Dream Science Fiction

A Weller Publication

£1 75

No. 28

April 1991

Surviving the Night by E.R. James

P.F. Hamilton — Gerry Connelly — John Gribbin

ISSN 0960-4162
DREAM SCIENCE FICTION
No. 28
APRIL 1991
EDITORS:
GEORGE P. TOWNSEND
TREVOR JONES
(ISSN 0960-4162)

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Illustrations this issue by Alan Hunter, Jack Mcardie, David Transue, Kevin Cullen, Dreyfus, Dallas Goffin, Tim Hurt, KDS

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Dear Alan,

Please find enclosed a cheque for £5 in respect of your contribution to 'DREAM' No. 28, plus a contributor's copy. Kindly accept our apologies for the delay in publication of this issue; we have had a vast amount of work to do recently on 'NEW MOON' and are now taking on assistance with various tasks in order to spread the workload more, and we hope that this will enable us to get back on schedule shortly.

Thank you for your patience and assistance and we hope that we may look forward to further contributions from you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

(Trevor Jones).
EDITORIAL by Trevor Jones

THOSE of you who have been with us since the early days of DREAM will remember our sadly defunct fantasy companion ‘NEW MOON’, which ran for five issues back in 1987-88. Sadly, at that point in our history, the time was not right for ‘NEW MOON’ but we always liked the title (it has a rather more science-fictional slant than ‘DREAM’, which is sometimes taken as being a title more appropriate to an ‘occult’ publication) and now ‘NEW MOON’ is to rise from the ashes. No, not as a fantasy companion to ‘DREAM’, but as the new incarnation of ‘DREAM’ itself.

You will know, if you’ve been reading our editorials for the last few issues that ‘DREAM’ is undergoing a metamorphosis after Issue 29. Well, now the changes are to be accompanied by a change in the title of the magazine. After Issue 29, ‘DREAM’ will become ‘NEW MOON SCIENCE FICTION’. Since the title is slightly different from the old ‘NEW MOON QUARTERLY’ the numbering will recommence with Issue 1.

Those of you who don’t like change — be assured! The new magazine will continue to be ‘DREAM’ in all but title. There will, of course, be the promised changes in format. Providing the purchase of a new machine by our printers goes ahead to schedule ‘NEW MOON’ will be an A4 magazine selling for £2.25 per copy. Subscription rates will be: 4 Issues £8; 6 issues £12; 12 Issues £22.50, BUT you can resubscribe (or extend your subscription) at any time between now and the publication date of ‘NEW MOON’ No. 1 at the current rates. (See inside front cover). We are also introducing a ‘Rest-of-the-century’ subscription, which gives you EVERY issue of ‘NEW MOON’ from No. 1 to the end of 1999 (or 60 issues, whichever is the greater) for only £70. This will increase to £100 when ‘NEW MOON’ is published. Please note — this is not a ‘lifetime’ sub. offer — if you do not get every issue of the magazine promised you get a pro-rata refund and every ‘century’ subscriber will get a certificate guaranteeing this!

Some more details: Every issue ‘NEW MOON’ will feature an 8-page ‘pull-out’ review section, featuring Sam Jeffers’ ‘DARK SIDE OF THE MOON’, book reviews, occasional author interviews and snippets of news and gossip from the SF scene. We will also be expanding our ‘Books of Interest’ feature, giving news of current and forthcoming SF releases notified to us by SF publishers. Of course this will be accompanied by all our other usual features and articles, including your letters and comments.

All this is a vast undertaking. Also, because of our rates increases we are getting many more manuscripts to read. Basically, we need help. We are taking on some assistant editors to help with ‘slush-pile’ reading, but we still need even more book reviewers, help with author interviews (expenses provided), illustrators, gossip columnists etc. etc. If you think you could help, either regularly or on an as-and-when basis, do let us know. We’ll keep you in touch with another update next issue.

Trevor Jones
THE GUARANTEED HOMOGENETIC PLANET eclipsed its unnamed sun. Above the darkness, the landing shuttle's shuddering motor decayed orbital speed, but unexpectedly cut to silence.

Raige, the white-haired pilot, studied his instrumentation, gasped and swore bitterly. "Looks like you've got an extra old man for your colony."

