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With Compliments.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
Hello again. This issue marks a milestone in the history of ‘DREAM’; the end of our first five years of publication. This gave us pause for thought and led us both to examine what had been achieved in that first five years and also for some special way to mark the occasion.

Basically, there are two distinct types of small-press SF magazine, with both types well represented in the New SF Alliance. The first type exists primarily to publish the type of fiction that is not normally published by professional outlets (experimental and unconventional fiction, for the most part) because the audience for such material is not large enough to support commercial publication. This leaves a place for the ‘little’ magazines and it is a place they fill admirably. SF poetry is in much the same class; the audience for it is small, but enthusiastic, the ideal type of audience for a specialised small-press publication and many such exist. Such magazines are under no illusions that mass-market acceptance awaits their offerings, nor, for the most part, is that what they want. They exist to fill a specialised need.

The second type of small-press publication exists for a slightly different purpose; to provide a market for new writers, who have got their sights fixed on the professional SF market, but who have yet to fully break through, or are just at the start of their careers. A ‘halfway’ house to full professional status can give them the chance to air their talents before a demanding audience and hone their skills. Indeed, this has been the traditional role of the SF magazine in past decades and it is this function which we see ourselves performing here at ‘DREAM’. Indeed, the majority of our contributors have made at least a few professional sales and we look forward to seeing many of them as ‘big names’ in SF in the 1990s.

We are, therefore, marking our fifth anniversary in a number of ways. First, we have this issue, packed with stories by some of our favourite (and, in some cases, most controversial) authors. Our next issue will feature material by writers so far unpublished in ‘DREAM’, and here we are looking forward as new blood is always welcome in SF.

Many of you have ordered back issues, but a lot of the earliest issues are now out of stock. These issues contained many memorable stories, but were of a lower standard of production (duplicated rather than typeset, with few illustrations) than the current issues. We are, therefore, publishing a fifth anniversary anthology, which will be out in time for Christmas, containing many of the most memorable stories from the period 1985-1987, but now presented in a fully typeset and illustrated format, with comments on each author and story. You may order this volume now (but DO NOT send cash) or wait until DREAM 25, where there will be an order coupon included.

I am also hoping to make another announcement in DREAM 25, which will mean you will be able to enjoy even more SF by your favourite authors in the months to come. I shall say no more at present, or there will be no surprises to look forward to, and you wouldn’t want that. Would you?
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war
Irreconcilable to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven.
"Paradise Lost", John Milton

Paul climbed through the hatch and into the barque. The craft was a box the size of a small room. He threaded his way through the interior.

There was a girl in one of the pilot seats. She turned. Tall and muscular, she wasn’t much older than Paul’s twenty years.

Paul tripped over a locker.

The girl’s eyes glittered with amusement. ‘‘Take it easy. You’re Paul right? I’m Jenine.’’

His face hot, Paul took the seat beside her. ‘‘Glad to meet you.’’ The instrument panel before him looked utterly alien.

‘‘Well, buckle in.’’ Jenine punched fat buttons. Monitors showed muscles contracting in the Ark’s hull. ‘‘And don’t be so nervous.’’

‘‘I’m not.’’

‘‘Of course you are. I never understand why. You’ve taken barques outside the Ark before, haven’t you?’’

‘‘Sure.’’ He tried not to sound defensive. ‘‘On inter-Ark hops. But this is my first mission drop — my first time out of hyperspace. It’s a little different.’’

She raised fine eyebrows. ‘‘We didn’t evolve in hyperspace.’’

‘‘Maybe. But it’s all I know —’’.

An orifice in the hull opened and exploded at them; the barque surged into hyperspace. It was like being born.

The Ark swam into their monitors. Holism Ark was a Spline ship: a rolling, fleshy sphere encrusted with blisters. It was a living being, Paul mused, and it looked like it.

He wondered briefly what those blisters on the hull were. They couldn’t be seen from within the Ark...

The barque receded rapidly. Hyperspace smeared out the Ark’s image.

Now more Arks came into view. The Barque skirted islands of huge flesh as it worked its way through the fleet.

At last the barque surged into clear hyperspace; Jenine swung the barque about.

Holism was lost in a wall of ten thousand Arks that cut the universe in half. This was the Exaltation of the Integrality. Paul imagined he could hear a thrumming as the great armada forged onwards; barques flitted between the huge hulls and rained into three-space.

‘‘We’re privileged to see this,’’ Paul said.

‘‘Definitely,’’ said Jenine laconically. ‘‘A sight that hasn’t changed for two thousand years.’’ She snapped the barque away; the Exaltation became a blur in the distance. Her shaven head gleamed in the cabin lights. ‘‘I’ll tell you how we’re privileged. After a hundred generations it’s us who are around as the Exaltation reaches Bolder’s Ring, the Xeelee base. The sky here is full of lost human colonies.’’
Instead of a dozen missionary drops a century we’re getting a hundred a year. Which
is why they’re pressing almost anybody into service.”

“Thanks,” he said.

She grinned, showing teeth. “I’m your tutor on your first drop. And I’m not what
you expected. Am I?”

Paul said nothing.

“Look — I’m resourceful, a good pilot. I’m no great thinker, okay?... But you’re
different. Top marks in the seminary, Gren tells me. Well, with all that
understanding you should have no fear. The Integrality says that the death of an
individual is unimportant.”

“Yes.” That was a child’s precept; he clutched the thought and felt his anxiety
recede...

“And you do believe in the Integrality. Don’t you?” Her voice was sly.

He stared at her. Was she making fun of him? “Of course. Don’t you?”

She stabbed at the control panel. The barque popped out of hyperspace.
Stars exploded around him. Half of them were coloured blue.
He gasped. Jenine laughed.

*

It’s a simulation, he told himself. Just another sim.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Jenine watched with cold contempt. “Get your bearings.”

The stars blurred together. Behind him they were tinged china blue. Ahead of him
they formed a mist that hid...something, a hint of a torus shape —

“Bolder’s Ring is ahead,” he breathed.

“How do you know?”

Because that was the way everything was falling.

The Ring was a thousand light years across. It was the largest manufactured
structure in the universe — and it had been built by the Xeelee.

Its gravity well was so deep that galaxies billions of light years away were sliding
over its lip. This close, stars were pulled like a blanket around the Ring, and infalling
light was turned to blueshifted sleet.

Jenine said, “We’ve been spacegoing for tens of thousands of years, probably.
And yet we’re still children at the feet of the Xeelee. Makes you sick, doesn’t it?”

Paul shrugged. “That’s why we’ve been trying to wreck that thing for almost as
long. Envy.”

Jenine paged through images on her monitor. “Shocking. And of course we of the
Integrality are here to put it all right...Ha! There’s our goal.” The screen contained a
single spark of chlorophyll green. “Human life... or near enough to show up. A
worldful of straying lambs. Right, Paul?” And she drove the barque through the
crowd of stars.

*

On Holism Ark there were sim-rooms of Earth. This little world, Paul decided, was
like a folded-up bit of Earth. They swept over oceans that sparkled in the jostling
starlight — and then flew into an impossible dawn.

It was impossible because there was no sun.

“It doesn’t make sense,” Jenine murmured. “Where’s that damn sunlight coming
from?... And the planet's only a quarter Earth's size, gravity a sixth standard — too low for this thick layer of air..."

Paul smiled. The little world was like a toy.

Jenine poked buttons in triumph. "Contact! About time..."

A holo tank filled up with a smiling male face, long and gracefully middleaged. He spoke; Paul picked out maybe one word in two. After a few seconds he flicked the translator button mounted in his thumbnail.

"...this equipment's a little dusty, I'm afraid; we don't get too many visitors. It's only chance I was in the museum when the alarm chimed —"

"We represent the Exaltation of the Integrality," said Jenine formally. "We come from beyond the stars. We are human like yourselves."

The man laughed; his eyes' epicanthic folds crinkled. "Thank you, my dear. You're welcome to land and talk to us. But you'll find we're quite sophisticated. Use this signal as a beacon. The name of this area is Tycho..."

*

Jenine let Paul pilot the barque out of orbit. Fifty miles above the surface the little craft shuddered; Paul's palms grew slick with sweat.

"Not your fault, surprisingly," Jenine said calmly. "We just passed through a kind of membrane. Now we know how they keep the atmosphere in. And maybe this is where the sunshine comes from... Interesting."

The Tycho museum perched at the summit of a green-clad mountain. A tall figure waved. The mountain was at the centre of a plain which glistened with lakes and trees. The plain was walled by a circle of jagged hills. As they descended the hills dipped over the horizon.

Paul landed neatly.

The air carried the scent of pine. Through the daylit membrane Paul could see stars; towards the horizon they were stained blue. He breathed deeply, invigorated.

Jenine whooped. "I love this dinky gravity." She did a neat double back somersault, her long legs flexing.

Their host walked around the curve of the little museum. He wore a white coverall and he was at least eight feet tall. He smiled. "Welcome," he said. "My name is Darby."

Jenine landed breathlessly and introduced herself and Paul. Paul was amused to see her blush furiously, discomfited by this elegant man.

"Come to my home," said Darby. "My family will be more than excited to meet you. And you can tell us all about your...Integrality."

Paul looked around for a transport. There was none.

Darby said nothing. He held out his hands. Like children, Paul and Jenine took hold.

Paul saw Darby's coverall ripple, as if in a sudden breeze.

Paul looked down. He was flying, as if in a glass elevator. He felt no fear. Hand in hand they soared over the curves of the little world.

*

Darby's home was a tent-like, translucent structure; it was at the heart of a light-filled forest. The days were as long as Ark days. Jenine and Paul spent four with Darby's family.
Jenine looked out of place: squat, brusque, embarrassed by kindness. She let Paul talk to the adults while she sat on the leaf-strewn ground telling Integrity parables to Darby’s two children. Each child towered over Jenine. Their earnestness made Paul smile.

On the final day Darby took Paul by the hand. “Come with me. I’d like to show you a little more of our world.”

They flew soundlessly. Houseboats floated on oceans; clumps of dwellings grew by the banks of rivers. Everywhere people waved. “This is a peaceful place, you see, Paul.” Darby said. “There are only a few thousand of us.”

“Yes. And this orderly world has risen from the debris of war... just as the Integrity teaches us to expect. As I’ve told you, the Integrity is a movement based on the intermeshing of all things. Local reductions in entropy occur on all scales throughout the universe, from the growth of a child to the convergence of a galaxy cluster. Order is to be celebrated...”

Irritation touched Darby’s face briefly. He said nothing. Paul fell silent, faintly embarrassed.

At a savannah’s heart sat a simple dome. “This is a place we call Tranquility,” said Darby. “What I’m going to show you is a kind of monument. On seeing this perhaps you’ll understand why your sermons are a little... out of place here.”

They landed like leaves.

Paul peered through the clear dome wall. Boulders littered a patch of bald earth. There was a craft, a spider-like structure as tall as a man. Gold foil gleamed through years of dust. Its colours faded beyond recognition, a flag lay in the soil.

Here is the original surface of the planet, preserved through the terraforming,” said Darby. “Airless.”

“The craft looks very old. What is it?”

“Human, of course. This is one of our first spacecraft. Do you know where you are yet?”

Paul turned and met Darby’s mild eyes.

“This is the Moon,” Darby said. “The original Moon of Earth. It was used in some ancient assault on the Ring... abandoned here, billions of light years from home, and terraformed by the handful of survivors.” He smiled. “Paul, every glance at the night sky tells us where we are and how we got here. We live surrounded by the rubble of the past, the foolish sacrifices of war.

“We have had to come to terms with this, you see. We have made our peace with the universe. Perhaps your Integrity has something to learn from us...”

Paul stared for long minutes at the ancient craft. Then Darby took his arm. “I’ll take you back to your barque. Your companion is already waiting for you.”

Hand in hand, they flew to the grass-coated walls of Tycho Crater.

*  

The barque soared through hyperspace.

“Those damn kids taught me a song,” Jenine said. She recited: ‘We may with more successful hope resolve / To wage by force or guile eternal war / Irreconcilable to our grand Foe.’ That’s all there was.”

Paul frowned. “Strange sort of kids’ song.”

“Sounds very old, doesn’t it? The kids say they learn it from older children, and
so it’s passed on.” Punching the controls briskly, she said, “Well, that’s your first drop. Wasn’t so bad, was it? Next one solo, maybe.”

Sunk in depression, Paul tapped at his thumbnail. “What do you know about glotto-chronology?”

Jenine snorted. “What do you think?”

“Starting from a common root, the languages of two human groups will diverge by a fifth every thousand years.” Tiny numbers flickered over his nail. “About half of Darby’s vocabulary is close to ours. That makes the colony about three thousand years old... This war has endured for millenia.”

“You enthral me.” Jenine’s brow furrowed as she concentrated on her piloting. “This is actually a bit tricky. The hypernet is breaking up a little... Ripples in hyperspace; large mass movements somewhere. A quake on a nearby neutron star?”

Paul found himself blurting, “Is it always like that?”

“What?”

“Darby..”

“What did you expect? To convert him?”

Paul thought it over. “Yes.”

She laughed at that. She was still laughing as they passed into the warm interior of the Ark.

*

Holism Ark was a sphere miles wide. Its human fabric was sustained from huge chambers strung around the equator, where the Ark’s spin gave the illusion of gravity. There were industrial zones, biotech tanks, sim rooms, health and exercise facilities. The weightless axis was a tunnel glowing with light. Tiled corridors branched away to riddle the Ark.

The barque docked at a pole. Paul slipped his arms into a set of light wings and swam along the axis. He was due to meet his seminary tutor, Gren, to discuss his voyage, and he tried to lift his mood. He stared around at the bustling life of the Ark: people coasting to and from work, children fluttering stubby wings in some complex game. Paul felt isolated from it all, as if his senses were clouded by his depression.

There was a free-fall common room at the centre of the Ark. Gren met him there, tethered to a floating table. Gren was a round, comfortable man. Over a coffee globe he congratulated Paul. “I was interested by that bit of doggerel Jenine picked up,” he said. “Did you know we’ve found similar fragments before?”

“Really?” Paul hung up his wings and fiddled with his table tether.

“Strange, isn’t it? These scattered bits of humanity slavishly maintaining their scraps of verse. We’ve a volume full of them... But what’s it all for?” Gren put on a look of comic puzzlement.

Paul drew a coffee globe from the table’s dispenser. “Gren, why are the Ark’s corridors tiled?”

Gren sipped his drink and eyed Paul. He said carefully, “Because it’s more comfortable that way.”

“For us, yes. But this Ark is a Spline ship. How must the Spline feel? Once the Spline were free traders. Now we’ve sanitised this being’s guts and built controls into its consciousness. Gren, we preach the wholeness of life, the growth to completeness. Is that a suitable way to treat a fellow creature?”
"Ah. Your first drop didn’t turn out as you expected." He smiled. "You’re not the first to react like this."

Paul cradled the globe’s warmth close to his chest. "Please take me seriously, Gren. Is our philosophy a sham?"

"You know it isn’t. The Integrality is a movement based on centuries of hard human experience. It has quasi-religious elements. Even the words we use — ‘seminary’, ‘mission’ — have the scent of ancient faiths. That’s no sham; it’s quite deliberate. We want the Integrality to be vibrant enough to replace other faiths... especially man’s dark passion to die on a mass scale."

"War —"

Gren thumped the table, his round face absurdly serious. "Yes, war. And that’s why the resources of planets were spent to send the Exaltation here, to the site of man’s greatest and most futile war.

"Paul, come to terms with your doubts. You found the Moon people discouraging. Well, they have found their own peace. That is not a threat to the validity of our crusade."

Another table drifted by. A young couple whispered into each other’s mouths. Paul watched them absenty, thinking of his parents. Both of them worked in the Ark’s biotech tanks. He recalled their pride when he was selected for the seminary, and then for the missionary cohort...

Gren was smiling again. "Anyway, you haven’t long to brood before you go out again."

Paul looked up, startled. "You still think I’m suitable?"

"Of course. Do we want ignorant fanatics? We want young people who can think, boy.

"Now. There’s a neutron star, not far from here. Spinning very fast... We’ve picked up a signal from its surface."

Paul stared. "A human signal?"

Gren laughed kindly. "Well, of course a human signal. Why else would we send you?"

Paul finished his drink and pushed the globe back into the table. "I guess I’d better find Jenine..."

Gren laid a warm hand on his arm. "Paul, this time you’re on your own. Go and get some sleep; you’ve a few hours to spare—"

*

The barque seemed hollow without Jenine.

The Spline’s orifice dilated and Paul returned to hyperspace. He began to thread his way out of the Exaltation, keeping his breath carefully level.

A holo sparkled to life; Jenine grinned. "On your own this time, kid? I just called to wish you luck." Paul thanked her. "Listen, Paul... Don’t let me get you down. I rag everybody, and my opinions are my own. Right? And you did okay, down there on the Moon. Be safe." She winked at him and the holo emptied.

Feeling warmer, Paul dropped into three-space.

The neutron star was one of a binary pair. It was the remnant of a blue-white giant, once so bright it must have made its companion star cast a shadow. Perhaps there had been planets.

The giant had exploded.
Planets evaporated like dew and layers of the companions star blasted away. The giant’s remnant collapsed into a wizened, spinning cinder as massive as Earth’s sun but barely ten miles across.

The new neutron star dragged down material from its companion and rotated ever faster. The spin deformed it until at last it was virtually a disc, its rim moving at a third the speed of light. Spin effects there cancelled out the star’s ferocious gravity and a layer of normal matter began to accrete...

A human ship had blundered here, scarred by some forgotten war; Paul found a battered wreck in close orbit around the neutron star. The crew had no way back to hyperspace and no way to call for help.

And in this dismal system there had been only one place that could conceivably sustain human life...

In Paul’s monitors the neutron star was a plate of red-hot charcoal. A point on the rim was emitting green laser light, picking out a message in something called Morse code. The message was one word of ancient English. “Mayday. Mayday...”

Paul set up a reply, in the same old tongue and code. “I represent the Exaltation of the Integrity. What is a mayday?”

The reply came a day later. “Sorry for the delay. It took time to locate the Comms Officer. I am the Comms Officer. What do you want?”

“My name is Paul. I have travelled here in an Exaltation of Arks. I have brought you good news of the Integrity —”

“Are you human?”

“Yes, of course. How long have you been stranded?”

“Stranded where?”

Paul pulled at his chin. “Would you like to hear of events in the galaxies? Of the wars with the Xeelee?”

“What are galaxies? — Cancel question. Please understand that this is the first time the Comms System has evoked a reply —”

“Then why have you maintained it?”

“Because we always have. The role of Comms Officer is handed from father to son. We know we came from somewhere else. The Comms System is the only link with this other place. How could we abandon it? Are you in this other place?”

“Yes. You are not alone.”

“How reassuring.”

Paul raised an eyebrow. Sarcasm? “Please describe your world”

“What world?”

It took some time...

The stranded crew had observed the layer of soupy liquid at the star rim. The liquid was full of complex molecules, left over from the supernova’s fusion fury.

It was their only hope.

With astonishing audacity they had terraformed the ring-shaped sea. Then they began to mould their own unborn children...

Their descendants swam like fish in a dull red ocean, chattering English. They didn’t need hands or tools; only the old Comms System had been left for them, lasing its message to the skies. Paul imagined the Comms Officer tapping a broad, unwearing key with his mouth or tongue.

They weren’t too impressed by the Integrity.

“All mankind are joined in freedom,” said Paul. “The worlds in home space are linked through the hypernet in a neural network; decisions flow through the
net and reflect the wills of all, not just one man or one group..."

And so on.
The Comms Officer was silent for a long time. Then: "Is this some sort of expensive joke?"

Paul said nothing.
"You see, Paul, nobody here feels the need to make too many decisions."
"Your world is unchanging."
"Certainly not!" replied the Comms Officer. "Great events mark our lives. Why, since my last sleep I have ended my liaison with a lady of my acquaintance after her husband...Never mind. And there are places where we swim in concert and cause the ocean to sing. We did this not long ago."

That puzzled Paul. It sounded like a starquake, a sudden collapse of the crust; that would make the whole star ring like a bell.

Could they cause a starquake?
Perhaps they had some way of manipulating the star's ferocious magnetic field. And after all, a quake had disrupted the Exaltation hypernet not long ago.

He sent down a small, sturdy probe. It was a passing novelty among the fish-folk.
Paul wondered if they thought he was swimming somewhere inside.

There was death among the fish-folk. A corpse fell from a school of wailing relatives and settled slowly to the star's flowing surface.

Paul's probe took a tissue sample.

Two groups on Earth will show divergence of genetic structure at a rate of one percent every five million years. Paul found that the fish-folk had swum their ocean for two hundred thousand years.

It appalled him. How long had this damn Xeelee war dragged on? How many human lives had been wasted?

After a fortnight Paul took his leave of his friend.
"Wait," the Comms Officer said unexpectedly. "I have a message to give you."
And he transmitted: "'Our grand Foe,/Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy
/Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven.'"

"What does it mean?" asked Paul.

"I don't know."

"Then why do you send it?"

"Every Comms Officer is taught to send it."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"What is 'heaven'?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

Paul thought of the rhyme the Moon children had taught Jenine. 'To wage by force or guile eternal war / Irreconcilable to our grand Foe, / Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy...'

The pieces fit together. But that was impossible. Surely?

He transmitted it to Holism Ark for analysis.
Paul went through the motions of lifting the barque back to hyperspace, his thoughts clouded.

Once more his mission hadn't unfolded as he'd been taught to expect.
The humans in this region had been forced to find their own ways to come to terms with the events that had stranded them. If they hadn't they couldn't have survived. So — why did they need the Integrality? — or a junior missionary like
himself?

Was the Integrity's crusade meaningless?...

The Exaltation's formation had changed.

His speculations driven from his mind, he stared at his monitors. Around Holism Ark the fleet's symmetrical pattern had been distorted into a wedge; at the tip the Arks' fleshy walls were almost touching. Barques scurried between the Arks; hundreds of closed-beam hypernet messages radiated away from Holism.

What was happening?

He pushed into Holism Ark. The maintenance bay was deserted. He flew through an axis filled with a harsh light. People rushed past, wings fluttering.

Men came along the axis showing a cannon-like piece of equipment. Paul recognised a machine-shop heavy-duty laser. He had to press against the wall to allow the team to pass. Their eyes passed blankly over him.

Paul noticed a fist-sized, fleshy lump on the back of the neck of the nearest man, at the top of his spine.

The free-fall common room was unrecognisable. Paul clung to a wall and stared around. The floating coffee tables were being cleared away; he saw a group of children shooed away through the commotion.

There were more bulges on the spinal columns of the crew. Even the children were affected. Some sort of sickness?

A hundred crewmen worked to bolt together a huge, cubical lattice. Eventually, Paul realised, it would fill the common room. Medical devices and supplies were strapped to struts. Rough hands pushed a man-sized bundle of blankets into the lattice. Then another, and a third...

Crew members in sterile masks unwrapped the bundles.

Suddenly Paul saw it.

This was a hospital. It was being built in the soft heart of the Ark — the most protected place in case of attack. And towards the hull they were taking heavy-duty lasers — to use as weapons?

Holism Ark was preparing for war.

Paul's head pounded and there was a metallic taste at the back of his throat.

