DREAM
SCIENCE FICTION

No. 23  SPRING 1990

FEMININE INTUITION by Lyle Hopwood
Sydney J. Bounds — A.J. Kerr — Brian Rolls
DREAM SCIENCE FICTION
(A member of the New SF Alliance)

No. 23  
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EDITORIAL

George P. Townsend

IT BEING THE START of a new decade the media is full of predictions for the coming ten years. Not wishing to be left out here are the predictions of the editorial team for the near future. Not all of us agreed on everything, but the views expressed hereunder are a broad consensus. We'd also like to hear from you with YOUR views (not your hopes, but your expectations!) We'll print a selection in a future 'MELTING POT' and the best set will get a year's sub. free. (The editor's decision is FINAL!)

Right, here we go:

SCIENCE FICTION: The small press will proliferate alarmingly. The best will survive, the majority will go under. There will be no successful new prozine, although 'INTER-ZONE' will survive through the decade, gradually leaving behind its 'arty' image and becoming steadily more accessible.

NEW TALENT: Many top new authors will emerge, a good number springing from the small presses. Names such as William King, S.M. Baxter and Keith Brooke will be among the best British authors of the 90s. The last of the 60s 'New Wave' heroes will fade away. Our tip for the top: Neil McIntosh.

SPACE TRAVEL: This will be in the doldrums throughout the 90s. Political and financial troubles in Russia will lead to severe cutbacks in their programme. A rundown of the U.S. military budget will likewise hit their space programme hard. There will be talk of a joint mission to Mars but nothing will come of it this century. Privately budgeted Earth Resources satellites will be the only significant growth area.

FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT: TV will continue to dominate. Satellite TV will be a flop and will remain marginal if it survives at all. 'X' rated TV shows will vanish — the emphasis will be on family viewing. Videos will become ever more popular. Laser video discs will take off. Cinema will diminish in popularity somewhat, but theatre (especially ballet and opera) will gain, although remaining minority interests.

MUSIC: 'Rock' music will fade in popularity, becoming marginalised as a minority interest, such as Country & Western. The 'popular' classics will gain adherents, but the real boom will be in straight 'pop' as the audience for music grows younger. 'Snobbery' in music will be out of fashion. By the turn of the century people will regard the songs of Stock, Aitken and Waterman as 'classics' in the same way as Tamla Motown music is regarded today. Kylie Minogue will fade as a singer and concentrate on her acting career. Jason Donovan will last a lot longer than people at present think likely. New band for 1990: Halo James. (This is the tip of the publisher's teenage daughter, for which we disclaim responsibility.) Dance/house music will remain popular until 1992, when it will be replaced by a blues/folk 'world' music, leaning heavily on the music of third world nations. 1992 will see a boom in 'Europop.'

BRITISH POLITICS: Mrs Thatcher will not last past 1992. Labour will NOT win the next election outright. The Conservative party will return to its traditional 'soft-right' image. After 1992 Britain will become far more 'European' in outlook. Gordon Brown will be a favourite for next Labour leader. John Major will be a future prime minister, but very unlike Mrs Thatcher. 'Green' issues will dominate 90s politics. There will be an upsurge in 'green' terrorism, with fanatics latching onto the issues.

WORLD POLITICS: The Soviet Union will disintegrate. Germany will reunify and be the main European power, much to French dismay. China will be democratic by 1997, allaying the fears of Hong Kong's citizens. Communism will survive only in a few third-world countries and will be totally discredited. Many former apologists for communism will be seen as the fools they were. There will be major disarmament by 2000, but Europe will keep the nuclear deterrent as a safeguard against spreading moslem fundamentalism. Many countries will be fiercely nationalistic and fascism could begin to reappear.
Feminine Intuition

LYLE HOPWOOD
THE SKATE MUTE visibly bounced as the gravdrop faded into the polished gritstone paveway. The Mute, X-stream board buckling under supreme stress, guided the super-chop threetwenty degrees, topped the kerb, and braked one-footed outside the overlit atrium of Ikon House. The salaryman had time for one glance, one shout, before the crisp note of the Deklan 660 wristband crossbow sang out sharp above the sussuration of the hothouse growth inside.

The Mute bent down over the crumpled corpse. Fumbling hurriedly with the body belt, he extracted the Jewelsoft, a crystal about a cubic centimetre in size, gold and crimson, with the standard ports on the basal surface. Delicate fiberoptic reticulations glinted inside.

The Mute was still trying to stow the Jewelsoft in the panphage pocket of his spandex skategear when the ugly whine of a pair of Hunter-Rainbirds dopplered up the frequency spectrum above him. Locked onto a stylized representation of his dynamic surface, they would hunt him until they killed.

Spinning the board, he accelerated for the gravdrop. The Rainbirds whined in closer until, looking back, he could see the bubble-colors roiling on their carbonfiber hides. Closer now, they homed in on the Mute, silently springing the fletcher barrels from their tight-packed stash of weapons.

Mute wheeled around, trying not to lose velocity, and threw a Puffball up, shouting to activate it. The Puffball exploded into a cloud of radar-opaque aluminum fleas intended to crash the pattern recognition programs of the Rainbirds.

Immediately the drive units coughed, decelerated, then whined again as the classic search-pattern algorithm was initiated. The Rainbirds emerged from the cloud simultaneously, barely seconds later.

Swearing in a private Mutie tongue, he rode the board up to the edge of the upstream gravdrop, slowed it up and threw himself back to cancel his remaining momentum as he entered the drop. The board tumbled up away from him, rising faster as the gravdrop stoically translated its momentum as a greater mass and increased the degravity to suit. As he intended, the Rainbirds streaked into the gravdrop field on max — and went helplessly ballistic, smashing into the underside of the skyway.

He jumped off at the terminus and thumbed the contact over his misshapen forearm. ‘Delorean? Skies are safe. The King Biscuit’s in the box.’

Marietta licked the honey from her fingers. ‘No, Malik. No way. ‘I’m allergic to major surgery.’ She brushed the crumbs of the fresh, warm croissants to the side of her plate. ‘I guess I always wanted to be last on my block to get wired up. I mean, you see these blue people these days, two heads, whatever. Fashion victims. I just swore I wouldn’t get involved with body-updates. You never finish. One day, you’re ahead of the crowd, tomorrow you’re last year’s thing.’ She tried not to scowl; she hated ‘working breakfasts’. The whole concept was obscene.

Malik smiled. ‘The unaugmented Personnel Warrior is certainly “last year’s thing”. We need the data, the enhanced reaction times. You’re up against people with dark vision, total recall, beam weapons embedded in very unlikely places. The only thing you have got, Marietta, is your feminine intuition. That’s why Ikon keeps you on.’

‘Yeah, well. I don’t want silicon intuition as well. Can’t even handle the auto-callback on the fone.’ She indicated the Ariel Brasserie’s archaic handset in the corner,
loosely grouped with ubiquitous monitor screens in their high tech ghetto. ‘So...’ She stood up and smiled, pinning on her Company Blue pill-box hat.

Malik remained seated. ‘You miss my point. As a bonded Salaryman of Ikon, you are legally obliged to accept updates as and when the company considers it necessary.’

She sat down, shakily. ‘You’re crazy. You can’t force me into a general anaesthetic and shit.’

‘It’s breaking of contract. Your credit would be cut off instantly, the apartment repossessed, and by tomorrow you’d be begging on the Beccar Skyway.’ He smiled. ‘Think about it, Marietta. Everyone has abdo computers. Kids get neuranes in day-care hospices. Grannies get neuranes so they can access soap sencasts. I’ll access some figures for you.’ He bent over the graffito’d nonreflective glass of the table top and touched the piezoelectric contacts of the dataterminal. A plasma screen rose from the table and flashed red, settling into the familiar command mode logo.

Marietta stared at him. ‘How didja get a computer outta the table?’

Angered, he bit off the glowing eulogy on the benefits of modern technology and stood up. ‘Get to those people at the Retrofit Hospice by ten tonight. I’ll see you in my office tomorrow.’ He strode out of the cafe.

Marietta didn’t look up. After a while she brushed with a fingertip at the pads on the table. Her own, hidden abdominal computer fluttered at the touch of transferred data as the screen sank back inside the rococo surface.

Delorean stared at the fused flesh in front of him. The Zone mutoid’s taut, neoplastic hide upset him. Inside that ‘face’, he thought, is an intelligent, sensitive man. He couldn’t make himself believe it. In the shell of the apartment block the only source of illumination was the precious broadcast power wireless teevee, playing out some meaningless fragment of drama in the corner. The dim, disorganized speckle of Hamburg flickered across the smoky wasteland and through the salvaged Mercedes windscreen that served as a window. Delorean’s neuranet input the steady clicks of his Geiger counter, notching up second by second a week’s dose. Then a month’s dose.

‘The State Department report said that you built a swimming-pool over the reactor core, and tap off the steam. I hate to think what that cost your men.’

Grumman’s expression didn’t change. The hardened lipoma that shaped his features wasn’t capable of moving. ‘After the meltdown we still expected the government to ship us out, but they tore up our plea-bargain. So we got together the remaining seventy power workers and they built the steamer. It got us some heat, though it killed five men.’

‘Including my brother?’

‘No, Martin died... before then. Very quickly, Jim. We’re all dying. We can’t live near the steamer, in the Epicentre. We have enough problem living out here on the border. We’re not mutants, you know. We haven’t adapted to high radiation levels. The government propaganda is just that.’

Delorean looked out of the window for a long moment. ‘Martin didn’t... You didn’t really do it, did you?’

It was impossible to read the expression on Grumman’s case-hardened face. ‘Of course we did. We told them if the satellites went up, we’d pull the moderators from the pile. They tried to call our bluff. When we eventually gave in, the superheated core had damaged the moderators’ waldos and they wouldn’t reseat. The core blew.’ His voice betrayed stress; whether remorse or bitterness, Delorean couldn’t tell. ‘We had to do it, Jim. The Watts satellites are the major producers of power in Westworld. Whoever controls them controls everything. There are historical
parallels — look at the oil crisis of the Seventies. If it had been only a matter of our
jobs, our livelihoods, we might have backed off, like the British Nuclear Power
Workers. We were fighting for workers' self determination, democracy. You
outsiders delegated to the Industrial Complex, and you've been left literally
powerless.'

'IC never show any signs of usurping power.' He shrugged, realizing he had
slipped into using the same metaphor. 'I believe you've acted honorably. God knows
you're the injured party all right. I've got the Jewelsoft. Just don't kill anybody.' In
the corner of Delorean's vision a tiny VU meter surfaced, the needle flickering into
the red. 'Every day you stay here, those growths get worse?'

This time, a bare subduction of a smile did appear under Grumman's scar tissue.
'Burns like these don't come from radiation. They come from purine. So that we
didn't come tunnelling out and trying to mingle outside, they flew in helicopters
loaded with 2-amino purine. Dosed us up like murderers. Fifteen hundred people
turned into monsters.'

'I have to go.' Suddenly nauseous, Delorean stood up and made for the door. He
heard Grumman's polite, inconsiderate laughter as he made his way across the
ashland, looking for the ruined spire of St. Stephens and the makeshift graveyard
dug into the fused slag of the firebombed area.

2-amino purine, said his neuranel, after a database he was sure he hadn't
prompted, is a mutagenic agent causing a derangement of DNA synthesis. Used
originally as an agent in treating viral infections, its use was discouraged due to its
extreme toxicity. When coupled with an enzyme limiting uptake to skin tissue, it is
used as a marker technique for known felons. Also see (1)RadZone and (2)Fashion
references.

No, thought Delorean. I've seen them.

He reached the graveyard. A thousand gravemarkers on a hundred graves. The
powerworkers had dug until the diggers died to bury the dead, but they hadn't dug
enough. Raw bones poked from the charred earth, and the outlandish, soil-less
steppe was peppered with the still thrashing bodies of poisoned crows. He found his
brother's marker with some difficulty, and stood bowed a moment. He wanted to
speak to him, but nothing came. He turned on his heel, crushing horror beneath
him, and made for the little shaft he had sunk as a tunnel under the barrier. The
ashflat stretched on into the twilight where the watchtowers, like Wells' Martians,
rulled the edge of the RadZone.

Marietta took the skyway towards Ikon's downtown headquarters, appreciating
the breeze blowing across the belt, and the thousands of morning commuters
providing her with complete privacy and anonymity as they passed back and forth on
the fast belts over the Financial Centres. Her best-kept secret, her Proviron
Neuranel, thrashed across its holoforme, attempting to fit the Rainbirds' data on the
mutoid killer to the wheeling skateboarders around her. They flitted along, mostly
going against the belts, never colliding, never falling. Their balance skills, like her
own, were the result of the neuranel's firm linking of vision and bodily attitude. Not
that she had ever conquered her fear of heights. Her heart leapt every time the flow
swept her near the edge of the belt.

She accessed her neuranel, looking for some common factor in the Jewelsoft
death toll. A bonded salaryman dead, two Personnel Warriors missing. And the
sheer reluctance of Ikon to release details of Jewelsoft. Was it a defense chip?
Comms? If you don't know what it's for, how can you guess who wants it so badly?
Information, even Malik realized, was the key to everything.

Almost everything, she corrected herself. Surprise was a powerful weapon too. 'I kept you a secret for six years,' she said to her neuranet, though it had no throat mike to input her voice. 'You won battles for me. The extra speed, the edge in statistical gameplanning. And all discreet, nonmetal. Never seen on x-ray, no magnetic field. But tonight when I go to that clinic, they'll find you straight off. Even if I persuade them not to fit the Ikonnet, the secret's out.' Birds wheeled around the belt, waiting for the transmitters to throw them scraps. 'Bye-bye surprise.'

A rectangular finderfield appeared over her vision, and, as she dropped into her fighters' crouch, she felt the neuranet guide her gaze over to her left, where a boy-Mute appeared targeted in the colored circle. The neuranet began to feed in information: PROVISIONAL IDENTIFICATION ATRIUM ATTACKER. There was more, but she wasn't paying attention. She was stalking the skateboarder, slipping between the commuters as she ran back down the fast belt, making no headway in the reference frame of the buildings to her left.

Jim DeLorean stepped back into his apartment on E 25th Street, his skin raw from the anti-contamination scrubbing. The neuranet Farmacopia had failed to deal with the pain. As soon as he walked through the door, he threw off the creased Armani suit in an attempt to cool his red, stripped skin. In the corner, the three TV screens, automatically triggered, slipped their horizontal holds as they searched for their preprogrammed channels. His own telethon, recorded half a world away, played back at him images of hunger made into soap-opera by the grammar of montage. DeLorean was a cynic, a manipulator. He saved more lives per dollar that way.

Later, as he resisted the urge to take a shower - he knew it would mortify the remaining skin - he put on a watered silk dressing gown and sat down on the battered leather couch. Digits representing the stress across the knee cartilages flickered briefly into his attention, vaulting into the red. Must lose weight.

He brought out a small, leatherbound personal organiser and leafed through it, mentally ticking off the completed tasks of the day. He folded the Filofax open and began to write in the thick section headed KING BISCUIT PROJECT: resettlement program.

Marietta manhandled the Mute into her dingy, rather Dickensian panelled office. He co-operated; once firmly grabbed on the skyway he'd seemed to lose all his fight. He was disfigured and half starved. She threw him into the tubular steel swing chair under the window. She put the skateboard wheels-up on her assistant's desk. Danger, said her hidden neuranet. Broadcast power transducer fitted. She eyed it with some worry; it might do something the neuranet couldn't anticipate. She could lose her prescient reputation. And her life.

The Mute sat sullenly.

'Okay, tell me the sordid details. All you've said so far is "I know my rights," and I don't doubt that's true. Where do you fit in with all this?'

He kept silent. Beyond his distorted profile she saw the city laid out in the heat haze. In some Magritte piece of city planning, the upstream gravdrop ran outside her office, about twenty feet away from the plexiglass. Businessmen, in casual style magazine poses, occasionally floated past.

'I'm gonna run a scanner over you, and if you say one word about your rights, I'll feed ya into the shredder. Okay?'

'You'll do what you want, lady.' The Mute had a refined voice. Probably from a Computeech package, he had enough hardware on him for that level of
sophistication. The scanner showed the habitual neurant: a cheap VietNamese silicon-chip type, technology as old as the boy. Souped up with some milspec Russian co-processors, it was about half as powerful as the new optical units like her own Proviron. And battery powered. Must be a bastard getting the batteries in. Her own ran on some enzyme redox reaction supplied by her muscle tissue. To prevent the neurant fading out when the body was exhausted and running anaerobically, it took backup power from the broadcast satellite Wattstaxsat. The 30 gram transducer produced radio interference and was scanner-opaque, but it was worth it.

He didn’t wriggle when she found the other hardware. ‘What the hell’s this, kid? Your whole ass is wired up.’

He shrugged. ‘Gear. For hustling, you know.’ She looked blank. ‘For Johns.’ ‘Christ on a bike. People pay to screw you? It’s a sick world.’ ‘You’re supposed to be a Personnel Assistant, not a Personal Remark Assistant’ ‘Shit, you’ve even got an ego. Surprised there’s room for one in there with all that crap.’ She broke off: the skateboard’s magnetic field had begun oscillating; the motor was running inside. Keeping half her attention on the board, she said, ‘You’re a Mute, right.’ ‘Aha, it’s the Nine o’clock News.’ ‘What I mean is, did you get that way from irradiation or did you get done for some felony?’ ‘Happy to have something shocking to say, the boy lifted his Mutie, dripflesh head. ‘No. I got it done elective, uptown, because I like it.’ ‘That is cosmetic surgery?’ ‘Yeah. You wouldn’t get me near some mutagenic 2-stinking purina. This is vat-grown.’ Marietta’s Proviron came in with the references for the keywords Mute/Elective/Cosmetic/Purine analog. In the brief, unsorted flashlight of information, she only gathered one point; radiation did not cause the cereus masses and distortions of so-called Mutes. The Central Bureau fed criminals a cocktail of 2-amino-purine, and the skin obligingly crept into some bizarre tumorous trademark.

Punks like the Skate Mutoid, admiring the cachet of twilight life, had it surgically imitated. She remembered the copyline of Helena Clinic’s ad, permanently on TV: In an age of easily affordable beauty....

When any dog looks like a million dollars, why not stand out?

Well, why not?

The neurant sensed changes in the board, and she brought her Kawakara Night Special out from the solid oak desk drawer. She laid the pocketbook-sized anti-tank device on the desk, facing the vehicle. The Mute watched, feigning disinterest. ‘A guy got himself killed in the lobby here, three days ago. We sent some Warriors after the killer, and no-one came back.’ She felt his electronic probe scan thoroughly and rapidly around the office. ‘Why’d you kill him?’

Instead of answering, he said: ‘You ain’t got a neurant, how come you see so much?’

‘I’m psychic,’ she said, and as if cued, the board leapt off Chelan’s desk and began to turn over. She picked up the Night Special and blew it out of the air, shielding her eyes from fragments with her left arm. The explosion silently vanished against the prepared walls of the office.

When she uncovered her eyes, the swing chair was empty. His diversion had
worked perfectly. She activated the intruder alarm and sat down to her paperwork. Let the SecGards catch the Mute. Down the corridor, klaxons began to sound.

Grumman put the Technical Survival Group's Jewelsoft report on the dusty bench. The group had assembled the remaining equipment from the power plant; the dusty racks of outmoded power transmission gear sagged unused against the wall. They had yet to succeed in building a generator that supplied clean enough current to the fuzzy silicon. The detuned portable television provided light and hissed with between-station static like a reinvented gaslamp.

'Biscuit Boy performed, then, Grumman?' said Ledbetter, the horny Mute growths of his face and neck casting electric shadows against the wall.

'Ja, and we got our next year's supply of high-energy biscuits, too.' In the corner, Michelson, a man who had once been fat, groaned.

Ledbetter stepped in quickly, hoping to head off one of Michelson's tedious food rants. 'We won't need those. Did you get Delorean to lift in clean water? The whole system is clogged with some lichen. Parris says that the flow has slowed so much that the water is picking up dangerous levels of radiation. No-one is willing to get in and clean up the channel. Too near the core.'

'You didn't tell me this. I thought we had the opposite problem.'

'What was that?'

'Too much water. Mike-the-suitstoresman told us that the Mueller dam is pooling water. The water table in the south ashflat's risen. Buildings are collapsing already.'

'We never go southside. That's down prevailing wind.'

