanism. We forgot about it.”

“It has been —”

“— so long.”

I spread out my hands, as if facing them, though I will not do that. I say, “I can’t

help you. I don't know what happened." There appears an emptiness inside, where my theories once were, where I kept my cobwebbed notions of space and time and x-space and waveforms. Once, long ago, I liked to consider myself as one of the last, carrying through the 19 when tradition, writing their names, the names of the great, on walls, forcing their recorded thoughts onward, re-theorising endlessly, hauling what they all said through the corridor-centuries. But now I no longer know anything; I no longer feel the desire to visit Copenhagen; I no longer can interpret any of the dualities I see. "I can't help you."

"But —"

That half-taste again, in the back of my throat, at the bridge of my nose, and a feeling at the back of my head, making me want to turn.

"—if we —"

And this time I do turn, no longer taking for granted the fact that I will not see time coming at me/I am curious/perhaps now it is victorious, perhaps now it will show itself.

"— our equipment —"

I turn, see them, the three, and behind them, closing in fast —

"— may not —"

behind them, coming through the artificial black —

"— again —"

coming through, and washing over and through them, and over and through me.

I feel the time-wave's cleaning power, eradicating the clinging things — I look down — my body, mountainous, floats, while the water-field washes out the feeding parasites — that I never saw them before — that I never saw them before is — they were hidden, with their glass jaws in my bloodstream — now they sparkle, obvious, as the wave drags them — they shine with the last light of their passing — all the things — all the clinging things.

Morning light. Three pools of liquid, and the last echoes of their dying. The real sky is back, respendent, gently blinding, with the sun low in the east, and the atmosphere blue.

The liquid bubbles faintly. I go no closer. I turn.

Below, far below, the sea glistens.

Below, straight below, her body lies, ever twisted.

But the breeze is fresh, and light, like everything, like myself, my inside.

I shall build her a cathedral. I shall quarry the stone, and haul it, small piece by small piece, and place it, piece upon piece, wall with wall, myself. I shall reproduce the religion. As I build the stone thing I shall build my own faith. I shall preach to ghosts, whether they hear or not. Whether they hear or not is not important. I shall build.

I have a very long time. Perhaps at the end of it — perhaps. ●





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NEWS RELEASE

NOVA SF REPLACES NEW VISIONS

New Visions has been wound up after one issue, to enable editor Adrian Hodges to concentrate on a new dedicated science fiction and fantasy magazine called *Nova SF*.

The first issue of *Nova SF* is now available, and contains fiction by Graham Andrews, Matthew Dickens, John Townsend and Alan Garside, an article by Matthew Dickens, plus a special Featured Poet section devoted this issue to Andy Darlington.

Nova SF #1, Spring 1990, A5, 40pp, ISSN 0958-7756, is available from Adrian Hodges, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 4LG, price £1:25 (four issue subscription £4:50), cheques payable to *A. Hodges*.

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SPACE AND ART

Duncan Lunan

UNTIL THE INVENTION of photography, every astronomer had also to be a draughtsman — a point my colleague John Braithwaite emphasises when he gives a 19th century lantern slide lecture. It was inevitable that the more skilled should try lunar and planetary landscapes, putting themselves in imagination where they knew they could never go. In the 20th century, more and more artists have turned their imaginations in this direction. One British artist, David Hardy, has just produced a very fine compilation featuring over 60 artists ("Visions of Space", Dragon's World, £16.95).

Is it art, or mere illustration? I've argued this out more than once with artists who work in other fields. My reply to them is that the difference is shown by comparing, say, Constable's painting of Salisbury Cathedral with the sort of artist's impression which accompanies an architect's plans. The illustrator tries to show what it would look like if you were there — the artist tries to communicate what it would *feel* like. The best of space art makes a statement about our relationship to the Universe.

Between April 7th and May 2nd the 90's Gallery in Otago Street, Glasgow, mounted an exhibition entitled 'Urban Spacemen'. It was organised by ASTRA, the Association in Scotland to Research into Astronautics, and may go on tour later in the year. The artists featured are Ed Buckley and Gavin Roberts, who illustrated my own nonfiction books; Tom Campbell, whose paintings appeared in *Space Voyager* and *World Magazine*; Brian Waugh, a well-known book jacket artist; and Sydney Jordan, who drew 'Jeff Hawke' — the world's longest-running science fiction cartoon strip — for the *Daily Express*. There are telescopes on display from Dalsersf Optics, sundials from Richard Robertson of Skye, and a large model by Gordon Dick of a Waverider re-entry vehicle. The exhibition was part of Glasgow's year as European City of Culture and was used to launch an appeal for Tom Campbell, who suffers badly from Dry Eye Syndrome.

2 — CHOOSING A TELESCOPE

Everyone interested in astronomy will consider buying a telescope at some point, and will ask 'What type of telescope should I buy?' Unfortunately there is no easy answer. It is really a question of what can be afforded and whether it represents value for money. Where possible, I have been advised, Japanese telescopes are to be avoided: they pass through so many hands before reaching the customer that prices can be severely inflated. In addition, very few shops which sell Japanese telescopes have workshop facilities or ready access to spares.

In contrast, the best of the British manufacturers produce and sell telescopes which represent excellent value and will out-perform their Japanese equivalents. Japanese optics are usually excellent, but the stands which support the telescopes are

often too light to hold an instrument which is magnifying an object several hundred times. 'Shake' in an astronomical telescope will make it impossible to get a satisfactory view of anything — if you can't keep it still you can't examine it.