Jenine came sweeping across the bustling space, towing a small package of clothes. Paul pushed away from the wall and grabbed her arm.

"The philosopher returns," Jenine said, grinning. Her eyes sparkled and her face was flushed.

There was a growth at the top of her spine.

"Jenine.... What's happening?"

"I'm going to Unity Ark. As a Battle Captain. Isn't it fantastic?"

"Battle? Against who?"

"The Xeelee. Who else? Why do you think we came all this way?"

Paul tightened his grip on her upper arm. "We came for the Integrity. Remember? We came to remove war, not to wage it."

She laughed in his face, her mouth wide. "That's yesterday, Paul. It's all gone. And you know who we have to thank? You. Isn't that ironic?" With fingers like steel she prised open his hand and kicked away.

"Where's Gren? Just tell me that."

"In the sanatorium," she called back. "And, Paul... that's your fault too."

Paul hung there for long minutes. Then he turned to the makeshift hospital.
Gren lay in a honeycomb of suffering people. Bandaging swathed his neck.
Paul touched the shrunken face. Gren’s eyes flickered open. His face creased as he recognised Paul. He whispered: "...our grand Foe,/ Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy / Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven."
He grimaced. "You have to admire the planning. Over thousands of centuries, even as men died before the Xeelee, they hid those words among thousands of fragments of verse, and built an epic deception..."
"Please," Paul said miserably, "I don’t understand any of this."
Gren stirred. "I’m sorry, Paul. The truth is that the Integrity is a fraud. It is a lie which has allowed this huge armada to penetrate Xeelee space, its true purpose unknown even to generations of crew.
"The reassembled poetry was the key, you see. Hearing those words ignited something in each of us — something locked in the genetic code that defines us. We began to suffer explosive growths —"
Paul fingered his own smooth neck.
"You’re a lucky one," Gren whispered. "It doesn’t always work. A tenth of us are unaffected. Perhaps two-thirds have been — programmed. Like Jenine. The rest of us are dying."
Paul turned away.
Gren said, "No, Paul. Hear the rest. The growths are nervous tissue. They contain information... it’s like a false memory. And an obsession. I walked to a wall and touched tiles in a certain way; control panels unfolded — and I knew how to work weapons mounted in the hull..."
"Your poetry is being spread from Holism by closed hypernet. Not all the Exaltation has yet been infected. But... but finally..." His rheumy eyes fluttered closed. Paul shook frail shoulders. "Gren... Tell me what to do. We’ve got to stop this —"
Gren’s mouth gaped, spittle looping between his lips.

*

Holism Ark had become an alien place. Paul watched weapons pods erupting from walls still coated with uplifting Integrity slogans.
He thought of trying to find his parents. He envisaged their welcome... overlaid with spinal knots and blank, driven faces.
He shuddered and swam towards the barque hangars. There was no way he could influence events here. Perhaps if he made his way to the battle site...
Then what?
He readied the barque for launch, trying to lose himself in activity.
He skimmed the surface of the Ark; the blisters which had puzzled him earlier had now opened up to reveal the snouts of weapons and guidance sensors.
He pulled away. Much of the Exaltation, he saw, was still unaffected and held its formation. He flew to the tip of the flying wedge.
For the first time in two thousand years, the Arks were leaving hyperspace.
His heart heavy, he swept ahead of the fleet and dropped into three-space.
He was in a mist of blue-stained stars. A torus glowed: Bolder’s Ring, still hundreds of light years away but already spanning the sky.
He pushed towards the Ring.
The barque passed through the last veil of crushed matter and entered the clear

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space at the bottom of the Ring’s gravity well... and for a few seconds, despite everything, Paul’s breath grew short with wonder.

The Ring glittered as it rotated. There was a milky place at its very centre, a hole ripped in the fabric of space by that monstrous, whirling mass.

That milky patch, Paul knew, was man’s best guess about the purpose of the Ring — the Xeelee’s justification for distorting space across a billion light years. The Ring was a door in space: a portal to another universe... perhaps to a better one.

Xeelee were everywhere.

Ships miles wide swept over the artefact’s sparkling planes, endlessly constructing and shaping. Paul watched a horde of craft using cherry-red beams to herd a star, an orange giant, into a soft, slow collision with the Ring. The star’s structure was breaking up as its leading edge impacted —

A dozen flesh-pale spheres hurtled over Paul’s head, spitting fire.

They were Spline: the warships of the Integrality. They tore towards the star drovers and battle was joined.

At first the humans had the advantage of surprise. The ponderous Xeelee construction ships scattered in confusion. One of them was caught in the cross-fire of two Arks; Paul could see its structure melt and smoulder. More human ships dropped out of hyperspace and the battle spread.

But now a Spline ship splashed open. Paul watched people wriggle in vacuum, soaked by gouts of Spline blood.

A Xeelee night-fighter covered the wreck with wings a hundred miles wide.

There were night-fighters all around the battle site.

Fire bit into the sides of the labouring Spline.

It was a massacre.

Paul could not bear to watch. Each Ark was a world, carrying families... He increased the scale of his monitors, turned the battle into a game of toys.

But now the Xeelee fighters pulled away. They folded their wings and hovered outside the mist of debris, almost aloof.

The human ships tore into the defenceless construction vessels. Out of control, the orange star splashed against the Ring surface.

The Arks withdrew to hyperspace. One of them whirled as if in jubilation, spitting fire in all directions. Wrecks sailed into clumsy orbits around the Ring.

The Xeelee fighters departed, wings shimmering.

Paul closed his eyes.

This had been no triumph for the humans. The Xeelee had given them a meaningless victory; they had simply not wished to slaughter.

Couldn’t the humans have seen that? Would this happen again and again until every Ark was disabled, every human life lost?

No. He couldn’t let it occur. And, he began to realise, there was a way he could prevent it.

He opened his eyes, rubbed his face, and lifted the barque to hyperspace.

* 

The neutron star scraped the surface of its companion, just as it had in that dream time before the metamorphosis. “‘Integritality for the Comms Officer —’”

“Greetings to my friend, Paul from the Integrality. How can I help you?”
Paul, in broken bits of old English, described the futile battle.
The Comms Officer mulled it over. "I understand little... only that people are
dying for a foolish purpose."
"But with your help, I can avert many deaths."
"How?"
"Not all the Exaltation has been... contaminated. The virus of words is spreading
via hypernet links. If we break those links, the spread will stop."
"And how can we disrupt this hypernet?"
"Cause a starquake."
The Comms Officer hesitated. "Paul, there are two things you should know. We
cause these events for specific religious and sexual reasons. They are not — a sport.
Second, many of us will lose our lives."
"I know what I'm asking."
A monitor flashed: another craft had dropped out of hyperspace near him. A holo
tank filled up with a grinning face.
The craft was Unity Ark. The face was Jenine's.
She said, "They told me your barque was gone. It wasn't hard to work out where
you'd be. You're planning sabotage, aren't you?"
Paul stared at her.
"Are we still in contact, Paul of the Integrality?"
"Yes, Comms Officer..."
"Paul, you have one minute to begin your approach to Unity. After that we open
fire. Do you understand?"
"Comms Officer, what is your answer?"
"I must consult."
Please hurry. I am desperate."
Jenine's smile broadened as the minute passed. Paul realised that the
metamorphosis was a liberation for her; she made a much better warrior than
missionary. It was hard to remember she'd once shown him a gesture of friendship:
"Time's up, Paul."
"Integrality? We will do as you say."
"Thank you!"
And Paul slammed the barque into hyperspace; Jenine snarled.

*

The Exaltation was beginning to split up.
The metamorphosed battleships continued to drop into three-space... but they
returned battered and bleeding, and there were fewer each time.
The bulk of the fleet, now isolated from infection, cruised on its way.
Paul probed at his feelings. Had he betrayed his race by wrecking this grand
design?
But the stratagem itself had been a betrayal — of the generations who had lived
and died in the Exaltation, and, yes, of the ideal of the Integrality itself.
The perpetrators of this plot had been too clever. In their search for a fine lie they
had stumbled on a truth — and that truth had driven Paul to act as he did, and so in
the end it was the truth which had betrayed them.
Paul would never see his parents again.
But the Exaltation would go on. He could join another Ark, and —
Jenine's voice hissed through the distorted hypernet. "I know... you've done..."
Unity Ark loomed in his monitors, its bulk cutting him off from the Exaltation.
"Jenine. There's no point—"
The barque slammed.
"...next time..."
Roaring with frustration he dropped into three-space, emerging poised over the Ring.
Unity closed, bristling with weapons. Jenine's image was clear. "It's over, Paul."
Paul took his hands from the controls. He felt very tired. "Okay, Jenine. You're right. It's over. We're cut off from the Exaltation. Kill me if you like."
Unity Ark exploded at him. Jenine stared into his eyes.
Then she cried out, as if in pain.
The Ark veered sideways, avoiding Paul, and disappeared into the mist at the heart of the Ring.

*

"Integrity calling Comms Officer."
"This is the Comms Officer."
"How are you?"
"I have to tell you that I am not the one who spoke to you previously. My father died in the recent starquake events."
"...I'm sorry."
"Did we succeed?"
In simple terms, Paul told the story.
"So, in the end, Jenine spared you. Why?"
"I don't know. Perhaps the futility of it all got through to her. Perhaps she realised that with all contact with the Exaltation lost her best chance of survival was to take the Ark away, try for a new beginning in some fresh universe..." And perhaps some lingering human feeling had in the end triumphed over the programming.
But now you are stranded, Paul. You have lost your family."
"...Yes."
"You are welcome here. You could join my sexual grouping. The surgery required is superficial —"
Paul laughed. "Thank you. But that's well beyond my resources."
"What, then?"
"I'm going back to the Moon." He thought of Darby's wise kindness. If the Moon people welcomed him, perhaps the loss of his family would grow less painful...
"We will remember you, and your Integrity."
"Thank you, Comms Officer."
Paul turned the battered barque and set course for the Moon. ●
ALONE IN THE CITY PARK with the Spring sunlight pointing out a few white hairs in the general dark of his closely cropped head (old invaders gathering in the dark continent) Ossie did not feel free. At least he didn’t feel as he thought he should feel. A whole three days ago he had ended a ten year stretch on the inescapable side of bars and a whole three days ago he had thought ahead to this moment in the Park when he would feel and be free! But it didn’t feel that marvellous! He speculated that even if he hadn’t spent the last ten years of his life in jail he would have spent it in no extravagant or high flung way — a well-lit room, his stamps, his books, his music; his mother in the next room chatting to Telly, her electrical companion; a chocolate biscuit easiness throughout the apartment. Now he had that world again and no real desire to change it. He began walking briskly. Something was missing or he had changed or... he began whistling as he walked.

The City, where Ossie had been born forty three years ago in 2056 had definitely changed. He paused before the statue of a man on a horse, way up high on a stainless steel stand. The gleaming man drew a short sword from its scabbard, raised it on high, then faster than the eye could follow, brought it down in a hissing sweep, then up it went again and was returned to its place in the scabbard. The green eyes of the metal warrior beamed out of a bronze face and for a moment Ossie forgot about statues and felt afraid. He walked on through the Park and found a lion which twisted its head, opened its jaws and snapped them shut. He found ancient politicians wagging tall spindly fingers and modern ones shouldering short stun guns, heros, whose giant muscles rippled visibly in cavernous iron chests, and most amazing of all: a small space army of Earthmen repelling an invasion of Trokers, whose unlikely limbs, as they were shed in the furor of the electronic battle, were instantly replaced so that it seemed warriors sprouted from the ground, as the oldest stories of ancient mythology might have insisted it was.

He bought a dinner stick from a Park peddlar, entered The City Zoo and after staring at the heaving sides of a sleeping lion for several silent minutes, wandered down an avenue of trees up to a squat concrete building, studded with a large plaque, which read:

THE GROF HOUSE

The Grof was brought back from Noah 11 in 2090 by Dr. Herbert Von Groff. It is the first creature to be seen from another planet. Studies have yet to determine its gender and age.
It is characterised by what appears to be an even temper and a “bubbling” sound.
The Grof House is purposely kept dark to simulate the conditions on Noah 11.

Ossie had heard of the Grof. He became suddenly anxious to see what the creature looked like. He pushed through a door and found himself alone in a long dark room. Dimly he made out a cage at one end of the room. He approached the cage and stared through the bars. His heart jumped. One moment he had been staring through the darkness, the next he was looking into twin tunnels of deep yellow eyes, which were triangular and moist and without pupils which a human eye could move in and out of with little jumps of understanding and insight. The eyes were in a perfectly round head. There were two breathing holes beneath the eyes and a pair of purple lips which sprang out from the face of the creature on a long thin stem like that of a tulip. Somehow that mouth reminded Ossie of the way his mother often kissed him
goodnight, stretching her neck, making a kiss with her lips. This marvellous head was in the middle of four concertina-like limbs, attached to the head by four short crinkly necks. The Grof moved around the cage slowly, using all four limbs which had three fingers at their ends. It moved like a child doing cartwheels in slow motion and was covered like a teddy bear with a thin brown fur; the head, however, was dark and naked like a hazel nut.

"Incredible!" Ossie whispered aloud to himself.

The Grof, whose yellow eyes had never moved from Ossie's, now stopped its turning and came to a standstill in front of the staring human. Two of its limbs contracted. The creature sank from five feet to three in height. Ossie realised the Grof was crouched down now, staring at him. The yellow eyes shone like torch beams and suddenly the "bubbling" sound started. Ossie listened carefully to it. It reminded him of water boiling over a ballet of boiled eggs in a pan. He began to smile and drift along with the liquid music.

"Funny looking fellah, ain't he? Hello Groffy. Chow time soon."

Ossie spun around. The frosty haired Grofkeeper was standing just behind him. Ossie felt an unexpected shot of guilt course through his body, as though, like a little boy, he had been caught doing something he shouldn't. He nodded in some confusion. The Keeper went on:

"He used to be a popular fellah some years ago. Groffy used to be the star attraction of the Zoo. Not any more. All his admirers have come back to lions and tigers."

The Keeper shook his head from side to side. Ossie nodded again and with a feeling that his privacy had been invaded, went out into the Park with a memory of yellow eyes and bubbling music. He thought he could still see the eyes and hear the music when he reached Avenue 15, for Ossie a new motorised section of The City. Individuals shot up and down the sidewalk on wheels. Ossie grinned to himself. There seemed to be two speeds: 'Don't stop me' miles per hour and "Just cruising" m.p.h. A shadow fell across him. He looked up and saw two Pleesmen hovering in the air just above him. The sun glinted on the tiny heli-blades which revolved with a small whine on their enormous flying boots.

"Wheel problem, sir?"

Ossie shook his head:

"No wheels: no problem."

The Pleesmen shook their heads. One said:

"Wrong sir. No wheels in a motorised section"...

"I'm looking for the Belt to Branksville, The City."

The Pleesmen, not anxious it seemed to issue a ticket, gave Ossie directions and buzzed away like giant blue bees. He reached the Belt with a hitch and was swept through a tunnel which spat him out almost on the doorstep of his mother's ground level apartment.

He heard Telly talking to his mother in her room and quietly went into his study. With a pair of fine tweezers he began moving postage stamps from a large album into little paper approval booklets. He worked with his stamp business for three or four hours, then he put them aside and lay back on his bed. He wondered if he shouldn't go out, fill himself up with Lastliquors and feel and reciprocate the bold caresses of the leggy women of The City. He closed his eyes. That wasn't what he really wanted to do. His breathing took on a steadier rhythm. Oily patterns seemed to run beneath his eye-lids. They were shapeless and moving and multi-colored like gasoline spills.
But then suddenly, as though freed of some hidden impediment, they ran in definite
directions, making a shape, forming a form. It was the Grof. There for a moment,
yellow eyes pouring light, and then it was gone. Ossie opened his eyes, swung off the
bed and reached for the Tellyphone. He dialed: "Hey! Everything that's Known is
now on the Fone."

"Request info on Grof, extra-terrestrial creature, located in The City Zoo.
The tape on the Grof told him little. The creature weighed a hundred and five
pounds and could extend or contract its limbs. It was the only life form found on
Noah 11 or anywhere else. There was a scientific explanation for the bubbling sound,
which Ossie could not fully understand but which he felt was somehow absurd. He
returned to his stamps until his mother, a frail widow, full of love and anxiety, came
into the room. She kissed him on the forehead.

"I'm going to bed, Ossie. Get a good night's sleep yourself. Get that pinched look
out of your face."

Ossie grinned: "Don't worry about me, Ma."
She shook her head: "Well I do. Always have done. And we're all on the Fone
now. No secrets anywhere."

She went out of the room and Ossie, filled with curiosity, phoned for info on
himself. He was listed he found under C for criminal. He had been charged with rape
and savagely resisting arrest. He had bitten a finger off a Pleesman and wounded
another. He listened to further details and as they piled one on top of the other he
slammed the Fone down. His head was swimming. It wasn't that he couldn't see
himself somewhere in the jungle of info; it was just that at the end of it all, he was
emerging not as the quietly spoken Ossie Mathews but as some ugly distorted
monster, not really himself at all. Oh it was true he had loved a girl who had been
legally under age. He had loved her to distraction and she had welcomed him as the
first real lover in her life... until that day when the door had cracked inwards on its
hinges and the girl's father and three Pleesmen had burst in on the lover's nest. Ossie
had fought them off like women are said to fight — with their nails and teeth. He
had never been that way before, so like an animal... "Inside" they had told the story
differently again. To murderers, cut-throats and armed robbers he instantly became
an animal, a "specimen", a "freak", a "perv" — as though even in a jailed society
there existed a need for a higher and lower form of person. Ossie shook his head and
felt himself go tight inside. He was not the man on the Fone banks or any of those
other versions of himself. He had lost in translation. The original was a mild man,
long and stringy in build, the opposite of trembling spars and wavery notions so
often attributed to this "type". He turned the lights out and let the day slide away.

"How are you?"

He was alone in the Grof House. His voice had sunk to a whisper of intimacy. The
bubbling stopped. The eyes were locked into his. He suddenly thought he was
listening for something in the silence. Then the Grof started again: "Lop lop lop"...
The Grof paused and began again. Ossie listened for an hour and then a little boy
dragged his mother into the House and began to squeal and point.

"Tomorrow", said Ossie and steamed out into the Park but not before he had
heard a funny moment in time when the Grof's sudden silence seemed to be filled
with: "I'll see you tomorrow, Ossie."

He went straight into an informal soccer match in the Park, exhausted himself,
admitted he felt great and took a Bumpcar back home. His mother was sitting on
the stoop. It was her place when Telly was too boring and the sun was shining. She
looked up at Ossie:

You've got more colour in your cheeks today. Did you meet a pretty girl?"

Ossie said:

"I met the Grof."

His mother began to laugh, then they laughed together, their family laugh, ladling it out like it was good and ready. He touched her and went into his room and closed the door. A giant sob passed in and out of his body. He crumpled to his knees. Coils in his mind, which had been shelved and placed in small out of the way places, now began to stir and unwind. It occurred to him he was a free man. Why should he resist anything? He didn't. The sobs came and shook his body like a passing storm. And then they were gone. He felt himself settling as though for a moment the floor had disappeared and was back again. He thought of his mother sitting outside. The season had changed. When you could sit outside it was summertime. He went into the shower and beneath the rush of the welcoming water he smelt a memory of coffee beans. Percolating in the pot it would go: "lop lop lop..." Ossie felt great again.

"Hello Grof," Ossie said.

"Lop lop lop..."

In the spaces when the Grof went silent he heard sounds. They were fantastic whispers from labyrinthine palaces beneath the water and they were words scratched and whispered in caves. He saw or he imagined he saw a younger Grof handwheeling down a mountain slope and the narrow astonished face of Herbert Von Groff as he brought a stungun up to his shoulder and froze the creature like an old fashioned statue that didn't move. The journey from Noah II to Earth had been hell, so had the mental and physical examinations, the tests, and finally the Zoo. Ossie nodded. The bubbling music and the silence that followed had made him drowsy. He understood the way it had been for the Grof.

"I'll come back tomorrow as usual."

He went out into the park past the gyrating statues and beneath the flying eyes of the Pleesmen. Neither bothered him that much anymore. His visits to the Grof became part of the routine of his life. Between the morning hours of nine and eleven he would sit talking and listening to the creature. He was generally undisturbed and that was a blessing. The music of the Grof and the golden days of summer quickened his life. His stamp business picked up. He was busy and tanned and in the arms of several pretty girls, who found him "different" but whom he knew would soon find him "ordinary" because it seemed to Ossie it was all planned to happen that way. He felt loyalty to none and his lack of feeling was welcomed with carefully embroidered intimacies sewn on sheets throughout The City. He never missed a day with the Grof however. He found the creature to be a sentient like himself. Their communication therefore went on as they continued, the both of them, to put out feelers, exploratory probes. Ossie often found the bubbling music too complex for him to be comfortable. He concentrated on the silence and was rewarded with different sounds. He could hear something indistinct, as though written by the sea and left lingering on the breeze above the water. Day after day he listened.

It was true if you held a shell up to the ear you could hear the whispered memories of the sea. Similarly Ossie began to hear the wings of broken things in the silence that followed the music of the Grof. All summer long he listened. August became September and the people on wheels were no longer "Just cruising", they were moving at "I'm in a hurry" miles per hour. The seasonal changes brought with them their own urgency. Ossie remained patient. His life was set in familiar grooves. He
didn’t want to rush anything now. Not now that he felt something was about to happen.

In the first week of October it finally happened. The new month had burned the Park red and the kinetic statues were immobile, their moveable parts stuffed up with leaves. Ossie had been listening to the Grof for an hour. He had lost himself in the yellow eyes and the bubbling river of the Grof’s music. There was a sudden abrupt silence. Then he heard two words: “Free me!” He bit his lip. They were words he hadn’t wanted to hear. Radical words which demanded he break the law. The yellow eyes held him. The bubbling had stopped. He knew he had not been mistaken. The Grof wheeled abruptly into the back of its cage and left Ossie with no alternative but to go home with those magic words dancing in his brain cells. He came back the next day as usual and the message he heard was exactly the same: “Free me!” He wanted to tell the Grof a hundred things about survival in an alien world and how there was no longer any place to hide. The Grof would not listen. He began to explain and the creature disappeared into the back of the cage. Ossie went home in distress. He was being torn in two directions by a hundred conflicting pieces of logic which told him to do one thing, then the other. He put his hands to his head and felt pieces of it could break away in his hands like pieces of cake. He saw himself as Hamlet... to free or not to free... and the picture and the pun brought him the consolation of a sword’s point.

In the quiet of his room he watched himself. He watched his hands. They couldn’t really belong to him, could they? Those hands which were cleaning files, polishing a hammer, selecting lengths of sturdy wire which might negotiate where a chisel failed. And now those same hands were wrapping those metal tools of freedom in plain brown paper. He lay back on the bed holding the parcel in his hand. It dawned on him that he had decided to free the Grof. He was breaking the law and ending a friendship which had sustained him since his own freedom from jail. What he was about to do didn’t make sense, at least not as he had known it before. He grieved for the Grof who would not survive and he grieved for his actions: his hands which would carry the parcel to the Zoo early on the next day.