'Any moment now, southside's coming up here to meet us. It's a mudflat. Half the reactor core is floating on it.'

Grumman cut him off. 'No time, Steve. Tell us later. Now we have to hear Jurgen tell us what he can do with the pretty stone Jim brought us.'

Michelson, his voice cracking, said, 'He can't do nothing. We should've signed the contract after the meltdown. We'd be quarantined outside the Zone. We wouldn't have been Purined...'

'We sure as shit would. And they said they'd sterilize us.'

Jurgen said, 'Look at this TV. Know how it's powered?'

Startled, they stopped arguing. 'Sure,' said Ledbetter. 'Broadcast power from a Wattstaxsat.'

'It's got the communication protocol for the satellite in the comms chips, the transducer, and the unscrambler for the signal. The European satellite runs on internal, fixed programs and has only one groundlink for adjustments. That's to Ikon's West German headquarters, line-of-sight from our towerblock. And Mr. Charity Biscuit has somehow procured this hackers' delight, the Ikon Jewelsoft itself. It'll be a week before I can be sure I have sole control of Wattstax, though.'

'Good so far!' said Grumman. 'Everybody have a delicious charity biscuit. I got plenty.'

The luxury home-market vidscreen in Marietta's office blanked out the holding pattern designed to soothe and relax, and replaced it with the unsoothing face of Head of Security.

'He got out. Can you download your net-description of the escaper?'

'I haven't got a net. I can give you a full verbal description.'

The image on the screen showed stark disbelief. In reply, in some ritual of lower-
tech-than-thou, it produced a fountain pen and some paper. 'Ready when you are, Madam."

'He's a Mute...'

'Chemical or surgical?'

'Surgical. And he has a tattoo on his left arm. Look, get Malik. He's got the initial Rainbird data on file.'

A stray reflection in the screen caught her eye. She looked out the window in time to see the Mute searing up the gradrop at three times the normal rate of lift. 'How the hell...?'

Leaving the SecGard to his laborious calligraphy, she grabbed the Night Special and blasted a hole in the window. Ragged and dangerous, it was about three feet wide and four high. Marietta knew that the gradrop cutoff was twenty feet away, the ground more than a hundred below. As she began the run up to the window she was engaged in a battle with her second, optoelectronic innervation, trying to offload the fear but getting neurofeedback as it upped the sympathetic neurotransmitters.

She twisted in midair to avoid the cracked edges of the plexiglass, and watched the ground get closer. She hadn't reached the gradrop column. Fighting hysteria, she spreadeagled, instinctively attempting to maximize air-resistance. Her right hand was jerked up away from her with bone-cracking force, the gun was ripped from her left, and her fall slowed dramatically. She kicked out until her legs caught the column, and with a groundhog's misunderstanding of inertia, attempted to pull her body into the column by pushing against nothing. She succeeded in inverting and was carried struggling and upside-down to the skyway drop.

As she ran onto the skyway, she briefly examined her wrist. Fractured. The neuranet had already supplied endorphin. Mid-morning, the Financial District Skyway was deserted except for the drifting population of intransigents. Some were Mutes, but Skate Mute had disappeared. She walked cautiously around the broadcast-power transceiver tower of the gradrop. Finding nothing, she mentally tossed a coin and strode for the fast downtown belt.

'Hey, Personal!'

She turned round. The Mute stood on the power tower, crouched ready to run. He had been unable to resist the temptation to gloat.

'Hey, Personal! That was the worst diving I've ever seen! You should get a neuranet.'

The Mute had acquired a Safe-T-Needle during his brief battle with SecGards. Knowing the gun was designed to kill only at close quarters, for safety in crowded areas, he held it lightly, pointing down. Marietta sat on the rail overlooking the Plaza, trying not to visualize as people the antlike things crawling into the Ikon atrium one hundred and fifty feet below. She tried talking him down.

'You couldn't!'

She gasped, then shouted, 'Mute! Get down!'

Suspecting a trick, the Mute knelt, bringing up the little needle-gun. Malik's heavy dumdummed slug caught him in the hip, and the cavitation scattered flesh over the tower. He rolled off, flopping onto the skyway like a wet rag. Marietta stared into the column of the gradrop, where Malik tumbled helplessly in the recoil of his favorite Magnum replica. He was grinning. She had to admire the technical excellence of the shot; he'd set it up like a snooker player, firing along the acute line between the shaft and the tower and allowing for the inertia-effect of the gradrop
on the bullet.

She ran over to the Mute. He was still alive. The copper wires of his outmoded neurant, their insulation burned away, fizzed as the dark blood pulsed over them. The major processors lay smashed in the exposed abdomen. What can it feel like, she wondered, to have half your senses blown away? Radar. Microwave reception. Full blood count. Electrolytes. Stress analysis. Absolute position to one centimetre. Time, to the millionth of a second. The full complement of 21st century senses provided by a neurant. You'd be naked. You'd be helpless.

She shivered.

'Sixteen million,' said the Mute.

'What?'

'Horned Skulls.' He was talking through bubbles of blood. 'I always played Horned Skulls down the videoarcade.' She knew it; standard horror shoot-'em-up, at the blurred, amphetamine pace the augmented youth demanded. 'And I never got past the twenty-fourth screen 'cause I never got my sixteen million points. Am I dying?'

'No.' Marietta found lying easy. 'Malik's bringing the Crash Box.'

'You look like a Rogue Cyborg person to me.'

She laughed. The inane conversation unbalanced her. Rogue Cyborg was a game tolerated for the unaugmented. To the neurant, it crawled. The Mute was thinking clearly while only seconds from death. That thought sobered her.

'Mute, tell me who hired you.'

'So I am dying. I've seen this movie already.'

'Just tell me. What have you got to lose?'

'I can see a white light. I never liked his crappy biscuits anyway.'

Wondering what synesthesia the shorted neurant had produced, she asked him again. But he was dead.

Malik fell out of the gravdrop and ran over, scanned for a pulse.

'Hell, I aimed for the legs. He just dropped right into it. Smashed the net's memory, too. Did he say who put him up to it?'

'He was talking about videogames.'

He glanced at her, untrusting. 'Shit, how do you know he was really talking about videogames? I want the memory dump of your neurant on my desk by noon.' Then, net-prompted, he said angrily, 'Except you haven't got one.'

Marietta steeled herself. After the miserable breakfast, she would have to have lunch with Malik as well.

Delorean folded up his Filofax and stepped out of the helicopter. The Hamburg lights were obscured by smog. He walked to the fifteen-meter high concrete barrier and hunted among the wreaths and flags for the rough tunnel into the RadZone. The hot, paradoxically airless summer breeze rustled dried flowers left by antinuke demonstrators. The tunnel was north of the podium where world leaders, with every apparent sincerity, pontificated on the disaster that had happened within. Delorean had never heard one mention the fifteen hundred they sealed inside.

He terminated the higher functions of his neurant. When questioning a suspect, police policy was to dump the net's memory and use whatever they found as evidence. Delorean's profile was high, but not high enough to protect him from the Deutsche police.

Grumman met him at the edge of the ashflat, the firebombed cirque intended to prevent birds carrying material from the Zone.
‘I’ve set it up, Grumman. We have a ten-thirty media slot for a Children in Distress broadcast. All channels, all media. Cut Wattstaxsat during that, then when the power comes back, I’ll run the tape of your demands.’

‘We’ll break the satellite. We got the code.’

Delorean hovered a moment, gathering his courage. Then he said, ‘For God’s sake, Grumman, I’ll broadcast your threats, but if they don’t come through with the deal, don’t kill anybody. You wouldn’t fry a city, would you?’

‘Jim, as far as you, or anybody else, is concerned, if we don’t see the helicopter with the white flag twenty minutes after the brownout, we make the tight-beam and microwave somebody. They’ve dealt with us before. They know we mean it.’ Delorean shook his deformed hand and walked to the barrier. Deep in thought, he failed to reset the neuranel. The RadZone guard squatting outside the tunnel shot him in the head before he finished pulling his body through.

Marietta went home and ran a bath. Malik phoned with one new item of information; the Jewelsoft carried the proprietary communications codes for the Ikon computer network. So the thief intended to crack the Ikon system; a clue so nebulous it was worse than nothing. And She’d been reminded of her appointment at the Retrofit Hospice. Eight hours to go.

She woke up in the cold bath, still confused by a dream in which she’d died, and her neuranel, powered by its backup transducer, had dragged her dead body around, occasionally injecting sufficient stimulants to light the cortex with a fitful, basic consciousness. In these lucid moments she’d watched the flesh rot away from the fiberoptic cables and felt the dead sense organs flare with new possibilities. In the paralysis that affects people on the edges of sleep, she lay in the water and heard the television in the next room begin a hatchet-job on the dead philanthropist, Jim ‘Charity Biscuit’ Delorean.

As she came fully awake she heard Delorean bad-mouthed as the man who made millions providing the energy/protein biscuits for the hungry two-thirds of the world. Governments everywhere provided the Delorean biscuits as basic dole to the underemployed; she remembered the panhandlers on the Beccar Skyway queueing for them. He’d made a fortune, running charity after charity, a ruse, according to the TV, to force juntas into buying his product with the donations.

He’d been killed in Hamburg, at the podium outside the RadZone. So what? ‘I never liked his crappy biscuits anyway.’ Who had said that? She came suddenly awake, and filled with certainty, dressed in the Company Blue of the working Personnel Warrior and made for the airport fastbelt.

By the time the aircraft stacked up in Hamburg airspace, she had changed her mind. Mute must have been given biscuits by the welfare people; why suppose he had ever met Delorean? She watched TV, wrestling with the thought, and heard the videoannouncer say, ‘Due to the tragic death of James Delorean, the scheduled Children in Distress Charity Telethon has been cancelled....’

She deplaned, and made for the podium.

In Hamburg, according to the local time-signal, it was ten-fifteen. The soldier at the entrance to the tunnel lived to regret her Pacific afternoon wakefulness. He was dozing, and she grabbed him from behind and gently squeezed the carotid artery. She dragged him through the aperture behind her, cutting off radio contact. He came round in time to watch her twist his knife in his neck; the fiberoptics parted, and bleeding a little, he was left functionally netless. She bound him with his
uniform, and set out over the ashflat.

The stars overhead were clear, the perfect quarter moon sharp above her. She picked her way across the cracked sewer roofs and over concrete blocks bearing their pili of twisted reinforcement rods. Within the scorched perimeter of the Zone she could make out the shells of buildings. Her infrared pit-organs overlaid the unfocussed image of the fiery mass of exposed core to the south.

'Shoulda had the military mirrorshades,' she told her net. 'Not enough resolution in the pits. Can't make out warmblooded creatures without proper lenses.'

She searched the radio frequencies and found only commercial stations and a single pirate bouncing a signal from a satellite into Hamburg city, distorted by the slow phase that affects 24-bit digital audio when broadcast over domestic equipment. The sound, reconstructed, was a military march sampled into a groove, witty and danceable. The TV frequencies were unintelligible to the net, which attempted to deconvolve the impossibly dense sidebands and never even came close. Sometimes, she thought she got a ghost of a picture; but commonsense said the net could never succeed.

She found the occupied cluster of buildings. Six intact towers north of the core, scorched by small fires, windows replaced with glass scavenged from the abandoned blocks. A large fire burned in the main street of this entrenched village. She walked out of the alleyway, her augmented senses straining forward. No one in sight; no one within hearing. Lamps cast gray shadows against a fifth floor window. She cursed the bright workday clothes that shone like a slideprojection against the crumbling concrete on either side.

Without warning, her image-enhanced vision deteriorated into some Super-8 nightmare, all gray, grainy, low contrast. She saw with what brochures called 'vanilla vision', her standard physiological lot. Quickly, she stepped back into the shadow and ran through emergency procedures. The net was perfect; but top-up broadcast power was down by half. She glanced up, searching through the stars for the three red beacons mounted on the Wattstaxsat, and failed to locate it.

In six years the Wattstaxsats had become fixtures, like the Moon, or Jupiter. If the power failed completely... she imagined the gravdrops collapsing, transmitters thrown from shuddering belts. Hospitals desperately attempting to start forgotten backup generators. Her neuranel terminated GT functions, reverting to the basic muscle-powered optoelectronic computer. Her augmented vision reassembled piecemeal. Within seconds she made out the dim glow of the satellite as it reflected the Earthlight. Not shot down, then, but shut down. She heard footsteps.

'Where are you going?' said a confident, healthy voice.

'Grumman detailed eighteen of us to guard the tunnel exit. Delorean's Mute got captured by Ikon; if he talked, they might slip a warrior into the Zone.'

'Sure you can manage with eighteen people?' He sounded ironic, but got a straight, worried answer.

'Ahh, probably. It's a small entrance. Come through one at a time.'

The detail made off. She heard the confident man's partner say: 'How can a guy do that to himself? The Mute, I mean.'

'I wish it had caught on. We could walk out of here and be fashion models.' They both laughed. In the firelight, she made out his diseased profile. They walked on, past the bonfire.

The broadcast restarted after 33.333 seconds of brownout. A signal, then, a warning, not a malfunction. She walked into the dazzle of the firelight and failed to
see the confident man turn and signal to his partner. As she searched for the occupied building, she heard the crunch of a footstep beside her, and jumped sideways. A shout followed and she began to run, zigzagging between the rusted hulks of autos along the street. Fading into a doorway, she crouched amongst the mouldy, dust-covered furniture and listened.

'It's a Warrior, Mike. Ikon Personnel. They're onto us already.'

'A what? A what did you say?' Mike was laughing. 'It's just some chick. We can have some fun.'

'It's a bloody Ninja, dickhead. Blue uniform, hood, everything. We're gonna die.'

'Why are you shouting?' He was still laughing. 'She's probably training an atomic cannon on us already.'

'We have to get back to Grumman, tell him Ikon got a man in.'

'A Ninjette. Get a brand, she's in one of the blocks. Biscuit Boy must've followed up the powercut with the demands by now. They know we've got control of Watts. We're making the running from here on in.' He was moving forward, breathing heavily. Her net posted his speed, his distance, echolocated and calculated the space available for a kick. Come closer, Mike, she thought. Six hundred forty centimetres.

'We need light. I'll get a brand.' Mike flattened against the gray concrete directly opposite Marietta's door as his partner left him. Whatever emotion was coded into the bizarre contours of his face, it certainly wasn't fear. He glanced around with an almost professional awareness, leaned down and selected a piece of metal pipe from the debris, weighed it and put it down again. He chose another, accepted it. Marietta watched his blighted profile jump in the firelight. She tested the soldier's knife. It didn't balance. Vague shouts came from the tower block to the south.

She hunched onto the floor, feeling around in the looted room for something small, hard and matt that she could throw. The net's proximity-warning didn't work through concrete. The second man could be heading back already, bringing his torch. Her hands closed on something; a pepperpot? A cruet? She swung it. Heavy, no reflections. Taking two small, careful steps to the doorway, she peered out at Mike. When he looked away, she hefted the cruet and threw it at the window on the floor above his head, praying that there was sufficient glass in the window....

There was a satisfying crash. Mike jumped away from the wall, searching for cover, expecting a gun barrel to poke from the smashed window. As he careered backwards, she caught him, put her hand over his mouth, and drew the soldier's knife across his throat.

'Mike?' The scared man crunched loudly up the garbage-strewn sidewalk. 'That you? Grumman is calling for us.'

Mike stopped struggling, and she let him drop. The second man, untrained and afraid, froze as she got up. She saw his life story in his eyes, and pitied him. But she killed him too.

She heard shouts, presumably Grumman's, from the lit fifth floor of the tower block and made her way round to the entrance.

'Mike?' Grumman's accented voice shouted.

She took a chance. 'Yeah?' she said, synthesizing an approximation of Mike's confident voice.

'Mike, we have no reply from Delorean or no-one else. Watch out for the helicopter. If you don't see it, the satellite fires Koeln in ten minutes. Ledbetter thinks they don't believe us and he is switching off the power now, as an extra
demonstration.'

'Right.' She scouted the entrance, scanning for warm bodies or metal weapons. The lobby was some twelve meters square, the stairs lit by smoky torches. No guards. She began to mount the stairs, and the power beam flickered and went out.

For a moment she stood disoriented as the net swapped out the functions it could no longer support. When her vision came back, she continued climbing. She heard the voices arguing above her and realised that cutting off the beam left them in the dark too. They had concentrated their stored wet-battery power, and used it to maintain the Zone-Ikon link.

'Hey, Ledbetter, help me,' she said as she reached the fifth floor landing. The voices stopped abruptly, and a small man opened the plywood door and looked out into the dim smoke. She broke his neck and threw the body downstairs. The door slammed. More voices; a surprise. She had assumed that Grumman was alone with the man he had called Ledbetter.

'Shit, Grumman, we're dead. Isn't there anything you can use to tell them to call it off? Can't you broadcast a demand from here?'

'No time. Just keep it away from the satellite's timer. It's an Ikon Personnel Warrior. Half-machine. Without Watts, it'll crash.'

This was something at the forefront of her mind, too. After climbing five flights her neuronet was barely nominal. During a prolonged fight it would fail completely. She kicked the door and dived into the room, rolling onto the hard, sharp pieces of discarded technology that littered the floor. She stood up and crouched, knife held loosely. Something lashed out in the dark and caught her wrist along the fracture and the knife clattered to the floor. She choked back a scream and somersaulted backwards, her radar searching for obstacles. And they both fell on her.

She briefly monitored the satellite link, allowed herself four minutes. At first she got the impression she was winning. She broke Grumman's arm, knocked Michelson to the ground. She couldn't land a death blow - Grumman managed to keep her away, weighting his arm with a piece of heavy equipment casing. She calculated and recalculated radii and speeds, never managing to get under his wildly swinging arm. Michelson sat up and felt around for the knife. Then the net began to fail. The lightspeed reflexes she had taken for granted deserted her. Grumman's blow finally connected, crunching against her shoulder. He pushed her back, and Michelson chopped down with the knife, in the dark, at random.

For a moment the six pretty red laser beams puzzled her. The red was HeNe, she remembered vaguely — the net didn't come up with a confirmation. She felt something warm, and saw laserspeckle flash around the room. And then she knew. The beams were from her own fiberoptics, shining from her severed wrist. She kicked out blindly, and caught Michelson on the jaw. Her laser dimmed and went out.

She fell back against Grumman. Unthinkingly, he grabbed her from behind and tried to tighten his arm around her neck. Reflexes took over, and she threw him over in a simple reflexive motion, and, not thinking clearly, tried to grab the knife with her right hand, almost fainting with horror when she realized why it didn't work. She used her left, and pressed the knife between the horny pads on Grumman's epidermis. Before she put the tourniquet on her forearm, she killed the unconscious Michelson; she regretted it later, but at the time, it seemed reasonable.
After, she could never remember regaining control of Wattstax. The power was on as the Third Force poured over the concrete barrier and overwhelmed the ragged Mutie soldiery.

'And you missed your appointment at the Retrofit Hospice,' Malik said, reading her report as she sat in the Paris hospital bed.

'Well, what the hell. I got the Jewelsoft back. I told you I don't need wiring up.' She examined the red line across her wrist. The astocyte graft had taken and the hand already opened and closed in a reluctant sort of way.

Malik opened his briefcase and brought out a box of dark Swiss chocolates. 'I should have your ass for that.' She glared at him. 'Just let's say I read your medical report, and I'm dropping the recommendation. Is your 'Feminine Intuition' back in working order yet?'

He ate a chocolate and passed her the box. She didn't bother to reply.

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COMING IN DREAM 24

An issue filled to the brim with some of our favourite authors. To lead off we have S.M. Baxter's 'THE TYRANNY OF HEAVEN', ably supported by Gerry Connelly (with the long-awaited sequel to 'THE RZAWICKI INCIDENT'); Peter T. Garratt, with a space opera set at a SF convention and the welcome return of Philip Sidney Jennings with 'THE GROF'.

Our novellette is 'BLUES IN THE NIGHT' by the infamous Bruce P. Baker. (Yes, he's back!). This is one of his most outrageous and best yet.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LYLE HOPWOOD appears for the first time in DREAM, but her name will be familiar to most small-press SF fans. She has had several stories in fellow-Alliance magazine 'BACK BRAIN RECLUSE' and her story 'THE OUTSIDE DOOR' was in a recent 'INTERZONE'. She is currently resident in sunny California. 'FEMININE INTUITION' was written back in 1988, well before the release of BACK TO THE FUTURE II. Great minds...