The choice of telescope is between a refractor (using lenses) or a reflector (using mirrors). All telescope sizes are quoted in terms of the diameter of the lens or mirror. This determines how much light the telescope can collect and how great its 'resolving' power is. Resolving power is the ability to distinguish small detail. Magnification is not the yardstick of performance — you can only magnify the detail which the objective (lens or mirror) can see. The general rule is — the more the advert emphasises the amazing magnification the more suspect is the quality of the instrument. Magnification can be increased by changing the eyepiece; nothing short of a larger objective will improve the telescope. That said, no instrument should be discounted in starting astronomy: anything which enables you to see more than you can with the naked eye should be pressed into service.

Many beginners' books on astronomy will advise purchasing a pair of binoculars rather than a telescope, in the first instance. By definition a telescope shows only a small area of sky and one has to learn how to use it: young people, in particular, are often put off by cheap optics and the difficulty of obtaining a clear focus. Furthermore, a telescope is generally only as good as its mount — it doesn't matter how good the image if it's whisked away by the first puff of wind or touch on the focussing mount!

The advantage of binoculars is that they combine a large field of view, very useful for learning the constellations and the fainter objects within them, with wide aperture and consequently good light grasp — approximating to the type of telescope called an RFT (Richest Field Telescope) often used in comet searches, variable star work etc., where high magnification is not what's required.

The *disadvantage* of binoculars is the problem, again, of keeping the image steady. Binoculars are heavy, especially for young users. Patrick Moore has been seen demonstrating a frame, hung round the neck, which is supposed to take the strain off your arms! Another approach is a beginner's telescope which combines the cheapness and light grasp of binoculars with a table-top tripod or a camera tripod fitting. Dalserf Optics of Scotland (Tel 0698 881004), whose John Braithwaite has provided much of the material for this article, produce a table-top telescope of this type which sells for well under £100.

In general, Braithwaite's advice to first-time buyers is to avoid small refractors — although good second-hand ones, especially from reputable dealers, can be worthwhile. Remember how many great discoveries were made with tiny instruments, by today's standards! Some manufacturers will part-exchange instruments, and this can be very useful if you plan to buy a larger telescope when funds or experience permit.

3 — Lunar Eclipses

The recent lunar eclipse occurred at a particularly convenient time and gives a good opportunity to talk about these events. When the Moon eclipses the Sun, its shadow follows a narrow track across the Earth's surface and few people see what happens; but when the Earth's shadow falls on the Moon, it can be seen from anywhere on the hemisphere facing the Moon at the time.

In the early part of the eclipse, often there's little or nothing to be seen. That's

because the Sun shows as a disc half a degree across, and it takes time for the Earth to cover it. During that time, from the Moon, the Sun would be seen only partly eclipsed. This outer part of the Earth's shadow is known as the *penumbra*. From within the inner cone, the *umbra*, the Sun would seem to be completely eclipsed. The curved edge of the umbra, as it sweeps across the Moon, helped to convince the ancient Greeks that the world must be round.

As it happens, the Moon and the Sun appear almost the same size from here, and that's why solar eclipses are so dramatic when the outer atmosphere of the Sun flashes into view. (It took quite a long time to establish that it was the Sun's atmosphere and not the Moon's.) But from the Moon, the Earth has four times the apparent size of the Sun — another reason why lunar eclipses are more frequent and last longer.

Nobody has seen a lunar eclipse from a lunar viewpoint, though artists have been fascinated by the prospect for a long time. One of the earliest pieces of astronomical art I know is the colour page in the 19th century book "The Moon", by Naismith & Carpenter, showing the red-rimmed Earth eclipsing the Sun. The late Chesley Bonestell had several paintings on this theme, and it had been hoped that they could be compared with the reality by the TV camera on the Apollo 15 Lunar Rover, after the astronauts returned to Earth. Unfortunately contact was lost before the due eclipse occurred — the British artist David Hardy painted the Rover being driven away by a mocking alien.

Nevertheless we have one 'picture' of the phenomenon: compiled with some difficulty by a sensor on the unmanned spacecraft Surveyor 3, before manned landings on the Moon. The surprising thing was that the Earth wasn't surrounded by a uniform ring of light — there were breaks in it, like the 'Baily's Beads' effect caused by mountains on the rim of the Moon during eclipses seen from here. Earth has no mountains of such size in relation to its diameter, but careful checking revealed that the breaks in the ring coincided with masses of cloud, on the rim of the Earth seen from the Moon.

What this means is that we can never be entirely sure what we're going to see in a lunar eclipse. How soon the penumbral effect will become visible, and how dark the umbra will be, depends very much on the clouds round the sunrise and sunset limbs of the Earth at the time.

Clouds have another marked effect on eclipses, as far as we're concerned. Back in my schooldays, before Luna III showed us the far side of the Moon for the first time, I was brought up on a poem — attributed to a servant of a poet, in the 30's, by Patrick Moore — which ran:

"Oh Moon, lovely Moon, with the beautiful face,
Careering along through the bound'ries of space;
Whenever I see you, I think in my mind,
Shall I ever, oh ever, behold thy behind?"

Not often quoted nowadays, when the Farside has been thoroughly mapped. But one night back then, while waiting out an eclipse in which the clouds never broke at all, I came up with my own version.