"You?" Moss, grassroots farmer and organiser of the refugees, turned. "I thought you were to plant us down there and then plough back up the gravity gradient to your ship."

"Can't. The ship has gone. To get out of my contracted fees, Captain's drained my fuel and abandoned me. I've heard of it happening. He'll engage a younger pilot with a newer shuttle on his next planetfall."

Moss stared aghast.

"Could be worse," Raige muttered. "Some Captains would have murdered us; dumped our corpses in Space. Your tools, seed and livestock are worth their weight in gold on the frontier."

Moss shook his weather-beaten head.

Raige leaned back. "The planet seems Earth-like. But there must be a snag — some reason for it not to be officially colonised." He bent over his data display. "Without fuel we're helpless to alter course in vacuum. We cannot land where it was recommended. This trajectory will take us once round the planet..." As complaints penetrated from the passenger cabin, he grunted: "Pity we can't drug that soft lot insensible, like your animals."

The planet rolled slowly and unseen below until red and blue bands lit its edge to herald the light.

"You'll have to make the best of where we do land," said Raige. "You're the farmer, watch and learn all you can about conditions."

"Oh, I will," nodded Moss. "But you've three seats here. I know you don't like women, but must my daughter stay back with the others? She's quicker-witted than I."

"Really?" sneered Raige. "Way I heard it, she'd be in prison, if you hadn't organised this private emigration."

"I did it for her," said Moss. "A man took advantage of her. It's taught her not to be too trusting. She's a qualified computer data analyst, you know."

"Criminal hacking for love?" Raige snorted. "Poor training for pioneering! Howsoever ... get her here but don't start a panic."

As the shuttle cleared the planet's shadow, Moss's Trix shook back her blonde curls. "Whatever could cause that cloud all down the line of dawn?"

"Mist," hazarded Moss, "often hung over the lower land as the sun rose to warm my old farm."

"Don't be such an old fool!" she scolded. "That would make it the biggest, thickest morning mist in the Galaxy!" She peered ahead. "What is our projected descent?"

"Well," said Raige. "We have reached daylight at about latitude 30 degrees south. Half-way across the day-side, we will pass diagonally over the equator. We will come down into the atmosphere only just in time to hit surface before dark at about 30 degrees north."

"That's awful!" gasped Moss. "On Earth, that's all in the tropics. Our animals won't do well in such heat."
Raige adjusted small screens to magnify samples of the surface.

The mist slid behind. Cirrus cloud curved shining ends hundreds of miles into the upper atmosphere. Blizzards raged. To the south, a white desolation broke into pack ice and bergs, spreading over a restless ocean. Below and to the north, land emerged from the melt as a greyness dotted with tall trees and lashed by sleet and rain. Water gathered on an increasingly green-tinged landscape to meander around the isolated trees and form broad rivers flowing into the southern ocean.

As the green brightened, Moss pointed at a small screen. "I'm sure that's a camp of tents. And there's someone ploughing, with horses!"

To the south, icebergs tossed and shrank in brightening sunshine until unbroken sparkling water curved placidly to the spreading horizon.

On the continent, clouds gathered over plains. Storms raged over hills. Foliage thickened, ran riot, climbed over itself in a profusion of lush growth. Flocks of large birds made patches of colour.

"Rain forest?" Moss wondered. "I was assured we could land in Spring weather sunshine and showers ... ideal weather for planting..."

"We passed over that," said Trix.

The approaching landscape darkened to greys and browns peppered with a spreading, darker green. A grass carpet grew between the giant, isolated conifers. Small saplings appeared.

The shuttle crossed a region of young trees in flower and, further still, similar trees laden with fruit and busy with birds. "Down there would do," Moss said wistfully. "Isn't that a wagon train heading towards the dawn?"

The southern ocean encroached into the land mass. Islands dotted calm waters. Beaches and lush vegetation brought a smile to Trix's blue eyes. "That's for me. Islands in the sun. Look, there's a ship — a schooner, I think. Get us down there, Mr. Pilot Man."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"We've no fuel."

"But we are going to land O.K.?"

"More or less. This bird was purpose built to enter an atmosphere with enough fuel to lift her back to a ship. With vacuum-empty tanks, she'll be unbalanced."

"Can't we dump the tanks?"