Ossie felt the reassuring touch of the Grof’s three fingers on his shoulder and through them he felt a river of friendship flow. He passed the bag of metal tools through the bars. The Grof took them, cartwheeled into the back of his cage for a moment, hid the package somewhere and came flying out bubbling at nineteen to the dozen. Ossie listened to his friend until the little boys came pulling their tired mothers behind them. Then he pulled his ears out of the bubbling music and his eyes away from the twin triangles of liquid light. He went quickly out of the Grof House with the music still trailing behind him like oxygen bubbles surfacing from deep deep water.

At home Ossie began to stick his stamps in all the wrong places. Africa was in South America and China was on the Moon. He gave himself up to Telly.

The City was excited that the Grof had escaped. Of course Telly didn’t exactly say that, nor did the newspapers that Ossie bought in the days that followed his last meeting with the Grof. There were headlines which shouted: GROF FREE! “Mysterious disappearance of extra-terrestrial starts monster hunt!” Several papers said the Grof had been freed by another Grof and that made Ossie smile. Grof sightings ran like brush fire through The City. Telly laughed and reported that the
elusive creature had been seen on top of the Empire State Building and in New Mexico at the same time. Ossie waited for the knock on the door which would summon him "downtown" for questioning — but it never came. The Grof had freed itself and left no clues for the Pleesmen to follow. The door in its cage had been picked clean, Ossie read, no tools were found. The Grof was free but its chances of survival, even bearing in mind the flexible nature of its diet, were low. Then Winter drew an icy hand from the North and dropped it over The City. Humans could not leave their homes without their Winta Skins. Telly said one night as though to voice the creeping thought of The City: "If the Grof is out there it must be frozen stiff." Then where is its body? Ossie demanded and Telly answered almost immediately: "Its body, however, has not yet been found." The little flame inside Ossie that said that the Grof was still alive, flickered, as though threatening to go out. He missed his visits to the Zoo in the morning. It had left a hole in his day, an emptiness. Winter froze the emptiness inside him and confined him to the solitary business and pleasure of stamps. Then his mother died. He found her one morning seated in front of Telly who was jabbering on about the fashion needs of the spacesetters. Ossie went numb and became efficient. In a mist of time in which dates were carefully arranged and set and met Ossie dealt with the funeral, the rearrangement of the apartment, his stamp business and the sundry affairs of staying alive. He noted how Telly had lost interest in the Grof and often found himself seated before the electrical companion absorbed in that one fact.

Winter deepened and broke its back only in March. Then the heavy winds came. They punched the buildings and moaned in the throats of the alley-ways and made garbage cans lift up their caps like polite robot boys. They groaned with the thunder of their release. Then the rains came spitefully, spitting and snarling on unexpected street corners. Then they steadied their flow to an established beat.

Ossie sat listening to the sound of the rain. His stamp albums lay open before him. He sighed, closed them carefully and went in to the front room without bothering to put on the light. There was no sound of the rain now, only the silence of the room. He walked over to the window, expecting to see it splashed with the broken lances of the rain. It was dry. He pulled it up and looked out. A smile broke on his face like a mountain slide. He stepped back from the window, leaving it open... With a little "lop" the Grof cartwheeled gracefully into the room.
THE HIGHER TEACHER

If you have learned from all the teachers men
Acclaim the most and hold the best and then
From all their teachers too that came before,
And your desire is not the less but more:—
Go learn from him to whom they interdict
With one voice fire and water and evict
To seek the shelter of the oaks and sit
Among the shattered domes and derelict
Tombs of the ancients in companionship
With lizards and with spiders,
And show your readiness to understand.
And he will teach you what behoves you well
To know — and all the rest you questioned could not tell.

Ann Keith
“Alcohol would appear to be the main problem.”

“Enlarge.”

Princess Iguerra’s blunt manner did not disturb her advisor. Field Academician Estellia had got used to it in the light-parsecs since they had first met at Star College.

“The inhabitants of Milky Way/Spiral 2/27282/3 are suitable in many ways. They are fairly typical of the common Separately Evolving Humanoid, Type 2. In their case, intense evolutionary pressure has produced a perfect example of the Unbalanced Primitive Subtype.”

Iguerra uncharacteristically puckered her perfect brows. “You mean highly developed intellect, coupled with strong emotional drives, and rudimentary internal control?”

“Exactly. Earthmen, as they like to be called, sometimes develop purely intellectual powers which would not disgrace any species in Andromeda, while suffering the raging pangs of anger, lust and fear, as severely as the mindless creatures from which they sprang.

“In fact, they can restrain themselves from expressing these emotions in violent action, most of the time. But the effort of restraint combines with the unexpressed drives to create a state of unbearable inner tension.”

Iguerra dissolved impatience: “This type of violent primitive has often been shown to make ideal combat material in time of war. As you should know, we of the Interstellar Advanced Type have too much emotional control to show uninhibited aggression, even against malevolent non-humanoids.”

“I worry about the extreme instability of this race, of which I’ve been able to make a detailed study. In two hundred light-parsecs, they have progressed, if that’s the word, from dismembering each other with sharpened bars of iron, to making threats with quite sophisticated matter-fusion weapons. Their broadcasts show an obsession with violence, real and imagined. This disturbs me so much, I can hardly dissolve my anxiety.”

“I see. You haven’t explained why alcohol is important.”

“More than in most similar sub-types, the drug dissolves tension. Most Earthmen use it. It also dissolves intellectual functions... sometimes permanently. Worse, wrongly applied, it can lead to unpredictable outbursts of violence. Or even lust.”

Iguerra allowed herself to feel embarrassment, enough to form a light flush beneath her startan, visible only to an experienced eye like Estellia’s.

“Lust will hardly be a problem. The intergalactic situation is so serious, that it may well be necessary to allow selected primitive chromosomes into the Imperial gene-pool. As you know, in times of crisis, a Princess of the Imperial house nearly always marries a primitive who has helped to save civilisation.

“You will also know, my dear, that we Imperial women, among our other genetic advantages, have a super-refinement of the womb-laboratory, which not only allows us to analyse the nature of a lover from his spermatozoa, and remove obvious defects before conception, but to select exactly which characteristics are to be transmitted to the next generation: different in these desperate times, to those our ancestors preferred.

“Of course, that can only happen as I experience vaginal orgasm, inspired by personal insemination, and unrestrained directional lust. But the Duty-Gene, unneeded for generations, comes into its own at such times and ensures that can happen.”

She dissolved the embarrassment, became decisive:
"Have you a briefing and plan prepared?"

"There is an elite with knowledge of rudimentary science. Many have developed their imaginations by reading and writing literary inventions based on it. A planetary gathering of these relatively advanced types is about to begin. There isn't much preparation time, but I do recommend you to attend in person. There should be potential recruits to the Alien Legion."

"What about the alcohol problem?"

"The elite is not immune to its effect: they consume a lot, but seldom commit serious anti-social acts under its influence. This may indicate the start of evolution to Interstellar Basic Type. They should respond to the external tension-dissolving agents which normally deal with the addictions of primitives."

Two milli-light-Parsecs later, Iguerra's personal study-disc was skimming alien-bright blue wavecrests. She allowed exhilaration, as though she were flying the Foaming Seas, beneath the orange light, of her own beloved Tyala. She passed a tiny, primitive wave-craft, wind-powered, scarcely bigger than a sleeping-board. Its solitary crewmanoid seemed to panic on seeing the disc, so she submerged, and navigated by subnart to the sea-front of an Earthly city, near enough to conceal it among the rusting piles of an ancient iron pier. She surfaced; enjoyed swimming in; looking keenly at the alien shore.

The yellow star was bright as could be expected, and there were humanoid in plenty on and around the beach. All wore small, often sodden, garments around the loins, and some of the womanoids covered their breasts in a similar manner. She darkened parts of her translucent envo-suit in similar shape to these womanoid garments; choosing a strong red colour to match her hair and eyes, and the jewels in her control rings. The rest she rendered transparent enough to appear only as a glittering film over her beautiful, starburned skin.

Thus, she attracted no more attention than any woman of Advanced good looks, striding up the beach. She could see buildings now: some gracefully reflecting the style of many a parallel civilisation, yet with an eerie alienness all their own, others wierdly brutal, as though eldritch non-humans had occupied the planet, randomly scattering their cyclopean halls among the unconsidered dwellings of the natives.

She checked her equipment. Her ear-jewels were clusters of bright computcrystal sparks, fancifully shaped to resemble the Magellanic Clouds. The left, Lesser, cloud translated the main language: the Greater accessed a data mass on the planet, much of which she had yet to absorb. At her throat, a compujewel in the likeness of a spiral galaxy translated her own words. Her bag simulated the hide of an aquatic monster, containing items necessary for a brief stay in a savage environment. She confirmed no record of actual non-humanoid occupation existed, identified a large red building as her target, and entered.

Humanoids queued at a registration desk, attended by a manoid whose restless good looks struck an immediate chord: an air of boredom behind the friendliness; a fascinating, indefinable sense of the out of place. He smiled dazzlingly:

"You still have to pay." She produced facsimile notes of currency, as he continued: "I'm Prince Barth Arn, from Bathos, capital of the Bathetic Empire, when I feel like it. Otherwise known as Jim Cribens, from Aldershot. I'll put you down for the Costume Parade."

She explored the gathering. There were many rooms, each devoted to a different activity. The largest hall was dark, with a moving visual display. The topic was
relevant: a caricature of interstellar war; the illusion of depth, space, hugeness and motion skilfully achieved; but the detail preposterous. Starcraft, travelling at lightspeed, were shown buzzing each other like the tiny cloud-skimmers of primitives; and the enemy, when they appeared, more resembled anthroposperms of the humanoid unconscious, than the real Thing.

The next room had an array of smaller screens, with crude depictions of combat. Young humanoids interacted with the equipment in a kind of game. The theme was always destruction. She tried to estimate the sophistication of these rudimentary comps, while accessing the Technology Status Summary. In one corner were machines clearly capable of greater complexity than the rest, or than the Status Summary indicated. Overhearing a conversation, she gathered these were imported. She wondered where such dubious playthings could be manufactured, and who would sell them to the unstable inhabitants of Earth.

On to a lecture room with a notice pinned to the door: her transglass told her that talks were due on subjects such as ‘The Future of Artificial Intelligence’ and ‘The Technical Feasibility of Space Weaponry’. ‘Psychoanalysis and Science Fiction’ was starting. The room was crowded but fairly small: an earnest, bearded manoid was holding forth. He insisted that devotees of the scientific fiction had unresolved conflicts from two stages of childhood: the phallic stage, hence the interest in rockets and assorted weapons, and the oral, breast-sucking phase, hence the obsession with consuming alcohol. They had few anal problems. Creativity stemmed from inability to resolve sexual problems, and most of those present would be in desperate need of inexpensive services, which he could offer.

Iguerra asked, if a person thoroughly analysed would not, by his theory, be rather boring; suggesting that the resolution of emotional problems need have no such side-effect. She was invited to join a weekend group meeting devoted to ‘Dynamic Encounter’, with the assurance that both her question and the costume she was wearing indicated her dire need of this.

The largest number of humanoids congregated in rooms where alcoholic liquids were served. Most wore rather drab garments of woven material, but some paraded in crude, colourful envo-suits; or strutted in scanty outfits, seemingly designed merely as harnesses, for weapons obsolete even on Earth.

“Hi, Iguerra. Like a drink?” It was Barth Ann/Jim Cribbens. He had changed into a tight black outfit, with an arrangement of gold wires on his head, and a long iron knife in his belt.

“Yes, I’d like to try the local mineral waters.”

“Sure you won’t have anything stronger? I’m on the new Moroccan lager.”

She tried a sip from his enormous glass. “I don’t need this stuff. Why do you use it?”

“I thought everyone did at cons. Let go, have a great time.”

“Isn’t it unhealthy in the quantities people consume here?”

“I should know. I’m a hospital biochemist, analysing liver damage and recovery in an alcohol rehab unit. Two people’s work really... low pay, no prospects under this government. Frankly, we don’t get a good recovery rate. That should put me on the wagon, but it just makes me feel even more like a drink.”

“You turn to the substance you know from your science is harmful?” She had never encountered such a contradiction, even in a primitive, and allowed herself to feel her amazement.

“Only at cons and weekends. You can’t relate a nice pint at a really good con to
samples and figures in the lab. I’d go insane if I didn’t drink. Anyway, by the success rate of the quacks at our place, there’s no cure for alcoholism except religion, and that’s insanity in itself.”

She could see for herself, his inability to dissolve tension unaided. He fidgeted, stared rudely at her magnificent neck-jewel, and took copious draughts of his lager.

“Where are you from? When you’re not from Andromeda.”

She allowed herself to feel, and show, embarrassment. “It’s true that I was born on Tyala IV, in one of the small galaxies satellite to Andromeda. My branch of the family was out of favour at that time. But I assure you, I have since been recognised, and accredited to negotiate and recruit.”

He showed clearer signs of alarm, staring even more rudely. Placing hypersensitive fingertips on his forehead, she said: “In fact, I co-ordinate all Imperial activities in this arm of your galaxy.” She paused to analyse the emotional patterns evident in his skin conductance: stark fear, an undercurrent of lust, the two intertwined like embracing serpents.

He said abruptly: “I must get another drink. Sure you won’t have one... OK. See you.”

She found a corner to access data, hoping to understand this strange behaviour. She reviewed the Data Summary, and allowed self-irritation at once. She had not absorbed a basic fact: the planet had the status of an Isolated Culture: no contacts authorised. Could the imported equipment in the room of violent games be contrabrand? Perhaps very different standards applied in different areas of the planet. Accessing the Technology Report, she realised that detailed work, mostly examination of unmannonied spaceprobes, had occurred about five light-parsecs ago; the recent work directed by Estellia glossed over evidence that humanoid technology still advanced alarmingly fast, in favour of a study of their drives and instincts.

There was a reference to ‘sightings’ of study-discoi: some accounts of actual encounters, a few involving what sounded like strictly unofficial raids on the terrestrial gene-pool. Briefly she recalled carefree student days. Estellia had embroiled her in a ‘project’ to womb-lab-study the genetics of handsome members of relatively primitive sub-types, and had shown an irritating dedication to this work.

Earth governments encouraged the view that sightings and encounters stemmed from the emotional hysteria endemic on the planet. Humanoids never normally encountered off-worlders, were educated to doubt that these existed. Disturbed as a group of noisy youths with large glasses clattered through the room, she consulted the Alcohol Summary. The drug was seldom refused, save by those already damaged by it: Cribbens must have thought her insane, a reminder of the danger he courted himself.

Tension was prickling her neurones, demanding dissolution. She walked out into the air, cautiously crossed the busy, polluted road, found a vantage point to admire the star as it set over the quiet water. She decided to experience all of her spontaneous emotions. Voiding conscious control, she let unease flow through her. Fears sought the thoughts that inspired them with the tenacity of bloodzoids: laying out the strain of this real encounter, with beings who revolutionised their technology in less than a lifetime, but could only use it for war games.

For did the Earthlings know of what they play-acted? Horrid images of Toadmen oozed over her like carniv-slime, bringing their inevitable paralysis of revulsion, eclipsing all the little fears from Earth. She let herself shudder without control, then commenced the dissolution process. Only a little anger, unnaturally stunted rage,
emerged from the disgust: the thousand generations of selection and geneering against aggressiveness had ended warfare between humans, leaving an emotional amputation when survival was threatened.

She needed that little rage. On a planet of unstable passions, destruction of the aeons-ancient evil of Toadmankind must remain her sole crusade. Drained, resting for a little on a railing above the calm water, she encountered further emotions: pity for the entrapped, destructive selves around her; and a stirring of sexual desire which grew in strength as it flowed through her body and stiffened it. No surprise: she had, through pressure of work, auto-dissolved such feelings for over a light-parsec; too long, Estellia often assured her.

Perhaps, she reflected, walking slowly back, this was where her life had always been leading: childhood, and the scarcely credible heroines and romances of the legends; adolescence dominated by the growing menace of the Toadmen; then a life of duty, which for her, might always someday become genetic.

With an uneasy thrill, she recognised Jim in the entrance. “Come on Iguerra. It’s time for the Fancy Dress rehearsal.”

The largest Hall had seats for thousands, the long stage thrusting itself into their midst like the angry tongue of a star viper. People were preparing the pageant, wearing quaint, outlandish, get-ups: some cruelly disguised as alien life-forms, others in outfits which exposed their fully humanoid bodies, with exotic glamour far from their drab everyday clothing. Most merely paraded, but a few mimed adventures, displayed simple illusions, or recited messages. Iguerra was last. She paced the snake-walk to a position which commanded the undivided attention of the multitude, started planning.

“No special effects?”

“Oh yes.” She gave a few instructions to the sound and light operators: Then things will happen, which will appear strange. Do not worry. Normality will be restored, at least for a little while.”

Jim stared, bafflement masking desire, a yearning for more than her. “If only you were for real, not some schizy wierdo.”

“In Andromeda, there is no insanity; it is not necessary to lie, to act being other than oneself.” She found an awkward truth, and added: “But there can be...fun...in doing so.”

There was a little time. She moved purposefully round the Hall, then the rest of the building, planting transmitters. She started the light mesmer music, calming, scarcely audible.

Cribbins was one of those who did a little act. He slouched onto the stage in a long, faded grey coat, and a ridiculous hat, shaped like half of a ringed planet, with a dent in the pole. During a diversion, he divested himself of these, then did battle with other costumed characters, fighting unconvincingly with long knives and imitation ray-guns. She did not know whether to feel more sorry for him before or after. Having perfect self-knowledge, she decided after.

Her presentation was different. Standing in a single bright light, her suit in its red/transparent mode, she drew attention by suddenly darkening it to the most Imperial purple, and causing a gold likeness of her coronet to appear around her head. She spoke easily, but her voice filled the Hall:

“People and scientists of Earth! I am the Princess Iguerra! I come to you across the endless gulfs of space, which fall like the soaring of forever, between here and the Great Nebula in Andromeda. I bring a message, and an appeal.”
Everyone could hear her clear voice perfectly. She caused a holage of her study-disc to fly through the room, glowing softly. Next, the vast image of the ‘Star Cruiser’ filled the great roof space, every viewport alight, Imperial beacons glowing, astrocannon rising slowly from their peace bays, even the Novamaker ready for action, as it hung, Leviathan, above.

As she spoke of her far-distant home, and of the benevolent Empire that kept the peace of countless thousands of worlds, she caused the lights, and even the roof, to fade, and brought Andromeda itself to their awed eyes, seen as it would be from the high dome on Tyala, hanging in the endlessness like a vast wheel of spilled fire, great currents of chill luminence caught in a still second of inconceivably distant, imperceptible motion. Calm, beautiful, alien, the music of the crystal zither, from the cool worlds of Ni Tona, rose around them in a soft fountain of sound, the nearest evocation that can be made, of the silence of intergalactic deepness.

Her little control rings had power to show far more: a voyage from Tyala, with the suns of the lesser galaxy flashing past like meteors, as the greater scarcely seemed to move beyond: the capital of the Empire, with ambassadors from ten thousand planets crowding into the Council Hall. Then she showed them Toadmen, hopping lasciviously, in their odd, six-legged gait, towards screaming, nubile female victims.

"We of the Imperium are not warlike. We have evolved ways of settling the disputes of all the humanoid races. For untold ages, the gentle rule of Andromeda has kept the spacelanes free of war and piracy. But diplomacy means nothing to the evil, abhuman Toadmen. Evolved in an extremely hostile environment, they have no ability to control their implacable aggression.

"Worse, a quirk of their strange biochemistry means that the combination of human female sex and fear hormones, devoured raw, has a similar effect on their raging neuroanatomy to alcohol on yours, although they gain no nourishment from such feasts. When they conquer a humanoid planet, the fate of half the population is both worse than death, and death.

"Their evil empire has recently expanded to parts of your own galaxy. In space, our awesome power matches theirs; weapons you cannot imagine controlled and directed by our sophisticated comptus. So they avoid the challenge of battle, sneaking in search of unexplored worlds to invade, among the thousands of uncharted stars.

"Often we find whole solar systems turned into their horrid harem-farms, and there they have the advantage. In wars of liberation, planet-side, we need warriors who have not lost their aggressive drives over aeons of geneering.

"I am here to recruit heroes for our Alien Legion. Tomorrow, when your star is overhead, my ship will come."

Iguerra awoke early. She opened her conscious mind to the details of Jim Cribbens genetic make-up, sleep-learned during the night. With previous lovers, her interest had been confined to identifying those likely to exploit their relationship and her position: now she had to consider her chances of geneering an heir to the highest powers in the Imperium; one who would pursue the war with more vigour than the present ineffective leadership. The subtle channels of communication between womb and mind told her this might, with effort, prove possible — subject, of course to review. What had Jim said, as he removed her coronet: ‘Uneasy lies the head?’ No Basic woman needed her pregnancies approved by the Academic Parliament!
A knock at the door: "Breakfast."
She did not bother to dress to open it. An ugly manoid put his foot inside, regarded her with shifty, unconscious lust.
"Murpert, 'News of the Sewers'. Are you the Star Princess? If so, I can offer you, say, five hundred for an interview and picture. There's no need to dress.
"You can have a picture for nothing." She reached into her bag, gave him a white card. An image of herself in full regalia appeared on, or rather beyond it, a mirror of another world.
"What the devil is this?"
"A portrait of me addressing planetary delegates at the Spiral 2 Sub-Galactic Council. If you move it...so...you can see part of the audience."
Murpert was clearly impressed, if resentful.
"Will we be able to send delegates to this...Council?"
"Initially only as observers."
"I see. And how long is 'initially'?"
"About ten generations is standard, though in view of the level of violence and intoxication here on Earth, it might take a little longer."

He grinned unpleasantly. "So we're going to be set straight by a naked Princess, are we Princess?"
In her emotionally satisfied state, Igurrea was not upset by this temerity. She detected, and decided to allow, an unusual sense of fun. Picking up Jim's imitation ray-gun, she pointed it at Murpert: "Please leave us."

Showing signs of appalling physiological torment, he backed out of the door, and fled.
"Was that animal annoying you?" Jim was awake.
"No. He seemed quite articulate for an animal. Is he part of a separate sub-species?"
"More or less." His gaze held tenderness and admiration, mixed with a little fear, and that restless, indefinable longing, which she could see was not only for her, but for the stars beyond her. "I still can't really believe it's all true."
"It is true. Later today, I shall show you the 'Star Cruiser' in the metal. It is too impressive to allow doubt. Then you will have to decide whether to join the Alien Legion. I want the first detachment of volunteers to leave soon."

Stroking his forehead, she detected a heady mix of emotions running through his rangy, attractive body: hope, desire, uncertainty, tension stemming from terror of disillusion. She made herself an extra-dissolver, massaging away at the muscles of his neck and back, kneeling astride him so their naked buttocks brushed gently with every stroke: "I can influence commissions, and secondment to my staff. We need a security cohort in this spiral, checking little-known worlds for Toadman infiltrators and raiders, liaising with primitive cultures, exploring unknown systems for enemy bases, possible sources of recruits. Similar work to what I'm doing at the moment."
"If this is what you call work, I volunteer!"