"Oh Moon, lovely Moon, with the unknown behind,
On this night of eclipse how I think in my mind,
As penumbra and umbra fall on you through space,
I would be quite content with your Earth-shadowed *face!*"

4 — Incoming Asteroid

In March 1989 the Earth was passed at 450,000 miles by an asteroid designated 1989 FC. It's now been announced that it was 500 to 1000 feet across, depending on its reflectivity — which is to say, on its composition. This isn't the closest shave we've had lately: asteroids have passed between the Earth and the Moon, and in 1972 an object up to 4000 tonnes in mass — 100 feet across or less — flew through the atmosphere over the USA, mercifully without striking the ground.

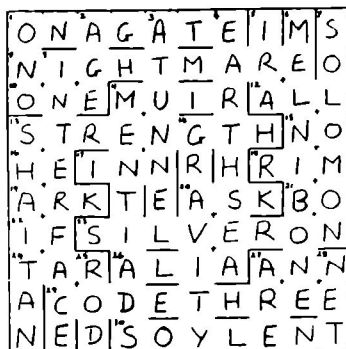
The really worrying thing is that the period between 1989 FC encounters with the Earth turns out to be only 13 months; and that suggests a resonance with Jupiter, which the Earth overtakes in its orbit every 13 months (though not at the same time). Resonance situations can lead to collisions and the March issue of *Spacefaring Gazette* announces (rather casually, if it's true) that the asteroid will hit either Earth or the Moon some time in the next 30-40 years.

The article goes on to point out that the effects of an impact would depend very much on the object's composition. It may be an extra-large version of the giant fireballs which enter Earth's atmosphere: loose structures of dust which disintegrate harmlessly, high above the ground. A more closely bound object like a carbonaceous chondrite would disintegrate at low level, causing widespread damage like the Tunguska meteorite of 1908. If it's a small cometary nucleus, currently shielded by a dark crust, then a large impact crater could be formed with great destruction.

A stony or nickel-iron body would be worse still, generating a crater up to ten miles across. This is still small-scale compared to the event which wiped out the dinosaurs - if that was a single impact, the crater was at least 100 miles in diameter — but would devastate a country or even a continent. In the sea it would cause terrible waves and storms.

An early space probe to 1989 FC would seem to be indicated!

ANSWERS TO WORD GRID 9



BOOK REVIEW

Hunter of Worlds by C.J. Cherryh
Published by Mandarin, Paperback,
254 pages, £3.50. ISBN No.0-7493-0212-7

THIS IS A NEW PAPERBACK edition of a novel first published in the USA in 1977 and in Britain in 1980. In other words, it is an early C.J. Cherryh novel re-issued in view of the author's increased reputation. The question is, does it deserve the renewed attention?

The plot of 'Hunter of Worlds' takes us into 'Star Trek' territory, being space opera with an exploration of alien moralities. There are four humanoid species in the novel: iduve, kallia, amaut and human.

The indigo-skinned iduve are the masters of the Universe, an amoral race who have long since left their native planet to travel between the stars in enormous ships. They treat the other races as naturally inferior, using them as servants, and such is their power that this exploitation is never disputed.

The kallia, azure-skinned and silver-haired, are a basically peaceful people who believe in the harmony of all things. This gives them a fierce sense of loyalty which can sometimes lead them to surprising violence, though they will always stop short of killing.

The small, grey amaut are traders, with a tendency to cruelty towards what they perceive as inferior races. They look after their own interests above all and because of this can rarely be trusted.

Humans in 'Hunter of Worlds' fall into two categories. The bulk of humanity has left the worlds in which the novel is set, leaving behind only a relative handful of settlers who have degenerated towards savagery. "Their ancestors might have been capable of starflight but these were not even capable of coherent speech." By contrast on their own worlds, which iduve, kallia and amaut do not normally visit, the human race are still advanced space travellers.

The basic premise of the novel is that the iduve have forcibly co-opted two kallia, Aiela, a male not previously in their service and Isande, a female born on an iduve ship, and used a device called a "chiabres" to link their minds with a human, Daniel. Daniel, thought at first to be a savage, turns out to be an intelligent human brought out of human space by amaut kidnappers. The three captives are to assist in catching a fugitive iduve, Tejef. It is a measure of iduve morality that if Tejef is not caught they are quite willing to destroy the entire planet on which he is hiding.

Unfortunately, the section of the novel explaining how Tejef became a fugitive is extremely complex and needs to be read twice before it even begins to make sense. One sentence will serve to illustrate the point:

"Of Mejakh's great 'vaikka' she gained such 'arastiethe' that she met in 'katasakke' with Chaxal-Orithain of 'Ashanome', and of that mating came Khasif, firstborn of 'Ashanome's' present ruling 'sra', but not his heir."

These unfamiliar words, describing alien, and particularly iduve, concepts, are the novel's greatest liability. Even at the end of the book the reader is still trying to establish the exact distinction between 'chanokhia' and 'arastiethe'. A glossary at the back of the book does give detailed explanations, but these are apt to add as much to the confusion as they take away.

It should also be mentioned that here and there the publishers have let printing errors go unamended, some of which change the meaning of a passage.

In conclusion 'Hunter of Worlds', although fast-moving and never dull, fails to be totally satisfactory. Nonetheless, it can be recommended without hesitation to Cherryh admirers and is worth a look for anyone else.

The Legacy of Heorot by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes,
Published by Sphere, Paperback,
400 pages, £3.50, ISBN No. 0-7221-6407-6

Some Centuries in the future, humanity's first manned interstellar flight has established a small colony on the fourth planet of Tau Ceti. The settlement is well ringed with defences, but now, after several months with no sign of danger, pressure is growing for the resources tied up in defence to be used elsewhere. Just one man, former soldier Cadmann Weyland, preaches continued vigilance, to increasing derision from the other colonists. Then the colony's animals begin to meet with mysterious and gory deaths ...