"Daren't. Shuttles are only a framework. Without the stiffening of the tanks and containers, the old bird would crumple."

The sun reached vertical. Raige muttered: "Crossing the equator now." Greenery thinned below to a savannah of monotonous greenish brown, dotted with huge trees. An occasional bird of prey soared or dived. The southern ocean disappeared over the curvature of the world. Savannah deteriorated to barren landscape.

Moss shook his head. From horizon ahead, to horizon behind, the sun scorched a vast desert. Only the tall scatter of trees defied heat and dust.

Trix put her slender hand on Moss's thick arm. "Oh, father! I always did attract trouble. You should never have gambled your money and what's left of your life to take me on this voyage."

"I'll always help any way I can." He covered her hand with his.

She pulled away. "I've a life of my own. You can't live it for me!"

The land dwindled away northwards until it disappeared over the curve of the planet. The shuttle crept over a vast ocean. From foam-ringed islands, volcanic
smoke plumed. Crested waves rolled endlessly towards them.

Trix whispered: "Can we touch down on water?"

"Sure. And with these empty tanks we'd float like a balloon. But shuttles can only cope with atmospheric stresses. Waves would batter us to flotsam. A lifeboat service, there won't be —"

"Sailing ships!" Moss pointed.

A little fleet under a small show of canvas rose and dipped over the roller-coaster of endless waves.

"Land ahead!" shouted Trix.

Keening of thin air lit the leading edges of the shuttle. Vibration developed a juddering roar slowly easing to a plummeting glide. Raire growled: "Moss, watch to the left. Trix, look right. I've got to concentrate on landing."

Waves reached up. Sky darkened. Coastline rushed to meet them. Boulders gleamed on pebble beaches. Leafless trees, large and small, shook on either side. Wind, gusting down a vast, smooth valley, pressed against the shuttle.

As it lifted and fell and swung, passengers screamed. Fingers of golden sunshine flickered from behind them onto the high, grey landscape. Distant mountains, wrapped in gloom, shone snow caps.

Northwards, cliffs jutted out of the sea. Ahead, the smooth valley opened like the spillway of a giant's reservoir. Southwards, hills rose in ridges. The huge conifer trees dotted all the high ground. Wind-blown scrub and small trees shook in the valley.

To their right, above an extra high precipice, a chimney emitted a column of smoke to below reddened overcast where it was cut off and streamed inland.

High on Moss's side of the valley, a squareness suggested a long, low building. An undulation rose in the valley. Landing gear bottomed. The shuttle crashed through sparse, frozen vegetation until it halted.

Raire fell back in his seat. "I'm too damned ancient for stunts like this!"

"We can't be in the tropics," groaned Moss. "This is like the arctic circle!"

"A chimney!" Trix pointed. "Smoke from it."

"I saw a sort of house — maybe a ranch," said Moss.

"Hellfire!" Raire sighed. "I've done my part. Now it's up to you. Do we stay the night in the shuttle or freeze outside?"

"We must set up camp," said Moss. "Our drugged beasts lie like corpses. They must be got out, even in a place like this."

Raire stabbed buttons. The shuttle shook and rose on its springs as containers of livestock, seed and stores grounded under it.

The refugees flooded out. They shivered in the wind from the mountains. They hurried back into the shuttle for warmer clothing and to complain to Moss.

He faced them. "There's no way to go back! The first task is to erect the pre-fabs. Without shelter the animals will soon be dead. Get to work!"

Alone with Raire, he voiced his despair. "Everyone is wishing not to have come. And ... I don't know what to do next in this climate."

Raire shrugged. "I'm 73 years old and I'm going to get my head down while you lot work. Be soon enough to worry about a cold wind tomorrow."

Trix climbed into the cabin. "Father, you've got us into an awful mess. Is it always evening in this dreadful place?"

He sighed. "Oh, Trix! Yes, it would have been better if you'd served out your imprisonment on our own Earth, even if it had cost you your youth."
"Don't be an old fool!" she snapped. "I made my own decision to come."

Living quarters were erected for people and animals and a meal was prepared.

In the continuing twilight Trix complained: "Father, we might as well be waiting to die. We must do something. This dim light won't produce current to drive your tractors, but there are our two horses. You take the stallion and I'll ride the mare. You investigate that ranch on the hillside. I'll take a look at that chimney. We must have help — or at least information."