BRIAN ROLLS is another new name to DREAM. He lives in Caversham, Reading. His excellent DREAM debut leads us to think he’s been cut up by maniac drivers more than once.

G.M. WILLIAMS is a teenage author living near Newcastle-on-Tyne. 'THE MORAL CONSIDERATION' is his first published story and leads us to expect great things from him in the 90s. It is a hard-hitting horror story of biological experimentation gone wrong.

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS has appeared many times in DREAM and was writing well received SF as far back as the late fifties and early sixties in 'NEW WORLDS' and many other promags. He lives in Kingston-upon-Thames. His latest story is another of those set in an alternate time-line where magic has developed instead of science.

TIM HURT will be familiar to many DREAM readers, but as an illustrator rather than an author. He lives near Leicester and 'LOVE KILLS' is his first story for us, an intriguing tale of an alien life-form.

A.J. KERR's name will be familiar to readers of 'OPUS' where he has had a couple of his striking horror pieces published previously. He is another of a group of up and coming young authors to watch out for. 'THE WATCHER' is another creepy tale of horror.

DUNCAN LUNAN is our regular science columnist. He has appeared in 'ANALOG', 'GALAXY', 'IF' and many more professional magazines, both with fact articles and fiction. He was also in 'NEW MOON' 2. His latest venture is as editor of 'Starfield', an anthology of SF by Scottish writers, published last October by Orkney Press at £10.95. The anthology includes a story by William King. Duncan lives in Glasgow.
TWO TONE SIREN blaring, Kerry Lester’s pneumocar swayed out, overtook the red family roadster and cut in just in time to avoid the transporter coming the other way. Both the family car and the transporter braked, slewed on their air-cushions, then regained control. His teeth bared, Lester waited for some retaliatory action from the red car, perhaps an attempt to overtake in turn . . . No, the driver maintained a discreet distance even though Lester slowed invitingly. In the mirror Lester could see the woman beside the driver twist in her webbing to hush white-faced children.

Gutless weekend drivers, thought Lester contemptuously. He kicked down the control bars and the slim pneumocar drew away. Red and orange checkers signalled the approach of the city; giant blocks of pastel-shaded stone loomed over green patches of parkland and a soft feminine voice whispered on the trafficcontrol receiver:

“Urban area ahead. Mandatory thirty-five kils speed limit. Repeat, urban area ahead. Reduce your speed now.” Bloody old women, snorted Lester, and speeded up. The residential tower blocks flickered past.

The street sluice was washing down the roadway, laying the dust of the early afternoon heat. The drive jets sent up sprays of water; the stabilisers fought for traction and failed. At 35 kils it would have been a barely perceptible wobble, but the needle in Lester’s screen hovered over the 50 mark.

The car burst through the metal link fence as Lester kicked ineffectually at the steering pads and traction bars. Then he saw, like a still from a video, the terrified face of the girl framed by fair silky hair. A brief sensation of impact, and she vanished from view.

Lester sat for a moment before he could conntrol his trembling and get out. The girl — she looked about eight or nine — lay on her back, her fair hair soaking up blood. He stood, uncertainly, as the crowd gathered. A woman — the mother, perhaps — knelt beside the child and reached out an uncertain hand. A young man sprinted through the static scene and bent down, performing confident motions. A shadow slid across the grass and the medical technicians spilled out of the heli, dragging their equipment with them.

They knelt beside the casualty and began snapping open portable equipment.

“Heart stopped,” said the young man casually, pointing to a mass of tubing one of the technicians was unravelling. She began to pass him the tubes one by one.

“Dead?” said the mother fearfully. The technician found time for an encouraging grin.

“No harm, lady. Not enough time for brain damage. You’ll have her back home before you know it.” Resuscitators clamped over mouth and chest, silicised tubes slid into veins — nauseated, Lester turned away. But not before he had caught a glance from one of the techs. not hostile, surprisingly. Curious, perhaps.

Lester felt uncomfortable, despite the self-moulding chair. The courtroom was light and airy; the oppressiveness of dark-stained wood was part of the forgotten past. The two magistrates sat behind a table, looking at the vid screen, which had just finished replaying reconstructions of the accident at normal speed and in slow motion from several different viewpoints.

The senior magistrate, a sere old man, coughed dryly.
"We are anxious to consider any mitigating circumstances," he said. "It is clear that no mechanical failure was involved. Were you perhaps affected by an abnormal emotional state resulting from — from some upset — some — ?"

"Invalid," stated the flat voice of the court computer. "Subject habitually drove in excess of legal speeds and in a dangerous and discourteous manner." The magistrate spread his hands and looked helplessly at Lester.

"You see?"

"Bloody nonsense," snapped Lester, his anger overcoming his nervousness. "Letting some machine tell you what to do."

"A computer has no volition, Mr. Lester. It does nothing but store and access information —"

"I'll tell you," shouted Lester. "No red-blooded man is going to let a bunch of statisticians and old women of both sexes tell him how to drive. It's ridiculous, anyway, having across-the-board rules. I'm a damn good driver -"

"Assuming your skill to exist," broke in the woman to the chairman's left, "it was inadequate to prevent this accident."

"Something like that could happen to anyone," protested Lester.

"It would not happen to someone who followed the rules," she said. She glanced down. "Is analysis complete?"

"Working," enunciated the computer. It hummed for a few moments and then, abruptly, sheets of paper extruded from slots before each magistrate.

"Interesting," said the senior magistrate. He turned a page. "Fascinating. Indeed, a case unique in my experience." He regarded Lester with troubled eyes and glanced down at the report again before continuing.

"The worlds of man," he declared, "have known peace for almost a century, but we have not yet erased the effects of the irresponsibility of our ancestors. In order that we may feed our people we enforce rigid birth control laws and devote as much land as possible to food production. As a result, we must live — save for some agricultural technicians — in population concentrations. Cities, Mr. Lester."

Lester shifted in his chair and he smiled.

"Do not become impatient, Mr. Lester, this is relevant. Since we are forced to live in such close proximity, we are obliged to accept restraints; we must behave in ways that makes such closeness tolerable. Politeness, neighbourliness, restraint: these are devices to ensure the survival of society. Perhaps, one day, when other worlds —"

The woman beside him intervened.

"The teleological and utilitarian interpretations of society have been argued many times."

Her senior smiled. "Garrulousness is still a prerogative of the old, Dr. Marchant."

He turned back to Lester. "My point is that you are unable, or unwilling, to accept these social restraints. Even after many warnings, you still drive dangerously. You might have caused a death if our medical technicians had been less alert."

"What our chairman means," said the woman sharply, "is that you are an anachronism, Mr. Lester. You do not fit into society. You are what I believe was once called a rugged individualist. In former times mankind needed your drive so much that it condoned your ruthlessness. But now there are no frontiers for you; even ExTee work needs men and women who can operate as a team. You are an embarrassment to us. You are a barbarian in the City States, a soldier in an age of diplomacy, a dinosaur among the mammals."

"You mean I'm a man and not a sheep," burst out Lester. The chairman lifted his
thin, old hands.

"Perhaps, perhaps. I can only say that the service of one's fellows is as worthy an aspiration as the expression of one's own personality.

"Now, we must consider what is to be done with you. My colleague was right when she said that you were an embarrassment to us. We cannot allow you to endanger the lives of — of the sheep. But what to do?"

"Will you accept psychiatric treatment to enable you to come to terms with the world of today?" asked Dr. Marchant. "Problems of adjustment are nothing to be ashamed —"

"I'm not going to let anyone tamper with my mind."

"As I expected," she sighed. "Quite uncivilised. But we can hardly do away with him."

"No, of course not," said the chairman hurriedly. "Neither can we put him under continuous hallucination; he would be aware that he was living a delusion."

"That leaves only one conclusion," said Marchant.

"I know." He shook his head. "Mr. Lester, I am an old man. My memories go back further than those of Dr. Marchant here. Possibly for that reason, I am not entirely unsympathetic. But my primary duty is to society as a whole. Since you refuse treatment, you will be deported to the Construct."

Lester sat fuming at the control bars of his pneumocar. At first the Construct had seemed ideal, an expression of his own wishes. A beautiful city with wide roads, straight or gently curving. Yet if he took any of the routes leading out of the construct some wrenching of the fabric of space-time would ensure that he would find himself travelling back along the same road, the city rising ahead of him. He was as much a prisoner as any ancient incarcerated behind stone walls and iron bars.

He was convinced that they wanted him to feel like this. They wanted his frustration to be so profound that he would go to City Hall and tell the Construct computer that he would accept conditioning.

Around him the cars with their blanked-out windows scurried past in complex patterns, testing the theories of the traffic controllers and training their apprentices. In the housing complexes building materials and consumer goods were tested again and again with untiring patience by the bio-engineered automatons with whom he shared the city. It was a vast array of interlocking experiments: a social, engineering, biological, political, economic laboratory with aims that he could not share and indeed could sometimes barely understand. And of course there were the forces that maintained the Construct; forces that one day might produce the longed-for hyperdrive and the key to the earth-like worlds out of reach. He was no more than an incidental.

He turned off the freeway and headed towards the villa that had been assigned to him. Like the rest of the Construct: clean, efficient and soul-less. He weaved in and out of the traffic, forcing the beetle-like black cars to brake and swerve to avoid him. This now represented about his only enjoyment, and even that was marred by being unable to see the drivers. He wondered just what sort of bio-engineered creature sat at the controls behind the one-way glass, staring glumly out at the other vehicles. Of one thing you could be sure, the programmers would have made them with the same range of reactions you would find in a representative sample of the population as a
whole. He swayed round a corner and kicked down at the speed bar.

The child who ran into the road might have been a sister of the one he had nearly killed. His mind knew that it was an android, an artificial device; his body fought to reduce his speed. When he got out the pseudo-child was pulling herself — itself — from beneath one of his stabilisers. Huge injuries sprayed gouts of blood as she attempted to chase her ball in a ghastly travesty of play until her mangled leg gave way, and even then her limbs thrashed in the motions of running.

If he had needed any reminder that he was in the Construct he would have had it in the contrast to his accident back in his own world. The bio-engineered surrogates seemed to have a limited capacity for dealing with the unusual. Some drifted towards the scene, but none made any move towards him or his victim. The ‘mother’ stood unconcerned at the window, repeatedly loading, operating and unloading a cleanser.

Moved by some impulse, Lester entered the house. The woman ignored him; her fingers flicked plates from a pile into a rack. It was difficult to believe that she — it — was an artifact: muscles moved under the tanned shoulders and the red mouth pursed as she worked.

Overcome by a feeling that was more loneliness than anything sexual, Lester caught at the woman’s arm. She stopped and turned slowly towards him, her expression untroubled, her attitude calm and accepting. The pseudoflesh was warm and resilient under his fingers but, suddenly repelled, he turned and ran from the room in a near panic, reversed his car and drove off. A last glance showed that the creature had returned to its monotonous task.

Another example of their cunning, he told himself: to deprive him of human companionship until he began to treat these androids as if they were people. And in the end he would accept conditioning to stop himself going mad. Typical. They lacked the courage — or the honesty — to enforce their will openly; they preferred the fiction that he ‘accepted his social obligations’. But they had chosen the wrong victim. He would not give in.

Suddenly his attention jerked back to the road. He was overtaking a transporter and he realised that the oncoming car was not going to slow down. He cut in desperately and sat shaking for several minutes as he cruised along at an uncharacteristically moderate speed.

He had been going home, but he turned and drove to City Hall. He parked opposite — in a no waiting zone — and stormed across the street. Only a high-pitched whine warned him and even then he stood paralysed for a moment in the path of the black car as it accelerated towards him. Then he scrambled for the entrance to City Hall. The car swerved on to the sidewalk but still missed, although he felt the wind of its passage.

“What the hell do you mean by all this?” he stormed, glaring round the terminal room. Since the computer equipment was sited all around the walls he did not even have a satisfactory focus for his abuse.

“I assume,” said the inhuman voice, “that you refer to the aggressive driving of the mobile units.”

“You know damn well I do.”

“During the investigation of your case you made the specific statement that you wished you had lived in a society where your behaviour, including your driving habits, were considered normal. The Construct directors considered that an experiment in uncontrolled aggression would not be without interest. Hence the mobile units were programmed to be provoked by your uncivility and to resent it. I
speak loosely, of course. So, you see, their actions result solely from your own."

"You mechanical obscenity," shouted Lester. He caught up a discharged Elden energy bar discarded by some untidy technician and raised it above his head.

"I urge you to stop," said the machine emotionlessly. "Your behaviour is irrational and unwise —"

Lester ignored it. The heavy bar smashed across tape cabinets, disk stores, racks of electronic equipment. At last, his rage spent and his frustration purged, Lester walked unsteadily back to the street.

He emerged cautiously, but there was no sign of the homicidal mobile unit, or of any others. He climbed in, engaged the engines and drove towards his villa with more care than he had ever taken in his life. The blank, featureless windows of the other pneumocars now seemed charged with menace. He wondered again what sort of things were inside, and shivered. Even the fact that all the vehicles were black seemed threatening, although he remembered being told that the reason was nothing more sinister than a lack of colour discrimination in the artificial creatures.

He was nearly home when he saw the accident. Two of the black cars jockeyed for position at a junction and neither would give way. They collided with a scrape of metal and plastic. One, its steering damaged, wobbled away, but the other pursued it and forced it against a wall. The window of the aggressor slid down. Lester could not see into the interior, but thick roped arms reached out and across into the car. After a while blood and ichor began to seep from the burst joints of the damaged car. Fortunately, the whine of the engines covered any sounds there might have been.

The hollow metallic crash made him spin round. The side of his pneumocar was crumpled as if by a blow from an enraged giant. The black car that had rammed it backed off, revved its motors and charged again. Other vehicles waited.

"Hey, stop," cried Lester. He had taken a couple of paces towards the roadway before the foolishness of what he was doing came to him. By that time one of the pneumocars had detached itself from the huddle and was accelerating towards him, brushing the low hedge aside in its passage.

The villa door looked miles away. Lester leaped aside barely in time. Thorns scored his face and arms as the black car tore across the spot where he had stood, ripping deep tracks in the lawns and flower beds and crushing a patient metal gardener.

Lester dragged himself free from the rose bushes and ran for the door while the pneumocar screeched round for a second attack. There was a moment's panic as he fumbled for his personal card, imagining the car drawing up behind him and those arms reaching out — the card slid into the slot and the door swung open.

He slammed it on the sight of the approaching pneumocar and stumbled hurriedly to the telecom. He had activated the line — which led only to City Hall — before he remembered what he had done in the terminal room.

But nonetheless the symbol of the Construct computer network appeared on the screen and a harsh, obviously mechanical voice said, "Receiving."

"Are — are you all right?" He felt stupid, asking that of a machine, but added, "Look, I'm sorry."

"My memories and systems processes are unaffected, although some control and communication equipment is non-functional. Thus I must utilise this inferior vocaliser. Your expressions of regret have no validity; I am not programmed to feel emotional response such as resentment."

Lester ignored all this.
“Look,” he said, “you’ve got to help.” He described what had happened. There was a brief silence.

“I am surprised.”

“You’re surprised? Let me tell you — ”

“The mobile units display a greater cunning and capacity to learn and adapt than had been anticipated. The directors will be — ”

I don’t give a sod if they all have heart attacks. It’s the — the mobile units that matter. Stop them.”

“Impossible.”

“Look, you bloody clockwork toy, do what I tell you.”

“My circuits do not select inappropriate phraseology. I did not say that I refused to control them, I said it was impossible. All the androids and mobile units are endowed with self-volition. Among the equipment you rendered non-functional were the command channels that gave me over-riding control. In effect, all forms of pseudolife are out of control. Since the mobile units were programmed for aggression they must be regarded as dangerous and unpredictable.”

“All right, all right.” Lester sank into a chair. He put his hands over his face for a moment and then looked up. “O.K., you win. I’ll accept conditioning. Tell them I give in; they’ve won. Well, get on with it. It was what you wanted, wasn’t it?”

“I believe some such hope was entertained. However, I fear that your change of heart is too late.”

“What — what do you mean?”

“You also incapacitated my communication lines to the outside of the Construct. The fields englobing the Construct are of a nature such that — I see that you are not interested in the technicalities. In short, I am unable to transmit your request for treatment. Or any reports.”

“But surely — ” Lester groped “— surely someone will come — ? Routine inspections — ?”

“Improbable. The experiments are all long-term. The technicians would find unnecessary contact with you embarrassing. To adopt a metaphor used at your trial — which I thought rather apposite — a sensitive mammal would have no wish to watch the last dinosaur dying.”

“I could repair your circuits,” mumbled Lester.

“Even if you could reach City Hall — which, from my observations, seemed unlikely, repairs would take several days, a week perhaps. You do not have the time.”

“Listen,” shouted Lester, “I’ll take my chances on getting there.” He swallowed and controlled his voice. “If I kept to the cover of the houses, dodged inside if I were seen — what do you mean? Why don’t I have the time?”

“The mobile units are ubiquitous and have infinite patience. They will never stop following you. Moreover, they are not actually attached to their vehicles, they can get out. They have never done so; until now there has been no motivation, but the idea will occur to them, sooner or later. With the speed of adaptation they have shown I estimate that it will come to them in two or three days. And when it does they will come after you, wherever you are.

“I fear that you must regard your position as hopeless. They are immensely strong and they can use their vehicles to batter down any barricade you could erect. The only suggestion that I can offer is that you use whatever time remains to you to make such religious or philosophical preparations your personal beliefs indicate as
appropriate.

"Under these circumstances, any further communication between us would be without purpose. Signing off."

The screen went blank. The wide picture windows seemed to expose him pitilessly to the outside. From the street came a few final crashes as the black pneumocars converted his own car into still smaller pieces of scrap. Staring beyond the garden to the slowly circling black cars, Lester began to tremble uncontrollably.

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**STORY RATINGS — DREAM 21**

It seems to be the ‘norm’ lately for the result to be very close. After the tie for top place in the ratings for DREAM 20 the current set of figures also produced a close-run finish:

1: **THE SUGGESTION FORM** E.R. James 2.16
2: **DO DET IKE** Gerry Connelly 2.22
3: **SPARKLE** Charles Luther 2.48
4: **REICH** Marcin P. Sexton 3.27
5: **THE MEMOIRS OF INTERN ZONE** Peter T. Garratt 4.58

So Ernest James gets his second top place, pipping another consistent top rater in Gerry Connelly.
The Lilies Have Dried ....

DAVID C. KOPASKA-MERKEL
1. prelude
Rowan sinks her teeth into the child's pallor,
Then drinks the warmth like a
hot mug on a cold winter's night.
Ahhhh!
She wriggles her shoulders in ecstasy and
Throws back her head.
Her laughter breaks windows and shatters stout hearts.

2. first movement
By daylight the hills are not empty.
Herds fill them, and the buzzing of small things in the grass.
By night the folds between ridges fill with fear like blood,
Pouring out, spilling out into the Valley,
Where tiny candles flicker behind heavy shutters.
A wraith occurs above a broken headstone,
Woven of moonbeams and ancient malice.
The rowans sigh her name in the nightwind:
She moves like quicksilver,
Like a wolf out of legend.

3. second movement
Into the Valley she moves on wings of hunger,
Searching for dead summers and withered smiles,
Children tremble when her shadow passes,
Dogs bark and cats slink into secret corners.
She senses a hurrying figure on the road below
And swoops down for the kill,
Bloodlust galvanizing her ethereal corpus.

4. climax
Aaron trudges homeward from his mournful errand,
Hurrying as dusk settles out of the hills.
Each year on her birthday he lays flowers on his dead
wife's grave;
This year he's lingered overlong, sorrowing for her
vanished loveliness.
He glances nervously over his shoulder;
Fear rides the air tonight.
He shivers.
Then he sees it, flickering faintly as it dives upon him,
Like an owl on a mouse.
A chill eats into his bones
And the wraith glares fiercely into his eyes.
He gasps, then groans wetly as she rips his heart out.