The mesmer music was working well. Throughout the building reigned an atmosphere of calm expectancy. The rooms of alcohol and violent games were almost deserted, though she noticed Murpert in a little group in the former. There were news sheets scattered about, most dealing with problems of electricity supply; power cuts having occurred overnight around the planet. She found the 'News of the Sewers': it had a heading 'STARSHIP TO LAND ON BRIGHTON BEACH', with a picture of herself in yesterday's revealing costume, and the text: 'Lovely Princess
Iguana, of Dromedary Galaxy, who wants to lead an army of Sky-Fi fans against
girl-eating giant toads. But you don’t need to be a giant toad to lick your lips over
delicious Iguana’.

The room of serious discussion was closed, with arrows pointing to a large Hall.
This was full. As she found a seat, a smart, elderly manoid spoke from the platform:
“Well, we’ve just established that space weapons are unworkable in practice. Now
here’s Princess Iguerra to prove us wrong.”

“No. Your technology is unable to adapt easily to that purpose. If I may have a
little time, I will demonstrate some of the principles behind simple but effective space
weapons.”

She spoke until many of the people were sneaking out, having lost fascination with
the way her comptus and projector ring enabled her to cover the screens, walls, and
ceiling with equations, finally leaving some hanging in the atmosphere.

Others stared, rapt with amazement. The elderly man said: “Incredible. But if
your race is so advanced, why entrust your technology to mercenaries, who might
turn against you?”

“What have shown you is obsolete...used in Andromeda when the sluggish light
you see from that galaxy was still leaving it. No Alien Legionary knows the principle
of the weapon he carries, or the way it can be neutralised in time of mutiny.”

Murpert was at the back: “How do we know this isn’t all trickery?”

“It is nearly mid-day. Follow me and see!”

There reigned an unnatural calm, as the mesmer music from the extro-dissolvers
washed through the building, like bubbles in a slow-turning whirlpool-bath of the
mind. Only a few of the people (she no longer thought of them as alien) seemed
immune to its influence, lost in their own inner turmoil. Indeed, she worried that this
sophisticated therapy might act too well on the angry passions which had brought
her to Earth. She fine-tuned the transmissions, added subliminal echoes of the evil
chuckles of Toadmen, and the imploring cries of their victims.

There was a good crowd outside. People from the pageant were there, some still in
costume: their energy had survived her dissolution of its adverse resulting tensions.

They were still crowding out. To impress and entertain, she caused her study-disc
to emerge from the water, and fly up and down the beach. Humanoids scattered in all
directions, some stood and stared, others fell to their knees.

Murpert pushed his way through the crowd, followed by a bearded individual who
carried a crude notice: ‘NO TO SPACE IMPERIALISM. FAIR RIGHTS FOR
TOAD COMRADES.’

“Rodkins, ‘Socialist Intellectual’. What are the plans of the Andromeda regime
for the workers of this planet?’

“You will be offered a Galactic Protectorate...self-government under Interstellar
Law.”

Murpert snarled: “You haven’t told them about your planet Parliament, where
Earth won’t have an MP!”

She looked him in the eye, dissolved her anger, sent out relaxing vibrations with
her transmitter ring: “Do you really believe, that people who read such publications
as yours, are ready to decide the fate of galaxies?”

“I suppose not.” The anger and arrogance drained from him.

Rodkins persisted: “What if Earth workers rise up against your paternalist
protection?”

She shrugged. “It won’t be forced. But we would protect ourselves against your
eruption into the spacelanes. You pride yourselves on weapons which kill people, and leave their equipment. We do the opposite."

They were starting to look at the sky. A low, deep, distant thrumming, like the sound of gods hammering far away, spread over the firmament. Iguerra projected her voice: "When you see the 'Star Cruiser', you may believe we have already done that. Our scavenger beams have located all supplies of processed transuranic metals on this planet, and drawn the energy from them. Your governments will find that their most feared weapons now have warheads of pure lead."

The 'Star Cruiser' was now settling, starting to eclipse the sky, hovering effortlessly over all the space between the two iron piers. Jim, still in his costume, pushed his way to Iguerra's side. She stroked his hand reassuringly.

An energy ramp flashed to Iguerra's feet, solidified to the appearance of a grey metal gangplank. Estellia appeared at the top. Iguerra dissolved a stab of annoyance that the latter's envo-suit was completely transparent.

As the people stared at the starship, and a few shuffled forward, a strange music began, making counterpoint with the soft thunder of the engines. She looked at Jim. He nodded, and she took his arm, and led the way up to the stars. Compelling a stiff salute from Estellia with a glare, she led him past the Alien Reception Area, through the middle decks with their rows of bowing, saluting crew, up to the bridge, with its stunning array of on— and off— planet viewscreens. She turned, and gave him a slightly mocking, very affectionate, little bow.

"Welcome to the flagship bridge, my Prince!"
ACROSS
1  Donaldson's preserves. (5)
3  Planet of the Hoyles. (5)
6  Leto's House. (8)
9  On which Merrill's shadow fell. (6)
10  "_ _ and Monsters". (2,3)
11  Before Diego Lightfoot Sue. (3)
12  What the sheep of Charun do. (5)
13  Those of the Krynoid threatened doom. (5)
14  Brown had it after the mind. (5)
16  Do androids dream of electric ones? (5)
18  A mixed up one from Greg Bear. (3)
19  The one in Moominland caused great consternation. (5)
20  Del Rey says do this to your planet. (6)
21  Precedes eight-four for dystopia. (8)
23  An explosion following a peek? (-1-4)
24  Shy person's space within (5)

DOWN
1  One of the God Star Pack. (5)
2  My ear for a mixed up writer! (5)
3  Of paratime? (5)
4  Mr. Hyde was Dr. Jekyll's. (2)
5  The Nimon had these. (5)
6  Aragorn's father. (8)
7  Oakenshield. (6)
8  One of Yep's? (8)
11  Contraterrane. (6)
14  Yes to Alpha but No this this. (5)
15  Bester's 100. (5)
16  Did his burst give rise to legends? (5)
17  To be looked for at the Gates of Dawn. (5)
22  Cooper's Time. (2)

Answers on page 68

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S.M. BAXTER should need no introduction to anyone who keeps up with modern SF. Since his first story in ‘INTERZONE’ a couple of years ago he has appeared in a host of SF magazines and is probably the top new writer of ‘hard’ SF in the last few years. He lives in Buckinghamshire. He has a couple of books coming out soon (a novel based on his recent short story ‘RAFT’ and a collection of his Xeelee stories.) ‘THE TYRANNY OF HEAVEN’ is another set in the Xeelee Universe.

PETER T. GARRATT lives in Brighton. He has had a couple of stories in ‘INTERZONE’ and this is his fifth appearance in ‘DREAM’. He is currently working on a novel version of his 1986 ‘DREAM’ story ‘THE ANGEL OF DESTRUCTION’. For anyone who missed the original, ‘ANGEL...’ will be in our fifth anniversary anthology.

PHILIP SIDNEY JENNINGS makes a welcome return to our pages with ‘THE GROF’, which we are sure will be welcomed as much as his previous ‘DREAM’ stories. He lives in Walthamstow and is ex-publisher of the lamented ‘JENNINGS MAGAZINE.’ He is a teacher of creative writing. His 1987 story ‘THREE FINGERS IN UTOPIA’ will be in our anthology.

GERRY CONNELLY lives in Corby, Northants., and is a frequent contributor to our pages and a long-time favourite with our readers. ‘ZONKI!’ is the sequel to his well-liked story ‘THE RZAWICKI INCIDENT’. If you missed the original, that too will be featured in our anthology.

BRUCE P. BAKER lives in Lingfield, Surrey. A self-confessed eccentric, he must be one of our most controversial authors to date. He confesses to being martial, patriotic and a lover of the ladies. His unique fantasies have appeared in many small-press magazines and he has been described as everything from a genius to a barmpot! ‘BLUES IN THE NIGHT’ is his best for some time, we think. If you want to see how it all started his first story ‘CLOUDGODDESS’ (1986) is reprinted in our anthology.
THE OLD MAN'S MOUTH gaped like a Bakerloo Line tunnel when he opened
the door to find me, Shall and the Brat out on the balcony.
"You're supposed to be on that island," he said.
"We had to get off Benbecula. There's an army base there. I beat up a couple of
soldier boys in the bar — they were Tottenham supporters. Now the whole
regiment's after me."

The next door along creaked open — Mrs. Norton's nose still as long as Pinnochio
running for parliament. I gave her a Stratford Johns wink. Her door snapped shut.

The Old Man let us in.
Nothing had changed much. The place still looked as though a nuke had hit it and
it smelled like a giant armpit. The Old Man had just come back from one of his dive
bombing missions: there was a bowl of dog ends on the table along with a packet of
skins to roll the salvaged tobacco in.

"Where did the baby come from?" he asked, following us into the lounge.

"We nicked her from a pram outside the post office. Where do you think we got
her from? She's your grand daughter. How about a cup of tea, Dad? We've been
travelling all day."

Poor Shall. She'd never had a cup of the Old Man's stewed tea before. Caustic
soda was a refreshing drink by comparison. Me? I was off.

"I'm just going to get rid of the car," I said. "It's hot."

"But if you leave the car overnight, it'll cool down," said the Old Man.

I'd often wondered why people had trampled on him all his life. Now I knew the
reason.

After dumping the car in a forecourt on the St. John's Wood Road, I walked
home with the radio/cassette player under my arm, rejoicing at being back in
London again after more than a year away. The place had changed: Chelsea in the
second division — and what was all that talk about them selling Stamford Bridge and
knocking down the Shed? If only I'd stayed...

When I got home I found the front door ajar. Shouting came from inside. I
slipped into the hallway and stalked into the lounge. It was Shall's parents — her in
her slippers and him with a Mount Everest gut hanging over his waistband. They
were yelling simultaneously at my old man. The Brat was wailing and Shall was
trying to calm her.

That nosey cow next door! She must have rung Shall's parents as soon as she saw
us back. One of these nights, something's going to drop through her letterbox.
Something hot.

"Oi!" I shouted. "Leave my old man alone!"

Shall's parents stopped beating a paraddiddle on the Old Man's eardrums and
turned on me instead.

"So you've decided to show your face at last, Razawickey," Shall's old man said
to me.

"Rzhatinski," my old man corrected.

"Sharrap!" Shall's old man said to my old man. He turned back to me. "I owe
you a good thumping."

"That's one debt you can write off, mate. You lay one finger on me and I'll snap it
like a Kit Kat."

"Let's not have any violence," Shall's mum pleaded. "We've just come to take
Sharon home."
"Just you try."
"Just you try and stop us," said her old man. "She's our daughter."
"She's my wife."
Stopped him in his tracks, that one. Big Nose Norton hadn't told him everything. After silently mouthing like a gasping goldfish, he said: "She's only seventeen: she's a minor."
"We got hitched in Glasgow, mate. The legal limit's sixteen under Scotch Law. There ain't nothing you can do about it."
"Sharon!" said her mum. "You should have told us."
"And then what?" asked Shall.
"As for my name," I told Shall's old man, "you'd better start pronouncing it right: Rzawicki's your daughter's name now — and your grand daughter's."
"Rzawicka," my old man corrected. "Feminine Polish endings..."
"Yeah," I said to Shall's old man, "what he says."
"If that is my grand daughter," said Shall's old man, pointing to the Brat, "what's the big secret? Every time me or the missus asks what her name is, Sharon changes the subject."
"Do you know what year I was born?" I asked.
"Now you're doing it."
"I ain't. I was born in 1970. Don't you know what else is so special about that year?"
"Stop playing around. Get to the point."
"Chelsea won the FA cup."
His face went the colour of my old man's Polish borsch.
"You mean you've called the kid after..."
"Yep. Subs and all."
I thought he was going to rush me, using his gut as vanguard, but he stormed out of the room instead. I followed him.
"Don't worry," I called after him. "The team are only her middle names. Her first name's Michael."
The front door would have slammed, but it sticks to the frame.
"Don't mind him," Shall's mum said to me when I was back in the lounge.
"Life's been hard on him of late: first Sharon; then Dean."
"What's happened to Dean?" Shall asked. "Has he flunked the uni?"
"He's pulled out of university. He's joined some funny cult and vanished. We haven't seen him for about six months."
"What cult's that?" I asked. "The Church of England?"
"Shut up, Johnny!" said Shall. "This is serious."
"Your brother always was a weirdo."
Shall's mum gave me a look as black as a Guardian reader's hands.
"He ain't joined — what are they called? — the Loonies?" asked Shall.
"No. They've got a funny name — Max something."
"Bygraves."
"Shut up, Johnny!"
"Maximitas?" said the Old Man.
"Yeah. That's them."
How did the Old Man suddenly become a mine of information?
"You a member too, Dad?"
"A man from Maximitas came about two months ago. He said he wanted to see you about that flying saucer you said you saw. He left his card. I have it somewhere." He went to a drawer in the sideboard, but couldn't get it open because it was full of junk.

"Never mind, Dad. I'll see if I can open it later."

"Do you know where Dean actually is?" Shall asked her mum.

She shrugged. "We've told the coppers. They've never done nothing. They never do."

"Johnny'll find him for you. Won't you, Johnny?" Shall's Lili Damita eyelids drew downwards like little roller blinds, so I had to agree.

After Shall's mum had gone, I prised the Old Man's drawer open. The card wasn't there. I would have to find Dean some other way.

Dean! What a stupid name to give a kid!

Next morning I went round the larkin' office to tell them I was back. That gave me an idea. Dean took after his old man in one respect: cult or no cult, he'd still be drawing larkin'.

I went next door to use Big Nose's phone. I got the numbers of all the Greater London larkin' offices from her phone book. Amid howls of protest, I rang one after another. After talking to a load of thick bureaucrats, I found an even thicker one in the Stoke Newington office.

THICKO. Can I help you?
RZ. I ain't got my giro.
THICKO. Have you been called to an interview here or at the Unemployment Benefit Office recently?
RZ. Don't you want to know my name?
THICKO. It would help if you answered my question.
RZ. Well, yeah. The UBO called me on the 14th. I couldn't go because I've got no threads.
THICKO. No what?
RZ. I was at a party. I fell asleep. When I woke up, my threads were gone. My mates must have nicked them.
THICKO. So you're completely...
RZ. No, I've got pyjamas and...
THICKO. You ring the UBO and make another appointment. If you want your money, you'll have to attend the interview, even if you have to go in your Y-fronts.
RZ. They're in the wash at the moment.
THICKO. That's your problem. Not ours.
RZ. Just one more thing: can you check you've got my right address?
THICKO. Well...
RZ. I've just moved here from Birmingham, you see, and...
THICKO. We are rather busy.
RZ. Please, mate. It'd set my mind at rest.
THICKO. (Sighs) Very well. What name is it?
RZ. Rzawi...Rogers. Dean Rogers.
THICKO. What's your new address, Mr. Rogers?
RZ. (Uncontrollable bout of coughing.)

THICKO. (Sighs) Hold the line, please. (A lifetime later) Hello. Are you Dean Alan Rogers?

RZ. I think so.

THICKO. Don’t you know your name? Or did your mates nick it along with your "threads"?

RZ. (Hangs up.)

We spent all afternoon and all evening searching for that Maximitas card. Just as I thought I’d arrived at another dead end, it was found — inside one of the Old Man’s slippers: he’d used it to plug a hole in the sole. I didn’t dare touch it. Shall gave me a pair of tweezers she used to pluck her eyebrows.

Next morning I rang Derek Planter, the man from Maximitas. He seemed pleased to hear from me.

"We have a member called Dean Rogers," he told me in a voice as high as Susanna Hoffs’. "He said you’d had a close encounter. You must come and tell us about it."

"No one believes me."

"I think you’ll find us more receptive. Look, we’re having a little soiree on Sunday. Would you like to come along? Bring your wife."

Shall insisted we should be well turned out for the party. She changed out of her 501s into the only dress she had. I didn’t have a suit, so I put on my old school blazer after Shall had cut the St. George cross off the top pocket with a vegetable knife. The blazer was now a couple of sizes too small, but it would do so long as I didn’t raise my arms or breathe too deeply.

I was no longer a skinhead, but I still had my OIL SKINS tattoo on my forehead, so I combed my hair forward. I finished up with a hairstyle like Moe from the Three Stooges.

Late Sunday afternoon we went to the Camden address Del Planter gave me. The front door was opened by a woman with crows’ feet round her eyes, dressed like a gypso fortune teller.

I put on my poshest voice.

"Del Plant...Derek Planter said there was a meeting tonight."

"You must be Mr. and Mrs. Raz...Do come in."

She showed us into a kitchen that looked as though it came from the set of Upstairs, Downstairs and left us there.

"I think we’re supposed to get some food here," said Shall, pointing to a table with a vego spread. There was another table with bottles of drink on it. You could have red wine; white wine; breakfast orange juice; clean, wholesome Evian water or polluted, flouridised tap water. No beer. I filled two recycled paper cups with red wine, while Shall filled two recycled plates with vego pate and hunks of wholemeal bread containing enough bran to have the entire population of Camden sitting on the bogs all next day.

From the kitchen we went into the room where the conversational buzz was coming from. It went quiet as soon as we entered; then the noise picked up again. I felt out of place in my black blazer — all that denim and corduroy.
This pathetic specimen approached us, slobbered a kiss on Shall's hand and shook mine like a wet teatowel. He had those specs worn by kids in primary school — you know, the ones with the circular wire frames that always get smashed and are patched with Elastoplast. He had a Heinrich Himmler haircut — sideburns halfway up his temples — and a tweed sports jacket with leather elbows he must have slept in. He might have had a bad back because he stank of Ralgex. He introduced himself as Derek Planter before leaving us and mingling with some of the others.

Shall saw Dean and we went over to him for a family reunion. As we were catching up on all the news, Del clapped his hands and shrieked for silence. He said it was time for the entertainment and could we all move back a bit for the band. The other half of the room cleared as though there was a drunk ranting in the corner.

It was the strangest band I ever saw. One guy had a recorder — bigger than the ones that went whistle and squeak in school. They had a single drum on a sling instead of a full drum kit, a lute instead of a guitar and a trombone instead of a bass. And there was this woman playing a little fiddle between her knees — maybe her chin was sore.

The front man puffed on his recorder, then started singing like that guy from the Communards. I didn't hear much from the lute, because the player kept fiddling with his tuning pegs, and that violin thing reminded me of the lathe in the school metalwork shop. The trombone drowned out everything but the drum.

I turned to the guy next to me.

"Crap, in' it?"

He looked at me, then at his wine cup.

"The music, I mean."

"Oh, I think it's rather good actually." He started to sidle away from me.

I gulped down my red wine in one. I reckon the Evian water would have been stronger. I was about to go back to the kitchen for a refill when I noticed a bottle of red hanging on the radiator. I'd heard of serving red wine at room temperature, but wasn't that being a little too optimistic?

I took the bottle off the radiator and poured some of the contents into my cup. I nearly drank it before I noticed that there was now water in the cup. A dead fly floated on top.

"Looks like the Frogs are taking us for a ride," I said to the guy who liked the band.

He sniggered up his denim sleeve before saying: "That's not a wine bottle."

"You could have fooled me."

"That's a designer humidifier — for the radiator."

Honestly, it was just a wine bottle with a piece of wire coathanger looped round its neck.

After about an hour, the torture stopped and the band packed up. It was now me and Shall's turn to be the centre of attention. Del asked us for the story of our close encounter. I told them how me, Shall and some of my mates were stopped in a hot car by a flying saucer. I had told that story to quite a few people and I could tell from their faces that they thought I was spinning some yarn. But this crowd just lapped it all up. I reckon if I'd told them the saucer had stopped to pick up some chips, they would have believed it.

"Then they forced us on board," I said.

"You mean you were actually taken aboard?" asked a gape-mouthed woman in a dress Noah's wife gave to a jumble sale.
"Yeah, a close encounter of..."
"Please continue," said Del.
"They started pawing Shall, so we smashed up the spaceship. Then they landed and chucked us off."
"That's one of the most amazing stories I've ever heard," said the gyppo woman who let us in.
"There's more."
"Really?"
"Some fool rang to tell me to keep my mouth shut. Then these three bers came round."
"MIBs?" asked Del.
"Who?"
"Men in black."
"Yeah. That's them. I thought they'd been to a funeral."
"What did they say?"
"Not a lot. They just took our records — made them vanish."
"Records!"
"Yeah. The Old Man's Chopin. My UB40 albums. The Bangles — I'll never forgive them for taking those. You'd think these aliens, with all their superior tech, would have gone over to compact disc by now."

Del gave us a sheet of cardboard with pictures of these different aliens pasted to it, like mugshots at the nick. He asked us to identify the aliens we'd seen. There was a spacesuit with a mirrored visor, a shaven-headed Roman senator, a transformer robot and an alien who ate too many liquorice allsorts. The ones I saw were there too — bald pear-shaped head, three fingered hands, cat's eyes and a pair of nostrils drilled in the middle of his face. I showed Del.
"Wonderful! They're our friends."
"You keep funny company."
"Let me explain who we are," said Del.
"I was wondering when you were going to get to that."
"Eight years ago, our founder, Oscar Maxim..."
"Maxim — Maximitas. I like it."
"Maximitas is Latin," Del explained. "It means greatness. Greatness is the watchword. Those who follow our way become great people."

Wow! Here we were in the presence of great people.
"Oscar had a close encounter with the occupants of a spaceship from a world orbiting Tau Ceti."
"Tower Seat I?" said Shall.
"That's right. The Tau Ceti people told Oscar that the human race was in danger of ruining the Earth."
"Oh, I get it: you're greenoes."
"What? Oh, greens. Well, we see eye to eye on a number of things."

Del described how the Greeno Party manifesto was dictated to Oscar Maximitas: acid rain dissolving Christmas trees, Brazilian forests flattened to make room for football stadiums, vandals smashing the greenhouse effect with aerosols. Del told us how we should be living, conjuring visions of homesteaders in Welsh farmhouses, dressed in denims and sandals, eating pease pudding and organic mushrooms as the aerojon...aerip...windmills whirred outside.

The woman in the Noah's ark dress said: "I was in a mess before I joined Maximitas."

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She still was.

"Now my life has changed. The magnetic dancing and the meditation have helped enormously. Within each of us — even poor me — there's so much power — mind power."

"Prayer is a very powerful force," Del added. "The churches have known this for years."

"Prayers never done the Old Man no good."

"If it's harnessed properly it can be very potent. We can put our prayers together to form a super-powered battery."

"Is that the one with the copper-coloured top?"

Del then announced it was time for party games. We played consequences — you know, he said, she said. The consequences were that they had to abandon the game after several people refused to read out what I had written — maybe they couldn't read my writing.

They played musical Habitat chairs instead. I dropped out early because it was so stupid. Shall nearly won, but before she could sit on one of the last two seats, some moron barged her out of the way as though she was a ticket collector. He sat there giggling like a hyena on grass. It took all the muscle power of Shall’s eyelids to keep me from playing musical heads with him.

"What shall we play now?" squeaked Del after the last chair had been removed.

"I know," said a woman in denims and pixie boots who sounded as though she spoke through clenched teeth. "Let's play zonk."

The best way to find out is to learn the rules as we go along," said Del. "Basically it's this: the hero has to rescue a damsel in distress. There are other characters: some will help him; some will hinder him. It's like sword and sorcery, only we act out the parts to make it more realistic."

"Oh, I see: a role-playing thingy."