Moss scratched his chin. "Wilderness is dangerous for a young woman on her own. We'd better ride together."

"Can't you get it into your head," she snapped, "that I can look after myself?"

"Well, before we go, I'll set sentries and issue guns for them and us."

"You can do that before you go," she informed him. "I'm off now."

"You'll wait for a pistol!" he insisted, "or I'll stop you going!"

They had ridden off when a refugee woke Raige. "We're being watched. What should we do?"

Raige muttered there was no rest and he was not in charge, but he armed himself with his old, but carefully oiled, long-barrelled pistol and leaned in the hatchway.

Refugees stood in groups looking south. A few flakes of snow tickled Raige's wrinkled face. Along the side of the valley, small trees and undergrowth swayed and rustled.

A sentry pointed and shouted: "I see you! Who are you? Halt or I'll fire!"

Gunflames answered. The sentry cried out and crumpled.

By the trees a man stood and yelled. Bursts rattling from his automatic rifle, he advanced towards the camp. Out of the shadows around him emerged other armed people.

Raige steadied his pistol against the side of the hatchway and squeezed the trigger.

The leading man flung up his arms. His scream was carried off in the wind. His weapon clattered on the ground. He pitched over backwards.

His followers halted. One turned and ran. The others backed into cover.

Raige shouted down: "Go, fetch back our sentry. Do what you can for him." He faced the man who had awakened him. "Ought to dig in. But can't make trenches in rock. Organise a barricade round the camp. I'll keep lookout up here for a while. Make sure nobody shoots Moss and his damned daughter as they ride back."

He watched for what seemed a long time but eventually descended stiffly to look up at the old shuttle. With the front a mere skeleton empty of the containers and the rear bulbous with the cylinders that should have held fuel to get them out of this mess, it reminded him of a giant praying mantis. He shook his head so that his white hair rippled. "Well, old bird, we've done a lot together. What a place to end up ... If time should come when I dismantle you for parts, you must try to understand."

Further up the valley, Moss reined in his horse. He had ridden up the centre where there seemed a sort of path and, below the building, had turned onto a definite track between the small trees. Occasional flakes of snow added to the deafening effect of the wind in his ears, but he was uneasy over sharp noises.

He trotted the horse forward. Close to, the valley side was a polished cliff but stones had been built to carry the path.

On a high slope, a giant conifer towered beside the building. He paused, anticipating being challenged. Stone blocks formed a wall three yards high and a hundred yards long, hung at intervals with heavy wooden doors, all shut. He walked the horse, opening doors as he reached them. Rooms extended beyond a timber roof
into the rock of the hillside. In some, animal shapes rustled sluggishly in the gloom. In others, wood was piled to the roof. A few held stores and implements. In the largest room, old men and women huddled around a fire over which bubbled a cauldron of aromatic stew. Distrust, fear, hatred and indifference on the wrinkled faces did not change when he spoke. Neither his own language nor the Esperanto of Space seemed understood. Because they made no move to offer him food or drink, he felt the only thing to do was to leave.

In the valley bottom, he thought he might go a little further but found too much rock and debris to skirt the cliff. He rode the path to the smooth centre of the valley.

As he continued towards the mountains, his farmer’s eye picked out animal tracks that, in his haste, he had probably overlooked until then.

He followed one track through the trees and found himself going up a cleft in the cliff. Tethering the stallion, he pushed through a clatter of plant debris and came to the entrance to a cave. Or was it a huge burrow? he wondered as he heaved out branches plugging the opening.

He looked into a huge, pig-like snout. A wide mouth sagged open showing the flat, grinding teeth of a herbivore, but the head and ears were more like those of a giant rat. Yet the body bulked enormously fat, shaggy as a bear. Front feet splayed claws almost like fingers.

The creature snuffled, grunted and turned from the light.

Moss backed out, pushing the debris back into place. The stallion met his return with a whinny. He swung into the saddle, only to rein to a halt.

A few steps in front of the horse’s hooves, the wisps of grass vanished. A blackness hid the valley floor. He dismounted. The blackness seemed not quite still. When he reached down into it, his hand disappeared. When he walked forward, his feet vanished. He looked back the way he had come. Through the snowflakes, the sun shone as the smallest amount of upper rim over the ocean horizon. He crouched low into the gloom and the last of the sun winked out. When he stood, it showed a mere edge of light.