Sound familiar? It should. What we have here is quite simply 'Jaws' in outer space, or, to take the concept back to its roots, 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf'. It will surprise no-one to learn that the native inhabitants of Tau Ceti Four have discovered the colony and are only too eager to try out new sources of food, or that the bulk of the novel deals with the colonists' battle against the alien threat (alien to them, that is) and the change of Weyland's status from pest to hero.

With this kind of novel, much depends on the aliens. The creatures in 'The Legacy of Heorot', like many of science fiction's most memorable creations, have their roots in Earth biology. Dubbed 'grendels' by the colonists, they are similar in appearance to the largest Earth lizards such as Komodo dragons, though they are in fact amphibious.

Grendels are non-sapient carnivores, drawn to the colony and its livestock purely by their instinctive desire for food. Their one truly alien feature is a gland which, when aroused, adds extra oxygen to their blood, thus acting as a supercharger and enabling them to move at amazing speeds. It is these speeds which give the grendels their menace.

In common with most Earth amphibians, grendels have a totally aquatic larval stage. This fact is signalled to the reader early in the

book, but overlooked by the colony's biologists, who have been hit by 'Hibernation Instability'. This is the most original concept in the novel, a form of brain damage brought about by the process of waking from cryogenic suspension, in which state the colonists have travelled. Hibernation Instability has varying degrees of severity and may or may not be reversible. Certainly it is an idea to which Larry Niven might fruitfully return in future novels.

Failure to spot the grendels' larval stage for what it is places the colonists in increased danger, but to explain why would give away too much of the plot.

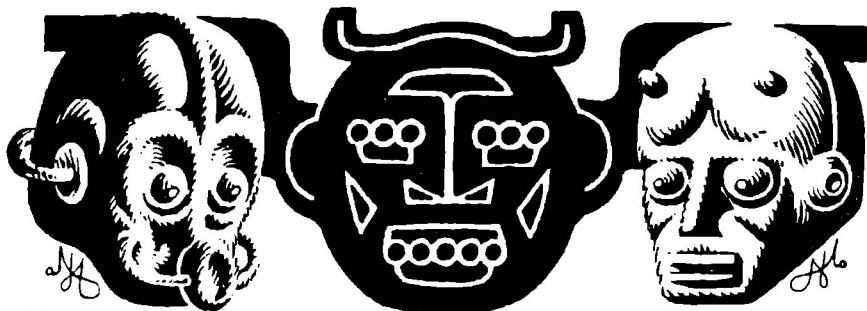
The name 'Grendel', by the way, comes from the Saxon legend of 'Beowulf', in which 'Heorot' was the name of the village.

The humans in 'The Legend of Heorot' are well drawn, from the career soldier Weyland, through his womanising friend Carlos Martinez, to the scientists trying to come to terms with the fact that Hibernation Instability has robbed them of their brilliance. All the major characters have their own rivalries and relationships, professional, social and sexual, and it is the tensions these create which lift the novel above the level of a 'bug-eyed monster' yarn.

My one objection to the novel is that the colonists, whose names suggest mixed origins, have too many of the attitudes of twentieth century America. For example, when Carolyn McAndrews is being pursued by a group of grendels she names three of them 'Ayatollah', 'Khadafi' and 'Charlie' after Charles Manson. I doubt if the first two will still be figures of hate so far in the future and I suspect Manson may well be totally forgotten.

This, though, is a minor point. In the final analysis, 'The Legacy of Heorot' is a light, pleasant read, but not a novel the reader is likely to remember for long. ●

Stephen J. Wood



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THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Sam
Jeffers



AS YOU will have read elsewhere in this issue, John Townsend has left 'DREAM' to concentrate on his writing. The results of his new-found attachment to the typewriter have not been long in coming through — for those of you who are Townsend fans the future looks bright indeed. As well as the couple of stories he has coming up in 'OVERSPACE' (mentioned in my last column) his tour-de-force 'THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN' is upcoming in a near-future issue of 'NIGHTFALL' (see the ad. in 'DREAM' 24) and he has another story in an early issue of 'XENOS'.

Incidentally, for those of you who haven't heard of 'XENOS' it sounds interesting — the first issue is out soon (as I write this at the end of May). It will be A5 size and a 'forum' type magazine, aimed at giving writers critical reaction to their stories. It will be bi-monthly, cost £1.50 per issue, or £8.50 for a 1-year sub. No payment for contributions at present. If you're interested contact S.V. Copestake at 65, Abbott Crescent, Kempston, Beds. MK42 7QJ for more details.

Incidentally, going back to 'NIGHTFALL', Bruce Baker tells me that they are running some of his stuff in graphic form, illustrated by Dallas Goffin. I've always thought Bruce to be a very 'visual' sort of writer and it'll be interesting to see how the project pans out. 'NIGHTFALL' looks as though it's going to be an interesting sort of 'zine.

Simon Clark's 'BLOOD AND GRIT' is now available from BBR books. A full review will appear in the 'Book Review' section of a future 'DREAM', but I just thought I'd let you have the bare details. Six rather gut wrenching horror stories from Clark are included in a neatly produced 104pp paperback, available from 'Chris Reed' at BBR, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield. S40 3LA. Price is £3.50. If you like the guts 'n gore school of writing this is the volume for you — I just wish someone would give us some 'subtle' horror for a change.