5. antclimax
A dog howls;
The wraith begins to feed.
On her grave in the hills
White lilies lie drying.
The Moral Consideration

G.M. WILLIAMS
It was a city under a stained sun. A tribute to man. A sprawling, dark mass of tumbling hi-tech madness under a dead sky. A dead sky and a stained sun. Time passes. Nations rise and nations fall, mountains are formed and eroded. Nothing truly survives time or its ravages. The dinosaurs were the mightiest beasts to walk the Earth. The British Empire was the largest the world has known. The Soviet Union and United States were the greatest economic powers ever. Nuclear weapons the most destructive arms to be invented. Not so. That was then; this is now. Automatic Earth. In that polluted city people slept. People were always sleeping. People woke and some people were in waking. Great black machines churned out thick, awful, smog over the crazy metropolis. Nobody knew why anymore, no-one had bothered to do anything about them and now nobody cared. Anymore. Some of the people went to work. Working in dirty, shadowy places, or in tiny rooms, countless floors of endless files, computers, microchips all crushing down upon them. But not many people went to work, so it did not matter. Much. Great metal arches, circuitry engraved. Massive buildings, hi-tech dinosaurs. Girders. Windows. Frozen in death. And people live here? Automatic Earth. In the city two people went to work. They were specifically unique people, so they worked in a unique place. Without them, however, that place was silent. All silent. But the minds of men are never fully silent; death is the only thing which brings true silence, and the minds of men are often full of thoughts of death. Death. At exactly 9.05 citytime the two men arrived at their place of work. Vapour hissed and the door slid open. The two men stepped quietly out of the grubby metal tomb which was the lift. Their names were unoriginal, unimportant and would have nestled, with relative ease, into any century. Unlike in glossy and shining prophecies of the future which had been made long ago names had not really changed. Why should they? Names were only labels for people, why bother making new labels? As it happened these two were called Doctor David Racksay and Doctor James Locker. The ‘Doctor’ of their titles was the official name tag. They could be described equally well by other terms: professors, biological engineers, geneticists, genesplicers or even immoral murderers. They were men of science. The actual name did not matter. Much. The two men crossed the empty outer room, then Racksay went through the familiar sequences of opening the door seals. The inner door moved slowly open and the two stepped into the chamber beyond. A clean, gleaming, metal and plastic environment, sparkling sterility just like those prophecies of the future. The only thing that marred it was the large window out onto the cityscape far below and around. A stain on the whiteness, or maybe just a contrast which accentuated the differences. Various thick inner windows looked into other sterile areas: operating theatres, laboratories, storage facilities and equipment with a myriad of uses.
Technological wonder. Biological nightmare.

Locker took a pair of ‘dustfree’ bodysuits from a rack, with hundreds of others, in an airtight compartment. Racksay engaged a computer terminal, reading the day roster and initiating various sophisticated sterilization processes. The two pulled on the clear plastic suits and clicked on ‘dustfree’ helmets. Their movements were precise, unhurried. So efficient now, with practice.

“Batches one hundred through to one hundred and fifty need adjusting. We'll see to them first,” Racksay said. “And so the day begins again.” Then with a deep breath he and Locker moved into another chamber.

And so their work began again also, the senior Racksay officiating, Locker assisting. Work. Work.

Batches to be adjusted, changed, operations, inoculations, formulae to be tested, genes to be spliced and flesh to be mutated. Then a break for nutrition.

A stop for lunch. How antiquated.

Racksay grunted, unappreciatively, as he shovelled another spoonful of coloured mush into his mouth. Locker’s thin face looked up questioningly.

“This stuff,” Racksay growled. “Why the hell can’t they get proper food? It would make this place more bearable.”

“You know why. It’s far too expensive, and please keep your voice down; there is no need to shout, I’m barely a metre and a half away.”

“I can’t help the way my vocal chords are made,” Racksay retorted loudly, and scratched through his iron-grey hair.

Locker returned to his food, resisting the temptation to point out the inaccuracy in Racksay’s statement: they were, after all, in a laboratory designed to change such physical characteristics. But it would not be worth the effort to argue.

The two ate on in stony silence, overlaid by the dull whirring of an air conditioning system.

There was a sudden irregular sound across the floor, towards the table. Something nuzzled softly at Racksay’s leg.

“Herbie, old man,” Racksay enthusiastically greeted the creature. It was probably a little under a metre in height and covered in clean white hair. It was shaped rather like a fluffy Koala bear. Hands and feet articulate, clawed, its face a weird cross between a rabbit, a bear and a cat. Its ears were long and floppy while its irises were maroon. Across its body, here and there, could be seen bare lines of scar tissue.

Racksay lifted Herbie up onto the nearest seat and began teasing him by flicking him with a plastic spoon. Herbie made strange growling, trilling noises as he tried to grab the offending spoon.

Racksay rapped the creature, quickly, three times between the eyes then noticed something: the creature’s eyes were wandering rather than converging, pupils going in opposite directions. Racksay frowned.

“Looks like an extrinsic eye muscle drift” he predicted. “Here, pass over the light.” Locker handed the heavy, tubular lightbar to Racksay without a word.

Racksay held the bright light up in front of Herbie’s eyes. The creature yowled in annoyance and jerked away, but its pupils did not close.

“No pupil contraction due to light stimuli,” Racksay bit his lip. “Probably muscle relaxation over the whole general area including the circulars and radials. I can’t be sure of what’s causing it so we’d better see to it this afternoon. Anyway, that will give me a chance to check up on his optic nerve; I’ve been meaning to do that for a while now.”
“So it’s back on the table for the creature, again,” Locker said quietly. Racksay gave him an irritated glance.

“I thought you didn’t like him.”

“Back under the knife. Zap, zap, snip, snip, buzz goes the electric saw,” Locker continued, ignoring Racksay’s words. Racksay regarded him angrily across the table.

“What point are you trying to make? As if I didn’t know.”

“Don’t you think the creature has had enough operations. Countless times being messed about. Being put to sleep, cut up, then waking up... different.”

“Nonsense,” Racksay sneered. “He hasn’t the intelligence to understand what is happening and by now he’s got used to it. Anyway, this creature, as you refer to him, has had vastly improved physical attributes due to my operations. His life expectancy, for instance has been quadrupled...”

“Due to lengthy sessions of open heart surgery.”

“... In fact without me, and my operations, this creature would not have existed at all. He’s only a gene conglomeration developed using state of the art techniques; almost the first thing that was done with this place,” Racksay continued, brushing over the interruption.

“It’s not just this matter, it’s everything done here, in this place. It is this place, and the work. The things you, we, do. Creating blasphemous travesties of life, mutants and unsightly things that spurn all natural orders. Where are morals when we, here, create diseases and viruses which could destroy mankind a thousand times over!”

Herbie jumped down, and scurried away to escape from the mounting argument.

“You know just as well as I that, by law, nothing created in this laboratory after its initial two month trial period has the facility for living longer than three weeks. You also are fully aware that since Herbie was created during the lab’s first two months, with untested equipment calibration, he is exempt from such laws; also he is assigned to me, on my research permit, as an official pet. I can therefore perform any surgery or experimentation on him and by law you have no right to interfere,” Racksay said as he watched the thin, neat face of his young colleague turning almost livid. Racksay knew all the accusations, he had heard them all before. But when Locker entered into an argument of this nature he would begin to act like a fanatic. Raving and nearly foaming at the mouth with the increasing fervour. The arguments were invariably loud, but only on this subject; otherwise he did not say much.

“It makes me sick I tell you, to my stomach. Total revulsion, and just snuffing these things out, after three weeks is no good. In fact it’s worse. It’s just legislation introduced by those in control to satisfy worried souls. Nobody cares really. But they should. We are flying in the face of God. Breaking the law of things set down by the Lord...”

“What did you say?” Racksay snapped suddenly. He stared at Locker who sputtered to a halt.

Eyes met.

Everything was silent bar the droning of the air conditioner.

“You’ve been to see that priest again, haven’t you?” Racksay said, breaking the silence.

“What if I have?” Locker spat.

“I should have reported you when you changed your assigned hobby to religion. You were lucky to slip under their notice. They don’t like that — changing hobbies. I definitely should have reported that charlatan of a priest,” Racksay began coldly.
“Also, in answer to your previous outburst, all I can say is that you can't hold very strongly to your convictions. Because you still come here every day. Day in, day out, and you work. You help me in this horrible, blasphemous work. Remember also, that you yourself chose this branch of science; back at school, years ago, you had to make one of the few decisions of your academic career. Obviously you were deemed intelligent enough to undertake scientific training and you chose this area. Besides every act performed here is done in the name of science.”

“That's as much a myth as the theory of thought-induced metamorphosis, and you don't believe it anyway”. At this Racksay looked quite shocked. “What matters are morals. The moral consideration.”

“Well, that's a myth too,” Racksay said darkly.

Locker, who was breathing very fast, opened his mouth as if about to say something, then he stood quickly and walked towards the window.

The plastic chair hit the plasticised floor with a hollow clash.

Racksay glared after Locker. These continual outbursts of his were becoming intolerable. They lowered efficiency, bringing work rate down to an absolute minimum at times.

The situation had begun to deteriorate about a year ago. Locker, at first unknown to Racksay, had changed his governmental assigned hobby to religion, without notifying the authorities. But Racksay had his suspicions that it was that priest Locker visited who had changed his allegiances. The authorities did not like priests. After that Locker had gradually got worse, in both the intensity and the amount of his accusations. He kept raving about the moral consideration.

It really slowed work down.

Racksay's mind spun back to a thought that had been plaguing him for some time. Why not just kill the irritating little man?

Racksay's own assigned hobby had been exercise and bodybuilding. Even though he was getting older he was much more powerful than the slightly built Locker. Racksay reached for the heavy lightbar. It had a good weight.

He imagined it smashing into Locker's face.

Smash. Smash.

Bones breaking, blood spurting.

It gave him a wonderful sense of power. Racksay liked power. In the end he had to admit to himself that it was the reason why he had chosen this scientific field. The feeling of power, of defying nature. Racksay liked power.

Locker looked out onto the dirty cityscape, it had a calming effect for him.

Heaven only knows why. It was a city in turmoil.

He glanced back at the growling Racksay, there was something animal, vicious about him as he sat. He was holding the lightbar in a threatening manner. Locker swallowed hard. Perhaps he had pushed the big man too far? Deep down he was very scared of Racksay, he was not only a big man but a big man with intelligence. A dangerous combination.

Racksay was intelligent, at times startlingly so. Locker was sure he could see straight through his own plans, his thoughts and emotions. This made Locker even more afraid. Then there was all the secret research work which he carried out; a classic workaholic the man often worked deep into the night, after hours.

Racksay's intelligence ensured his senior position, but his soul should have had him burning in Hell.

Locker opened his mouth to speak, but paused.
What he was about to say could well push Racksay that little bit too far. But it needed to be said.

"You can't do this operation anyway. You are getting older and recently your eyesight has been deteriorating. You have begun to make mistakes. This would be extremely delicate optic surgery — so I will have to actually handle the instruments" he said quietly.

Racksay's eyes narrowed and Locker could see all the muscles of his lined face tightening. He half stood, looking like he was about to explode. Locker took a step towards the door.

Tension mounted.
Then Racksay fell back. He just looked deflated, struck by the truth.
"All right then" he muttered almost inaudibly.
And so the work began again, but the atmosphere was different, subtly different.

Time passes.

Hours later Locker lay on his bed in his room, far away from the laboratory. The only light was that filtering in through the window at the end of his bed. As before he looked out onto the dim night lights of the city and he thought. Calmly. He briefly wondered why Racksay had chosen to work on late tonight, after hours, at the lab. He thought of a myriad of reasons and how they related to himself, but then dispelled them all. Racksay would be home himself by now, and it did not matter much.

Outside a transporter passed by. Its long, black, metallic ovoid shape cut through the air. Sheets of brilliant flame burst from its nozzle end, disassembling the darkness around it. It reminded him of the Phoenix of mythology that he had read of in books from his previous assigned hobby: ancient literature.

Not that it mattered, now he had found his true calling. The priest had told him all about faith, though he also told him that he was still rather religiously naive; but he was sure that the Lord had accepted him. After all, when he had been desperately worried about his work, had not God come to him in his sleep and told him of its great evil? Or so Locker thought, and it all made sense.

But he was still concerned about Racksay. Locker thought that he himself was probably somewhat jealous of Racksay, and that this coloured his perceptions slightly. Even so he was concerned, the man was quite unpredictable. He could even be plotting to kill him.

Somewhere else in that sprawling metropolis, Racksay stood in front of a smooth topped table. He held a knife. He looked at its long sharp surface, as light flashed, reflecting into his face. He smiled wickedly as thoughts tumbled through his mind. Behind him a baby began to cry. Racksay put down the knife and turned to attend to it.

The following morning Locker was uncharacteristically late for work. He had overslept — almost unheard of for him. Hurriedly he walked out of the metal tomb lift and across the floor of the empty room. His hands quickly found the door seals. The door moved slowly open, Racksay was within. He was already preparing the day's work. Performing his part of the ritual, even though Locker was not there: computer terminal on, sterilization processes engaged, day roster for checking.
"Sorry," Locker began. "Overslept. Sat up late in my room, thinking." Racksay did not say a word as Locker said this, slipping smoothly into his section of the morning sequence. Or to be more precise he began to do this, but stopped dead halfway to the airtight compartment. There was someone else in the room with them.

A little boy, sitting on a chair near the window, legs dangling. At first Locker thought him to be of negroid descent; then, as he looked more carefully, saw he was simply jet black. Caucasian features, just jet black. The little boy looked straight at Locker. He had closely cropped hair and a very round face. The irises of his eyes seemed to be black, as the pupils were, and he was sporting a wide grin. An almost malicious grin.

"Authorities have assigned him to me for childcare duty," Racksay said, before Locker could speak on the matter. "Unfortunately, there wasn't any time to fix up any cybernetic care for him in my living area. So he will have to stay here for the day. He won't get into any trouble as long as we keep an eye on him; he can play with Herbie most of the time. His skin is like that due to a rare pigment condition, I thought we could investigate it later. By the way, his name is Janus."

 Locker started at that name. He seemed to remember it vaguely, but he could not quite place it. It meant something though.

"Come on, Locker, to work, quickly, we're already behind schedule," Racksay's actions implied that the previous day's animosities had been forgotten. As the two pulled on their sterile worksuits Janus watched them.

Big eyes. Fixed grin. All day.

Racksay did not seem to notice, or was not bothered. Perhaps he was trying to get back at him for the previous day.

It got to the point, late in the afternoon shift, when Locker was positively longing to be out and away. Dreading to look up, to see the child again. At last the day's labour was ended, Locker fled as soon as possible. Back to the safe haven of his room. To thoughts, contemplation, then sleep.

The next day, thankfully, Janus was not there. Everything returned to relative normality.

Time passes.

Two weeks, five days passed.

Day in, day out the blasphemous work continued. But all in the name of science, of course. Arguments and tempers flared in the passive environment, both men's minds were full of thoughts of death. But those thoughts were very different in nature.

But the work went on.

At exactly 9.05 citytime on the sixth day of the third week Locker arrived at the laboratory. He unsealed the door and entered, Racksay was not there yet. As Racksay had done before him Locker entered his part of the familiar preparations. The ritual.

Six minutes later Locker heard the hissing of the lift. Racksay strode briskly in, he looked rather annoyed. He was holding a compudisk listing board in one hand and a vacuum wrapped pack of syringes in the other.

"I've just received some rather bad news, although it's probably the best thing you've heard for weeks," he paused and looked back. "Come on Janus, bring those boxes through."

"The governmental board in charge of finance is closing this place down." But Locker hardly noticed that. He looked, open mouthed in astonishment, at the figure
who followed Racksay in. The child of the previous encounter could not have been older than five years.

This man could not have been younger than thirty.

Average of height but powerful of build he carried two empty supply cases easily, one under each arm. His skin, of course, was black, deepest midnight. His face, though much older, was the same as before. Rounded, close cropped hair. He smiled, in an unnerving fashion, at Locker; those strange eyes almost boring into him.

Big eyes. Fixed grin.

Janus put down the cases and stood back, waiting for further instructions. Locker stood stunned.

" Apparently it's much too expensive altogether to keep this branch in operation. The board has been reviewing last quarter's total spending and have come to this decision. We're to run down all ongoing projects before the end of the week. Total shutdown" Racksay continued, in a matter of fact voice.

"You'll be transferred, to archives division most likely. Certainly not to another of these places, though. It looks like you and that priest have finally got what you wanted. Come on now, we've got various DNA structural samples to check, catalogue and pack. Then we've got to do the same to everything else, so get moving." Locker obeyed mechanically, mind still reeling.

The day passed like a half formed nightmare for Locker. There was a seemingly endless stream of samples, machines, experiments and instruments to check. To tick off on the inventory, to pack away and vacuum seal, then to go back again and do the same for a different set.

And all the time, in the background, there was the black spectre: Janus. Dark eyes staring from under dark brows. Now and then he did manual lifting work, on instruction, otherwise he just looked on silently. Looked at Locker. All day Racksay ventured no explanation for Janus, and Locker did not, would not, ask. In fact, for the full time Racksay and Locker spoke only in numbers and formulae. No proper conversation, they did not even argue.

"You go now Locker. Janus and I are staying on here for a while to do some heavy lifting and checking work" Racksay told him. Locker left wordlessly. Feeling physically shattered he only let out an explosive breath of relief when the lift doors had finally clicked shut.

It was later. Locker, as always, lay on his bed thinking. Fragments of light played over his face in a weird, alien way. At first his thoughts were only of the bizarre appearance of Janus and the dark implications that had. But he dismissed that from his mind to make room for other thoughts. After all family resemblances, cloning, and cryogenics could all provide feasible explanations.

No, it was Racksay's attitude that disturbed him now. It had been totally out of character for him to just accept the closing of the lab, the destroying of the place which was essentially his way of life — the place for which he argued most vehemently. Under normal conditions, Locker would have suspected him to go into a fit of burning rage when confronted with such a situation. His work was his life. Yet he had only been annoyed.

Only now had Locker the presence of mind to consider this. At the stifling lab there had been work and Janus, which together had held his full attention. His mind
sorted through the jumbled sets of reasons to explain Racksay's actions, and settled on the most likely. The worst. But everything fitted; Racksay did not seem particularly bothered that the work was finishing because, for him, it was not. He, and that Janus character, were planning to construct an illegal laboratory of their own devising. It would be a terrible biological hellhole that would be thousands of times worse than the current one. Without even the present flimsy laws to limit it, it would truly be an utterly unforgivable blasphemy against God, destructive and depraved beyond conception. After all, had not Racksay only said that Locker himself was to be transferred? Already the idea had begun to eat away at him. He knew he must go and confront Racksay with it, even though the man might try and kill him, it had to be done. Locker looked at his chronometer, Racksay would still be there, Locker would go and confront him now.

When he arrived he found that, unusually, the inner door was half open. It stood ajar with its locks undone; dim light filtering out from within. Quietly, Locker crossed over from the lift, and looked cautiously inside.

Racksay sat at a table near the door, his back facing Locker. Locker slipped inside, on the table he could see there were various scalpels, multihued containers and syringes which Racksay was preparing. Also on the table was a glowing lightbar which provided the room with its only illumination. Another, deactivated, lay on a nearby tray.

"Ah, Locker, you are just in time to be witness to a truly remarkable event. Please come in, come over and bring your 'moral consideration' with you." He uttered a low, wicked laugh and turned.

The end of the deactivated lightbar struck him full in the face; its momentum snapped the nose bone and drove it up into the brain, killing him instantly. Racksay's spasming body was thrown backwards by the force of the blow, blood spurting. Vials, scalpels, syringes and trays were all knocked to the floor in an explosion of glass and bouncing metal. Locker struck the hated face again and again, releasing all his pent-up energy like an uncontrollable beserker attacking. Again and again.

Then he staggered backwards, gasping, as the terrible realisation of what he had done lashed out at him. Somehow he managed to close the main door and collapse into a plastic chair. He sat, head in hands, breathing heavily. Pieces of thoughts tumbled crazily around in his brain. Police. Authorities. Government. Murder. Death. Death.

With an extreme exertion of will he managed to calm himself down, to think coherently. He glanced up at Racksay. Racksay's body. He sat, no, sprawled, head back, face a broken mask of scarlet, arms outstretched, fingers twitching vaguely. Blood covered his previously unblemished white overalls, it bubbled darkly down to drip onto the shard covered floor. Locker shuddered.

Suddenly a dark shape interposed itself between Racksay and Locker's line of vision. Locker looked up, though he knew what he would see.

He was not completely prepared for what he did see.

It was Janus, but his visage had altered again. Before he had been a young man, now Locker saw the face of a man falling out of his middle years. There were lines on the rounded face, and the close cropped hair was now gray. But the eyes were the same, sparkling and strange. There was no smile though; his mouth was set into a
disdainful sneer.