"Edge of ... Night!" he gasped. He stood clear of the darkness and frowned. The horse cropped a few blades of frosted grass and tasted a snow laden bush. Edge of night no consequence to a horse ... Minutes passed and Moss gasped. Darkness had crept over his feet. He timed the advance. In five Earth-standard minutes, night advanced some eight yards. Bemused, he mounted the horse and urged the animal to a gallop, back towards the encampment.

On the other side of the valley, Trix had ridden up another track...

The chimney disappeared behind what she had thought from a distance to be an extension of the valley’s precipitous side, but which she now realised to be a wall of close-fitting stones. Dismounting, she led the mare onto a track flanked on one side with the wall and the other by the sheer drop.

She was thinking how vulnerable she was, when onto the track ran two men, colourful in decorated leather and sheepskin. They shouted in an unknown language, one threatening with a rifle, the other with a metal-tipped spear.

Escorted through an archway, she entered a long, high cavern, the outer wall of which was the wall of stones. She noted that the roof was buttressed; that there were sheep, some with lambs, penned at one end; that, in one area, carcasses of unfamiliar animals hung as though recently slaughtered. Then she and the mare were
surrounded and the guards overwhelmed by a swelling throng of children and young people. All talked incomprehensibly, fingered her manufactured clothing — she kept a hand on the pistol holster — but, to her secret chagrin, they cried out in amazement and admiration not at her but at the mare.

Warm, stuffy, smelly air reminded her of cramped shipboard conditions. Men and women poured from the many tunnel openings. She reluctantly allowed herself to be parted from her horse and led to concentric circles of carved seats, some like thrones, some mere benches.

Seated on an ornate stool, she was offered a crystal goblet and found herself looking over it into the handsome face of a muscular man of about her own age. He lifted a similar goblet as though proposing a toast. At his side a dark young woman scowled at Trix.

Trix smiled at the young man. She drank and he drank. The crowd around them in the little ampitheatre fell silent. Another man, perhaps in his late thirties and definitely the oldest person she had seen in the cavern, leaned forward and addressed her in barely recognisable phrases of Space Esperanto.

Moss, riding back into camp, heard shots and finished in a wild gallop. Dismounting as fast as his fifty-year-old limbs would allow, he hurried the blown stallion into a pre-fab — where a girl scolded him, in spite of the shooting, for mis-using the animal.

Raige met him. "It's hell! We're pinned down by rifles sniping at us from the trees on the side of the valley. I stopped their first charge at us by shooting their leader, but they'll be working up courage to try again — And your damned daughter has not come back!"

"I'll go look for her —"

"Like hell you will! Give her time. She'll not thank you for fussing! She may even turn up with help. Calm down and tell me what you've found out."

Moss recounted his experiences. "It could be those old people were too senile to join the attack on us," he said. "And there's no doubt in my mind that the creature I found is hibernating. But I think my most important discovery is that advancing line of darkness."

"To understand that," Raige said, "we had better think of it in terms of Earth time..."

"Five minutes to advance eight yards ... About one hundred yards an hour ..."

He frowned. "That's less than a mile and a half in the period of an Earth day ... a mere five hundred miles in a year..."

He gasped. "If we assume an approximate distance of an Earthly 24,000 miles in circumference, then the planet must take 48 years to turn in relation to its sun..."

"Hellfire! The planet's 'day' is 48 times longer than its year! There are, by Earth standards, 24 years of continuous daylight and then 24 years of darkness..."

"According to my information, the planet circles its sun in about 350 'Earth-day-periods', so, to get this very long day and very long night, the planet must revolve very slowly, almost, but not quite, a revolution every orbit."

He shook his head. "A 'day' of 48 years instead of Earth's day of 24 hours, would be O.K. if we'd started with 24 years of continuous sunshine, but the prospect of 24 years of darkness is nightmare..."

Moss shivered. He looked at the lowering sky, at the restless ocean, at the wintry
valley and the mountain barrier. "There is nowhere to go. We are under threat from
the inhabitants of this place. We face a night that will last for 24 years — a third of a
lifetime. I'll be 74 when dawn comes. Trix will be 46. If we survive."