On to the magazines — they're a bumper bundle as usual these days. I was pleased to get Issue 12 of 'AUGURIES' (52pp A5 for £1.30, or £5.20 for a 4-issue sub. from Nik Morton, 48 Anglesey Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants. PO12 2EQ. Advertised on the front cover as quarterly, but has been irregular. However, see below.) It is quite a while since Issue 11, but the editor promises us a bi-monthly schedule for the remainder of 1990 to redress the balance. 'AUGURIES' pays £2 per 1,000 words for short stories.

Issue 12 has an improved type-face for most of the content, although it does seem to have been changed part-way through giving the issue a rather untidy appearance. When it is standardised, however, it should be a great improvement as it is a lot more readable than the old style. The story headings are still a bit messy as though Nik hasn't yet quite decided which format is best.

The best of the stories are Sydney Bounds' 'FIND THE MAGE', a sequel to 'MURDER BY MAGIC' (DREAM 23) and Arabella Woods' 'EGGS', set in a world where mammals (and people) occasionally give birth to eggs rather than live young. No-one else writes quite like Arabella Wood — she is by no means a perfect writer, but has that little strand of 'difference', which will, given time and practice, stand her in good stead.

Dorothy Davies' 'CIRCUS!' is very short and because of that does not have time to develop any real originality. Davies is an excellent writer, but I wish she'd do some longer stories, even if it meant writing less of them. Other good stories by Matthew Dickens and Graham Andrews make this a slightly above-average 'AUGURIES', which means it ain't half bad. No wild experiments in this magazine, just good solid (if sometimes a bit lightweight) nicely crafted SF and Fantasy, by a good batch of 'coming' writers. Let's hope Nik can keep to his new schedules. I was beginning to suffer withdrawal symptoms!

What was 'BACK BRAIN RECLUSE' has now apparently become 'BBR', and undergone a metamorphosis in layout as well. It is now A4 size, 48pp for £1.75 or £6.30 for 4 quarterly issues. Address is as for 'BLOOD AND GRIT' above.

BBR is a handsome beast — there's no getting away from it. Very professional production standards mean that BBR is only lacking a full colour cover, with which it would look perfectly at home on the newsagents' shelves with the other professional 'zines. In addition, the editor/publisher, Chris Reed, is paying for material from the next issue. He doesn't say how much but I'm sure a S.A.E. would get you full details.

Probably the most interesting (and controversial) section of this issue of BBR is Chris Reed's editorial, wherein he laments the state of 'commercial' SF and lambasts 'INTERZONE' for not remaining true to its early ideal of encouraging new writers and leaving established writers to their existing markets. Far be it from me to defend 'INTERZONE' of all publications, but I feel Chris is a little unfair to them. It seems to me that they have published quite a few 'new' writers (even though some of them may already have been familiar to readers of the various small presses) and, in fact, have devoted a couple of issues entirely to

emerging writers in the recent past. True, 'INTERZONE' is not filled with the kind of experimental 'cutting edge' fiction that Chris obviously favours, but to sell to the general public in newsagents you have to travel down a certain route — call it commercialism or whatever. Yes, 'INTERZONE' does plaster the well known names in big letters on its cover, but what else is it expected to do? Advertise a lot of unknowns? A lot fewer people would then buy it, and it might even go out of business. Is that really what Chris wants? However, although I don't agree with him at all over the direction that British SF should take he does raise some valid points and I am sure his editorial will provide much fodder for correspondents to BBR's letter section.

On to the fiction. D.F. Lewis is a writer who has a way with words but seems unable to utilise it in a sensible fashion. His 'MADGE' is evocative and poignant, but hollow. He should try writing something longer than 1000 words occasionally. Mind you, it does give Kevin Cullen the chance to do a brilliant illustration which is 200% better than the story. In a recent 'AUGURIES', Philip J. Backers lambasted Lewis as (I paraphrase) talentless. I disagree. The man has ability but he's wasting it on this sort of snippet.

More substantial is 'LOVEGUN' from Mark Haw, who has a talent for writing stories from an angle unseen by other writers. This fact convinces me he is going to be a 'name'. The 'artistry' of his language is occasionally overdone as though he is trying too hard for effect, but there is a big talent there. Other highlights are a jokey fantasy about a trilby by Garry Kilworth (pleasant but unsubstantial), a short by Mark Iles of a man who got what he wanted in a roundabout way and David Hast's 'CRIME WATCHER' which was a fair enough story, but spoiled by being written in a kind of pidgin English. I would have been happier if it wasn't for the fact that I suspect that it was this that got it into BBR, rather than the intrinsic merit of the storyline. Letters and reviews complete the issue. As I said before, a handsome production. Recommended, especially if you like 'cutting edge' SF. (Whatever that is. Why the hell can't people stop inventing new names. Technogoth — Cyberpunk — SFU — Slipstream. How pointless and how confusing!)