"The ageing process accelerates at the terminating end of the cycle," he said, as if in answer to an unspoken question. His voice was rich and melodious, it chilled Locker to the bone. Janus looked over his shoulder at Racksay.

"Your work presumably?" he asked and cocked his head questioningly. Locker nodded dumbly, standing. The chair fell to the ground noisily as he moved back and collided with a table behind him. The implements on top of it rattled. Janus moved so that he was between Locker and the outer door. Locker watched him closely. He still had the heavy lightbar in his hand, and the surgical equipment on the table was razor sharp. Janus, like Racksay before him, was powerful but old. Locker reasoned that he could not best an armed younger man. If he needed to fight, Locker could probably escape with his life.

"You do know what that was?" he began, pointing at the smashed mess on the floor. "It was the various preparatory equipment necessary to perform the 'extending process'. To be used on specimens, to be studied longer than the normal three week limit. To give them a longer life-span."

*Three weeks.*

It rang in Locker's mind. Janus' ageing, it all made sense now.

"Yes, that is right. I am a product of this laboratory, as much as all the others you see around you," Janus said with a wry smile. "And Racksay was about to perform the 'extending' operation on me," he continued.

"So, since you have removed him from the scene, you must now undertake that operation."

"I can't," Locker said, almost inaudibly.

"What?" Janus gave him a cutting stare. Locker swallowed and licked his lips.

"I can't; I don't have the knowledge or the expertise. I'm only the assistant," he said.

At this Janus' face twisted in fury; he let out a scream of blazing anger. He lashed out, left and right, at equipment tables. Locker flinched at such a display of utter rage. Then Janus dropped into a low hunched crouch, arms extended, shoulders forward.

"Then little man," he hissed, spittle on his chin. "You are about to witness the crowning triumph of Racksay's genius. Then you shall die, oh so horribly."

Locker scrabbled for the implements.

Janus threw back his head and let out an animalistic scream. Suddenly a wet tearing sound rent the air of the room. His back seemed to split open and another torso of silvered black, horned and armoured, forced upwards. Ebony fluid sluiced across the room. Locker let out a hoarse yell of amazement.

"Thought induced metamorphosis; a myth no longer. A creature created with an almost supernatural talent: the ability to warp the very fabric of its flesh. With a single thought, a single pulse, I can transform into a completely different being," Janus shrieked. "You wonder why I am called Janus? He was the two faced Roman god, like he I wear two faces."

At this his own face ruptured and the new one beneath broke through: a great black eyeless skull, armoured, with a mouth containing thousands of hooked fangs. As the skin curled off his limbs they swelled; massively muscled and veined, bending back into strange settings with different joints. Tentacles like thick electricity cables writhed across the floor, making obscene metallic sounds. In fact the whole being looked in some way mechanical. A half mechanical horror built by machines.
The smell of steel was on the air.

But Locker had already fled. Not even pausing to consider how strong such a creature must be to support such a large exoskeleton. He just ran, legs and adrenalin pumping, not enough breath, even, to scream.

It was blocking the outer door so he had to go inwards. But the Janus-thing was after him, bounding forwards with terrifying speed. Locker slammed the heavy metal door behind him. The horror tore it asunder as if it were a petal being ripped from a rose. As he ran through the various store rooms he pulled countless racks down on the following thing. Organic acids, awesome oxidizing agents, ghastly diseases, awful mutations all rained down upon it.

It did not even seem to notice.

At last Locker reached one of the heavy blast doors, just ahead of his monstrous pursuer. It only just clicked shut before the creature struck. Metal buckled, groaning in protest, but did not yield. That was the first of five such doors. With speed born out of desperation Locker closed them all in rapid succession. Then he found himself in the cryogenic vault: a hexagonal room, a dead end.

Ranged around him, one to each of the five inner walls, were the truly stupendous doors to the cryogenic chambers. They were completely unbreakable and absolutely inaccessible. The thought rang in his mind like the sounds of the approaching destruction.

An idea.

He leapt towards the computer console and began stabbing at the keys as fast as his fingers would allow him. On the far side of the room one of the chamber doors, ever so slowly, began to creep open.

It was here that things were kept in cold storage for weeks, months or even years on end. It was the most efficient storage method known to man: cryogenic freezing. Even animals could be stored, still living, their bodily functions slowed to an absolute minimum, down to the barest spark of life — hardly ageing. Even humans could be stored.

Three or four days? For the life of him Locker could not decide. What did it matter, the horror would be dead either way. He punched in three. Three week life span only.

Once initiated the storage process could not be altered, nor even opened, till it had run its programmed course. Locker sprinted across to the cryogenic chamber, where the door, ever so slowly, had begun to close. He skidded on the smooth floor within. Sounds of metal tearing began to float in from outside. Then a scream of inhuman rage and frustration rang out, echoing round the cold gargantuan chamber that Locker stood in. There were sounds of movement across the vault outside but the barest instant before they arrived the door finally shut.

Light was snuffed out.

Locker could no longer even hear sounds of anger from the vault beyond, the door was that thick. All was dark, Locker lay down, there was nothing else really to do. All around he could feel the mists of the freezing process gently beginning to caress him. And so he passed into cold storage. On ice so to speak.

He floated in limbo for three days: a nowhere nothingness. He did not even dream, his bodily functions had been slowed down so far. Only the very smallest spark of life.

But at last it ended, like so many other things before it. Locker returned to consciousness in stages. Like climbing a mountain he scaled his way up, gradually, to
full awareness.

He woke.

He got up, he stretched, he rolled his head around a bit and jumped up and down till the door swung open. Then, nervously, he peered outside. The power of the horror's fury was plainly evident, destruction was all about. But the cryogenic chamber doors had survived, gouged but intact. All that seemed to be left of the creature was a stain on the vault floor. It was very strange that something so large had been reduced to that, but Locker was not about to argue with the facts; there was nowhere it could be, and no way it could have survived. Three week life span only. He strode out and looked through the broken blast door to see the damage beyond; it was extensive to say the least.

He had to have time to prepare his story he thought, addressing the realities of the situation. Had to have time to clear away anything that might incriminate himself, that was the first priority. Quickly he made his way back to the entrance and closed the outer door, engaging the lengthy emergency safety-lock system. Blast-proof bolts clashed home somewhere deep inside the door's surround. Locker breathed a sigh of relief, no-one would interrupt him now. He shuddered again as he passed the cold, stiff form of Racksay. He would deal with the unpleasant task of removing the body later he decided.

He wandered back into the cryogenic vault and leaned against the computer console. Eyes closed he thought. It was finally the end of this place, this awful biological nightmare. But what would he tell the authorities? That an experiment got loose and went mad? What would he say to all the questions that were bound to come?

But at least it was all over.

Suddenly there was a ringing, hollow click. Locker's eyes snapped open, his heart almost missed a beat with fear.

Across the vault from him slowly, but surely, another chamber door was opening....
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an owl flaps
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sparkles in the sieve

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from the herb jars

a heart beats
inside the fridge

where is the cook?
is she sleeping?
at the bottom on the garden
on the compost heap
where snails drawl their
silver pathways
across her swollen legs.

★★★★

She is sleeping now. And the creature lies beside her. The room is filled with a new sound. Like leaves falling, like the pulse of blood.

The creature watches over her. Her face is lost in dreaming. Dark voices whisper outside the window. The creature stoops before going to join them, and kisses again every part of her body.

In the morning she wakes and does not remember. But a leaf lies on the pillow beside her. And outside in the warm wind all the trees have been stripped naked.
Murder By Magic
SYDNEY J. BOUNDS
SOME IDIOT of an apprentice was hazing traffic in the Gray's Inn Road. His magic carpet swooped low, startling both horses and pedestrians. He was having the time of his young life.

I had my back to the office door and watched from the window, wondering how long it would be before the cops brought a master to deal with him. I could have done it myself, of course, but didn't feel like getting involved. Or maybe I remembered my young days.

Anyway, I didn't hear the door open and a potential client walk in.

"Mr. Weaver?"

The voice was loud, with an edge to it, so I swivelled my chair around. I saw a young woman, but not one I could fancy. She was outsize and wore a tweed jacket. Her face was beefy and she looked like she had a problem apart from her appearance.

"Yes," I said, and indicated the client's chair. "Please sit down."

She did, hitching up a long heavy skirt to reveal thick ankles. Her hands would have suited a pugilist.

"You are a mage?" This time her voice held a note of wariness.

I nodded towards the framed licence hanging on the wall.

"Private, but don't let it worry you. We're human — the only difference is that we have the talent. Everything you tell me is in confidence."

Still she hesitated. I waited patiently.

"You may be involved in the cover up. There's a mage involved."

I smiled. "'No cover up. First off, I don't know what you're talking about. Who's covering up what? I assure you that any mage caught practising black magic is dealt with drastically by the Guild. Suppose you start at the beginning?"

"My name is Bessie Barton. My father, Joe, has been murdered, and it looks as if he was killed by magic!"

I started a new file. "Address?"

She gave an address in Hampstead and informed me that her father had been an experimental philosopher. Well, there are a lot of them about.

"He was going to demonstrate his new invention, a magnetic machine, today. I know it works because he showed me. I believe he was killed to suppress the invention."

"You've called the police?" I asked. "Yes. They're treating his death as murder — but their investigation has been blocked by your Guild."

I sat straighter in my chair. "How blocked?"

"They won't let the police question the mage."

"Which mage?"

"The one who was investigating father's claim. I didn't catch his name. But you have access to the Guild, so —"

Now I knew why she had come to me.

"Will you take the case?"

I said I would and we went downstairs. Bessie had a tandem cycle propped against the wall of the building.

"I hope you're not expecting me to ride that thing?"

"It's quicker in traffic, she said vigorously, "and makes us independent. Father and I always used it."

I sighed and sat on the rear saddle and we pedalled up Gray's Inn Road. The hazer had already disappeared. Bessie turned left and then right into Pancras Road; she
was a skilled cyclist and took chances I wouldn't, squeezing through gaps between heavy wagons. I could hear the animals in the Zoological Gardens in the distance, and then we were pedalling up Haverstock Hill.

"Harder," she called. "Put some beef into it!"

It took an hour to reach our destination in Belsize Park and my legs ached.

As I climbed wearily from the tandem and took a few unsteady steps, Bessie snorted. "You're out of condition."

"Long time, no cycle."

The Barton house was large, old style, but well kept up and the garden extensive. At the end of a path was a wooden shed.

Bessie ignored the constable on duty and walked in. I followed. It was well appointed for a garden shed, and divided into two sections.

Inside the room was a desk, with a chess game set up, the walls lined with books on mathematics, experimental philosophy and magnetic theory. The rear half contained a workbench with some kind of device on it and a rack of tools. Copper wire projected from the middle of the machine.

The body of a middle-aged man lay on the floor, doubled over, his facial muscles twisted in a grimace; he had obviously died in agony.

Two men stood looking down at the body. One I recognised, dapper with his beard neatly trimmed to a point. Keith Damian, forensic magician.

The other man might have been playing a stage undertaker; dressed in a dark suit, his face was long and sad.

"Superintendent Fox," Damian said coldly. "He's just arrived from Central to take charge."

I showed my I.D.

AL WEAVER

Private Mage

Fox didn't seem impressed. In fact, I thought I heard him mutter something about, "Too many mages spoil the crime."

Bessie said loudly, "I hired him because he can get into the Guild. Perhaps they'll talk to him."

Fox, hesitated, showing signs of frustration.

"The Guild won't co-operate with me," he admitted grudgingly. "I want to interview the mage they sent here."

"Why?" I asked.

Damian said, "I advise you to keep out of this one."

His tone was unfriendly, considering we'd worked together on a previous job.

Fox pointed behind the desk. On the floor lay a rag doll with the handle of an ice-pick projecting from its stomach. A tuft of human hair was glued to the head.

"Can you deny that suggests murder by magic?"

It looked an amateur effort to me. "Could someone by trying to throw suspicion on a mage?"

"Or is a mage trying to be clever?" Fox encountered.

"Who discovered him?"

"I did," Bessie said promptly. "Father often worked through the night. When he didn't appear for breakfast, I came to get him."

I indicated the chess game. "A problem? Or was he playing someone?"
"If he was, it would be Ernst. Ernst Meredith, an old friend."

"I've sent a constable to fetch him," Fox said.

I bent over to look at the body. It seemed like any other body, except that the fingers were discoloured.

Bessie asked loudly, "Well, will you talk to your Guild?"

I hesitated. There was something here I didn't understand. Experimental philosophy is not my best subject; I doubt if it is with any mage.

I glanced at Damian, who was looking unhappy. "Do you want to speak in private?"

He shook his head and repeated, "Keep out of this."

I noticed Fox looking at him suspiciously and got the impression the superintendent didn't trust his own forensic magician.

I decided I'd push this job as far as talking to the Guildmaster. "Yeah, I'll —"

The door opened and a roly-poly man brushed importantly past the constable. He wore a twill suit that had seen better days and his round face looked as if it might normally be a smiling one. He wasn't smiling now. He hurried to my client and put an arm about her.

"My dear Bessie. This has been a terrible shock for us both. If there is anything I can do to help, you must tell me."

He swung about and drew himself up as far as his short height would allow.

"As for you, superintendent, there was no need for your constable to use coercion. Joe was my friend, and I know my duty. I hope you know yours. You must bring his murderer to trial."

I asked, "Did you play chess with Barton last night, Mr. Meredith?"

"Yes, indeed. We played from eight o'clock till about ten, when I left. It was not unusual for us to leave a game to finish another time."

I pointed at the device on the workbench. "Can you explain this to me?"

"Explain, yes. Whether you will understand is another matter. However —"

Ernst Meredith drew a long breath and launched into his exposition.

"— with this invention, my friend proposed to revolutionise the world. He called it a magnetic generator. You observe the pair of heavy magnets? When copper wire is rotated — turned by this handle here — between the poles, a flux is generated. This flux is a source of power that could be used, for example, to heat a room"

He turned to Bessie.

"This remarkable machine must be given to the world in Joe's name. I hope you will allow me to continue his work. We discussed it often, and I have ideas of my own for further development."

"Of course, Ernst. You must take Joe's machine and prove its worth. I won't let it be suppressed."

"Does anyone know the name of the mage investigating this invention?" I asked.

When no-one answered, I shrugged and left. I took the regular coach back to town, returned to the office and laid a spell on my crystal ball.

I got a simulacrum of the Guildmaster's secretary.

"Al Weaver, private mage. I'd like an interview with Sir Terrance. Subject: the death of an experimental philosopher, Joe Barton, at Hampstead. Superintendent Fox, from Central, apparently suspects a mage."

She said, "I'll get back to you," and faded out.

I sat back in my chair, surveying the horde of late afternoon City workers trekking home, and brooded.
In theory, any mage could ask to see the Guildmaster about a problem, and get advice. Not that he was better than other master magicians, but he had contacts in high places. His job was administration; a political appointment.

I wrote up my case notes, stomach rumbling.

My crystal ball pulsed and the secretary said crisply, "Tomorrow morning at ten, Mr. Weaver."

Just like that. I pursed my lips, wondering what was going on behind the scenes and what sort of reception I'd get at the Guildhall.

I shut my office for the day and strolled down to the winkle-stall on the corner. I'd missed lunch, so a pint of winkles with brown bread and butter and a mug of tea went down well. Then I went home to sleep.

I woke early after a restless night. Fragments of dreams chased each other through my skull; a devil doll riding a wave of magnetic flux; a cloaked figure with no face practising black magic; the Guildmaster keeping a horde of police at bay with spells.

I dressed in my best suit and travelled by magic carpet to the Guildhall, an imposing building with colonnades. Inside the main entrance was a lot of gilt and ornamentation.

An apprentice wearing an acolyte's tunic guided me to the secretary's office; walking that polished wood corridor brought back memories of my own time as an apprentice. The Secretary showed me in, and left.

This was obviously to be an official audience. Sir Terrance Whitehorn, Guildmaster, wore his robes of office adorned with magical symbols. A portly figure with a stoop of white hair, his manner fitted a public representative of a large organisation.

"Sit down, Master Weaver."

We were not alone. Another mage sat next to Sir Terrance at the table; a thin man, also wearing robes of office, his ascetic face suffused with high colour.

Sir Terrance introduced him. "Master Packman, one of my special investigators."

I felt undressed and at a disadvantage, guessing this was the mage Fox had been denied access to.

"Summarise your position in this affair," the Guildmaster said.

I did that, and waited. Packman looked as if he'd like to speak first, but daren't. Finally, Sir Terrance nodded. "Your actions so far are in order, Master Weaver. However, it might be best if you do not pursue the matter further. We can't afford to be mixed up in murder."

I protested, "But the police aren't going to drop a murder enquiry."

"Of course not — but they can manage well enough without our help, I hope."

"Are you covering up for a murderer?" I blurted out.

Sir Terrance looked shocked.

Packman snapped, "Be careful what you say, Weaver. Barton was a crank, one of those freaks who believe their ridiculous ideas will one day replace orthodox magic. His invention could harm us all."

I leaned forward in my chair. "So you had a motive to kill him."

"That will do," Sir Terrance said firmly. "Packman did not kill Barton. You have my word for it."

"Will he let me give him the black box test?"

"That will not be necessary." Sir Terrance said. "He was investigating Barton's claim on behalf of the Guild. I administered the test myself."

That should have been the end of it. I couldn't insist that Packman take the test
again; it would have looked as if I doubted the Guildmaster's word. But Packman couldn't leave well alone.

"Barton was a charlatan and no doubt someone he duped caught up with him. His invention is no more than pseudo-magic!"

Sir Terrance sighed. "Let me put it this way, Master Weaver. The sooner Barton's machine is forgotten, the better for all of us. Any alternative form of power threatens every mage. If allowed to get out of hand, it could destroy our society."

"But his friend, Meredith, is planning to develop the invention," I said.

Sir Terrance frowned. "That would not be in the best interests of the Guild, so let us hope he fails. Now, I suggest you let the police handle this matter. No mage should be involved. I have not, in my term of office, felt the need to revoke a licence..."

I found I was sweating, and my voice developed a croak.

"Guildmaster, I'm asking for a little time. Time to prove a mage did not murder Barton — prove it to the police. This would get the Guild out of an unpleasant situation."

Packman opened his mouth to speak, but Sir Terrance waved him to silence. He studied my face for a long moment.

"There may be something in what you say. Very well, Master Weaver, you have forty-eight hours. At the end of that time, you will withdraw from the case. Is that understood?"

"Yes," I said, "and thanks."

When I left the Guildhall, I didn't stop for lunch. I knew what I wanted to do — get a line on the background of the people involved.

I started with Joe Barton, and found he was well-known in untalented circles. It appeared that the magnetic generator was by no means his first invention. He'd devised several small mechanical devices that worked and brought in a regular income. His wife had died in childbirth.

On the other hand, Ernst Meredith was not in the same class as an experimental philosopher. His inventions rarely worked and didn't make him money. He was strictly a second-rater.

My local cop-shop informed me that Bessie Barton had been in trouble with the law on a number of occasions. Apparently she was a bit of a militant and adopted all sorts of political and revolutionary causes. She'd also had more than one row with her father — and his will was in her favour.

Packman, being a mage, I had to investigate warily. But he was on record in a number of back issues of the Magician's Circular, where he advocated banning all "Inventions of the Devil!" This confirmed my opinion that he was prejudiced, a reactionary, and against any kind of change.

Time was short, so I hired a magic carpet to reach Belsize Park, and called on Bessie. This visit I got to see the interior of the house, which was as comfortably upholstered as Bessie herself.

"Well," she demanded, as I sat in the kitchen drinking coffee, "what did your precious Guild have to say?"

"The name of the investigating mage is Packman, and the Guildmaster's sure he is innocent —"

"Huh! And you believe that?"

"There are other possibilities."

I said, "but that doesn't mean I've crossed Packman off my list."
I didn't like to think the Guild would cover up for murder, and sighed. So many dreadful things are done in what the perpetrators consider 'a good cause'.

"So what are you going to do?" Bessie asked.

"I want two things. The name and address of your father's regular physician — "

"Dr. Knutson. He's just around the corner — the house with green gates."

"— and I'd like to borrow a book on magnetic theory. It's not a subject I know much about."