"That's it."

"If I may make a suggestion," said the woman in the Noah's ark dress: "Our two newcomers get the starring roles."

"That means it's your job to rescue Sharon, Johnny," Del added.

"All right then. Let's get going. What or who do I rescue her from?"

"Not so fast," said Del. "We'll have to change into our costumes first."

"Costumes!"

"There's a costume box upstairs," said the fortune teller who'd let us in the front door.

We piled upstairs. There were more rags in that costume box than on a Scott Joplin double album. They gave me a ridiculous costume: a plastic helmet with horns on it, a pair of black woollen tights that were too small and a pair of fireman's boots that were too big.

"What about a shirt?" I asked.

"You don't need one," said the gyp woman, who now wore a black cape and a witch's hat.

"You could be berserk," Dean suggested.

"You what?"

"Some believe the word berserk derives from the Norse bare serk meaning without a shirt."

You live and learn. Next time I go berserk, I must remember to take my shirt off first.
I found a spare bedroom and changed into my costume there. They'd given me this plastic sword too. You pressed a button on the hilt and the Thundercats logo lit up.

I quickly became the centre of attention in the main room. My tattoos — the five-masted schooner on my left forearm, the Polish Eagle on my right, CHELSEA in blue on my back and I red-heart MICHAEL STEELE on my chest — you'd think they'd never seen tattoos before.

"Before the game starts," said Del, now dressed as a spindle-legged dwarf, "we'd better introduce ourselves. Johnny, you're Sor, son of Mir, a young adventurer. Sharon, you're Princess Ronama, who has been captured by the wicked warlord Morto. I am Peskin the dwarf."

One by one the others introduced themselves.

"I'm Sandana, Queen of the Fairies."

"I'm Gob the Magician," said Dean.

"I am Morto."

"I'm Latto. I guard the road to the mountains with my trusty axe." He held up a toy two-headed axe.

When they had all finished, Del said it was time for Morto and his wicked goblin guards to take Shall — sorry, Princess Ronama — to their lair.

Shall, now wearing a cardboard coronet, was led out. A few seconds later I heard the front door close.

"Where are they taking her?" I said, going over to the window. I found an assortment of odd characters blocking my path.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" asked Del the dwarf.

"They've taken her out of the house."

"Whether she's still in the Kingdom of Magernia or not is something you'll have to find out in your quest."

He turned away and told everybody to take their places.

"Where's my place?" I asked.

"You stay here."

Dean, dressed in a conical hat adorned with moons and stars, came up.

"I am Gob the magician. You have need of my help?"

"Probably, Dean. I'm new to this game."

"Do you seek the hand of the fair Princess Ronama in marriage?"

"I'm already hitched to her."

"We're supposed to be playing the game," he hissed.

"All right, Dean if it'll keep you happy, yes."

"Come then. We must go into the hills in our quest to find her."

"But she went out the front door."

"Come. We have no time to lose."

"Into the hills" meant the stairs up to the first floor. That guy with the double-headed axe was lurking on the landing.

"I am Latto. I guard the..."

"Yeah, all right, mate. You told me."

"You must decide whether he is on your side or whether he is a minion of Morto," said Dean. "If you decide he is on your side, and he is, he too will accompany us on our quest."

"Can't you make him vanish with a magic spell?"

"My powers don't extend that far."

"I reckon you're working for that Morto guy," I said to Latto.
“Then you must do battle with him” Dean whispered.

Latto swung his plastic axe at me. It hit me on the arm, stung a bit, but didn’t chop it off. I raised my sword, flashed the Thundercats logo and hopped up the remaining stairs to the landing. I whacked at his head, but he parried with his axe. My fireman’s boot pounded his shin. He wasn’t expecting that and he bent forwards. A knee in the face knocked him back and he dropped his axe. I was about to haul him down the stairs when Dean stopped me.

“You’re not supposed to do that.”

“You said I had to do battle with him.”

“Not like that. With the sword.”

I had turned my back on Latro. I felt a shove from behind. I reached for the stair rail. I caught a baluster, but it came free and I tumbled down the stairs with the stupid thing in my hand like a relay baton. I was still in one piece when I reached the bottom, but as I tried to get up something hit me on the head. I distinctly heard someone say “Zonk!” just before I flaked out.

I had a dream, but I don’t remember it now. What I do remember was that it was cold enough to make me shiver and that there was a lot of traffic noise — so much that I thought I might be sitting in the middle of a main road. When I heard a bus passing only a few feet in front of me, I realised I had to wake up quickly.

I opened my eyes and blinked. I was propped on a chair behind a round table with a Martini umbrella. I knew where I was — outside a Greek restaurant on the Edgware Road. The clock in the bank window across the road said it had just gone half past eight.

Well, at least I wasn’t thrown from a moving Citroen 2CV!

People were gazing from their vehicles in my direction. Workbound pedestrians stared from the corners of their eyes and tried to hide laughter by coughing or putting their hands over their mouths. It was only after noticing this that it dawned on me that I was still wearing those tights and those fireman’s boots, and I was still stripped to the waist.

Thankfully I wasn’t far from home so I rose stiffly and clumped along the pavement. Everybody seemed to be heading in the opposite direction. Some laughed outright; others tried not to look. I realised I was still wearing that Danish Biker’s crash helmet. I chuckled it into a shop doorway. I crossed my arms over my chest, wishing the Bangles’ bass player was called Prudence or Elsie or something.

I turned into Church Street. I brightened the stallholders’ Monday morning as they dressed their barrows. One of them wolf-whistled, and the others joined in like it was a costermonger’s shanty.

I was never so glad to get back to the Old Man’s flat, even though Big Nose Norton saw me.

Shall hadn’t been home since we’d left for the party. The Old Man hadn’t changed the Brat’s nappy in all that time.

After I’d put Michael’s new disposable nappy on and stuck a bottle of milk into her mouth, I rescued that card from the Old Man’s slipper, took a note of Del’s Hampstead address and set out.

He lived in a block of flats with an entryphone on the front door. I sneaked in the back through the fire escape. I climbed the fire stairs to the third floor and rang his doorbell, keeping my hand over the door viewer. There was no answer, so I waited.
About three o’clock, I heard the lift stopping at the third floor. Just in case it wasn’t Del, I hid in an alcove as the doors opened with a pneumatic hiss.

I peeped out. It was Del, dressed in a brown suit with dandruff scattered on the shoulders and a white snot rag in his top pocket.

As soon as he saw me he jumped back into the lift and frantically started pushing buttons. As the doors closed, I rushed up and blocked them with my shoulder. They slid open again. I dragged Del out by his knitted tie.

“What’s the matter?” he whined.

“Where’s my missus?”

“I don’t know.”

“Into the flat, mate.”

“I don’t know where she is. Honest.”

I hauled him to his door by the tie.

“Open up!”

He fished a bunch of keys out of his pocket and tried to fit one in the lock with a trembling hand.

“Where is she?” I repeated when we were inside.

“I—I can’t tell you that. She’s all right. That I do know. She’ll be returned to you...eventually.”

I noticed that stink of Ralgex again.

“You got a bad back, mate?”

“I don’t see what...”

“Have you tried the Jackie Pallo treatment yet?”

He cringed against a wall.

“I’ll make a deal with you, mate. You tell me where Shall is and I’ll leave your back untreated.”

“Do you know anything about biology?” he asked.

“I’ve got a daughter.”

“Do you know what genes are?”

“Yeah. I’m wearing Levis now.”

“Biological genes. You’ve heard of a genetic fingerprint?”

“Oh, yeah, those things they use to fit up rapists and that.”

“That’s right. Each of us has a distinctive genetic fingerprint. I work for a firm that specialises in such things. Now, do you remember the aliens aboard that spaceship?”

“How could I forget?”

“They want to interbreed with us.”

I burst out laughing.

“There’s only one problem though,” Del continued.

“There’s more than one, mate.”

“They’re obviously not of the same species. Because they don’t come from this planet we can’t classify them at all, but they might be close enough on the genetic scale to be of the same order — maybe even the same family.”

“Families? Them? What are you on about?”

“If you copulated with a mare there would be no baby because your genes would never mix. But if a donkey copulated with a mare, the genes would be close enough to produce an offspring, yet too far away to produce fertile offspring; mules, as you know, are sterile.”

“What have donkeys and mules got to do with where Shall is?”
"I'm trying to explain what's happening to your wife. Our friends from the cosmos can juggle with human genes so that a hybrid between us and them would be fertile, so long as the two sets of genes are a close enough match. We took swabs from every Maximitas member a few months ago and one genetic fingerprint was ideal: Dean Rogers. Unfortunately we couldn't use him: he's sterile."

"That figures: his old man's an ass, and his mum's a mare."

"But he does have a sister," said Del.

Now things were getting serious. I had visions of Shall, wearing only the eye shadow on her Lili Damita eyelids, being banged by a bunch of drunken aliens.

"Where's Shall? Take me to her."

"She's quite safe."

"You're not so safe."

He got the message. He took me down to the basement car park. We got into his Morris Minor and started off towards the M1. There was a jam on the North Circular and we got caught in it.

"I'll drive," I said.

"This is my car."

"Listen mate. I've taken all I'm going to take from you. You pretend to be interested in our flying saucer story when all the time you want my wife; and you trick me into making a fool of myself at that party, which was just a ploy to steal Shall away. Now either you let me drive, or you let me drive anyway because I'll break both your arms."

Del thought it would be a good idea if we changed drivers. Once behind the wheel, I turned sharp left. We mounted the kerb and started cruising along the pavement.

"You're crazy!" Del yelled at me, as a pedestrian darted for cover behind a lampost.

We rejoined the traffic at the M1 roundabout, gave the car a thrill on the motorway and took the Oxford turn-off. I followed Del's directions to a place just outside the city. The building was just four walls, a flat roof, a revolving door and a lot of glass in the windows. It could have been anything: a school, an office block, a factory. The noticeboard said CETI LABORATORIES.

We left the car in the executive car park. I ran ahead of Del, spun through the revolving doors and dashed into the foyer past a doozing security man.

Del caught up, wheezing.

"Where is she?"

He pointed to a pair of fire doors. I burst through them to find myself in a room that reminded me of the biology lab at school: it smelled of dissected rats and disinfectant, and those creeps in white coats were beavering away.

Shall wasn't lying naked, strapped to a laboratory bench. She was sitting on a stool, still dressed as Princess Ronama, drinking coffee out of a glass beaker.

"Hi, Johnny!"

"Shall! What have they done to you?"

"Nothing. I've been helping those little people from the flying saucer. I'll get you some coffee." She got off the stool and placed another beaker of coffee into a microwave oven. "Michael OK?"

"Yeah. The Old Man's looking after her. He's good with kids."

Nobody spoke, but somebody was trying to communicate with me. The last time I experienced this telepathy thing was aboard that flying saucer. I looked about me for an alien.
And there he was. I hadn’t noticed him at first: he was only about four feet tall. And I was looking for a guy in a spacesuit. This alien had jeans — yes the non-biological kind — tucked inside black legboots. He had a brown checked shirt with rolled-up sleeves and — wait for it — a George Melly hat.

I stood gazing at him in a kind of trance till the ready signal from the microwave woke me.

I then got a silent message from the alien saying that Shall had been implanted. I turned to her.

"Is that true?"
"Is what true, Love?"
"He’s been waving his magic wand about?"
"Eh?"

Without waiting for a proper reply, I turned back to the alien.

"I don’t know what it’s like where you come from, mate, but you’re in England now: every wife comes with a free gift." As I delivered it, I heard myself saying "Zonk!" The alien was made of something soft and he was as light as a Liverpool supporter’s brain. It was like a BBC fight: I just tapped him and he went flying across the laboratory, landing on top of his George Melly hat. I followed up.

"Johnny! Don’t!" Shall cried. But it was too late. There was yellow fluid squirting out of both the alien’s nostrils. I didn’t know their funny felt-tip-line mouths could open, but he rolled on his belly and started spewing up this turquoise stuff — God knows what they eat.

Then this bunch of morons in white coats dragged me off. More morons bent over the alien.

"What do you think you’re doing?" Shall yelled at me.
"Teaching him not to screw around."
"No one’s been screwing around."
"He was boasting you’d been ‘implanted’." I tried to shake off the white coats, but there were too many of them.

"I have been ‘implanted’," said Shall. "By artificial inspiration. It’s a scientific experiment."

"No wife of mine is going to be used as a guinea pig."
"I did it voluntarily. They’re going to give me twenty grand for it."
I stopped struggling. "Why didn’t you say so in the first place?"

One of the creeps attending to the alien looked up. "I think we’re going to have to get him to a hospital," he said to no one in particular.

"Are you out of your mind," said Del. "We can’t just take him into any old casualty department."

"We can’t keep him here either. He might die."

Two of them linked hands to form a kind of chair, like we did in the first aid sessions in the scouts before I got chucked out. The alien was placed gently on the handchair. He had stopped puking and they had plugged his nostrils with bits of cotton wool. Del fussed about like a blue-essed fly as the alien was carried out.

The men in the white coats let him go. Shall came up to me looking really annoyed.

"Trust you to cause an interplanetary incident," she said.
Then she zonked me.

Shall announced she was pregnant. It wasn’t my brat and I wanted it aborted.
Shall didn't. We started having rows. Then one night I came back from the pub and there was a showdown. Not only were Shall and the Old Man bursting for an argument, but Shall had called in Del Planter, and, just to make it look more like an inquisition, the Old Man had called in Father Koltanowski. The neighbours had something to listen to till around half past two in the morning. I agreed that Shall could have the brat, but only after Del raised the bundle to twenty-five grand.

I dread to think what the brat will look like when it's born. Del and Co. will take it off our hands anyway; it'll go back to its old man's home planet. (I've been told he made a complete recovery.) All Shall has to do is carry it for nine months, give birth, collect the bundle and suffer her withdrawal symptoms...and give the kid its name. Now if Chelsea were to be promoted back to the first division this season...

COMING IN DREAM 25

Issue 25 is our first issue devoted to writers new to the pages of 'DREAM'. We think there are one or two names you'll be seeing in this issue which will become increasingly familiar through the 1990s.

We lead off with Mark Haw's novelette "THE LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE", which we think you'll agree represents an impressive 'DREAM' debut by this Cambridgeshire writer. He is ably backed up by a host of talented newcomers and we think you'll enjoy this issue.

Looking further ahead Keith Brooke is back in Issue 26 with 'AWAY ON OLD DUSTY' and he'll be joined by (among others) Christopher Howard, David Gomm, Graham Andrews, Dorothy Davies and D.F. Lewis. Is there no end to the treats in store? We certainly hope not!

RATINGS — DREAM 22

Quite a good spread of votes this time. The final result worked out;

1: KISMET  
2: WHEELER-DEALER  
3: THE BIRDS  
4: THE SOUND OF THE SEA  
5: CITIES  
6: TIME FOR CHANGE

Keith Brooke  
Neil McIntosh  
Tim Love  
John Light  
Arabella Wood  
Mark Iles  
2.09  
2.46  
3.08  
3.27  
4.63  
4.81

For once not a tie (or near-tie) in sight!
BLUES IN THE NIGHT

BRUCE P. BAKER
I sat day-dreaming of theatrical fame and fortune upon the blue-painted park bench, the light breeze ruffling my long brownish-fair hair. "Brownish-fair, indeed!" I grimaced. "Mousey, more like!"

I flicked a vagrant autumn leaf off my black skirt. Someone had said I had nice green eyes! So far as I could recall that was the only compliment I had received in years. Why were girls so vain, anyway? Complexion pale, teeth a bit crooked...I surveyed my black-nyloned legs critically. "'H'm...not bad. And I could dance — but offers were few.

Still, I had made it into the Penhaligon le Fay Amateur Dramatic Society, but no-one offered me the glamour parts I yearned for. As if they would!

A crunching up the cindery path made me glance up, to see a little grey man with a beard scurrying along with arms full of books.

"Afternoon, Miss!" Grey eyes matching beard and hair; grey suit, too. Almost spooky!

"Oh!...Good afternoon!" I glanced at my wrist-watch. "You'll have to hurry! The Library closes at 4.30 on a Saturday."

"So it does! But they are not due back 'til Monday, now I come to think of it."

Puckish grin. "No need to rush, after all! If YOU read more and day-dreamed less, young lady, you might get somewhere!" Tuneful Cornish accent, richer even than mine.

I gasped. The little grey man spoke as if from knowledge.

"Of course I do, Fiona. We Thimblewidgets are knowing souls. Some there are who think we might be 'gnomes'. And 'gnome' means 'knowing one'. Paracelsus dreamed up that word, but the beings themselves are as old as the hills; as a race, that is."

Curiosity beckoned. "Do sit down, then, Mr. Thimblewidget. I would appreciate your company."

"No doubt," nodded the little man sidling on to the seat with a sigh of relief.

I glanced at the books piled up on his grey-clad knees. Titles like UFOLKLORE; ATLANTIS AND THE THIRD EYE; SECRETS OF TIBET, and LEGENDS, PARANORMALITIES, AND NUCLEAR PHYSICS: The Reality Behind The Reincarnation Hypothesis — by Doctor Alabaster, Ph.D., F.R.F.S."

Thimblewidget's grey eyes twinkled. "Never stops writing, Doctor Alabaster!"

He placed the books carefully on the slatted seat beside him, and handed me the "Legends" one. "You are not so much vain as creative, Fiona," declared the little man, seemingly clairvoyant, "and with a quick intelligence starved of material. Please be so kind as to read the Foreword — the first paragraph will do."

"All right." I took the vast green-covered tome. Heavy reading indeed. Still, out of politeness...

'Science teaches us that nothing is truly destroyed; atoms remain, unless they are transmuted into energy. The atoms and sub-atomic particles of all beings who have ever lived therefore continue to exist somewhere or somewhen, in things or in people and plants and animals. Some must achieve Escape Velocity in the jostlings with other atoms and particles and, born in Earth, they are now light-years away. An atom that was once part of Cleopatra is still in existence, unless it was turned into energy. Einstein tells us that matter and energy are interchangeable, anyway.'

I gasped, Mind-boggling stuff! And yet I thought I caught Alabaster's drift.
"Of course you do, Fiona!" beamed Thimblewidget. "And it will mean even more to you anon!"

"It will?"

"Depend on it, m'dearie."

"Where DOES he get his ideas from?" I handed back the book.

"Alabaster? Thinks a lot. Believes some life-atoms are conscious — and they 'talk'. 'There is neither speech nor language' — a piece from the Psalms." Finger along nose and grey-eyed wink. "Telepathy, m'dearie. Apart from which, he mines the Transylvanian Bookshop for such rare books as THE SEVENTH GRIMOIRE OF HERMES, THE ATLANTEAN CODEX OF CORNELIUS AGrippa, and THE COLLECTED WRITINGS AND CORRESPONDENCE OF DOCTORS GAMALIEL FIREBRASS AND JOHN DEE, from the Archives of the Nathan Topsell Antiquarian Society of Pootlebury, Hants."

A strange goosepimpily feeling crept up my arms under my white nylon blouse. I jumped up as blue sparks crackled about me.

"What on Earth — ?" I fixed a fierce green-eyed gaze on the spooky little grey man. "Are you a warlock or something?"

Thimblewidget's small neat teeth flashed. "Why, no! The ideas stirred you, didn't they? The notion that Death is an imposter! That Cleopatra may be still with us!"

"Of course, but — "

"Think, girl! Nylon and static electricity. Your aura blazed into visibility. Very pretty blue. Indicates purity of spirit."

I felt a sudden warm glow. "Why, Mr. Thimblewidget, what a nice thing to say!"

The little man's Puckish grin widened. "Aha! Already you show signs of blossoming, m'dearie! 'Twas not flattery; merely the sweet truth." He rose from the seat, bowed, gathered up the books, nodded, and darted off down the cinder track towards the blue-painted park gates.

I stared after him as he reached the gates. Abruptly — he vanished.

I laughed. He couldn't just disappear! Could he? Thimblewidget! What a funny name, even for a Cornishman! And he had said there were more around like him! A tribe of Thimblewidgets? I let out a sudden peal of merriment, and heard a sharp voice from behind the seat:

"What's the matter with you, young lady?"

I blinked the laughter-tears from my gingery eyelashes and twisted round on the seat to face the lanky blue-uniformed figure of the Park Keeper. Sad-looking, sallow, he brandished his rubbish-prodding stick as if it was a magic sword.

"Hang on to your weapon!" I giggled. "Here be gnomes — and maybe dragons, too!"

Blank incomprehension rewarded the sally.

I threw back my head and roared. The laughter-tears streamed down my cheeks. I doubled up and sobbed until my sides ached.

"Drink? Drugs?" The Park Keeper shot the questions into the air, as if expecting some oracle to enlighten him.

"Ask the gnomes!" I shrieked, then, stumbling to my high-heeled feet, I staggered off towards the blue-painted gates. Suddenly I knew that life was the most glorious fun. One never knew who or what might turn up next! Maybe seven Thimblewidgets in assorted hues!

"The Magic Well!" The thought crept out of my subconscious. I had lived in Penhaligon le Fay all my seventeen years and had never been there. Too practical for
such superstitious nonsense. Legends were all right for glamorous romantics like Gloria Hunniford!

But Thimblewidget and Alabaster were right! There was more to life than mundane ‘reality’. Mayhap the paranormal was more ‘real’ than everyday matters? ‘Mayhap’! ‘Fiona, you grow quaint! That’s a medivalism!’ And why not? It was fun!

It was not far from the town centre, along a cobbled alley, hard on my high-heeled feet, to the granite outcrop with the blue National Trust sign besides the ancient stone-built ‘Magic Wishing Well’. Penelope the pixie, the story went, dwelt in the Well. Toss a coin in and she would grant a wish. Locals had murmured when an archaeologist had gone down and brought up coins dating back to Roman times. Nobles, groats, pennies, sixpences, even a piece-of-eight-pirate-loot! But the archaeologist had come to no harm. Perhaps the pixie recognised him as a scholar, not a thief.

Penelope had been a Helene, an Ancient Greek, in a previous life. Queen of Ithaca. I started. Where had I got THAT idea from? I shrugged. A Greek queen would appreciate scholarship....

I opened my black handbag, found a penny, and tossed it into the well. I peered down over the stone coping and waited for the splash. After what seemed minutes I heard it faintly.

‘I wish to be glamorous!’ I called. ‘If you can grant that, I shall believe in magic!’ The thought occurred that belief was the key. Right. Think Positive, girl! It was worth a try...

Talk about the Ugly Duckling turning into a swan! Mousey hair dyed coppery-gold, teeth straightened, a touch of rouge to correct my pale complexion, silvery-blue eyeshadow to enhance my big green eyes.

Blue seemed to be my colour; all shades. Yet my room was mainly pink. I sat before my dressing-table brushing my long, wavy coppery hair and the day-dreams brightened. Fiona Smith...no! Fiona Morningdew! That sounded better! And why should I not have flaming hair? I had been a redhead as a child. A ‘foundling’ left on the doorstep of Saint Non’s Hospice labelled ‘Fiona’...

A glam part at last! A musical based on Spenser’s ‘THE FAERIE QUEENE’, with me as Britomart the British warrior-maid. Exotic Celtic make-up; woad-blue eyeshadow and a touch of gold on the cheeks. Nice!