Issue 6 of Sean Friend's 'OVERSPACE' (32pp A4 for £1 incl. p&p. No subscription rate given that I could find, available from Sean R. Friend, The Mill House, 177 Challymead, Melksham, Wilts. SN12 8LH) shows signs of a lack of material, apparently caused by the editor's illness. The 32 A4 pages are typed double spaced and there are a lot of full-page adverts and miscellaneous 'fillers' leaving room only for four shortish bits of fiction and several poems. Dave W. Hughes' 'FROM ANOTHER ANGLE' is a short written from the point of view of a character awaiting a part in a story — clever and amusing. Bruce Baker has Part 2 of his serial 'DRAGONWITCH', which is Bruce firing on all cylinders: evil monsters, the horrendous Wackett, crackling energies etc. etc. You'll love it or hate it. I loved it! John Light has a slight but amusing tale of Galactic Insurance, while Susan McKenzie's 'DARK CIRCLE' is a fairly pedestrian fantasy telling of another soul claimed by the devil. 'OVERSPACE' reminds me a bit of the (very) early 'DREAM' — the production is a bit low-key and the fiction is not the very top ('though entertaining enough in its way) but you get the feeling that there could be a lot better to come. I think that this is one worth trying and sticking with. Watch it develop!

One magazine that seems to be coming out ever more frequently is 'THE SCANNER' (24pp A4 for £1.50 incl. p&p or £5.50 for 4 issues from Christopher James, 4 Dover Road, East Cowes, Isle of Wight. PO32 6RG.) It doesn't seem like a quarter since the last issue, but I suppose it must be. At any rate Issue 9 is an average issue in terms of quality. Matthew Dickens' 'TRILLENIUM' is probably the best in the fiction stakes, a rather overdone story of pollution and ecological disaster. A bit like being hit with a blunt instrument. (Incidentally, with all this talk of the 'Greenhouse Effect' does anyone else remember twenty years ago when it was confidently forecast, by respectable scientists, that we were on the verge of a new Ice Age? Personally, I'll believe in the Greenhouse Effect when my little pad in Lymington is inhabited by our fishy friends and not before. Anyone who believes *anything* respectable scientists predict must be an idiot. If they believe environmentalists then they're worse!)

D.F.Lewis has a new set of 'Murkales' stories starting off in this issue. I wish he hadn't bothered. Better, because it is at least comprehensible is Colin P. Davies' 'DAVID YEUNG REMAINS' a kind of horror story of possession. Michael McNerney's 'FLY ME TO THE MOON' was a waste of space. All the usual features are present (but the Dan Dork strip wasn't as good as last time) and there is also poetry from Andrew Darlington. The artwork was not quite as dire as usual, with the unique art of 'Dreyfus' improving things somewhat. 'THE SCANNER' remains something of an enigma to me; among the magazines of the New SF Alliance this is the one I am least sure about. If you can get under its skin you'll love it — if you're not on the same wavelength you'll wonder what all the fuss is about!

ALSO RECEIVED: 'INTERZONE' No. 36 (Subscriptions: £23 for 12 monthly issues from 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton. BN1 6LU. 76pp A4.) Highlight: a brilliant story about the return of a comic-strip character by Kim Newman, who has regained form with a vengeance this time. Low point — Simon Ings' 'THE BRAINING OF MOTHER LAMPREY', which was just dire. No other word for it. (Incidentally, 'INTERZONE' now prints photographs of some of its contributors — Kim Newman looks a right poser and Simon Ings looks like a football hooligan!)

'OUT ON CLOUD NINE', a thin one-off volume of fiction and poetry from Dave W. Hughes (ISBN 1872890 00 8 — 32pp A5 from Zanzibar Productions, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Gloucs. GL52 4LG. £1.25 per copy). The fiction in this booklet is no great shakes, mostly being too short to work, but some of the poems hit the spot well. Dave W. Hughes can write some good stuff ('THE SONG OF THE SHAPES' — THE SCANNER 8) but often seems pretentious and over-serious.

'ASGARD' is the Journal of The Association in Scotland To Research Into Astronautics. It is £2 per issue to non-members, which is a bit steep for 20 A5

pages, even though it's nicely typeset. If you like Duncan Lunan's column in 'DREAM' you'll probably like this. Some interesting articles, but a shame about the price.

'RATTLER'S TALE' (£5 for 6 issues from Anthony North, BCM Keyhole, London WC1NM 3XX. 24pp A5) is a collection of very short 'rattling good tales' of all genres, for which, incidentally, contributors get £5 a time, which can't be bad. An entertaining

enough set of short-shorts, but the lack of variety in length makes reading the volume at one sitting a bit tedious. Nice try, but they should vary the format. Still, that'd destroy the whole point of the 'zine, which is to publish this very sort of 'coffee-break' fiction. Undecided on this one.

My space has run out. See you with a fresh batch of invective next issue.

STORY RATINGS COUPON

My vote for the top stories in Issue 25 is:

1:

2:

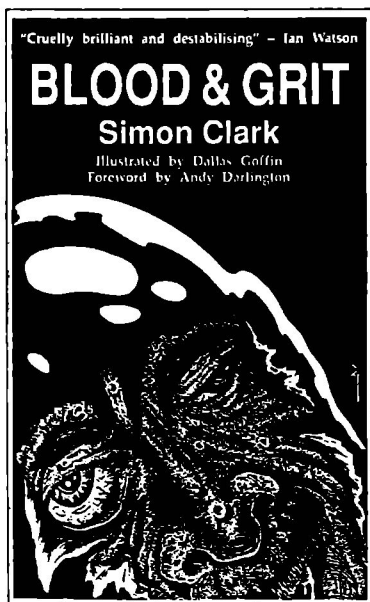
3:

4:

5:

Please cut out this coupon and send it to: Story Ratings, 'DREAM' SF, 7 Weller Place, High Elms Lane, Downe, Orpington, Kent. BR6 7JW.