"That's easy. Father's got — "

She was crying suddenly; grief often comes late, I've noticed. She hurried from the kitchen and, when she returned, she'd washed her face and carried a tome.

I glanced at the title as she handed it to me: *A Discourse on Magnetism: Observations and Applications.*

"Ernst took father's invention home with him," Bessie said. "He's determined to carry on where Dad left off."

"I'd better have his address too."

I finished my coffee and said, "I must go. There are questions I need to ask Dr. Knutson."

I found the house with green gates easily enough. The physician I had to wait to see; he had a queue of patients, none of whom looked happy.

When he finally spared me a few minutes, I saw why. Knutson was a fierce-looking man with unruly red hair, and his idea of a bedside manner was an array of instruments that would have looked appropriate in a torture chamber.

"Yes?" he barked.

I showed my I.D.

"I'm investigating Joe Barton's death on behalf of his daughter. I'm interested in learning about his usual state of health."

"A weakling. Didn't look after himself; his daughter didn't feed him right. If a goose said 'Boo', he'd collapse."

I walked a couple of blocks until I found Meredith's house. It was old and not kept up, and looked as if it needed a lot of money spent on it. I used the knocker and waited.

Ernst Meredith, when he came to the door, was not smiling. "What is it now? I'm busy."

"I'm calling about Joe Barton's magnetic generator," I said. "Can you arrange to demonstrate it tomorrow?"

Now he smiled. "Yes, yes, of course. I'll be pleased to do anything that will promote Joe's work. Shall we say, three o'clock? I'll have everything ready."

"Fine."

I used a messenger service to inform the people I wanted at the demonstration, and gave some thought to the rag doll with the ice pick through it.

I decided Lucy was the prop I needed for my own demonstration. Lucy Gosling was an old friend, and a witch. With her cat, Sting, she could give the sort of performance I wanted.

All set to catch a murderer, I went home and used my crystal ball to put Lucy in the picture. Then I settled down to read *A Discourse on Magnetism.*

I rose late, and lunched early to give myself plenty of time to reach Belsize Park. The sun shone and I felt pleasantly relaxed in a multi-coloured shirt and designer cords.

When I arrived, Meredith was bolting Barton's device to a work-bench on the
lawn. He had a treadle connected to the copper wire between the poles of the magnet.

His roly-poly body quivered with excitement.

"A small improvement of my own," he said modestly. "The treadle will give more speed, and so more power."

Superintendent Fox arrived next, his undertaker's face wearing an expression that might have been satisfaction.

"The alchemist reports finding no trace of poison in Barton's body," he informed me quietly. Hinting, of course, that lack of poison indicated murder by magic.

"Did you bring the doll?" I asked.

He nodded.

Just then, Bessie came from the house carrying a tray with sandwiches and lemonade. Maybe she thought she was organising a garden party.

Packman arrived, dressed in a tight-fitting suit. His expression was sour.

"Sir Terrance insisted I attend," he complained.

Meredith clapped his hands to get attention. "In five minutes, I shall prove to your satisfaction the value of experimental philosophy."

A flying carpet swooped down to land on the lawn. Lucy Gosling, playing a stage witch for all she was worth, wore a grey wig under a high peaked hat. Sting's black fur bristled and his tail swished disapprovingly.

"I'm ready now," Meredith said. "Gather round, everybody."

We gathered.

"When the treadle gets up speed, the rotating copper wire between the poles will generate magnetic flux. This flux will pass along the wires, here and here. Now if you watch this single thin wire, you will observe the effect. It will get so hot it will glow!"

He began to pedal, slowly at first, then building up speed. His plump legs pumped away till he became breathless, and I thought he should have given that job to Bessie, but refrained from saying so. We all watched as the wire glowed cherry-red. Despite being a mage, I was impressed.

I held out my hand to Fox and he gave me the rag doll. I handed it to Lucy, who bent over to let Sting sniff it.

"A witch's familiar can smell out a murderer." I said loudly. "Whoever made this doll killed Joe Barton."

Sting twitched his whiskers and looked around the circle of onlookers. Packman's lip curled, but he took a step backwards. Bessie crossed herself. Meredith kept pedalling as if his life depended on it.

"Search him out, Sting," Lucy urged. "Find!"

The black cat stalked forward, stiff-legged, sniffed at Fox and Packman, ignored me and paused in front of Bessie Barton.

"I never —" she began, and the cat moved on.

Sting reached Meredith, pedalling fit to bust, arched its back and spat.

Ernst Meredith almost fell over. His hand reached out to steady himself and he grasped bare copper wire. He screamed and doubled over, holding his hand as he rolled on the ground.

"It burns ...!"

"There's your murderer, Superintendent," I said.

"Get that thing away from me," Meredith babbled. "I admit it. I killed Joe ... I would have been famous. Help me."

"Thing," Lucy said indignantly, and called Sting off.
I bent over Meredith, studying his hand. There was a discoloured patch where the skin had burnt.

"You're lucky," I said. "You knew Barton had a weak heart, and guessed a shock would kill him."

Smoke rose from the magnetic generator as copper wire melted.

Packman's face twisted in a sneer. "So much for pseudo-magic," he said, and turned and walked away.

Fox snapped handcuffs on Ernst Meredith and recited an official warning.

Bessie looked pale. "I shall join the movement to bring back capital punishment," she declared. "A prison sentence is not harsh enough for killers."

As I watched Lucy and Sting take off on their carpet, I reflected that Sir Terrance didn't have anything to worry about. Yet.

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**WATCHER AT THE WINDOW**

Winds chant a cheerless threnody,
darkest night claws at me,
Moon-eye blinks orange,
summer heat's stifling cloak
rises to gag me.

Silence fills me with fear —
these streets are a dead place
where there is no escape.
I long to close my eyes and sleep,
lethargy weighs me down,
but though I fear, I must wait,
watching at the window —
for what?

I never know the answer even
when the red of the rising sun
brings the lost sanity
of blessed dawn.

Janet P. Reedman
IGGZ HAD NEVER KNOWN his father. His mother had eaten him on the first night of their union, and though it was the most natural thing in the world, he'd never quite forgiven her for it.

He emerged from his mud nest and climbed down its stilt set into the yellow mud, laying there to sink to the shallow bottom whilst stretching his eight legs so the sun could best evaporate his excess joint lubricant.

An odd thing was mating, he thought, as he idly watched a young slime-skate glide across the surface of his mud garden - throttling it with his tongue before it could damage his carefully arranged algae formations. Mating, he thought again, was the only thing that he and the Outside Worlders had in common, and quite frankly, he'd give anything to be one of their alien species right now, and so avoid the approaching crisis in his life.

Outside Worlders did it differently, so he'd heard. For them, mating only meant the wondrous creation of a new life and not, as in his case, the imminent end of one's own existence.

His own species, the Iyoggz, had a set way of doing things that had served them adequately enough over the past millennia. It was their custom that after the male had served his purpose to the female, he would lay spreadeagled beneath her mouthparts and let her devour him from the feet up, as a sign of his total gratefulness towards her. And as the female always used to lay at least two fertile eggs, there had never been any problems with the Iyoggz population. One egg would be given to the Kravies, to be eaten as payment for building the female her incubation nest, and the other would be hatched as a replacement for the dearly departed father.

That was The Way, and had always been The Way. Until now, of course.

For now the situation had changed. Iggz had witnessed a dramatic decline in his species' numbers over the past thousand years or so. Without apparent reason, the female Iyoggz had been laying one egg more often than the usual two, and that of course had upset them greatly — as they had no say over their bodily functions — and angered the Kravies, who still demanded one egg as payment for their nest building. Thus, for the last couple of centuries, the Iyoggz elders had died of old age (or certain other causes) faster than the young could be produced, and apart from one lonely female in a nest nearby, all were gone forever and all the fertile males remaining had been eaten.

Eaten, that was, except for Iggz.

He brushed his abdomen against his nest stilt in order to give it a fresh gum-coating to making climbing up and down easier, and turned his eyes to the sky, which looked a particularly gloomy shade of green this morning. Today's the day, he thought, and a sick feeling started broiling in both of his stomachs. He was going to die today. There was no getting around it. The entire future of his race rested on his arm sockets alone, and he was duty-bound to end his life to save the Iyoggz from extinction.
If Yorgtz, the last of the females, would mate with Iggz without him asking the Kravies to build her an incubation nest, then she would be able to keep the single fertile egg and so perhaps provide other males to keep the species alive.

He gave up with re-gumming his stilt, as he knew he would never again have cause to climb it, and instead looked sombrelly at what had been his home for the past sixty years.

It wasn’t much of a place. In the long-gone days when he had been acquainted with other males, he knew of some Iyoggz who had owned two or three nests each and a mud garden that stretched for as much as four tree-spaces in length and breadth, containing as many different types and colours of algae as the swamp could grow. But he only had a small place, as the trees which bordered it were tightly packed in this part of the swamp — and being the last fertile male, his waste produce wasn’t enough to harbour many types of algae except for the common blue stuff and some of the clear jelly variety. But for all its failings it was his own home, which he loved. So he tried not to think about today being the last remaining one of his life.

After a pause of a few solemn moments, during which Iggz enjoyed his bath in the yellow mud for what would be the final time, he bent his limbs, drove his feet to the bottom of the swamp, and raised his body out of his soggy garden. The sun had dried off the excess lubricant on his joints (a problem which he’d inherited from his father ... so he’d heard), and apart from the sorrow in his heart and the sickness in his stomach, he felt remarkably vigorous and refreshed.

He collected his mating bag — a vitally important requirement — from where he’d left it the night before, hanging by its vine-straps from a node point on his nest stilt, and hoisted it onto his back with a wet plop as it landed in the water that had collected in the groove along his shell. Now he was ready to pay Yorgtz his respects. There was nothing to hold him here except happy memories, he told himself, so he would leave immediately without looking back. or there would be bitterness as well as fear when the moment of his devouring finally came.

But Iggz did look back, of course; crane his eyestalks around the sides of his head to see the little mud nest where he’d spent so many contented years. A deep sigh whistled from him as he paddled away (being careful not to disturb his algae arrangements) and set off into the inky depths of the swamp. His pace was slow, and the densely packed trees scraped against his joints as he passed by.

The clearing Iggz eventually came across marked the halfway point between his and Yorgtz’s nest. It had been specially made by the hands and feet of his ancestors many thousands of years ago, when the females always laid at least two eggs per single mating.

Trees had been chewed off at their bases and laid around the clearing’s sides, piled up to make what were now algae-coated and decomposing walls. In the large area of artificially created swampland many clukz sticks had been planted, which now stood tall and spiky in the patch of sunlight that fell upon them. These were the Ceremonial Plants; their thick, hollow stems grown in nothing but the finest mud in order that they would sound a clear note when struck against an Iyoggz’ shell.

Igzz waded amongst them and swung the mating bag down from his back. Now that there were no other Iyoggz around to have need of clukz, the plants grew huge and strong, and there were many good examples to choose from that should impress
a female such as Yortz with their deep, resounding notes.

Iggz snapped off two likely looking specimens and scraped away their few feathery leaves. Then he grasped them both in his first set of limbs and beat them experimentally against his shell — making two powerful tones that vibrated deep within his body and bounced back from the clearing's algae-smeared walls.

Iggz was very impressed with his clukz sticks, so after scooping some of the pith out of one of them to make its note slightly higher, he put them in his mating bag, slung it onto his back again, and set off in search of Yortz once more, now fully prepared to perform his solemn duty.

But as he walked... slowing right down, now that he was so close to Yortz's nest... he thought of his garden and the life he'd enjoyed so much there. He'd never done a lot with himself, of course. Bathing in the mud used to be his main activity — that and making sure the slime-skates kept off his property. But he would always return to his nest each night with a feeling of contentment inside of him, and looking forward to the new shape he could stir his algae into the following day.

He liked the thickness of the air in the swamp. The way it was possible to taste it when he stuck his tongue through the nest entrance every morning — and by the feel of it being able to tell what creatures were up and about, or how many logs had burst in the night, releasing beautifully acrid-smelling gas from their trunks.

And the sun on his back had also felt good. It wasn't a very big sun. Other planets had larger, brighter ones, so the occasional Outside Worlder had said. But it was his own sun, and he wouldn't have had it any other way.

But what use was dwelling on the past? Iggz wondered, manoeuvring through another clump of trees whose bark against his knees was stirring up the old joint fluid again. All that was over forever; and no more would he see his dear sweet home. No more would he eat the juicy bulb-bodies that floated through the mud during dusklight; or swim in the deeper swampwater past the dam of dead branches at the back of the garden, where he liked to sink right to the bottom and lay there for hours, buried in the silt. No more would he do any of this, he knew — and scraped through the last of the trees to finally stand in Yortz's clearing, floundering in her garden until it was halfway up his eye-stalks and gazing at her enormous nest set on three gnarled stilts with a mixture of contemplation and freezing terror.

His time had come. No Kravies were waiting patiently nearby to build the incubation nest, because he had never visited their lair many miles beyond the swamp where the grass grew long and marshy, to inform them of any forthcoming event. Now he was alone with Yortz, lying asleep in her dwelling high above him. Just the two of them... and oh so soon there would only be the one.

Wading forward a little and skirting around so as not to disturb her algae patterns (mostly of the quite rare red variety, he noticed), Iggz heaved himself up onto a smallish bank of relatively unsodden mud and lay his mating bag upon it.

Now he would begin the courting ritual handed down by his father; going right back to a time when instincts governed its contents more than the mere ceremonial display which it had now become.

He opened the bag and took out his two clukz sticks — hoping that Yortz would find their tone pleasing for otherwise she would refuse to mate with him — and held them aloft, preparing to strike the first blows against his shell and breathing deeply and nervously through his vents.
Iggz brought his left stick down very softly — punnnng — against his side. The low tone rang out mellowly across Yorgtz’s garden, carrying up to her nest to wake her from her slumbers.

He waited a moment, his mouthparts suddenly stiff and dry, but there were no other sounds or signs of movement within the nest after the echoes of his stick had died away.

Iggz was suddenly worried. Had she died in her sleep? It was quite common for females to die whilst sleeping, and Yorgtz was surely at least three times older than he was. Maybe it was too late and his species was already as good as doomed.

He tried again, striking with both sticks together this time and making a louder, more piercing sound that Yorgtz must surely hear. It scared a couple of slime-skates from their browsing and they skittered across the top of the mud — one of them careering into Yorgtz’s nest stilts in its hurry to be away. And then there was the dry sound of many legs rubbing against hard muddied walls, and a sprinkle of earth fell from the nest entrance to splash into the swamp below.

Yorgtz had heard him, and one of her eye-stalks poked out of her dwelling to scan lazily over the surface of the beautiful garden.

Iggz wasted no time. He drew attention to himself by beating his clukz sticks in a loud, throbbing rhythm that reverberated off the branches of the surrounding trees to fall on Yorgtz’s ear pits in a way which, he hoped, would make her feel accommodating towards him, even if the absence of any Kravies had made it all somewhat of a surprise for her.

She looked directly at him with both eyes now, and after a moment began climbing down her stilts, giving them a fresh coating of gum as she did so.

Now she peered at him suspiciously, sinking slowly into the ooze and digging shallow trenches with her enormous rear legs. A thought struck Iggz, who hurriedly lay on his back and went through the necessary procedure to let her short-sighted gaze recognise him as a male member of her own species. He wagged his front legs at her in rapid staccato strokes, then transferred his sticks to his second set of limbs and struck them twice and twice again upon his belly. Low, dull tones drifted across the short space towards her — made muffled-sounding due to Iggz’s softer underside.

Yorgtz moved slowly forward, bobbing her body up and down to signal that she’d recognised him and was interested. She was much larger than he was, and her mouthparts — clearly visible from where he lay — were more heavily muscled than his own and much more able to crush. The sight of them made Iggz suddenly nervous. He felt joint lubricant start to trickle down his upturned legs.

Quickly he flipped back over and struck two more heavy blows against his shell, before Yorgtz had time to draw any closer. Still waving his front legs at her hypnotically, he retreated a little, and with his rear feet picked up the mating bag in readiness of the ceremony’s final act.

Yorgtz bobbed up and down again, her belly splashing the surface of the mud in a series of wet slaps. Now her jaws were moving too; anticipating the tasty morsel that would soon be her dessert.

Iggz tried to keep calm, reminding himself forcefully that this was his duty. He must mate with her in order that their species be saved, and in doing so sacrifice his own life to her, and all worldly pleasures along with it.

She took another pace towards him, her legs carving straight through the centre of her previously neatly arranged red algae. That was no way to treat a well made pattern, Iggz thought. Yorgtz obviously hadn’t the respect for her garden that he
had for his. And to think it would be he who was about to destroy himself for such as she to go on living. Sometimes it seemed as if there was no justice in all the swamp.

Now she was but two more steps of those long, scrawny legs away, and the barbs on her knees glittered with an ominous gleam in the sunlight streaming through the clearing. How each one of them would dig into him when the dreadful moment came. How those teeth would penetrate his shell, to suck the very life juices out of him.

He tried to put this out of his mind, instead placing his clukz sticks back in his mating bag and holding it out to Yorgtz with his arms at full stretch. Here was the ceremonial gift, to be taken graciously by the female before the grisly show commenced.

She snatched it from him so quickly that he felt his limbs pop in their sockets, whipping her eye-stalks over the contents and giving it only a cursory glance before casting it roughly aside. It landed right in the middle of one of her algae formations and destroyed it completely.

Iggz was so shocked by this terrible act that he even turned his eyes away from Yorgtz for a moment to stare in disbelief at the carnage she had made of her garden. The wonderful red algae — which he would have given both his rear legs to own — now lay in scattered patches all over the clearing, wavering dejectedly in the ripples made by Yorgtz's wading.

How could she do such a thing? She obviously lacked the least bit of respect for the riches that the swamp provided. And to think that her offspring would be multiplying in the world when Iggz was gone forever. Well, perhaps her devouring him was a good thing after all... at least he wouldn't be around to see it.

A sound of heavy breathing brought him back to the present. She was directly in front of him now, standing opposite on the mud bank and bobbing frantically for all she was worth. She was hungry for him in both meanings of the word, and sliding her forelimbs sensuously over her bristly thighs.

Yorgtz drummed her feet against the mud. Come to me, they said — and for all Iggz's horror and distaste, the beat played on his primal instincts and drove him towards her. How unfair was life, he thought, as he placed his front legs on her knees and started the climb up onto her back. How unfair that the last female around should be such a bloodthirsty old harpy. He pulled himself up over the nodes of her eye-stalks, passing so close to her terrible mouthparts just below that he felt her hot breath bending his body-hair. He didn't want this! He wanted to be back in his garden with his common blue algae, eating bulb-bodies and wallowing in his glorious mud.

Yorgtz drummed her feet again. Mate! the rhythm said, and between the individual thumps Iggz thought he heard saliva dripping onto the bank below.

He was on her back now, trying to shut his mind to the new message coming from her signalling, which referred contemplatively to the taste of his innards. Quickly he cleaned his eye-stalks and made himself ready and presentable. To prolong the act further would only make her angry — and then he would die a slower and all the more painful death.

He tapped a simple beat on the section of shell between her eyes to signal his readiness. In response she lowered her body to the ground, fencing him in with her eight raised legs. Now! said her still drumming front feet, and just as Iggz was about to do the very last deed of his existence, an idea crept stealthily into his mind.

It was a wicked idea as he well knew, and in any other circumstances he would
never have stooped to contemplate it. No other male Iyoggz had ever attempted it before, but drastic situations called for drastic measures, and if he had courage enough to go through with it, it could mean that he would see his beautiful dwelling again after all.

Yortz was suddenly puzzled. Igzz was standing in completely the wrong position and had as yet made no move to mate with her. NOW! she urged again, hammering with her impatient feet; and whilst Igzz thought happy thoughts of a pleasant bath in his own mud back home, he opened his jaws wide...and sank them in.

PERMUTATIONS

..... I mourn
For all the people never born;
For all the seed washed down the loo
In plastic packages; then, too,
For all the little eggs released
And pre-conceptionally deceased,
And even for the ones that tried
But, falling short, gave up and died.
The poor things had their chance and blew it —
A faster swimmer beat them to it!

Gaynel Thorold
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SUN RISE. Sun set. Much the same.

He watched from the front porch as the black of night turned to the grey of morning. Two hours passed, and he watched the grey return to black.

"Two hours to sunrise," he said, and he drew in a lung-full of warm, temperate air, and then released it again in a long, quivering sigh. He turned on the small kerosene lamp that was perched on the step, between his knees.