I heard the letter-box flap clunk. Still in my blue silk nightdress, I shrugged myself into an electric-blue negligee and swooped out of the room and down the red-carpeted stairs to the front door. Local postmark. Curious, I tore it open, and read:

‘Dear Miss Morningdew,

You’ll be great as Britomart. Spenser knew a lot. For the name is a variant on an old Celtic one; Britomartus was a Gaulish chieftain. Thought you’d like to know. Cheers!

Zadok Thimblewidget.’

‘Nice! Hey! I’ve only just decided to call myself ‘Morningdew’! Those Thimblewidgets ARE gnomes!’ I laughed merrily and climbed the stairs with the agility of a gazelle. Things got better all the time! I must dress. Rehearsals at 10.30 sharp.
As I re-entered my bedroom and slipped off the blue negligee, I started. I did not remember buying that! A slight shivery chill crept up my spine. Blue. Why this obsession with blue? Pink had been my colour until now. I shrugged. Pink was for timid girls! Fiona was going to be Britomart the Warrior-Maid!

Lunchtime break: I headed for the Corner Cafe and a much-needed cup of tea. Rehearsals for THE FAERIE QUEENE musical had been fun but confusing.

I slid into my favourite seat by the bow-fronted window and took out a note-pad and pen from my black handbag. My fellow-performers had all made for "The Pixie's Arms", but I preferred to keep a clear head.

Sipping my tea, I grimaced. What with that weird-o Erasmus Coote, the author, and that fugitive from the London School of Economics Tarquin St. John Pierce-Foggit, the Producer, my head buzzed. Coote and Tarquin were of Crypto-Communist persuasion and were convinced that King Arthur was of Russian extraction!

"So he was, in a way, m'dearie!"

I glanced up, startled, to see greybeard Zadok Thimblewidget seated in the ingle-nook. I could have sworn the Cafe had been empty when I came in, save for the proprietress, buxom blonde Betty.

"Will you stop reading my thoughts, Mr. Thimblewidget! In what way was King Arthur a Russian?"

"Sarmatian by descent, Fiona. They were a tribe from the Steppes, who provided cavalrymen for the Romans. Stationed in Britain, their most famous commander was one Lucius Artorius Castus."

"Really?" I gasped, and jotted down the information. "Did he take a sword out of a stone, then?"

"Out of a platform altar, m'dearie. Their cult object was a sword. And they had a sort of windsock dragon standard. What do you think of that ginger cove who's playing the wicked wizard Archimago?"

I shuddered involuntarily. "Since you ask, he gives me the creepies! Sinister. Over six feet tall, with a red beard and all in black. Type-casting, I call it! Pennington Wax, he says his name is."

"I thought it might be something like that," nodded Zadok. "Watch out for yourself on a dark night, m'dearie!"

I grinned nervously and wrote: "Pennington Wax playing a baddie. Thimblewidget says he is one." I glanced up: "Thanks — Hey, Betty!"

"Yes, Miss?" Betty's blue eyes regarded me over the tea-urn.

"He's gone!"

"Beg pardon, Miss?"

"Mr. Thimblewidget! Where did he go?"

"Thimblewidget? Which one? There's seven of 'em!"

"There would be! Zadok."

"You winding me up, Miss?" Betty frowned. "He's been dead and gone these past four years. I should know — I attended his funeral at Saint Non's! Popular, he were. Proper joker."

I felt the blood drain from my cheeks. "Joker? That follows!"

"Been working too hard at that they theatricals!" diagnosed Betty. "Folks do say it's real complicated, that FAERIE QUEENE stuff!"

I nodded. "Did you know King Arthur had Russian ancestors?"

Betty sniffed. "Just the sort of thing Erasmus and Tarquin would tell you! I
thought I heard you talking to yourself about that idea. Have you got to go back today?"

"Why, no. Rehearsals are over for today. The Morris Dancers have booked Penhaligon Hall. I—I think I’ll go home and put my feet up! The warrior-maid part is well, very physical!"

I stumbled up the red-carpeted staircase to my flat, kicked off my blue high-heels and sank into the nearest pink armchair.

I glanced through my notes. Saint George was in the musical, too, and Tarquin, a pedantic soul, remarking that George was 4th Century, had insisted "Prince Arthur" must have been a Sarmatian! As it seemed he might have been, according to Zadok. I shuddered. Zadok was a spook—or perhaps a gnome masquerading as a human! A funereal funer, too? Had I triggered off paranormalities by conjuring up the Pixie of the Wishing Well?

I stared at the note-pad and shot bolt upright in the pink armchair. The page was covered in drawings—and I did not recall doing any of them! Pennington Wax leered up at me, cone-hatted and long-robed as Archimago the Sorcerer. Thimblewedge was there, finger to nose. Down-page a pirate chest and the word "Morgan" and a bottle. Sir Henry Morgan—buccaneer—and a brand-name for rum! A big cat? A leopard! No...too burly a beast...a jaguar. Mushroom—no, toadstool; it had spots. Jaguars and Sacred Mushrooms—they had South American connections.

I had written ‘Alice’ alongside a looking-glass and the word “Blues”. That word again! A blues singer called ‘Alice’?"

I shook my buzzing head. Psychic doodling? If so, what did they mean? Something to do with Doctor Alabaster's "Conscious atoms"?

Vaguely I recalled a line from an article in "ENIGMA: The Magazine of the Paranormal": 'Two sub-atomic particles, once joined, continue to resonate when parted, though separated by vast distances.'

It rang a bell now. If true, that explained telepathy and prophecy and clairvoyance. Psychometry, too. When I was eleven I had become fascinated by the Occult, but the nuns had put a stop to that! Now, some of the things I had read then came back.

I yawned. Tired at 2.15 p.m.? Suddenly it struck me I had skipped lunch. Dreamer! I staggered up and headed for the kitchen, absently switching on the radio on the table.

"An unusual request, folks!" came the cheery tones of a DJ. "Ted Simpson remembers a blues singer 'oop North', Alice Morgan —"

I paused in mid-stroke with the bread-knife half-way through the loaf. "Alice Morgan!" I shivered; the kitchen seemed arctic suddenly. Chilly for August.

"— always wore blue —"

I shook from head to foot. Blue again! Eerie feelings up and down my spine.

"— so she was called 'Alice 'Bluegown' Morgan' from her dress and up-tempo version of the old song. Her promising career was cut short by —"

Fierce static. I banged the radio but the noise continued.

Abruptly, a powerful voice rang out with a Blues version of "My Sweet Little Alice Blue Gown", of all things.

The voice had a curious sophistication coupled with an odd innocence, Monroe-like—with a Welsh accent!

I did not recall ever having heard of Alice Morgan. And yet... there WAS
something familiar about the name. And come to think of it, Pennington Wax reminded me of someone.

The song ended and I switched off. What was that ringing? The telephone!
I rushed into the bedroom and snatched up the blue receiver.
“Fiona Morningdew?”
“Oh? Have I got the wrong number again?”
“Eh? Of course! I’ve changed my name! ‘Morningdew’ sounds nicer than ‘Smith!’”
“Ah! Edgar Cattermole here.”
“Oo-ooh!” I thrilled like a schoolgirl. “The Theatrical Agent?”
“That’s right. Remember the classic line: ‘Don’t ring us...?’ Well, now I AM ringing you! Fiona, want to turn pro.?”
“You bet, Mr. Cattermole.”
“Good. Do you mind becoming a flaming redhead?”
“Funny you should ask that! I’ve dyed it coppery-gold!”
“You have? Splendid. You can sing, can’t you?”
“I’m Cornish!” I laughed.
“I know — but can you manage a Welsh accent?”
“Why not, boy-o?” I chuckled. “Just tell me the part, Edgar bach!”
“Very good, Fiona. Erasmus Coote’s written a musical around the life and times of a Welsh singer cut off in her prime. She might have made the Big Time like Bassey, but —”
“Alice ‘Bluegown’ Morgan!”
“That’s her!” Cattermole, startled, threw grammar aside. “She’s practically unknown outside Lancashire, but Coote’s got a TV company ‘Oop North interested. It’s a powerful story, rags to riches — nearly, with drugs and Black Magic thrown in! Coote reckons it would be a cautionary tale and all! You know Coote, don’t you?”
“Why, yes! I’m in his FAERIE QUEENE musical!”
“Are you? He told me about that. Bit obscure; King Arthur of Russian descent? I ask you! Never mind, this ‘BLUES IN THE NIGHT’ is great — could well make the West End.”

My senses reeled. Blue! Always blue! And Alice kept looming up out of nowhere, as mysterious as ‘Morgan le Fay’, the Arthurian enchantress!
“Fiona?”
“I—I’ll do it, Mr. Cattermole! I’ll see Erasmus Coote and get the script!” I shook furiously. TV? West End? The tall, awkward orphan girl was going places! I drew myself up and realised, suddenly, that I had quite a good bust! Tall? Boadicea was over six feet tall and magnificent! Coote theorised that Britomart was a descendant of the warrior-queen. From now on I’d flaunt it — 6-inch stilettos!
“I’ll leave it with you, then Fiona. Ring me back Monday, early.”
“Will do.” I replaced the receiver. Why not ring Mr. Coote now? I dialled his number.
“Ee, is that yoong Fiona lass?”
My flesh crawled. Pennington Wax! Lancashire accent.
Icilily: “Mr. Wax! Kindly ask Mr. Coote to come to the ’phone.”
“Reet. Erasmus, it’s for thee!”
“Oh!” — faintly. “Coote here. Who’s calling?”
“Fiona. Mr. Cattermole’s just ’phonned about your play. I’ll be your Alice!”
“Splendid, my dear! Pennington and I were just talking about you! You make a
great warrior-maid — and Alice was a strong personality, too."

"Aye, that she were, an' all!" chimed in Pennington Wax. "I knew her, Erasmus. She would have gone straight to the top, if it hadn't been for'd accident!"

"What accident?" I demanded.

"It's all in the script. Penners will bring it round this very afternoon."

Then, before I could protest, Coote said: "Bye for now!" and hung up.

I shivered. Was Pennington a brilliant actor — or was he truly evil? The ghostly Thimblewidget — or gnome — had warned me to watch out. I grinned. My celtic imagination was playing tricks! Pixies, gnomes, whatever next? Next should be a hot bath to unwind me. Pennington just could not be that bad! Villians of the darkest dye were found only in Victorian melodramas!

Glowing all over, I stepped from my pink bath, towelled myself vigorously and decided to change everything. Everything blue — satin lingerie, blue tights and electric-blue knee-length frock. I sank down on the pink stool by the dressing-table and brushed my long coppery-gold hair. When Pennington arrived, he would find Alice Morgan reincarnated! Blue glass ear-studs to match the beads. Silvery-blue eyeshadow and royal-blue mascara and eye-liner.

I painted my lips a pretty rose-red and smiled at my new image. Great improvement! On impulse I added a thin gold chain with a crucifix.

Banging on the door.

I jumped. Pennington!

Heart thumping, I swooped down the red-carpeted stairs and opened the front door, to look up into the strange violet eyes of ginger-bearded Pennington Wax. All in black as usual.

Pennington thrust a large and bulging brown-paper parcel into my hands. "Here, lass! Erasmus Coote's script."

Suddenly he lunged forward and grabbed me roughly, and his big mouth twisted in a crooked-tooth grin. "Give us a kiss — that'll do for starters, any road!"

I struggled to break free, the parcel slipping from my grasp.

Leering, Pennington grabbed at my bodice, then leaped back as if stung, violet eyes popping, cheeks pale as death.

"Yaagh!" he choked, and, whirling, rushed off down the cobbled street.

I stared after him. I glanced down, to see the gold cross glinting in the pale Autumn sunshine. So Pennington really was a warlock!

Shuddering, I bent my knees and picked up the fallen parcel. I hoped there wasn't a part for Pennington in the "Alice" musical! The name 'Pennington Wax' must be a stage name.... It sounded very slightly familiar. I had THOMPSON'S GUIDE TO VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN THEATRES AND MUSICALS in my book-case.. What made me think Pennington was as old as that? But his parents might have been in Showbiz, too

Still shaking, I climbed the stairs, put the script on the dressing-table and opened my little book-cabinet. "W".... 'Waley, and Scott... see Scott and Waley...' No, I'm not looking for those two, thank you very much! 'Wax'...Wax...can't find one! Wackett...Pendlebury K...Born February 2nd 1892. Christened 'Josiah', and 'Bury' from his place of birth.'

1892! The shuddersome thought crawled out of the darkest depths of my subconscious: Wacket was the man!

"Began as music hall comedian, reputedly so bad that people came from miles away to watch him, in fascination, just to find out if he had
succeeded in getting any worse. Critics agreed that he never disappointed; he could always hit a new low. Strangely, as a dramatic actor he excelled, in melodramas and supernatural productions like Marlowe’s DOCTOR FAUSTUS. Bought an old Gothic Folly, in the shape of a windmill, in Mid Hampshire and plunged into Black Magic. Went to France in 1917, ostensibly to entertain the long-suffering troops, but in reality to seek a “Magic sword” called “Runebrand”. Vanished just before the Armistice, and is now little more than a rumour or a modern folk tale.”

I shivered. “I’ve got news for you, Mr. Thompkins! Wackett is alive, well, and up to no good!”

I snapped the book shut, replaced it, and picked up the parcel. Better have a look at the “Alice” script... and try not to get it confused with the ‘Faerie Queene’ one!

I ripped off the brown paper, sank into the pink armchair and started to read. To my horror, I found Wackett in the cast! Coote was not to know “Wax” was he! Probably thought Wackett long-dead.

I skimmed through the script, fascinated by the vivacity and energy of Alice Morgan, whose one great weakness was strong bad men. Wackett, it seemed, had turned to conjuring...not like Paul Daniels but in the style of an old-time warlock, “conjuring up spirits from the vasty deep”. He became Alice’s ‘Svengali’ and they took a small region in Lancashire by storm. Alice was a night-club torch-singer with a brilliant future....

Suddenly, in spite of my interest, I yawned. It had been a trying day, the rehearsals had been hard work, and the encounter with Wackett had been nerve-racking.

I would call it a night. Slipping out of my electric-blue frock, I creamed off the make-up and donned the blue silk nightdress, crawled into bed and switched off the lamp.

I lay back on the pillow, thinking of my strange adventures. A stray Moonbeam streamed in through a chink in the curtains and played on the dressing-table mirror. Concentrate on that and the optic nerve would grow tired and I would sleep, I decided.

Thoughtfully, I fingered the small gold crucifix on the chain round my neck. The nuns had been kind but like so many teenagers I had my rebellious moments. But the little cross had been worth much more than its weight today! The clasp was a bit dodgy, though. I must get that seen to, in case it got lost.

I yawned again and drifted off into a dream-filled sleep.... Confused images...seven little men in a cave a-glitter with stalactites and stalagmites, torchlight-sparkling...‘midst hissing retorts and bubbling cauldrons. Thimblewidgets! A ginger-bearded baldie in red worked closely with a little fair-haired midget in yellow. Yellowman played a small Irish harp and a little rainbow arched from the leprechaun figure on the instrument and into a brazen bowl held by the Red Thimblewidget. I seemed to be up amongst the stalactites looking down. Ingots of dull grey metal were turning yellow. Lead into gold! Alchemy!

My friend Zadok, the grey one, stood beside a similar being in green and they were staring at an opaque mirror.

Two more, dressed in blue and purple, sat cross-legged on a Persian carpet, eyes staring into space, in a trance.

“The Magic Mirror avails us not!” grumbled Zadok the Grey. “Fiona is as much
a mystery to us as she is to herself! ‘Smith’, indeed! The nuns had to give her a surname!”

The Green Thimblewidget nodded glumly. “Aye, Brother! Yet she is plainly more than just mortal. Mayhap born of the union of a sprite and human being?”

“As we are part-gnomes...” Zadok muttered. “Could be. But a long way back, perhaps in the time of Arthur and Morgan le Fay.”

The purple-clad Thimblewidget’s matching eyes rolled in his engagingly ugly features. “The Toadspell, Brethren! ‘Twill open many doors in the Braincastle!”

Blue Thimblewidget jerked out of trance and intoned:

“Bringer of gifts, Doctor of Flight voyaging afar on Wings of Light! Son of Thunder, Source of Light, Visionking, Magicmaster! Demotic, narcotic, even erotic, ‘twill bring Enlightenment faster!”

Purple Thimblewidget grinned broadly. “Magic and Theatre! Did David Garrick e’er sample Fly Agaric? Have a care how you fool with that lethal toadstool!”

“Everything and anything in moderation?” pontificated the Grey One. “Porphyrius has hit on the solution, methinks.”

Suddenly I seemed to be back in my bed, staring wildly at the Moon-glimmering mirror of the dressing-table. Was I awake or asleep? A greybeard with twinkling blue eyes peered out of the mirror. Head and shoulders only. Brown habit. “A monk?” I gasped.

“Nay!” Merry laugh. “I am Catweazle, wizard of Earth and Water!”

“Oh! You look friendly!”

“Aye, and thou hast need of friends. I voyaged into the sky in the ‘Zodiac’ fire-balloon and by chance found the Portal to the Aquarian Dimension. Wonder not at thy visions, Fiona — thou hast stirred up sprites and pixies and —” — sudden fierce frown — “demons! Didst know ‘glamour’ is a Celtic word for faerie illusions? ‘Tis a defence, in some measure, against the evil lies of the Devil, yet, like all good things, it can be perverted to wickedness.”

My head buzzed. “What on Earth do you mean? Oh! Yes! Ancient Babylon! The false glitter of this World and all that!” I shuddered. Vanity was a favourite weakness!

“Fear not, Fiona! Thy ancestress Britomart, the virgin warrior, painted herself prettily with blue-woad eyeshadow, a touch of gold and rose-red ochre on her lips. ‘Twas enchanting!”

“Are you THAT old, then?” I had heard that Catweazle belonged to Norman times.

“Nay! But I am a time-traveller. I reside now on Aqua VII, a world in the Aquarian Dimension. The Grey Thimblewidget asked me to appear in your dreams, to give you comfort, Fiona! Mysterious, that one! I bring you the Box of Enchantments of Britomart. Thou wilt find it on the morrow. Rest now, Fiona!”

Catweazle’s blue eyes blazed with light and he made strange passes with long-fingered hands. Dizzy, I sank back on the pillows and oblivion claimed me.

Suddenly I was wide awake, drenched in perspiration, hair bristling, eyes staring into pitch darkness. A peculiar smell hung in the air. Sulphurous? A dull-orange fireball exploded at the foot of my bed and there, outlined in pale fire, stood a tall darkling figure, eyes like burning coals in a black, horned head. Forked tongue flickered between fanged jaws and bat-like wings brushed the ceiling.

I clutched at the cross and thrust it towards the demon.

“Take off the cross!” urged the monster. “Join the Dark Powers! We offer you fame and fortune!”
“Go back to Hell where you belong!” I screamed. “I’ve heard what happened to Doctor Faust!”

“THAT old story? A modern young woman like you, believing in mediaeval fairy tales? You’ve got it all wrong, Fiona. Think: my Master’s name is ‘Lucifer’ — the ‘Light-Bearer’! How can Light be evil? For that matter, Chaos is but unformed stuff; neither good nor bad. It can become either.”

“Then why are you so ugly?” I demanded.

Shrug. “Why are octopuses hideous? The Creator made them — just as he made butterflies and cats. Why sickness, sadness and death? If all men served Lucifer, these horrors would vanish like...like the ‘Morningdew’!”

“Ah? Wh-what did you say?”

“The name you chose, Fiona!” purred the demon. “A mere chance? You believe in coinidence, I take it? No such thing: the Law of Synchronicity, my dear. The cross represents suffering and shame — cast it aside and join with Lucifer in bringing happiness to all in Earth!”

My mind whirled. Was this how Alice Morgan had been converted to Satanism? She had come to a sticky end —

“Because she renounced her vows to Lucifer!” the demon answered my unspoken thoughts. “The loyal are rewarded; the traitors punished. For Lucifer is just. You have the word of Swartbat Redeye.”

“Just? What about mercy?”

“Too often abused, my dear. Now, throw off that cross!”

“No, no!”

“A touch of the Ku Klux Klan, perhaps?”

I screamed as the gold chain and pendant crucifix blazed with sudden fire, burning my neck and cleavage.

“I can heat it up ‘til it burns deeper — scarring you for life!”

I gritted my teeth, but tears sprung to my eyes. I thought of the virgin warrior Britomart, or Christina Dodwell of the ritual crocodile scar, Odette...’Jeanne d’Arc!

“The so-called Good Powers let her die!” screamed Swartbat Red-eye. “Why are humans so blind?”

Averting his blazing-eyed gaze, Swartbat lurched forward and snatched at the chain with curling talons.

Frantically I twisted to one side and the claws ripped the sleeve of my blue silk nightdress and dug into my quivering flesh. Pain daggered my reeling brain as the warm blood trickled down my arm.

I shrieked. Surely someone would hear?

“Oz Factor!” mocked the demon. “Encounters with demons are usually one-witness affairs, my dear! Which is why Science rejects us! Throw away that cross, girl!

“No! No! I won’t! I WON’T!” Natural stubbornness reasserted itself and I pounded the monster’s massive black chest with balled fists. Still it kept its eyes averted. Even mighty Swartbat feared crosspower!

Searing pain encircled my neck and between my breasts and, screaming, I fell back on the pillows, and crashed into oblivion.

I awoke, stiff and sore and drenched in perspiration, with a nasty smell in the air, blood on the sheets and a Welsh voice singing ‘In my sweet little Alice-Blue Gown’ in my mind’s ear. I hauled myself upright and brushed the tousled locks out of my eyes. I stared aghast at the jagged scar on my right shoulder. Like the claw-marks of a
savage beast. The blood had clotted. I glanced down at the cross. The movement caused it to shift and I stared, horrified, at the cross-shaped scar between my breasts. I burst into sobs, the tears rolling down my cheeks and on to the bloodstained sheets. So the nightmare had been reality! Scarred for life by the malice of Swartbat Redeye.

I raised my tear-bedimmed eyes to the ceiling. Pale gold dawnlight, dustmote-laden, streamed in through the chink in the curtains and struck the dressing-table mirror. It had better be worth it!

What was that square silver object on the dressing-table, amidst the brushes and combs and make-up?

With cautious curiosity, I crawled out of bed and stumbled over to look at the object. A silver box, ornamented with sinuous dragons. Catweazle's gift! Britomart's Box of Enchantments!

I could do with something to bring light into my darkness and soul-horror.

I opened the box, to find little glass jars and pots, brushes, and tweezers. Ancient British beauty kit!

A ray of hope. Maybe it was magic? At least it would hide the scars! As Catweazle had said, glamour could work for good!

The crucifix chain broke and dropped on to the dressing-table. Heated up by demonic fire, the much-abused molecules had given up when they cooled down! I grinned shakily. Magic meets science!

I slipped the chain into a drawer. Penhaligon le Fay had a jeweller's shop somewhere in its maze of cobbled streets. Must have. I would go find it later. I felt desperately weary and sore.

I slumped on to the pink stool, took out a pot of flesh-coloured make-up and applied it gingerly to the jagged scar. It covered it well and soothed the soreness. Now for the burn-marks. Marginal relief; it worked there, too.