(Your votes may also be recorded by postcard or letter.) (DM25)



New from BBR Books:

BLOOD & GRIT

by Simon Clark

Illustrated by Dallas Goffin
Foreword by Andy Darlington

"Cruelly brilliant and destabilising ... Simon Clark certainly writes superior horror" - Ian Watson

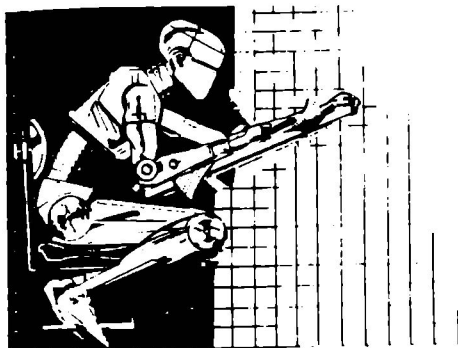
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The Melting Pot *Readers' Letters*

(A couple of issues ago Sam Jeffers asked about 'THE GATE'. As you might guess, someone, somewhere had the answer...)

Dear George,

About 'THE GATE': Richard Newcombe, the publisher, advises me that Maureen Porter has resigned as editor after expressing terminal dissatisfaction with distribution problems. In essence the distributors, Diamond Europress, eventually turned round and said it would have to be in A4 magazine format to reach the papershops. Richard 'now-they-tell-me' Newcombe is now left with 8,000 copies of Issue 1 in his printing works and is talking of remaindering them. But he's a nice bloke and he's plugging on, talking to magazine wholesalers and thinking of going the A4 route with a smaller print run and working up. He's got the stories for issues 2 and 3 lined up by Maureen Porter and friends and, incredibly, thinks very well of Maureen even though the advice that she and Paul Kincaid gave him when he approached the BSFA for advice turned out to have somewhat hit his pocket and his reputation. For myself I feel a little miffed about my languishing subscription but bloody annoyed that a new professional outlet got cocked up and that a brave publisher who wanted to have a bash at pulling British F&SF out of the hands of the doom-laden dystopic radicals/lesbos/activists blah blah got his fingers burned off up to the elbow.

You know I really did think that issue 1 of 'THE GATE' bar one story ('TYPE GENIE AND RUN' by James White: brill) was utter garbage, and this isn't just my own opinion. I run a postal writers' workshop and so have enjoyed correspondence with 54 other writers — and not *one* of them said they liked 'THE GATE' Issue 1. O.K., O.K., I know there are plenty of people who love the kind of stories I don't, but in my view British F&SF has truly been in the doldrums. Even

'INTERZONE' only manages to sell circa 10,000 copies worldwide and when you compare this to the mega number of people who'll queue up to see a film like 'GHOSTBUSTERS' you'll understand my feelings that U.K. F & SF is being held down at the small-potatoes level by the sort of shit that shafted Richard Newcombe good and proper from all sides.

By the way, my local papershop lady was telling me that the magazine wholesale business, which is the only administratively efficient way for a papershop to buy its mags. is a bit of a carve up. If a wholesaler is sloppy she can't go to another one, because the alternative wholesaler doesn't 'do' her area. Also, she tells me she's got to take promotions such as newly launched magazines and give them shelf space whether she likes it or not. I think it would be useful if 'DREAM' readers conducted a straw poll of their local papershops to find out more about this, because it could be materially, and adversely affecting our literature.

Talking of which brings me back to 'INTERZONE'. Did anybody else know that 'THE GATE' and 'INTERZONE' are both (or were supposed to be) distributed by the same outfit? Funny when you think about Richard Newcombe getting his surprise news of the wallet singeing kind. And was it only 'little moi' who thought 'INTERZONE's trick of 'analyzing' (which means 'selecting') 230 out of 515 ballot forms was a really neat way of ensuring Brian Stableford won top prize for his utterly dreary 'THE MAGIC BULLET' and top prize for his non-fiction writing.

Dear Reader, 'tis a funny business this F & SF publishing, truly it is. It's a dirty incestuous nepotic set-up and I'm going to bust it. I haven't put two years into 'The

Writer's Bootstrap' and reviewed a million words of speculative fiction to sit idly by and do nothing about the stranglehold that's been squeezing the life out of British F & SF for years. Grrrr.

John Duffield
(Hertford, Herts.)

● (Well, that should give those of you who want a more general discussion of SF plenty to bite on. Did you like 'THE GATE', if you even saw it? What about distribution problems for new magazines? What can be done about it? How are the new magazines, like 'R.E.M.' coping? What about 'INTERZONE's poll? I thought it was a bit slipshod myself, especially when money is resting on the outcome. Would the result have been the same if all the questionnaires had been analyzed, or did the remaining questionnaires not fully rate the stories/articles. If they did why not do a proper job and print the result in a later issue? If you know some of the answers let us know. — GPT)

Dear George,

'DREAM' 23 is very professionally produced, the gold on the cover giving that little extra finish.

One of the features readers need in any story is a character they can identify and empathise with. The character can be hero or villain (or better still a realistic combination of the two; sympathetic and idealistic but with redeeming vices). What matters is that s/he is three dimensional, not a cardboard cypher who is there to be moved around as the author's chess-piece.

It seems to me that SFF writers often fall down in this respect. We become so involved with the originality of the plot and the setting that we neglect the over-riding necessity of creating living characters. And if our characters are not interesting then the relationships between them are not going to matter to the readers. They are not going to care whether our characters live or die, because they're only the author's puppets after all.