He lit a cigarette, and looked back at the fly spotted door shutter of the shack.

"Two hours of darkness."

He sucked hard on the cigarette, and looked up at the black, cloudless, starless sky.

"Mary," he whispered.

He looked down at the glowing, yellow-gutted old lamp. "Mary."

He kicked the lamp savagely, sending it spinning and cartwheeling into the night sky.

He rose, shaking to his feet, and thundered into the shack, the glowing cigarette erect in his mouth like an ancient warrior's charging lance.

The lamp rolled over and over, retching and stuttering then exploding in a blue, liquid cough of flame, leaving a trail of white fir in its wake.

The man would try to repair the lamp two sunrises later, and eventually abandon it like some ship wreck in the writhing sea of sand.

"Time has passed," said the man into the old, clanking, spooled tape recorder's microphone.

"God knows how long I've been in this place." He shook his head, stubbed out the smouldering cigarette stem, and lit another. "Too damned long."

The man slouched back in his blackened wooden rocking chair, and knocked some cigarette ash off the straight-legged oak table.

"The last thing I remember before I woke up here is going to bed in my own room in Newcastle, and then..."

He rubbed his forehead, and jammed the cigarette back into his mouth.

"And if I walk in any direction, within an hour I end up back here. Right back here!"

The man turned off the tape recorder, rewound it, and pressed play.

As the tape recorder played he walked over to the other side of the room and picked up a large pack of unmarked cards. He began slowly shuffling through them, looking thoughtfully into the sparkling log fire.
It watched.
From the fire-licked shadows the tormentor watched.
Through valleys of fire, valleys of shadow it had come to this place, to this cold, dark place.

It watched the tormented man, the frail stupid man, and it could not help but grin.
A fitting subject.
Weak, stupid, cowardly, evil, greedy man.
A fitting subject.

"Jesus," whispered the man, his cigarette dropping from his mouth, the cards spraying into the fire.
He ran over to the tape recorder, and pressed the RECORD button. The tape jerked and rattled and finally snapped, but the man did not notice. His eyes were fixed on the shifting shadows behind the slab of orange light from the fire, his finger jammed down on the useless record button.

"It's here, Oh Mary, it's here again! Oh God, mercy, please!" He collapsed into the rocking chair, the tape recorder abandoned, forgotten.
The thing, the tormentor, moved closer, grinning hideously, its blackened skin crackling like a thousand dancing whips.

"Not another night of this pain, agony." He choked back tears and moved his eyes away from the thing. "I know, I know, have mercy on me, I know where I am, I know!"
The scream ripped into the blackened desert night, battering the night sky until morning broke.

The next morning the man appeared at the door of the shack, his cheeks stained with tears, stuttering, shaking, gibbering pleas for mercy.
After an hour he had eaten his way through a box of cigarettes, and had composed himself. He looked down at the lamp in the dust, picked it up, and took a large piece of curved glass from the centre of the shattered lamp.

He looked up at the grey mid-day sky.
One hour to sunset.
To darkness.
He slowly moved the curving shard towards his bared throat, his fingers trembling, gasping sobs erupting from his throat, he eased the sliver closer, and closer.

"Please," he whispered, squeezing his eyes closed, his hands shaking uncontrollably, the jagged tip of the glass scratching the skin of his neck. "Please," he groaned.

He opened his hand, and dropped the curving glass onto the grey sand. He opened his eyes, and released a shrill meowing whisper from his throat.
The man staggered to his feet, his legs swaying uneasily, and he turned into the shack.
His eyes widened in horror and disbelief, and he fell onto his knees again, his heart pounding like a trip-hammer.
He was kneeling on the jutting lip of a cliff.
The cliff was like a ragged black incisor rising a thousand feet or more from a
dancing sea of fire.

The flames spat from the base of the cliff like blood-red spinning surf, roaring like a thousand breaking waves, and spitting oven-hot air into the man's face.

Out across the sea the flames leapt and collided in reds, blacks and whites, the colours breeding and intertwining like sickening, lurching surrealist art. Black smoke belched from the sea like the fire's bastard child, covering the grey sky like a blackened cloak, spinning and rippling like the belly of a dragon leaping from hell.

And all of the man's nightmares twisted and leapt in that burning carmine sea. His mouth moved around one single word, but his constricted throat would not, could not release that one last horrible truth.

He staggered to his feet, and lurched towards the crumbling edge of the precipice, coughing hawking breaths as the heat stole the air from his lungs.

And then it began.

It started as a low moan, like a distant, cursing wind, and slowly it grew and grew, until it became a deafening, soul devouring crescendo.

The screams, the gibbering, tormented, insane screams shredded the air. The man watched as the vile sea spat free its burden.

Bodies floated to the surface of the sea, blackened, thrashing, matchstick demons, and as he watched they doubled, trebled and multiplied again and again until the flames were completely obscured, and the sea was a black, thrashing, flailing Babel of the arms, legs and heads of the damned. The flames broke onto the shore, wailing like a thousand dying souls, and as they broke hands lurched from the licking tongues of fire, and scrabbled at the demon toothed base of the blackened cliff.

The man turned, and ran screaming from the howling sea of flame.

The last few minutes of daylight dripped from the darkening grey of the sky as the man reached the slanting corrugated shack.

In the doorway of the shack, against the orange bow of the fire, a walking putrescence moved.

The man spat the sparkling stub of a cigarette from his mouth, crushing it into the grey sand, and he walked silently into the shack.

Sun rise. Sun set. Much the same.

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The Neptune Encounter

DUNCAN LUNAN

IN a previous 'DREAM' I reported on the imminent flyby of Neptune, with emphasis on the problems Voyager 2 had encountered in flight. So close to the end of the planetary encounters, it seemed wise not to build up too many hopes. But despite the extraordinary difficulties of the flyby, a major success has been achieved.

Neptune has been confirmed to be an active world — much more so than Uranus, which appeared nearly featureless. The existence of clouds and a warm layer in the atmosphere had been known since the 70's, and was put down to tidal drag from the large satellite Triton. The effect would be accentuated by the fact that Triton is in retrograde orbit, against the rotation of the planet.

It seems less likely that Triton alone can account for what we 've now seen. The huge dark spot on Neptune, and the mottling around the polar zones, imply internal heating on a scale comparable to Jupiter and Saturn, powered by major processes of gravitational settling.

One difference from Jupiter, however, is the existence of high, bright linear clouds, apparently forming when jetstreams in the upper atmosphere are forced upwards by the circular storm of the dark spot. On Jupiter, too, the Great Red Spot projects five miles above the ammonia cloud deck; but in the immense surface gravity of Jupiter, five miles is a long way and wind streams are drawn into the spot and around it rather than simply being deflected upwards.

Settling processes within Neptune could support the hypothesis that Neptune formed 400 million years after the other planets, causing the final bombardment which swept through the rest of the Solar System. Triton is almost the first body of any size not to show the traces of that bombardment. If we could see Uranus as it was 400 million years ago, would its activity still be as Neptune’s is now?

However, the other three bodies without final bombardment scars are Earth, Io and Europa; the three with surfaces which are fully geologically active. Four years ago I myself predicted active volcanoes on Triton, tidally powered, by analogy with Io and Europa. These have now been confirmed by Voyager, although the extraordinary pink and blue colouring of the surface has still be be explained.

Using the reasoning of the Soviet astronomer Vsekhvyatskiy (who predicted active volcanoes on all the Solar System's giant satellites), I went on to predict in an award-winning essay that Neptune would have incomplete, broken rings. Optical evidence for such ring arcs was found only a week later, before the essay was even finished. As late as August 31st, it seemed that there was at least one broken ring, though now it’s reported to be complete, though clumpy. Whether the clumpiness is due to injections of material from Triton remains to be seen. Within the clumpy ring there are at least two more regular rings, and a broad band of dust. Probably these particles originate from the six new inner moons which have been discovered.

Since I’ve done fairly well so far, let me throw in one more speculative idea. It’s long been suggested that the weird orbits of Triton and the other known satellite, Nereid, are the results of a catastrophic encounter with Pluto, whose orbit crosses Neptune's. Since we discovered Pluto's moon Charon, and so became able to calculate the masses of both, it’s become obvious that there must have been a larger body — the undiscovered Tenth Planet — of which Pluto was a satellite, now fragmented.
Or was it? In my essay I suggested that Pluto might have been a satellite of Neptune, expelled in the encounter. Was Triton then originally a satellite of the Tenth Planet? Does that explain why Triton has no bombardment scars? But if that were so, we have to ask why the Tenth Planet should be in retrograde orbit, and apparently older than Neptune. Could it be because it's a stray world, captured by the Sun as it formed? The astronomer Harlow Shapley believed that such stray worlds are common in interstellar space. But if all that is true, then the Voyager flyby of Triton may have given us our first view of a world which is not by origin a member of our Solar System at all.

As the flood of information about Neptune from Voyager 2 continues to be digested, inevitably what filters through the media is patchy and sometimes contradictory. Here is some of what I've picked up:

The length of Neptune's day is known at last — 16 hours, 3 minutes. The hoped-for magnetic field readings were obtained, and surprising: the field's axis is 10,000 km off-centre and 0 degrees off the rotational axis, suggesting that it's generated near the surface rather than in the core. So now we know that the four giant planets of the Solar System have quite different magnetic field structures, with no two the same or even similar. Bursts of radio noise were detected from the planet, and like those of Uranus were sharper than those of Jupiter and Saturn.

The great dark spot on Neptune is as large as the Earth, and a trail of dark vortices leads away from it. The dark material may be hydrogen sulphide, whereas the high bright clouds are methane ice, 50-75 km. above the main visible surface. The highest measured windspeed was 300 metres/sec (750 mph).

The atmosphere of Triton, the strange large moon, turns out to be nitrogen (like Titan, the large moon of Saturn). Triton's atmosphere is thin, but may be enough to protect the surface from radiation bombardment in Neptune's magnetosphere — unlike Jupiter's volcanic moon Io, whose atmosphere is seeded with sodium sputtered off the surface by radiation bombardment. Yet like Io Triton shows strong signs of volcanic activity, including faulting and dark plumes — like the wind-blown ones on Mars, but here perhaps due to geysers. There are frozen lakes, probably of methane, but the polar sea of liquid methane wasn't confirmed. Triton's surface temperature and atmospheric pressure are both too low to allow it.

Nereid, the other known moon, is very dark. At least one of the six 'new' moons is larger than it, however, and another is highly irregular in shape; another is in an orbit which can't immediately be explained, because it should interact with Triton.

Detailed examination of the Triton pictures has revealed an active volcano, with plumes reaching up to five miles. Views of Triton's south pole suggest that volcanic plumes can reach heights of 12 to 20 miles. It remains to be seen whether material can be injected into Neptune's clumpy ring, or expelled from the system, as I suggested in my prizewinning essay in 1986.

Previously I had reported on the successful launch of the Magellan spacecraft to Venus, and the August issue of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory’s Magellan Bulletin confirms that all is well. The spacecraft has successfully conducted Trajectory Correction Manoeuvres (TCM's) which put it on course for arrival at Venus on August 10th, 1990.

Another spacecraft now heading for Venus is Galileo, at last safely in flight just seven years behind schedule. The extraordinary thing is that it was originally intended to go by way of Mars, its final destination being Jupiter. The combination of Space Shuttle and Inertial Upper Stage wasn't ready when the launch window for that mission closed in 1982. Galileo was redesigned to be launched by the liquid-fuelled Centaur-G booster, to be carried by the Shuttle, but that was cancelled after the loss of the Challenger. Redesigned again, Galileo has been launched by Shuttle/IUS after all — but to reach
Jupiter it has to go through a series of Venus and Earth encounters to gain energy. Its arrival at Jupiter will be twenty years after the project began, and almost as long since we thought it was safe when the political attempt to cancel it was defeated in the US Congress, giving birth to the space activist movement in the USA. Previously named Pioneer-Jupiter Orbiter, the probe was then renamed Galileo, but we had no idea of the struggle to come.
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1. Gall's went Into Infinity (4)
5. Clue G for a saga's hero (5)
9. Burrough's wrote about the Earth's(4)
11. Evil city of Lythion (4)
12. It seems he had a castle not an ark (4)
13. Collingwood's Flying Fish had one (3)
14. Strange cowboys for a quest! (3)
16. It's a change to train with gusto for
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17. What Mary Shelley did to Frank-eneinstein, he did to the monster (7,3)
21. Morgan was Prince of this (3)
22. Its Parliament wanted a magic Lord (3)
24. Gawron apologised for it (4)
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27. Anderson's were of Ganymede (5)
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1. Of New-mown Hay, perhaps (5)
2. What Vance's Monsters did (7)
3. Plum Rain Scroll's Being of Everlasting
Wisdom (5)
4. By which Heinlein's hero was raised (10)
5. One of Tuttes! (10)
6. Fallen house of a wedding attendant? (5)
7. Sohl's was altered (3)
8. He ran (5)
10. Bishop's Funeral For The Eyes —
(2, 4)
14. Feature from the map of Maske (7)
15. Vance's Naughty Nineteen (6)
17. Men of Mars! (5)
18. Dr. Who sought a silver one (5)
19. Performed by the Changer and Three (5)
20. Moria was famed for them (5)
23. Goulart or Hubbard? (3)

Answers on page 71
"Back In The Dreamtime"

P.C. FEIRTEAR

ALL OF US dream every night and for a considerable part of the night. Some dreams may be pleasant; others, frightening; while others may be non-descript. Although dreams are unique to each individual, there is a typical range of dreams which people tend to have: of flying, falling, and of being chased; of stealing and of finding money; dreams of one's teeth or hair falling out; of violence, of sex, of being naked in a public place, and so on.

To most of us dreams are irrational and unimportant things, merely the confused by-product of a drifting, orderless mind at rest. Such was not the view in the ancient world, however. For our distant ancestors the dream was a vital, meaningful and real experience which needed to be understood. The Assyrian civilisation — one of the first to have developed a written language — has provided the earliest records of a people's interest in the dream. Excavation of the palace of King Asurbanipal at Nineveh revealed a library containing 7,000 clay tablets, and these on translation turned out to be books on dreams and dream interpretation. Interestingly, the dreams of the ancient Assyrians were no different than the dreams people report today. However, unlike us, they believed that their dreams were caused by evil spirits who communicated directly with them through sleep. This belief in dream demons was widespread in the ancient world, and indeed is still found today among primitive peoples in various parts of the globe. In fact, a trace of this belief is to be found in the word 'nightmare' ('maer' meaning spirit, elf).

The Chinese, Indian, Greek, Egyptian and Roman civilisations also showed a similar pre-occupation with dreams. To the ancient Egyptians dreams were messages from the gods which warned them of impending dangers, or advised them of a certain course of action to take, or sometimes urged a change of their wicked ways. Many temples were erected throughout the countryside in honour of Serapis, the god of dreams, and alongside these were to be found the offices of dream interpreters. Archaeologists who uncovered one such office in Memphis saw the following legend proudly carved above the door: "I interpret dreams, having the gods' mandate to do so. Good luck to you if you enter here". A dream interpreter, it seems, was a highly regarded professional in those distant days.

If there is one event which clearly demonstrates the significance ancient peoples attached to dreams, it must be the conversion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, to Christianity. On the night before the decisive battle against his rival Maxentius, Constantine had a startling dream. In it he saw a flaming Cross with the words "By this conquer" above, and heard a voice telling him to inscribe the name of Christ on the helmets and shields of his soldiers. Constantine obeyed the command of his dream and was duly rewarded with
victory. He became a Christian and soon Christianity was to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Ironically, the rise of Christianity was to signal the fall of the dream. The Christians were set against all pagan beliefs and became increasingly hostile towards the popular practice of dream interpretation. Eventually such practices were outlawed, even under pain of death. In Egypt the magnificent temple of Serapis at Alexandria was laid to the ground. And so dreams were to fade from the spotlight of the mind, banished once more to the underworld of sleep.

The twentieth century was a re-awakening of interest in dreams. One scientific breakthrough came with the discovery that rapid eye movements (R.E.M.'s) tend to occur during dreams. When subjects are woken during this stage of sleep 75% of them will report that they were dreaming, while very few will report dreams if awakened when their eyes are not moving. R.E.M. studies provided some answers to basic questions about dreaming. For instance, how long do dreams last? It had been thought that dreams occur with great rapidity. In the nineteenth century a Frenchman, Alfred Maury, had argued this belief after having a dream one night about the French Revolution in which he was arrested, tried and sent to the guillotine. The moment when the executioner's blade fell, he awoke to find the bedrail had fallen on his head! The dream, it appeared, had occurred almost instantaneously. R.E.M. studies, however, indicate that most dreams last from several minutes to more than an hour.

Does everyone dream? The answer is "yes". People who claimed they never had dreams were soon convinced otherwise after spending a night or two in a laboratory being woken up during R.E.M. sleep. Furthermore, all the evidence suggests that between one fifth and a quarter of total sleep-time is spent dreaming.

But the most interesting results were obtained when subjects were prevented from having dreams, that is, by waking them every time they entered R.E.M. sleep. The subjects soon showed signs of great psychological stress, much more so than other subjects who were woken when they were not dreaming. The evidence seemed to suggest that there is a need for us to dream, that dreaming may have some critical role to play in our mental well-being.

This, of course, is what Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, had been saying many years earlier. After studying his own dreams and those of his patients over many years, Freud had come to the conclusion that dreams expressed our deepest, hidden wishes, presenting them as being fulfilled. This sense of dreams is portrayed in everyday speech by such remarks as: "It was like a dream come true" or "I wouldn't dream of such a thing", or "never in my wildest dreams..." and the like.

Sometimes the wish will not be disguised in any way in the dream. Freud cites the example of his youngest daughter Anna, then nineteen months old, who had been kept without food all day due to an attack of vomiting. During the night she called out excitedly in her sleep: Anna Freud, strawberries, wild strawberries, omelet, pudden! "The hungry child's wish for food was plainly being realised in her dream. But in the vast majority of dreams the wish will be disguised.
Consider the following dream of Alexander the Great, recorded in the year 322 B.C. For some time he had been laying siege to the city of Tyre, but with no success, and was about to order his army to retreat. Then he dreamt he saw a satyr (a half-human, half-bestial creature) dancing on his shield. He went to his dream interpreter, Aristander, looking for the meaning of his dream. The skillful interpreter divided the word “satyr” into “sa tyr” meaning “Tyre is yours” and therefore promised Alexander that he would be successful if he continued his siege. He did and the city fell. For the dream interpreter, Alexander’s dream was a powerful omen of good fortune. For Freud, on the other hand, the dream was a fulfillment of Alexander’s wish to capture the city.

Alexander’s wish was disguised in his dream, albeit thinly disguised. A great number of dreams, however, seem to be disguised or distorted beyond all recognition. Why should this be so? According to Freud many of the wishes are so raw and unacceptable in nature that they would seriously disturb sleep if brought naked to the attention of the sleeper. The dream therefore disturb sleep if brought naked to the attention of the sleeper. The dream therefore cloths the wish in disguise and in so doing protects our sleep.

Clearly, there are differences between the ancient and modern dream interpreters. But what both share is a belief in dreams. There is a meaning to dreams, they say. Whether they be carriers of important messages, or the speakers of our innermost desires, dreams have something to tell us. They can tell us a little of what we really are.

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**WORD GRID 7**

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John Light
A LOT of news this time of interest to 'DREAM' readers, so, for a change, we'll lead off with some of it. Firstly, some good news for all you budding authors out there — news of another professional SF 'zine due out later this year. It's called 'R.E.M.' and will be paying 'about the same rates' as 'INTERZONE'. More details to come in a later issue but they are looking for 'long short stories' and anyone who's interested can contact Arthur Straker at 19, Sandringham Road, Willesden, LONDON NW2 5EP. Hope to see some familiar names in its pages.

Gerry Connelly tells us he has sold a story to 'THE GATE'. George T. tells me that another story he had provisionally accepted has also been bought by 'THE GATE' so they do presumably intend to continue publication although (at the time of writing) only one issue has come out. Publicity for 'THE GATE' seems to have been very low. Does anyone know what is happening to it?

Bruce Baker has had his first overseas success with the acceptance of one of his yarns by a U.S. small-press mag., 'THE BLUE AND COLD CORPSE'. The story will appear in Issue 8. He also has another story upcoming in Sean Friend's 'OVERSPACE'.