"Thank Heaven for glamour!" I muttered. "Wonder what Mother Superior would say?" Honorable scars? That was all right for soldiers! Blue woad eye-liner, touch of gold at the temples, red ochre on lips. Just like Britomart herself — with the authentic materials! "Ta, Catweazle!" I glared down at the floor. "The fight's still on, Swartbat Redeye! I'm not descended from Britomart for nothing!"

After a wash and brush-up, bacon and eggs and tea, I slipped into a swirly blue gingham frock and blue stiplettoes and tripped off to find a jeweller's, head held high, green eyes flashing defiance at Satan and all his imps. What the Blazes — I grinned at the pun — WAS Fiona Morningdew? Pagan or witch — or Magic Christian? Anyway, according to Doctor Seamus Alabaster magic and miracle were the same. Miracleworkers just said "Thy Will be done" first...

The magic make-up felt good. Herbal-based, no doubt.

"Good morning, Miss? Lost?"

I turned and looked up into the grey eyes of a very tall Policeman.

"Oh! I-I was looking for a jeweller's!"

"Leave that to your boy-friend!" Wink. "Try down The Pixie Lanes. Regular maze. Bound to be a watchmaker or somebody like that."

I nodded. "Thank you. Will do."

Early morning Sunshine warmed me as I teetered on six-inch heels down the cobbledstoned alley. Not very convenient, but glamour was glamour!

Small bow-fronted shops with overhanging eaves made the Pixie Lanes shadowy and mysterious.

'THIMBLEWIDGET BROTHERS, JEWELLERS AND HOROLOGISTS' said
a swinging sign in creaking counterpoint to the scurrying swish of autumn leaves.

I might have guessed.

Brass doorbells chimed as I opened the oak door and wiggled into the tiny shop, bending my long back to avoid bumping my head against the low oak rafters. A red-bearded Thimblewidget — ears just a bit pointed? — looked up from the glass-fronted counter. It was very quiet save for the ticking of many clocks.

“CUCKOO!” exclaimed a clock behind the counter.

“And ‘Cuckoo!’ to you, too. Good morning. Which one are you, sir?”

“G’morning, Miss Morningdew. I’m Martial. By name — and sometimes by inclination! Yes, we can repair your chain, but it will take time. “Porphyrius will help.”

“Oh!” I forgot to be surprised that Martial knew my purpose.

Purple-clad Porphyrius poked his bald head round the corner of the workroom. Crescent Moon job, Martial. Association of ideas, you see. Golden sickle of the Archdruid and the magic Scimitar of Ra. You know, the sword used by the priests of the Sun-god in their rites against the evil serpent Apophis!”

I stared, baffled and lost for words.

Martial nodded. “Quite so, Porphyrius. Leave it with us, Miss Morningdew. You can always make the sign with your fingers.”

“Well, yes.” I took the broken chain from my black handbag, and laid it on the counter.

Martial picked it up, and jeweller’s spy-glass to red-brown eye, he muttered: “Alchemic gold! I can feel the vibes! Of course! Doctor John Dee made sacred objects as a penance! Nearly got caught by demons masquerading as angels!” He grinned. “16th Century, m’dearie! Come back on the morning after the next Full Moon.”

“OK. Since you know so much, howzabout Wackett?”

“Wackett? He must be dead. ‘Though some say he found the Water of Eternal Youth on Aqua VII...”

“Didn’t Zadok tell you?” spoke up Porphyrius. “He reckons Pennington Wax IS Wackett!”

“Oho! Could be. Anyway, Wax or Wackett — he’s disappeared! Thought you were about to blow his cover, I reckon.”

I nodded. “What a relief! Even if it means finding a new Archimago AND — funnily enough — someone to play Wackett!”

“Good luck with the musicals!” Martial extended a small hand.

I grasped it warmly.

“Can’t tell you about your origins, yet. Psychologist. But you ARE descended from Britomart. Another valiant virgin!”

Next morning, I awoke, shaking, bleary-eyed, blue nightdress drenched in perspiration, from a nightmare about Alice Morgan, who, high on rum in an attempt to shake off the influence of her Svengaliesque lover, had smashed into a big lorry in her fast blue Jaguar. The lorry-driver survived and dialled an ambulance. Alice’s last words were: “I shall return!”

Lights flashed before my eyes, and, groaning, I clapped trembling hands to my throbbing pain-ridden head. I pushed my fingers through tangled red-gold locks, out of my tear-stung eyes. Every limb ached, every nerve screamed. I crawled out of bed
and swayed unsteadily on the pink rug. I had identified closely with Alice — and terror gripped me as my own personality shrank and shrivelled. I had seen in my dream the lorry-driver stagger to a handy Police Telephone Kiosk and dial 999.

The ambulance-bell’s clangour rang still in my aching brain and merged with the shrilling alarm-clock. For all the eerie vividness of the nightmare, it had contained items that seemed extraneous. Catweazle — he was in there somewhere — for some reason called “The Messenger Between Realms” and ‘Zodiacmaster’. And a burly pirate in blue doublet and wig seaboots, scarlet sash matching the plume in his broad-brimmed black hat. Sir Henry Morgan! “Captain Morgan” Rum! And a green-pressed watersprite....Morgan le Fay. Morgan! Again! Subconscious symbolism run riot: toads and toadstools...the Magic Mushroom...Childeric the Sorcerer-King...the shield-device of Clovis the Merovingian had been three toads...and Catweazle had a toad familiar. I did not know how much was symbolic, how much real.

“Thank Heavens I’m awake!”

I shuddered and sank down on the side of the dishevelled bed.

How did I KNOW I was awake? What if I were trapped in an alternate reality of unending nightmare? What if the nightmare was more truly real than the reality of everyday? And I was lost to the everyday?

A faint clink made me jerk my head towards the pink dressing-table. My green eyes widened as a tiny golden tube levitated and zoomed towards the mirror. Dustmotes danced in the dawnlight as it streamed through a curtain-chink on to the looking-glass. The cap came off the lipstick like the command module of a spaceship and the scarlet cone emerged.

I stared, fascinated, as automatic writing was inscribed upon the mirror surface by an invisible hand. The scarlet letters spelled out:

“I M P”

“Imp?” I queried.

“Intromolecular penetration”, wrote the enchanted lipstick.

Whatever could that mean? I jumped to my feet. Doctor Alabaster’s “conscious atom” theory! Had Alice inserted a conscious atom into my aura? Was this her way of returning? No wonder Swartbat and Wackett had...I sought for a word...“psychotrailed” me! A conscious atom could act like a space-probe...a probe of Inner Psychic Space! “Atmosphere”: now I understood why ancient ruins were “haunted”. Conscious atoms returned — or never left!

“Who wrote that word?” I demanded, staring at the scarlet script.

“Catweazle” scrawled the lipstick.

I staggered and collapsed on the bed. Surely I MUST be dreaming! Wasn’t Catweazle fictitious?

“No. Quite real!” insisted the automatic writing. “Authors are often psychic but not aware of it! For instance, Long John Silver’s ancestor sailed with Sir Henry Morgan!”

That name again?

“Any more questions? There’s an interdimensional tempest brewing and I can’t get through for much longer.”

“What made you contact me? Am I dreaming? Or is this real?”

“You are in an interdimensional warp. Real? Yes, but not your ‘everyday’ three-dimensional Earthreality. Anything can happen and probably will! Oz Factor. And a touch of Aus, too.”
"Orz?"

"No, 'A-U-S — a pun! I'm reminded of the Aboriginal Dreamtime concept. I'm running out of mirror and —""

Green lightning shot across the room and I staggered back, startled and pain-racked. I stared at the mirror — innocent of lipstick scrawlings and reflecting my dishevelled image, hair on end, green eyes wild and mouth agape.

I staggered into the kitchen. Boil a kettle and make some tea! The hands of the clock were going backwards.

Good. That would save some time.

Double-take. THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK — GOING BACKWARDS!

I found myself walking backwards, too, into the bedroom. The automatic writing appeared at the bottom of the mirror and the message spelled itself out in reverse.

I clutched hands to spinning head and screamed. "No! No! I will not be trapped in a timewarp!" From somewhere the subconscious supplied: "Belief is the key!"

Ergo: What you believe, if one's conviction was strong enough, would be the true reality. Faith! "I will not be — I AM NOT - going back in time!" I exploded.

I rushed back into the kitchen and saw the clock-hands moving the right way, but very fast.

Suddenly my teeth chattered and I shivered violently. It had become bitterly cold.

I whirled and looked up into the burning red eyes of a bat-winged demon. "So! You would defy me, girl!" roared Swartbat, forked tongue a-flicker between long curved fangs. "My powers far exceed yours! You shall go where or whenssoever I send you!"

Horrified, I could not move a muscle. Tongue paralysed, I darted a mental SOS into the void. The concept 'Warriorworld' leaped out of my subconscious.

There was a sudden shower of green sparks as a flame-haired warrior in golden scale armour materialised on the carpet between my paralytic self and towering darkling demon.

"BRITOMART!" screamed Swartbat. "Home from Leo III!"

"Aye! Conjured up by Zodiacmaster Catweazle, friend of Fiona!" She tossed red-gold curls and her sword rasped from scarlet scabbard. Red cloak flapping, she lunged at the demon, who dodged nimbly, for all his bulk. China animals scattered as his black elbow swept the top of the sideboard.

Still immobile, my mind raced. Saint George had slain the dragon...so demons could be killed when they became physical. Absurdly I recalled an Einstein precept: energy and matter were interchangeable. So spirits could become physical beings.

What a time for astrophysics!

"Excellent" mocked clairvoyant Swartbat. "But when we become physical — we can slay!"

Swartbat flapped his leathery wings and swooped on Britomart.

Statue-still, I stared at the weird combatants. Abruptly the room was plunged into pitch darkness, yet the fighters remained visible. Britomart's aura blazed pearly white and warm heroic scarlet, Swartbat in a swirl of murky orange and leprous sulphur-yellow. Britomart's "Starblade" sang like a harp, and, when Swartbat parried its slashes with long dagger-claws, a nerve-jarring screech ensued. A sweet aroma fought with a demonic stench.

I mind-fought the paralysis and perspiration drenched my fright-stiffened coppery locks. Beads bedewed my brow, broke, and rolled down my cheeks, soaking the collar of my blue night-dress. A sudden jerk and I found myself at the side of golden-armoured Britomart.
Bewildered, I half-turned and saw my form stretched out on the pink rug. I was out of the body!
A mental blurring and I found myself grasping Starblade and parrying the wicked talon-slashes. I had become one with my martial ancestress!
“This is too much!” roared the demon. “Fiona!

‘Into the past,
I doom thee at last,
But the last shall be first
And thy terror its worst!’ ”

I had a brief moment to wonder why magic had to rhyme, then found myself in a tiny cramped room, blue-gloved hands clutching a wheel. Leather creaked as I stared around. I was seated in a Car — headlights slicing the gloom as it hurtled along a winding lane under a full Moon. The Blue Jaguar! I had become one with Alice Morgan!
The headlights picked out small turrets. Clayton Tunnel! And a blue Police Telephone Box.
I felt my personality contract and disappear into the psyche of tempestuous Alice.
“Rum!” I heard myself speak in a wild Welsh lilt. “That’s the ticket! When I’m blotto, Wackett’s telepathic commands don’t come through!” Near-hysterical laugh. “So the Devil was framed! To think I believed THAT!”
Involuntarily, my hand groped in the glove compartment and drew out a bottle of Captain Morgan rum.
“Don’t” My Cornish accent came through. “You’ll have a smash-up, Alice!”
“I’ll risk it! I’ve got to get free of Wackett!”
Alice’s big green eyes widened, reflected in the driving-mirror. Like mine. They WERE mine!
“Leave the booze alone, lass!” came Wackett’s mental command.
“Alice!” I struggled to make my mental voice heard. “I’m Fiona!”
“FIONA? A telepath? Don’t tell your mother what to do!”
“My mother!”
“Yes! Sorry I abandoned you! I couldn’t let your father raise you as a devilchild!”
“Fiona!” came Wackett’s mental voice. “Your mother doesn’t know what she’s on about! Listen to your father instead! That’s me lass!”
With a mindshriek I jerked free of Alice, in deep spirit-shock, and found myself hovering up by the car-roof. Looking down, I saw Alice, one hand on the wheel, gulping the rum.
My mind whirled with confusing images.
‘Zodiacmaster!’ The word came out as a mental scream. “Sort this lot out — and quickly!” I did not know what that meant — yet? But I would later? Time in disarray. “Maylorp!”
Suddenly, amidst a shower of vivid green sparks, a brown-robed figure materialised on the blue-leather back seat.
The tall, thin, greybeard’s blue eyes rolled up at me.
Catweazle grinned at me. “Alice! I am the Zodiacmaster, come to take you to Leo IX, Theatre-world! Sarah Siddons suggested it! Reincarnation for thee! For the jewel of Leo is the sapphire!”
My psyche reeled at a sudden rending of metal and shattering of glass and an
appalling shriek. The hurtling Jaguar had smashed head-on into the big lorry in the narrow Moonlit lane.

I jerked back to my recumbant body on the pink rug in my bedroom, and, shaking uncontrollably, I propped myself up on one elbow. The sleeve of my perspiration-drenched blue silk nightdress slipped down and I stared at my bare shoulder. The demon-scar had gone! Awkwardly, I peered into my cleavage. The skin was as smooth as a baby's! 'Hypnosurgery by an alien doctor', whispered my subconscious.

Sobbing with relief, filled with wild hopes, I stumbled to my feet and watched the enchanted lipstick write rapidly on the mirror. Early-morning light streamed in through the curtain-chink, dustmote-laden.

I blinked the hot tears from my lashes to read the automatic writing.

"Alice Morgan, dying in hospital after the car-crash said 'I shall return'. She was seen to put out a hand to an invisible visitor. 'Twas the Zodiacmaster in a higher vibrational state. Happy ever After, we hope, on Zodiac Planet Leo IX, Theatreworld."

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**WORD GRID Answers - from Page 36**

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P O W E R   F I F T H
A   A T   R E   T   E   D   E   S   O   L   H   E   A   R   T
R
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EARTH MISSION 2000
Duncan Lunan

THE Soviet Union has extensive weather, communications and Earth Resources programmes, and the time has come, they feel, to offer their services to the world. At ‘Earth Mission 2000’, at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, the speakers were the heads of Glav-cosmos, the commercial Soviet space agency; Soyuzkarta, the mapping and remote sensing agency; and Goscomgidromet, the State committee for atmospheric and Earth science applications.

Even the Soviet mapping satellites have lifetimes of only two to three years, much less for reconnaissance spacecraft, so new technology can be incorporated as the series continue. By contrast the last American Landsat was launched five years ago. Films are returned to Earth by capsule or, from the space stations, by manned spacecraft. For that reason among others, the resolution of detail is down to five metres, ten times finer than U.S. Landsat photos and twice that of the French SPOT. The archives are expensive, and an agreement has been signed for Western access to them. But at least six months’ notice is needed for special requests, which are very expensive. Landsat gives coverage every 18 days, much more useful for agriculture and fisheries, and the commercial service is well established.

Dr. Yaak Lokk, the head of the Glavcosmos delegation, spoke wittily and well about the future of the Soviet programme. Legal changes would allow shareholder companies in the USSR, joint ventures in space with the West, and big investment opportunities for Western companies. The difficult question of the ownership of data was being addressed. The major news, almost thrown away, was that a presentation would shortly be made to the United Nations calling for spy satellite technology to be made available “for all and other purposes”. This would come with a programme of arms reduction monitoring “under the UN flag”. Since effective control of arms reductions would require each side to have access to the other’s military satellites, they might as well be made accessible to all. When the brochure referred to “the very latest Soviet technology”, they meant it.

There would be a call for a system of ecological satellites, a multi-national programme for ecological monitoring over the whole world. Soviet spacecraft factories would be opened to the West. If we insisted on secrecy, Western payloads could be launched on Soviet spacecraft without inspection. “But it’s easier I think to buy it from you, when we’re working together, than to steal secrets.”

By the year 2000, with 5th generation computers and Artificial Intelligence, the vast amount of data from monitoring satellites could be used effectively to save the planet. To do this people, ideas and technology would have to move freely across national boundaries. The previous generation was unready for this: the next would have to be educated, by means of space imagery, to see the world as a whole. “Three years ago,” Dr. Lokk confided afterwards, “I was unsure if this was possible. Now I am sure.” If he has his way, it will be a different world indeed.

2 — Shame about Solar Max.

1984 was the great year for space rescues. The case everybody remembers, for its dramatic images, was the November mission 51-A in which Dale Gardner and Joseph Allen retrieved the WESTAR 6 and Palapa B-1 satellites, both stranded in orbit by failure of their solid fuel boosters. But there was a more dramatic and more
important rescue in April of that year, when Nelson and van Hoften captured, repaired and relaunched the scientific satellite Solar Max.

Solar Max (full name the Solar Maximum Mission) was launched in February 1980 to study the Sun at the peak of its 11-year cycle of sunspots and flares — the same activity which had increased the density of the upper atmosphere and brought down the skylab space station the previous year, destroying the even more sophisticated solar instruments on the Apollo Telescope Mount. At first Solar Max was a good replacement, but within a year electrical and gyroscope problems had severely limited what it could do.

However, Solar Max was designed for repair in orbit, and in 1984 it was done — allowing study of the Sun at the minimum of its activity. Still more ironically, now the maximum is here again, Solar Max is coming down — forced out of orbit by the very activity it was launched to observe.

That’s not the end of the paradox. Before repairing Solar Max, the 41-C crew of the Challenger had launched a 10-tonne research payload called the Long Duration Exposure Facility. It was to have been retrieved in 1985, but the schedule slipped, and the loss of the Challenger in 1986 turned LDEF into a very long duration mission. The 12 million tomato seeds aboard for a schools experiment are presumably all dead, but the erosion and damage suffered by the materials technology experiments will be priceless information for the Space Station programme.

As a moment’s thought will reveal, LDEF’s orbit is very similar to Solar Max’s. However, LDEF if four times heavier than the astronomy satellite, and affected less by atmospheric drag. As I understand it, their paths had separated too far to reposition Solar Max and rescue LDEF on a single mission. So the decision was taken to save LDEF, in a mission scheduled for November 1989. With only three Space Shuttle orbiters available, saving Solar Max was impossible.

And then in July, it was announced that the November flight would instead be allocated to a Department of Defence payload, believed to be an electronic surveillance satellite. So the LDEF retrieval was put back to December, and the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope was postponed yet again in consequence.

As I write in early December, Solar Max is expected to fall within hours, and there may not be time to save LDEF either. The Shuttle is back from deploying its military payload; and Presidents Bush and Gorbachev have just announced that the Cold War is over. Shame about Solar Max.
EVERY ISSUE I have more news to give you regarding developments on the small-press scene and each quarter I get more magazines to review. Since I don’t get any more space that means something has to give, so the reviews this issue are shorter than usual. However, let’s get on with the news without further delay:

Peter T. Garratt tells us he is working on a novel based on his DREAM story ‘THE ANGEL OF DESTRUCTION’ (DREAM No. 7). If you missed the original story it’ll be reprinted in DREAM’s upcoming anthology. Peter has also sold a ‘Jack the Ripper’ story to ‘FEAR’ and has a short story in the ‘WOLF RIDERS’ anthology, edited by ‘INTERZONE’ s David Pringle. Other authors you will know who have stories in the Warhammer Anthologies include Stephen Baxter, William King, Neil McIntosh, etc.

Gollancz and Corgi have made offers for two novels Keith Brooke has written, plus a sequel to one of them. Brooke looks set to be a major force in 90s SF in Britain. The novels are ‘KEEPERS OF THE PEACE’, described as an anti-militaristic, post cyberpunk experimental thriller (phew!) and ‘EXPATRIA’, a more straightforward post-colonisation story. We’ll be reviewing both books when they come out. (In the long term our book reviews will focus particularly on authors who have made their way up via the small presses. We are anxious to receive news of/review copies of all such books. Keep us informed!) Oh, by the way, Keith has stories in ‘INTERZONE’, ‘THE EDGE’ and also in a couple of issues time in ‘DREAM’.

Look out for the ad. for ‘R.E.M.’ elsewhere in this issue. Publisher/editor Arthur Straker tells us he will be concentrating mainly on ‘hard’ SF, which will make a change from ‘INTERZONE’. As well as the great line-up scheduled for Issue 1, Issue 2 will feature Keith Brooke and Matthew Dickens, Charles Stross, Eric Brown and others. All these authors have appeared in small-press publications on their way up. Let’s hope R.E.M. survives. It could be an interesting magazine.

One magazine that’s having problems is ‘THE GATE’. Maureen Porter has now resigned as editor, because of frustration over the non-appearance of Issue 2. Apparently the problems have come about as a result of the format of the magazine. (Paperback format). The distributors would, we hear, only take ‘THE GATE’ if it was A4 format, leaving the publisher with 8,000 unsold copies of Issue 1. Apparently there are still plans to continue publication in A4 format and the stories have been selected for Issues 2 and 3.

John Light’s fantasy novel ‘THE LEGEND OF MELGOR ERDIN’ will be published on 26th July by Duncaith Publishing (28, West Lodge Avenue, LONDON W3 9SF). It is expected to cost £4.50. That’s another one we’ll be reviewing, if we can get hold of a copy. Also out is John’s volume of poetry ICONOCLASM, from Carmina Publishing (c/o Flat 1, 33, Knowle Rd., Totterdown, Bristol, Avon. BS4 2EB). It costs £1.35.

Coming in 1990 from ‘Zanzibar Productions’ (who publish ‘NOVA SF’; see review below) are a number of special volumes. “OUT ON CLOUD NINE” by Dave W. Hughes, featuring his poetry and fiction, “STRAVINSKY AND THE DARK FEAST” by D.F. Lewis which includes 13 new stories and 2 already published; “MOONBEAMS AND DREAMS AND SCHEMES”, a volume of poetry by Darlington, Haines, Sneyd and Dave W. Hughes and DISPATCHES FROM A LIVING PLANET” a collection of ‘Green’ poetry and fiction with proceeds going to Greenpeace and Friends Of The Earth. These volumes are £1.25 each or £4.50 for the four from NOVA’s editorial address (see review below for details).

Jason Smith’s “EXUBERANCE” (see ad.
elsewhere in this issue) is looking for 'longer-type' short stories in the SF/fantasy/horror genres. If you're interested contact him at 34, Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts. WD4 9PA.

Another magazine looking for material is "OVERSPACE". (Contact Sean R. Friend, The Mill House, 177, Challymead, Melksham, Wiltshire. SN12 8LH). Length is unimportant as they will serialise, but the longer the story the better it has to be to get acceptance. They also want articles on most subjects, artwork etc. 'OVERSPACE' is 75p per issue, or £4 for 6 issues. SSAEs would be appreciated. Bruce Baker and John Townsend have stories upcoming in future issues.