"And I'll be 96!" growled Raige.

A bullet caromed off the corner of the nearest pre-fab. Someone yelled: "They're
coming again!" A rifle banged. Figures rose out of the scrub. Flames stabbed, bullets
whined and whistled.

"Damned close," muttered Rainge, "and dodging about this time." He levelled his
pistol, fired and cursed: "Missed."

The running figures dropped into the grass.

"Now I can't see any of them in this gloom," complained Raige.

A straggle of shots and someone in the camp cried out in pain...

"We're sitting targets," sighed Moss.

"Ought to have brought a bloody strategist," said Raige. "No place here for
farmers and shuttle pilots—"

A tearing scream out of the sky — Landscape flashed — Air split in thunder —
Dirt and debris mushroomed amongst the attackers. Scream, flash, thunder and
eruption. Again and again ....

Silence.... while deafened ears sang.

In the endless keening of the wind, a small army of shadows picked themselves up
and fled to the trees.

"Those were mortar bombs," Raige said unsteadily.

Hooves clattered. Moss and Raige stood up as Trix reined the mare to a halt. A
dark young man in ornamented leather and sheepskin sat astride behind her. He
stared critically at the refugees who emerged from their defensive positions to ring
the horse and its two riders.

Trix, watching her father, put one leg over the horse's withers but the man held
her so tightly that she coughed. She resumed her position astride. "Father, this is
Hybe. Hybe is his name and it is also his title as Chief of the people who live in this
valley."

Her eyes still fixed on Moss, she spoke over her shoulder. "Hybe, that is my
father, Moss, who sold his farm to finance this voyage so that I would not have to
spend most of my life in prison and so that all the others here could start new lives
and forget the past."

Hybe looked at Moss and Raige and the refugees and his lips curled in disdain.
Moss, Raige and the refugees looked up at Hybe.

Trix said: "He does not know, nor does he care, what we are saying. He speaks
only the language in use on this planet. Amongst all his people, there is only one man
who can interpret. Hybe was very interested to know that, besides the mare, you have
bought a stallion. Also that there are five ewes and two rams, two sows and two
boars, three cows and a stock of insemination fluid — something of which he had
never heard. And he was delighted to hear we have fertile eggs which will hatch into
extra hardy hens." She tried to go on, but sobs choked her. Tears streamed down her
face. "He says all these creatures will be very useful to him."

The bitter wind rustled down the valley carrying snow flurries.

Moss, fists clenched, took a step towards his daughter held so tightly on the mare.

"No!" Trix gasped. Sobs cracked her words. "You must not ... upset him. Or he
will ... have you killed." She drew a deep breath. "It's not quite all bad. He does not
know about the tractors and farm machinery and might not want them if he did, for
the soil is so thin. He has agreed to leave you all the seed. It would not survive in
the moraine left by the glacier that comes down the valley during the long night, let alone
the succession of growing seasons and droughts of the long day — Oh! I haven’t told
you about the utterly fantastic night here that lasts 24 years —"

"We’ve worked that out," said Raige, his voice so uncharacteristically soft that

"I’m sorry, Raige..."

"Don’t be. In Space one always lives with the unforgiving face of the Universe.
Maybe it’ll work out for the best. What have you persuaded Hybe and his people to
let us keep?"

Trix took a deep breath. "It’s not like that. He will let you keep only what he does
not want. Besides all your livestock, he will take all your young people, everyone up
to thirty years old. That will leave hardly anyone with you —"

"Isn’t he going to ask them," put in Moss, "if they want to go with him?"

"No, he won’t ask anyone anything. Father, if you resist, he will have you killed.
If the young people won’t go with him peaceably, he will take them by force. If they
resist too much, he will have them killed. He means to finish the long night of this
planet with as big a population of able bodied people as he can. He says he cannot
afford to be kind; he has to be ruthless. The system they have of surviving the long
night does not include passengers like old people. I understand that, when the new
day comes, other herdsmen and hunters are expected to invade over the mountains.
Some always follow the dawn and will try to take over the valley. In fact, his tribe is
one of the few that does not keep moving, as do all the birds on this planet, to stay
within a climatic zone that suits them."

"You think," said Moss, "that his people will survive the night?"