Keith Brooke now has an agent for his longer work and is hoping for sales of paperback rights for his first two novels to Corgi and hardbacks to Gollancz. The novels are, apparently, a post-cyberpunk thriller and a more traditional adventure novel. He also had a story in 'OTHER EDENS III' (along with Steve Baxter) and met a lot of interesting folk at the signing.

Fans of William King will be interested to hear that he has a story in 'STARFIELD' a new anthology of Scottish SF, edited by our own Duncan Lunan. The volume is published by Orkney Press at £10.95 and includes contributors such as Chris Boyce, Donald Malcolm, Naomi Mitchison and Angus McAllister among many other.

Fans of the poetry of John Francis Haines might like to get 'SPACE-WAIN', a small booklet of his work. Price is 15p (stamps acceptable) from John Howard, Lincoln Theological College, Drury Lane, Lincoln LNI 3BP.

Phew! That just about disposes of that. Incidentally, any other 'DREAM' contributors who are having success in that great big world of publishing out there let us know and we'll keep the readers informed.

Onto the magazines. Firstly, my apologies to those of you who have written in complaining about the lack of vitriol in my column of late. The fact is I'm only too ready to blast rubbish when I come across it, but the amount of love and hard work that is put into so many small-press magazines is so obvious to me that even when they are not 100% brilliant I still feel that they need encouragement.

One magazine that needs no encouragement from me is 'BACK BRAIN RECLUSE' (currently £1.25 per issue from Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield S40 3LA, but to rise to £1.75 per copy w.e.f. Issue 15. 64pp. A5.) Chris seems to have the marketing of his mag., well in hand as, in addition to 'BACK BRAIN RECLUSE' itself he also sells BBR-related booklets, notelets, postcards and T-shirts! The man is also the co-ordinator for the 'New SF Alliance' so you might wonder how he gets the time to produce his 'zine. But he manages it and with some style.

BBR is somewhat like 'INTERZONE' in feel, so any 'hard' SF fans are unlikely to appreciate all the contents. However, the fiction is not uniquely experimental as we find if we examine the last two issues (Nos. 13 & 14).
Let's start with Issue 13. Undoubted highlight is S.M. Baxter's 'THE SPACE BUTTERFLIES'. Of all the practitioners of 'hard' (or traditional) SF Baxter seems to be the one most accepted by the more experimental SF presses, quite why I don't know, unless it is just that he is, consistently, the best new British author producing the Nivenesque type of story. Anyway, this is a typically inventive Baxter short and reminded me a bit of the story he had in 'OPUS' a while back. Another good one is Lyle Hopwood's 'THE FATHERS', which was rather similar in feel to 'THE LANDLOCK' which was in 'DREAM' a few issues ago.

Randy Chandler teams up with T. Winter-Damon for 'DUET WITH THE DEVIL', a very experimental piece (I hesitate to call it a story) that was packed full of disturbing images and clever-clever writing, but got nowhere, whilst another I disliked intensely was Hakim Bey's 'MOON PIECE' which was poetic, pretentious and, in the end, pretty forgettable.

Of the fiction that leaves Dave Hughes' 'DREAM SEQUENCE', a competent but not spectacular story of a private detective investigating a suicide. This was one of those stories which only qualifies as SF because of its future setting. Matthew Dickens' 'THE LAST LAUGH' is a very short story on the theme of 'the joke', but the purpose of the story was lost on me.

Issue 13 also contains many illustrations, a 'Mailart' special feature, a cartoon strip and the interesting results of a readers' poll (on somewhat the same basis as 'INTERZONE'S' annual survey.) The type is clear and crisp (though not typeset) and there are miscellaneous reviews and letters to round off the issue.

Issue 14 is the better produced of the two, with clear typesetting and excellent production. The page count also increases from 56 to 64, making this a very 'good-value' issue. One or two familiar names in this issue: Michael Cobley's 'SYNOPSIS OF A LOOKING-GLASS REBELLION' is an interesting (though choppy) story of an alternative history where England secedes from the Scottish parliament. D.F. Lewis has 'BOYS' which seems to be more a nostalgic look back to his school days, made SF by the introduction at the end of a somewhat superfluous spaceship. Elliot Smith's 'ASPHALT SEASONS' is an interesting story of a spaceship crew literally absorbed by a new world. The best of the rest is David William Sheridan's 'DEVIL'S ADVOCATE', which held my interest with some good writing but turned into something of a damp squib at the end.

BBR is, I must confess, not filled with the kind of fiction I like. However, despite this, I found myself admiring it for the obvious hard work and love put into its production. If you like the average issue of 'INTERZONE' you are more likely to enjoy BBR, but ten out of ten to Chris Reed for his devotion to British SF and the work he puts into his 'zine. Didn't altogether like the contents; admired the man immensely.

One magazine that patently doesn't give a damn what anyone thinks of it is 'THE SCANNER' (24pp A4 for £1.20 (£1.50 inc. p & p) or 4 issues for £5.50 from Christopher James, 4 Dover Road, East Cowes, Isle of Wight. PO32 6RG). Of all the New SF Alliance' magazines, this is the closest to being a fanzine. It's done for fun, no doubt about it — the irreverent style permeates the entire editorial contents ('though I did get annoyed with the habit the editor has of punctuating his comments with 'hee hee' all the time) The latest issue is No. 7, which has a rather sickly combination of blue and yellow on the cover. (The glossy cover of last issue has gone because of problems at the printers, but will be back. Frankly, I couldn't care less whether a mag. has a glossy cover or not — it's what's inside that should be the thing that matters). I haven't always been a great fan of 'THE SCANNER's fiction, but this issue sees a step up in quality with
a good short by Duncan Adams (who is about to become as ubiquitous in the small press as D.F. Lewis or Dave W. Hughes) and another goodie by Ian Watson (who isn’t one of my favourite authors) which was, apparently, originally published in Flemish in 1979! Liz Honeywill’s ‘FAMILY PORTRAIT’ reminded me strongly of a story Arabella Wood had in ‘AUGURIES’ a few issues back (the title escapes me). Alan Garside’s ‘VISIONS IN YELLOW AND BLUE’ (sounds like a description of ‘THE SCANNER’s cover) is well illustrated, but that’s about the only good thing I can think of to say about this piece of pretentious twaddle, whilst Iain R. Layden’s ‘TOTAL EXPERIENCE’ is by an author who is steadily improving and could cause ripples in the future. His current story is workmanlike rather than brilliant. ‘THE SCANNER’ also contains some (non-SF) poetry and the usual mix of irreverent (and sometimes superficial) articles. Kevin Lyons has now left ‘THE SCANNER’ to plough his own furrow, but it looks as though this will not affect the mag. too adversely. It is very much in a class of its own — not to be recommended for those of you who take life too seriously, but very light-hearted though with its own strong (and sometimes strange) ideas on what makes good SF.

To those of us who like getting and reading small-press SF magazines (even when we don’t always like the contents) it is a little disturbing to find quite a few publications that are advertised as quarterly coming out far less frequently than this. ‘AUGURIES’ and ‘WORKS’ are two that have not kept to their schedules lately (although, to be fair, although advertised as such ‘AUGURIES’ never has been quarterly, appearing on average twice a year.) With the amount of work that has to go into producing a small-press magazine, plus the costs involved, slippage in issuing new copies is perhaps not too surprising and we must be thankful for what we do get. One publication that does keep to its schedules is ‘INTERZONE’ (£1.95 per copy or £12 for a six-issue subscription from ‘Interzone’, 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton. BN1 6LU. 76pp A4). The magazine appears bi-monthly with never-failing regularity and is now canvassing opinions on a monthly schedule, so it is presumably pleasing enough of its readers to be making such a switch a practicable proposition.

There are two issues of ‘INTERZONE’ to consider here and not a lot of space to do it in, so let’s get straight into the meat: Issue 32 is not one of my favourites. The fiction varied from the stereotyped cyberpunk of Richard Calder’s ‘MOSQUITO’, which exemplified the type of story that ‘INTERZONE’ is currently publishing too many of, almost to the point of parody, through Lee Montgomerie’s ‘THE NEW JERUSALEM PLC’, a story with so little merit that one was forced to wonder whether it would have seen print were she not an associate editor of the magazine, to Barrington Bayley’s ‘THE DEATH OF ARLETT’ which was inoffensive but unremarkable. Perhaps the best was the haunting ‘LISTEN’ by Ian McDonald, which touched on a religious theme, both in a narrow and wider sense. The rest of the stories did little to enliven a somewhat lacklustre issue, but there was an interesting article on Stephen Donaldson by Brian Stableford and an interview with Michael Coney plus the usual reviews and letters.

Issue 33 is the better of the two, although marred by the inclusion of ‘THE EYE OF THE AYATOLLAH’ by Ian Watson, which seemed to be a deliberate effort to be controversial just for the sake of it. This rather offensive story had little literary merit and one must assume it was included to prove that the editors were not to be intimidated by fanatics. Far more to my taste was David Brin’s ‘PIECEWORK’, detailing a future where human reproductive processes have been adapted for
industrial uses and Stuart Falconer’s ‘FAMILIARS’, which reminded me slightly of Alfred Bester with its theme of mental powers unleashed. Sharon M. Hall’s ‘THE LAST GAME’ is oddly gentle and slow-paced, but nothing memorable. Kim Newman is also present, with a typically whimsical effort. However, to me he seems to have gone somewhat ‘over the top’ in his more recent efforts. All in all, Ian Watson apart, an entertaining enough issue complemented with an article on Terry Pratchett (by John Clute, who seems to have slightly reduced his penchant for obscure language in this article at least, if not in his book reviews) and a rather boring interview with Geoff Ryman (a rather boring writer!) Charles Platt contributes a rather unlikely article, comparing New York to Utopia (!) and — horror of horrors — the letter section has been squeezed out for lack of space. David Pringle does give the ‘New SF Alliance’ a plug, however, so all is forgiven. (Well, not quite all — I can’t forgive him the Ian Watson rubbish!)

Incidentally, all of you who were watching the news a few months back (as you read this) and saw the bit about Lymington being flooded, be of good cheer — the Jeffers household escaped unscathed! To those of you who wish I had drowned, well, bad luck, you’ll have to wait for the next natural disaster to strike the Hampshire coast. With global warming and the rising sea level it shouldn’t be too long before I’m fish bait!

See y’all in the next issue!
THE MELTING POT
Readers' Letters

(Quite a bit of reaction to Philip J. Backers' article on 'Keyboard Reptiles'. Don't forget, we welcome your letters on any subject related to SF and we also want your 'PETS CORNER' articles for publication in future issues.)

Dear George,

In 'DREAM' 21, Philip J. Backers tells us all about the hideous 'Keyboard Reptiles' and by criticizing his article I perhaps run the risk of being branded the protector of such people, which I'm not.

To a point I agree with Philip. Anyone who consciously sits down and rips off another writer's work deserves total condemnation. But when we read a story which is similar to another how can we be sure that the story has been consciously and deliberately ripped off? Stories can sometimes be written with the author unaware that he or she is under the subconscious influence of something he or she read, or saw at the cinema/theatre years before. Other times it is merely coincidence that an idea is similar to one that was thought up some time ago. Basically, there is no way of knowing if an author is a 'Keyboard Reptile'.

Occasionally, I'll admit, a new story can bear a startling resemblance to older pieces of work, but how can we be sure that it's a deliberate rip off? Before we call the writer a plagiaristic 'Keyboard Reptile' we must be certain. This, of course, is impossible unless the author admits to plagiarism or is found guilty of it in a court of law and even the latter of the two still leaves room for doubt. In law, plagiarism is usually one of the hardest things to prove.

An example of subconscious influence is given in 'Harlan Ellison's Watching' in the September 1988 issue of 'The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction'. Here, Ellison tells of how Robert Sheckley's "The Prize Of Peril" influenced Stephen King when he wrote "The Running Man".

In short, I just hope that a situation doesn't arise where any writer who produces work similar to an older story is stamped with the indelible mark of the Reptile. While I'll admit that Philip has a valid point I just don't see how we can prove that a writer deserves such condemnation.

And now onto the letters page. I wish it would contain more letters about SF in general instead of brief comments about the stories in the previous issue of 'DREAM'. Of course, I realise that this is hardly the fault of the editors, who must rely on what is sent to them, but I feel that a letters page orientated more towards a discussion of SF would be a far better read. At the moment the letters seem to consist solely of what people thought about the stories. While this is useful to individual authors and editors, it's not much use to readers. Surely all readers have their own opinions on the stories anyway, so why read about someone else's? The ratings express the opinion of the readership.

Having said that, there is one person's opinions who I do enjoy. That is Sam Jeffers. 'The Dark Side Of The Moon' always provides an interesting read. Sam is one of the few critics who has the guts to say what he thinks of that sacred cow 'INTERZONE'.

Steven J. Blyth
(Farnworth, Bolton)

- We too would like to see letters discussing the wider aspects of SF, so come on you lot out there. Mind you, we still would like opinions on stories, as we welcome the feedback. Most of all, of course, we'd like your ratings which are of great use to us in
assessing your likes and dislikes. The more of you who respond the more useful the ratings become, so get to it! - GPT).

Dear George,

DREAM 21 was one of the best issues for some time. Gerry Connelly’s 'DO DET IKE' was a well-plotted and absorbing thriller, only let down slightly by the stereotyped villain and his evil henchmen. 'THE SUGGESTION FORM' was another good story, earning its extra word-length by strong plot and original idea. It reminded me of Heinlein. (The earlier one, thank God, not the later!)

Charles Luther’s ‘SPARKLE’ managed to be amusing without overdoing it - the humour felt more spontaneous and unforced than in some other 'DREAM' funny (like 'THE ROBOT HANDBAG')

Marcin Sexton’s ‘REICH’ was a bold excursion into 'historical' SF, but the ironic parallel between the alien super race and the Nazis, though ingenious seemed a little contrived, particularly as DNA, of which the Germans (including the colonel, who wasn’t even a scientist) possessed an in-depth knowledge, wasn’t discovered until the 1950s. I may not know the difference between a molecule and a quark, Mr. Jeffers (see Sam’s column in 'DREAM' 21 — GPT) but I know an anachronism when I see one! (Damn clever people these Nazis! To be fair, it was the structure of DNA which was discovered in 1953 — the basic mechanisms of heredity were known long before that — GPT).

Why is everybody suddenly writing parodies of Ballard? There was 'THE BALLARD BOYS' by Andy Probert in 'NEW VISIONS' 1, a story of my own which I finished only a few days before getting 'DREAM' 21, which, though not a pastiche, uses a few Ballardian tropes (no, I’m not a keyboard reptile!) and now Peter Garratt’s contribution to this genre. As a parody it was quite neat, but I wish 'DREAM' would stop this habit of plastering stories with crass puns for titles all over the 'zine; the author may think it’s hilarious, but in such cases (and I’m thinking particularly of DREAM 19) the story becomes a tiresome but necessary excuse, superfluous in itself, to show off the author’s wit. If they want puns, they can always read 'FINNEGAN'S WAKE'.

How does one tell the difference between a 'Keyboard Reptile' and an original writer who just happens to have hit on an idea which has, unbeknown to them, been used before? This can happen — it’s happened to me and I’ve no doubt it’s happened to others. Take S.M. Baxter’s ‘THE BARK SPACESHIP’ (DREAM 14); this bears a striking resemblance to Bob Shaw’s “THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS" and, indeed, appeared more or less at the same time as that novel, but does that make Baxter a reptile? Or has he simply arrived at an original idea on his own account? Or to put it another way, is Shaw’s ‘THE WOODEN SPACESHIPS” a rip-off of “THE BARK SPACESHIP”? Obviously, Baxter and Shaw are both original writers and don’t need to plagiarise others — but Philip Backers failed to recognise the inevitability of plots and ideas being duplicated in this fortuitous manner. Even in a genre as diverse as SF this is bound to occur. A little discrimination is called for here before dismissing authors as ‘vermin’ without giving them a fair hearing.

Matthew Dickens
(Taunton, Somerset)

- We tend to agree with the above correspondents. As editors, if we rejected every story that comes into us which bears even a slight resemblance to an idea used previously we’d have precious little material to choose from. All SF must be, to some extent, derivative, unless the author wipes from his brain everything he has ever read/seen. However, Philip Backers was talking of deliberate and conscious plagiarism, which is a bit different. As to how you can tell one from the other ... well, perhaps someone would let me know. — GPT

Dear George,

I dislike commenting on the stories in 'DREAM', but everybody else seems to be doing it ... In truth, I know the hours of toil that go into them, so I will not criticize unless there is something I feel I can help the writer with. I would put the stories — discounting my own — in the order in which they appeared, but I must say that 'THE SUGGESTION FORM’ — perhaps deliberately — seemed to have been written in the style of the 50s — the British 50s that is. I would have been more convinced had E.R. James used SI units and scientific notation. So, 186,000 miles per second should have been $3 \times 10^8$ m.s. Also, a
British billion has been reduced to a thousand million (or $10^9$) in line with the Americans.

Apropos 'PETS CORNER', I remember this Backers chappie from that cruel letter he wrote in 'NEW MOON' 4. In answer, I would say that many duplications of ideas are unwitting. I do not know whether I count as a keyboard reptile; probably not since I have recently been converted to writing by dictaphone; but I have found that several ideas I worked out for myself have been done before, although I wasn't aware of them at the time. As Keyboard Reptiles have no original ideas, they will not get very far. Also, without unoriginal writers, original writers will cease to look original by comparison. (Didn't think of that one, did he?) Finally, if he is so concerned about originality, the best thing he can do is go to his typewriter — or his dictaphone — and write something original instead of wasting his time and his reputation slagging off other writers.

Gerry Connelly
(Corby, Northants)

Dear George,

Thought you would like to receive my comments and ratings for 'DREAM' 21, so here they are:

Although 'SPARKLE' and 'THE SUGGESTION FORM' are quite different in style, one facetious and the other deadly serious, I have to vote them a tie in first place. Both were tightly plotted with an interesting scenario, a problem and a satisfactory solution. In short, a satisfying read.

'REICH' in second place for originality and some good writing. It started well and presented an interesting problem but failed to provide a credible answer or a tidy conclusion.

'DO DET IKE' lost out on all counts. The writing was uneven, improving considerably after the first three pages, giving me the impression that the author had completed the story at a much later date when his writing style had improved. The plot meandered with interesting ideas thrown in almost at random, which inevitably led to an unsatisfactory ending.

Peter Garratt's piece has not been included in my ratings not merely because of its length and that it reads more like blank verse, but because I just did not understand it. How the collected works of J.G. Ballard can fit into someone's pocket and consist of blank pages, entirely defeats me (perhaps he meant the comprehensible works of J.G. Ballard — that would explain the blank pages! Only joking, Jim — GPT).

The various features are all great and should be retained exactly as they are, except for 'THE SKY ABOVE YOU'. This should be renamed and 'THE SKY THIS MONTH' deleted. It unfairly dates the issue and provides ludicrous information on what to look out for two months ago! The rest of the feature is excellent and I greatly respect the informed writing of Duncan Lunan. (Yes, the sky map is a problem that we have — unsuccessfully — been trying to overcome. The lag caused by printing time etc. has defeated us. See, therefore, the new style of Duncan's column, starting this issue. — GPT)

Layout and presentation is excellent. (Credit for this must go to our designers and printers at K.D.S. — GPT). I like the way you avoid chopping pieces off the end of the stories, to print them together near the end of the issue, which occurs in so many other small-press publications. Also, I enjoyed the interior illustrations, particularly the crisp, professional style of David Transue, which matched the story perfectly. (Much more by David Transue in future issues — GPT). It is about time for a new cover layout but where could you find an equally good design that expresses the essential character of 'DREAM' so well?

On the question of type and length of stories raised in your editorial — personally, I have no objection to horror/fantasy appearing alongside SF in an issue, so long as it is kept to a minimum. There are numerous horror/fantasy small press publications, but very few featuring SF. On the other hand, I can understand the SF 'enthusiast' who would prefer not to 'contaminate' the contents by sweeping up all the horror/fantasy into an issue of its own. You just cannot please everybody.

Similarly, I can quite enjoy an ultra-short story. It is a different art form, since it does not permit exploration of an idea or allow plot development, but it can be a useful and entertaining way of filling in and keeping the page count in a multiple of four. And I have known the rare occasion where an ultra short has been voted the best item in an issue.

Alan Hunter
(Bournemouth, Dorset)
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