Wow! More news every issue. However, on to the reviews:

The first issue of 'NOVA SF' (£1.25 from Adrian Hodges, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Gloucecs. GL52 4LG. 40pp. A5. Subs. £4.50 for 4 issues) shines as much more brightly than Adrian's previous 'zine 'NEW VISIONS' as a true nova does than a normal star. Production values are high, with neat typesetting and layout (by our own K.D.S.) and the stories are entertaining and worthwhile. My one complaint is the complete lack of artwork, but that may come in the future (actually, there is one illustration). Best story is probably Graham Andrews' "HELL IS A CITY.." a story of divine retribution for an I.R.A. thug. "THE TRANSCENDENCY CANTOS" by Matthew Dickens is one of those very suspect stories where a human on an alien planet finds that the inhabitants have the answer to life, the Universe and everything, but it was well-written and entertaining, despite being by an author who doesn't know a molecule from a quark! (In joke — I love you dearly, Matthew, honest!). John Townsend's "TO MAKE A MOONLIGHT MAN GO BLIND" is the most experimental story in the issue, detailing the demented delusions of a man whose brain has been affected by experimentation. I think he'd had a few pints of XXXX when he wrote this one. Alan Garside is an author who I usually find confusing, but his "BRIGHT CITY DREAMS" was a worthwhile effort, even though bringing up the rear in terms of merit in this issue.

Matthew Dickens also contributes a rather suspect article on the differences between US and British SF. It is a trifle cliched, but still held the attention. I wish I had more space to argue with his conclusions, but there you go..you can't have everything. All in all, "NOVA" is a bright entry onto the UK small-press scene. Long may it shine!

Issue 5 of "WORKS" (£1.25 per issue or £4.50 for 4-issue sub. from Dave W. Hughes, 12 Blakestones Rd., Slaitwaite, Huddersfield. HD7 5UQ. 52pp A5) seems to take the magazine ever closer towards the experimental end of the genre. My complaints about 'WORKS' are summed up neatly by two excellent letters in its "WRITE OF REPLY" column (from Matthew Dickens — yes, him again — and Kevin Cullen). The stories are, on the whole, too short and often confusing. That said there is a good comic strip by Kevin Cullen in this issue and worthwhile stories by Matthew Dickens and Chris James, although the latter, about a man losing his memory, was hardly SF or even fantasy. "WORKS" has featured some 'big-name' writers (Aldiss in No. 4 and Ian Watson in this issue, but their efforts are so weak I feel the editors would have done better to use the space for lesser-known writers.)

Also present in Issue 5 are such as John Light, Elliot Smith, Andy Smith etc., all with quite short or very short stories which don't really have time to get up and running. One more complaint about "WORKS" — the proofreading is dreadful (Matthew Dickens' name is mis-spelt on the contents page and in the heading for his story and "UNFORGETTABLE" (the title of Chris James' story) is mis-spelt in the title heading. There is also some rather strange use of the English language in the editorial (e.g., the choices... is getting harder).

Nevertheless, despite such flaws, "WORKS" does possess one invaluable asset — its editors' and contributors' enthusiasm. It's not the type of magazine I like, because I don't like the fiction it publishes, but many do and if you like the more experimental end of the genre you may find it essential reading. Incidentally, both "NOVA" and "WORKS" are available via "DREAM" through the New SF Alliance.

So is "THE SCANNER", Issue 8 of which is now out. (£1.50 inc. p.& p. from Chris James, 4 Dover Rd., East Cowes, Isle of Wight. PO32 6RG. 4 issue sub. is £5.50). I've said a lot about the unique atmosphere of "THE SCANNER" in previous reviews so will concentrate on the contents this time. The fiction has retreated from last issue's high, but Dave. W. Hughes' "THE SONG OF THE SHAPES" is probably the best this issue, a rather enigmatic but entertaining effort. Among the other 'regulars': D.F. Lewis, Alan Garside, James Mitchum etc.
There are the usual mix of critical articles and comment, with Kevin Lyons producing the best article, on a Bester story, and a rather poor selection of artwork ('though I did like the Dan Dare takeoff). "THE SCANNER" is improving issue by issue, but a little more discrimination in editorial selection could prove invaluable, I feel. (This issue is the usual 24pp A4 size).

Issue 2 of "THE EDGE" (£1.50 per issue of £4.50 for 4 issues, 32pp A4 from Graham Evans, 56, Writtle Rd., Chelmsford, Essex. CM1 3BU.) is a significant improvement over Issue 1. For one thing it has a short story by S.M.Baxter, "THE SWITCH", for another it has a better quality cover (although the cover illustration by Kevin Cullen, would have better suited an A5 format). D.F.Lewis and Andy Darlington are other significant names in the fiction department. Articles include a look at the work of Philip K. Dick by Kevin Lyons, whose small-press critical articles are becoming essential reading, even if his conclusions are often suspect. Dallas Goffin and Alan Hunter join Kevin Cullen to give this issue a better range of illustrations, though for an A4 magazine, artwork is still rather sparse. The one real minus for this issue is Patrick Whitaker's comment article "NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS", which is one and a half pages of fairly meaningless drivel, concluding with a nonsensical 'manifesto' which does little but hurl abuse. Still, never mind the bollocks, here's "THE EDGE" No. 2. Try it. The magazine has had problems, and is continuing to have them as I write, but the end result is worthwhile, even if the route to get there has been fraught!

Short reviews: "NIGHTFALL" is a new magazine of graphic and prose SF from "Nightfall Press, 58 Bleasdale Rd., Coppenhall, Crewe. CW1 9PZ." (Price £1. 40pp. A5.) Issue 1 consists largely of reprinted strips from the editor's previous publications ("SANDOR" and "STRATOSFEAR") but there is some new material from Steve Sneyd, plus art by Dallas Goffin and Colin P.Davies. If you like the graphic art side of SF, then "NIGHTFALL" should prove entertaining in future issues. At any rate, the editor gives the Alliance magazines some good plugs so get in there and support him!

"STRING" is another newbie (from Borogove productions, 97 St. Peters Way, Warrington, Cheshire. WA2 7 BL. 20pp A4. Couldn't find a price. It intends to run 'hardish' SF and come out twice a year). The first issue is a bit on the slim side with a couple of stories and a rather technical exposition of the likelihood of finding planets around other stars which would support life. I mean, complete with equations! Also, a poem by D.H. Lawrence! I should think that an s.a.e. to the editorial address would get you more information.

Now that "INTERZONE" has gone monthly there will be too many issues for me to look at each in any sort of detail, so from now on I shall just be picking out the highlights and paying particular attention to authors with small-press connections (£1.95 per copy or £23 per year from 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton. BN1 6LU. 76pp A4). Issue 34 is an all 'new-star' issue, featuring stories by Keith Brooke, with a tale of the ultimate narcissism and Matthew Dickens (can't get away from him this time, can we?) with his best story to date, "GREAT CHAIN OF BEING", which is a story of a rather different type of germ warfare. My complaint about this issue is the messy nature of the story headings, done (and messed up) by Ian Miller. Some are almost illegible. All the usual features are present.

Issue 35 has a great David Hardy cover and a lead story by Stephen Baxter (he has, apparently, been advised to drop the S.M. by his publisher). Other authors include Thomas M.Disch, Brian Stableford and Barrington Bayley. Booby prize to Neil Ferguson for his "ONE WAY TO WAP WAP", a story backed up by miscellaneous medical diagrams which failed to lift it above the merely mediocre. Charles Platt's article is missing this time, but we are promised that it will return. Most other items are present, including a rather disappointingly sketchy article about L. Ron Hubbard and an interview with Barrington Bayley. "INTERZONE" seems to have reached something of a plateau in quality at present — no really bad issues, but disturbing signs that the recent progress has been halted. Let's hope it's only temporary.

That's it for now. Out of space until next time.
Starfield an anthology, edited by Duncan Lunan. Published by The Orkney Press in hardback, 211 pages, £10.95. ISBN 0 907618 21 9.

I ALWAYS CONSIDER that if over half of the stories in an anthology are worth reading then it’s a success, and in Starfield, heralded as the first anthology of Scottish SF, we have a book with an impressive percentage of enjoyable shorts. The editor, Duncan Lunan, has assembled a wide range of authors covering nearly the entire genre; the one notable exception being a really ‘hard’ SF story.

Lunan has chosen The Rig by Chris Boyce as the lead piece, and it’s easy to see why. This is the longest story in the anthology, written in 1966, and remarkably un-dated. Boyce has employed a stroboscopically fast narrative structure, related from a most unusual perspective. It offers a cleverly realized view of an outbreak of peace and compassion, induced by a giant alien organism which is growing below the oil rig of the title. We’re shown the alien’s effect on the individual level by the change brought about on an introverted repressed anti-hero. From this well established foundation it’s an easy step to believing an entire country held in thrall. Equally persuasive is the horrified reaction of the neighbouring unaffected countries.

Mr. Loom Projects by David Lee. A sad little story of a man continually re-running the moment in his life which has caused him the most pain. Lee has aptly demonstrated the potential for enshrapement by an advanced imaging technology; allowing someone to lose themselves forever in the dead past.

What Kind Of Lesson by Naomi Mitchison is a slow-moving, dreamy piece. Set in a virtually ethereal parallel universe which humans can visit at will, yet are unable to understand. Mitchison’s prose is both practised and flawless, conjuring up delicate human/aliens who have settled comfortable into passive non-existence.

A Continuing Experiment by Janice Galloway turns out to be one of this collection’s gems. It deals with the inability of humans to communicate with aliens, and this most fundamental of SF themes is given a chillingly realistic treatment. Despite the two thousand word restriction Galloway’s accomplished technique crams everything that needs to be said of scientific insensitivity in pursuit of The Goal into that limit. I’d like to see more of her work in print.

Busman’s Holiday by Louise Turner, very much a fun extrapolation of today’s eccentricities. A perennial SF favourite. Turner provides us with a fast-paced description of the contest to rule Glasgow which breaks into a breathless gallop for the finale.

What Dreams May Come by Angus McAllister, in the same exploratory theme as Busman’s Holiday, but there’s nothing remotely amusing about this one. We’re shown a world where air has to be bought, and space is at a premium. Its strongly visualized background lifts it firmly out of the realms of interesting fantasy and drops it unpleasantly into the reader’s lap.

The Particle Poems, The Moons of Jupiter, and The Dowser by Edwin Morgan. Out of these three pieces it was The Moons Of Jupiter which I enjoyed most. Morgan has brought a deft brushstroke of distinct colour.
to each verse, animating the planetoids with their own separate identities.

The Particle Poems slid by a little too fast for my taste. But The Dowser had a quieter pace, one to sit back and savour.

Dragonsniffer by Elsie Donald is a neatly crafted anecdote about a master/apprentice relationship turned upon its head. A deft demonstration that logic does have its place in a fantasy landscape.

The Price Of Their Toys by William King centres around the concept of a man/war machine fusion, not only physical but emotional, the purpose of the machine ingraining itself on its pilot. Some sharp-edged imagery, and an interesting time scale, the whole story covers nine seconds.

Spaced Out by David Crooks appealed to my sense of humour, a wicked alien/(drunk) human encounter, written in a thick-as-tar Glasgow dialect. Takes a sly swipe at some of today’s idols.

Venjinss, alburt plethora. A super-brogue poem, one you’re either for or against, there’s no fence sitting her. I’m against.

Big Fives by Richard Hammersley. A reproduction of four communiques in future English, whose syntax hasn’t so much decayed as disintegrated. Its inclusion shows the kind of variety science fiction offers, and Lunan is to be commended for that.

The Crank that Made the Revolution by Alasdair Grey. Most short stories are written around quick simple ideas, or they’re a play on words. This comes into the second category, and to say any more would spoil the almighty groan you’ll have when you come to the end.

The Cause of Some Recent Changes by Alasdair Grey, this doesn’t sit so easily as the first, a little bit too fantastic.

For Some Dark Purpose by Donald Malcom, this is the only major disappointment of the collection. It’s set in the DREAM Institute of which there have been other stories, and this seems to presuppose the reader’s familiarity with them. I also found the plot of an alien ‘force’ taking over human minds for its own ‘purpose’ decidedly worn.

The Square Fella by Duncan Lunan, takes place on a unique structure which may or may not be an artificial construct, the reader is left to decide whether the builder is indistinguishable from God. A tautly plotted voyage of exploration which combines traits of both Columbus and Galileo in the way its eye-opening discoveries will affect the society which has developed in the artificial constraints of the structure.

King of England I will Die! by Archie Roy is my personal favourite. By using a pair of academic protagonists Roy has structured a sharply detailed story of time travel and its resultant paradox which sucks the reader into believing. The method of time travel he’s created is endowed with an eerie plausibility. Complementing this is the wave of temporal paradox which sweeps subtly through the story ending up as a tsunami. An excellent example of how good SF can be; well thought out and sleekly written. If only there were more like it.

Any book containing fifteen stories of this quality has got to be worth the money. Gets the approved stamp.

P.F. HAMILTON

The Autumn Land & Other Stories by Clifford D. Simak
Published by Mandarin in Paperback; 166 pages. £3.50. ISBN O 7493 0185 6

Selecting the six finest stories by a writer as prolific as the late Clifford D. Simak might be a bit like choosing the six best litres of burgundy from the EEC wine lake. However, Francis Lyall has made a personal choice and presents them with an intelligent introduction. The stories span the years 1938 to 1971. They might not be Simak’s very best, but they are varied specimens clearly showing the writer maturing with age.

Rule 17 was one of the first SF stories to utilise cinematic scene changes. Earth hasn’t beaten Mars at American football for 67 years, so the Earth coach bends the rules by science fictional means. Although the idea is incredible, the story is light-hearted and should not be taken too seriously. It does, however, highlight the lengths coaches will go to win, and the way sport to some people is the most important thing in the universe. But, written by a journalist, it suffers the illusion that the press know more about sport than sportsmen. A story chosen for historical rather than intrinsic value.

Published nearly twenty years later, Jackpot is a story about freebooters from
Earth finding a galactic open university as a means to the fortune they have always sought. The story moralises on human perfection and speculates that perfection may not be so desirable, and can only be reached through imperfection anyway. A first class story, and some evidence to show those genre-fiction-knocking snobs that, so far as moral philosophy is concerned, "our boys" can go places theirs can't.

**Contraption** is the shortest story in the anthology. A lonely orphan trades his only possession with the occupants of a crashed spaceship — a variation on the "give and you get more in return" theme.

**Courtesy** is the story I like the least. An Earth colony is left a batch of outdated plague serum by a supply ship, a fact known to only three people after the M.O. kills himself. The plague has nearly wiped out the colony when a cure is found in the hands of the planet's aborigines. I find it too convenient that the last person to contract the plague are the very people who knew about the outdated serum at the beginning. It is a parabolic story with a moralistic ending so blatant that it is like one of those horrible Sunday school stories. One of Simak's misfires.

**Gleaners** follows the events in a working morning of a commercial time-travel firm's executive vice president — events leading to his resignation just after lunchtime. There is plenty to enjoy here as the protagonist struggles to keep others' flights of fancy under control. A likeable story, although it doesn't pack the wallop of the "great" time-paradox stories.

**The Autumn Land** is the anthology's richest story, rightly getting top-billing. An engineer loses his job and drives across America to look for another. On the way, he makes the transition into another world and finds himself allocated a house in a run-down village populated by old, stereotypical characters, and where a mysterious milkman offers to deliver anything he needs. Written in Kafkaesque style, it is the best analysis of the problems of modern man I have read since Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman**. **The Autumn Land** will have you still pondering its ramifications months after you've read it. Go through it several times, take a day off work, lie in embryonic position on a comfortable sofa and have a good long think.

Although Clifford D. Simak has many admirers, he has always been an SF writer hovering just outside the circle of the truly great. The reasons for this are hard to find; perhaps he has simply been overlooked. He is, however, one of the most efficient, readable writers you are ever likely to come across, with an easy, unpretentious style that will catch you and hold you. Trips to the dictionary are rare.

Those who already know about Simak will only be interested in this book if any of the stories are new to them.

To those who have never read Simak before, I would say that this book is an ideal introduction; and, when you have finished it, I think many of you will have come to like Simak. You will then be delighted to know that he has written a couple of hundred other stories and twenty-seven novels.

They should keep you quiet for a while.

**GERRY CONNELLY**

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**THE PALADIN** has certain immediate attractions to the present writer, in that it is martial, has a heroine, who is refreshingly moral, and that the book was written by a woman. The 'empathy' of Bruce is well-known. That said, although THE PALADIN is well-written, with convincing if rather over-contemporary dialogue, and the scene is set with remarkable precision in a very brief Prologue, it is a disappointing work in one important respect, speaking personally, of course. Although it is called a 'fantasy', it lacks dragons, demons, gods, goddesses, elementals, and is set in a Sinoesque (China-like) country, whereas, lacking the mythological paraphernalia, it might just as well have been set in the REAL China. Indeed, this would have been a distinct improvement, because the legendry of THE WATER MARGIN, as dramatised by the Japanese for a TV series, could then have been utilised, adding to the conviction. What would one think of a writer who took the theme of Robin Hood and set it in an imaginary country, even if 'Merrie England' itself belongs to legend rather than to history? Such an idea would 'work' if the characters and setting were no longer **obviously** mediaeval and English. C.J. Cherryh's Pseudo-China is too like the 'real thing', yet lacks the appeal of historicity or genuine folklore.

**BRUCE P. BAKER**
Dear George,
Re. the comments in ‘DREAM’ 22 about my story ‘THE ROARING SIXTIES’: it’s not for me to reply to those of a purely literary nature. The story had been honed down from a greater length, perhaps not very skilfully and I’m always willing to listen to advice as to how my writing could be improved. However, I do take issue with Mark Tingle’s view that the story had ‘...nothing to do with SF or fantasy.’ Clearly, it isn’t intended to be fantasy, but, unlike some people, I don’t regard the two as interchangeable. A lot of writers on all levels get away with basing stories which are presented as SF on scientific concepts which are essentially fantastical and don’t therefore represent a realistic assessment of the changes possible scientific advances might bring about. Even such staples as time travel and Faster-than-Light are regarded with no enthusiasm by hard scientists. I’m not saying that such devices shouldn’t be used, merely that there is also a place in SF for near-future stories in which the scientific advances are depicted as low-key. If it’s the political implication that in twenty years we’ll have a society where people sleep on beaches I wish he’d say so. (But one non-SF aspect is that people already sleep on Brighton beach.)

PETER T. GARRATT
Brighton

● (I feel, having looked through several hundred submissions in the past few months that near-future SF, based on probable scientific progress over the next, say, twenty or thirty years, is the type of story that we get too little of. I sit back and await the deluge — GPT)

Dear George,
Thanks for ‘DREAM’ 22 and my fifth published story! (The fifth of many if what we hear is correct — GPT).

Moving past ‘KISMET’ without comment, I didn’t know quite what to make of Neil McIntosh’s ‘WHEELER-DEALER’. He’s shown that he can be a very good writer so that made me wonder if ‘W-D’ was some kind of parody: but I have my doubts. Diamonds as a medium of interstellar trade? Won’t they be able to make them/find an alternative/find sources in their own planetary systems by then? The trade names aren’t all that believable either. Novagucci suits? I bet they have Novarolex chronometers and Novabraun depilators, too... I just hope he wasn’t being serious.

‘THE SOUND OF THE SEA’ was far better. John Light managed to make a thoroughly implausible idea both acceptable and beautiful. I had my doubts about the need for the Holmes-Watson relationship between the narrator and Hugo Lacklan; for such a short story they could, perhaps, have been amalgamated into a far less distracting single character. The ending was far too simple and predictable too, but it was still one of my favourites from the last few issues.

‘THE BIRDS’ was not at all the sort of story I expected to find in ‘DREAM’. Present tense, lacking in plot, obscure throughout; and, despite a number of minor flaws, brilliant. (Which is, of course, why we ran it — GPT) Probably my favourite story in this issue.

I find Arabella Wood a very difficult writer. ‘CITIES’ showed her flair for telling
detail, for social extrapolation, for easy story-telling. And then it degenerated into a trite, romantic-novel ending. Of course there's room for the love story in SF, but hopefully not for this kind of hack plot device. I'd love to see the various elements of 'CITIES' remixed into something longer, but I hope it won't have the sort of plot that ruins what, until the last page, I had expected to be an excellent story.

(I sometimes wonder if SF isn't hampered by being too male-dominated. It seems to me that the ending of 'CITIES' was a very 'feminine' type of conclusion, whereas SF readers tend to expect very masculine type writing, even from female authors. Are we too sexist in our expectations? What do our (about 12%) women readers feel about this? Are our present authors serving your needs? Do women like cyberpunk, for example? Or horror? — GPT)

I was pleased to see Sam Jeffers describe my 'INTERZONE' story, 'ADRENOTROPIC MAN' as 'sub-cyberpunk'. Although not really cyberpunk in subject matter I had hoped to achieve the punk atmosphere — so far Sam is the only person to have commented on that. Now that Sam seems to be sticking to straight SF reviews I'm finding his column far more interesting — I hope he maintains this standard.

KEITH BROOKE
 Beckford, Gloucs.

Dear George,
An excellent variety of stories in 'DREAM' 22 with contrasting styles, treatments and themes, which makes a fair and logical rating extremely difficult. There is also the matter of length, where a longer story well handled can steal a place over a shorter piece equally well presented. And, as usual, there is a refreshing variation between the extremes of two pages and nineteen. So let me see how I can arrange them in order of entertainment...

First place to 'THE BIRDS', which is strange because it is the second shortest story in the issue, but it is a genuinely original idea well presented.

'TIME FOR CHANGE' in second place, which is even stranger. It is the shortest piece but contains ideas and suggestions worthy of a much longer work.

Thirdly, 'KISMET'. A technological background as carefully described as one would expect from Keith Brooke. I particularly liked the robot 'religion' and the twist of viewpoint when the humans awoke. Despite this, the basic ideas were far from new and the whole piece read like the opening chapters of a much longer novel, leaving a feeling of incompleteness.

'WHEELER-DEALER' comes next in fourth position. An entertaining and well handled humorous story. What spoiled it for me was the outrageous disregard of logical thinking in order to conclude the plot.

In fifth place 'THE SOUND OF THE SEA'. A neat idea well exploited. The final paragraph seemed too trite — perhaps John Light did not know how to end the story and this was the best he could manage.

Finally, 'CITIES'. A disturbing view of urban and suburban life in the future written in a terse style that robbed the story of depth and flow. Also, beyond the background details, it had very little to say.

To be successful, blank verse requires word images, pattern and meaning. Both examples fulfil these criteria very well but I am still puzzled by the meaning of 'R & R IN THE LMC'. (We took it to mean 'Rest & Recreation in the Lesser Magellanic Cloud', but Steve Sneyd will no doubt set us right if we are in error — GPT).

I applaud Rod McDonald's valiant attempt to explain the mysteries of creation in three pages of large type. It was fascinating reading but its brevity did lead to over-simplified and therefore misleading conclusions.

If the Universe created itself for no apparent reason, this does not mean automatically that everything within it has no purpose or reason. Once creation was triggered by the Big Bang, everything that followed was governed by rigid laws that apply throughout the Universe. These inescapable laws provide all the purpose and reason necessary.

Also, the alternative possibility quoted, that life itself created the Universe in order to exist, ignores the fact that if there were no intelligent life these questions would not arise, which is unthinkable (no pun intended!) If we compare it to the analogy of an embryo in an egg wondering where the mother hen came from, then it becomes obvious that this possibility is as erroneous as examining the Universe through the wrong end of a telescope.

ALAN HUNTER
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