Another turn-off is the constant headhopping from one character to another. 'FEMININE INTUITION' was marred for me by having five changes of viewpoint in the first four pages. (The last four pages of this story were so much stronger, being all from

one viewpoint.)

My ratings for the stories in 'DREAM' 23 are:

1. 'THE DINOSAUR', which was preachy but effective.
2. 'LOVE KILLS'. (Great title, taken with the author's name, Tim Hurt).
3. 'FEMININE INTUITION', despite the cyberpunk jargon and viewpoint changes.
4. 'THE WATCHER', which has the opposite fault; lots of feeling and vivid description, but no plot.
5. 'MURDER BY MAGIC'. (Readable and funny, but so predictable.)
6. 'THE MORAL CONSIDERATION', which was overly preachy and suffered from too much exposition.

Jack Wainer
(Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leics.)

Dear George,

Here are my predictions for the 90s. They are based on close observation of world events and, according to my algorithmic computer's calculations, have a 94.6% probability of coming true. I claim a 10% royalty fee on all SF novels based around these predictions.

Michael Heseltine will win the next general election and Mrs. Thatcher will be made a Lord, and finally a demi-god. (Don't you mean demi-goddess? Oh, no, perhaps you don't — G.P.T.)

Rupert Murdoch will render himself immortal by suspending his brain in a vat of life-preserving organic slime deep in the bowels of Wapping, from where he will increase his hold over the British people by broadcasting, via satellite TV, propaganda and images of topless models into their minds.

Corby will destroy western civilisation, revealing that Perestroika and Glasnost were in fact a diabolically cunning deception to lull the West into a false sense of security. He will be aided and abetted by Vaclav Havel. Soviet tanks will reach the Ashford bypass by lunchtime of Tuesday 14th May, 1995, or possibly a bit earlier. Communism will reassert itself and everyone will have to drive a Skoda or risk deportation to Siberia.

The oil will run out and all remaining oil will be in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists who will force everyone in the West to convert to Islam or they will refuse to sell us the petrol we need to drive on

the huge network of new roads which is currently being planned. The road and rail networks then becoming impossibly expensive to maintain we will convert to wind energy, using giant windmills to harness the power from the hurricane-force gales which will continue to wreak havoc.

The Euromarket will be dominated by the French and Germans and the English will have to learn to speak these languages fluently. We will also need to learn Japanese in order to compete in high-tech industry. English as a language will become obsolete, spoken only by a few 'typical English yeomen' for the benefit of tourists.

Dan Quayle will become president of the U.S.A. and will accidentally start World War III by pushing the button in the erroneous belief that it is the buzzer summoning his personal hairdresser and lobotomist.

Ecological catastrophe will strike by 2000 A.D. Most of the world will be under water. J.G. Ballard and other apocalyptic British SF writers will say: 'I told you so!' and it will be impossible to go outside without wearing an oxygen tent.

My advice to all readers is: get rich by flogging anti-apocalypse charms (e.g., a piece of paper promising the holder full exemption from radiation sickness) to gullible punters and with the proceeds rent yourself a freezer in California to cryonically suspend your body until things are back to normal. But don't delay — there are only 3556 shopping days before The End Of The World.

Matthew Dickens
(Taunton, Somerset)

● (Matthew wins the prize for the best set of predictions. It is either an extra year's subscription to 'DREAM' or a volume on *Nuclear Physics fully explaining the difference between a molecule and a quark. Let us know, Matthew. — GPT).*

Dear George,

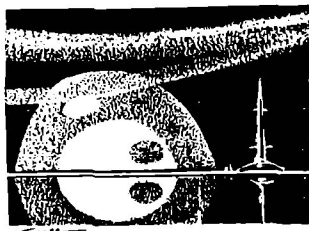
Some of your correspondents in 'THE MELTING POT' have recently been calling for a move away from specific comments about individual stories and for more general comment about SF. Always willing to oblige, I would like to make a few comments about the small-press scene. Whilst it is encouraging

to see a number of authors who have appeared regularly in one or more small-press publications going on to better things (notably the likes of Baxter, Brooke, Matthew Dickens and others) I feel that there is too much of a tendency in some small-press publications (and I name no names) to operate not on the basis of trying to foster and develop serious new writing talent (and by serious I mean the type of writer who understands the real world and the practicalities of writing for a commercial audience) but as a marketplace for the writings of a close-knit circle of their friends and acquaintances, who presumably are not practiced enough to sell on a commercial basis, but who use the pages of small press magazines as a chance to print their work. There seem to be a small but vocal number of such people, who congratulate each other on their accomplishments and who regularly appear in various magazines, often with work that defies any logical description.

It may well be the case that small-press editors have a perfect right to publish whatever they like and, if enough people buy the product to make it viable to publish such stuff on a 'small-run' basis then there can be no complaints. However, it is a pity that more editors do not at least try to lead writers along a path that could lead to a professional writing career. For experimental fiction there can be no large scale audience. Such writers are going along a path that leads to a dead end. My fear is that some editors are encouraging them to do so. What we need is more solid work and less airy-fairy meandering.

Steve Worth
Worcester

● (See my editorial in DREAM 24 for my thoughts on the different kinds of SF 'zine. I think there is room for a variety of publications, although I don't think anyone can be in much doubt where 'DREAM' stands — GPT)





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to which address submissions, letters for publication, etc., should be sent.

Manuscripts intended for publication should be submitted, typed double-spaced, on one side of A4 sized paper with a title sheet giving story title, word length and the author's name and address. If a pen name is used the author's own name should be clearly stated to avoid confusion.

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