"Oh yes. They have done it the last three nights. They have a tremendous stock of
stores and animals, and, beyond the system of caves they use, they have access to
warrens of indigenous species that hibernate — Ugh!"

Hybe shook her. He shouted.

She coughed. "He’s sudden. I think he means there has been enough talk. He will
allow the young people a short time to collect their personal possessions before they
herd the animals in the direction he wants."

Moss stood stiffly, his weatherbeaten features drawn and grey. "They must go, of
course. How else can they hope to survive here? What about us? Those he does not
want?"

"He suggests you join the old people he does not think worth feeding during the
long night. Now that there will be only a few of you, you will probably be accepted
because you are no threat and you have your own supplies of food — he says your
seed is no better than food. It is unlikely that his rejects and you will survive the
darkness but, if you do and you have seed left, you may use some of it to buy passage
in one of the ships that make a living from migrants. If you can reach a good climate,
he thinks you should get many harvests, one after the other, before you have to
move again."

Hybe dealt Trix a blow on the shoulder and stabbed his finger in all directions.

"Nobody is moving!" she squealed. "He’ll have you all killed if you resist."

Hybe held his free hand high over his head. Guns flashed and roared all around.
Bullets sang overhead.

The tableau of stunned refugees came alive. Slowly, grimly, it broke up.

* * *
Raige and Moss watched Trix waving from the horse. She had not been allowed to
dismount and it was now carrying her away.

"I'm sorry, my friend," said Raige, "I really am. You've brought the minx all this
way only to lose her."

"It was her choice, I think," Moss said, "so far as she had a choice."

He turned to the three men and two women too old to be taken with the other
refugees. "The question now is what should we do? It will only be a short time before
Hybe's rejects, who were attacking us, realise we've been abandoned, as they have
been. Can we hope to fight with our much reduced numbers or do we try to join
them as Hybe suggested?"

"Neither!" shouted Raige, "Neither." His white hair shook. "There was far too
much weight before, so I didn't suggest it, but now it is possible that we can all fly
out."

"Fly out?" Moss stared. "Have you lost your senses? How can we hope to sail over
that ocean behind us or over the night in front of us? Are you sowing seed that can
never germinate?"

"No," Raige grinned, "but I'm too old to do the work. I can't do much more than
supervise, but —

"Listen! Though she's rigid, the old bird's made of very light materials. She also
comes to pieces for stowage or conveyance... Pray our attackers stay away for just a
few hours...

"Everything has to be ripped out of the cabin. Moss's seed and stores must be
packed in — we can even try slinging his tractors underneath. We wire-rope the cabin
to the fuel tanks and release both from the frame. Those tanks are not just empty,
they are vacuum empty — light enough to lift us into that high level wind I saw
carrying smoke across this planet's night..."

The alien sun partly rose over the ocean behind them as they gained height, then, as
they were carried towards the mountains, it sank again behind their guaranteed
homogenetic planet. Darkness, mottled with ghostly light, spread over the frozen
hemisphere beneath the remaining refugees in the remnant of a shuttle
uncomfortably supported by super-empty fuel tanks.

Moss, grassroots farmer and organiser of the migration, stared down into the
extraordinary night. "Do you think Trix will be all right with those people and that
young man?"

Raige, the white haired pilot, bent over the data displayed on his monitor and tried
to sound convincing. "Sure. She'll bloody well wrap that Hybe fellow around her
little finger."

●
TOBIAS first saw Imogen in the National Gallery. He'd spend a lazy self-indulgent two hours reacquainting himself with the splendour of the old masters. Moving on to the colour-swirl baroque-ness of twentieth century art, both its touching and its pathetic. Admiring the freakish techno-forms of the early twenty-first century. Finishing up amid the essence sculptures of the present day.

He saved Raoul Frances for the last. Taking time to study the other glass slabs, arranged round the room like crystal tombstones in a giant's graveyard, savouring their essences. The images frozen in the glass were imaginatively portrayed; some abstract, some monochrome, even a few delineated with hologram perfection. As he walked past each one their nuo plaque cells bathed him with the tiny frissons which the artist had impregnated; a music of emotion to bestow the work with life.

The Raoul was a nude called Open; a woman sitting with her legs drawn up against her chest, her head straining forwards, fair hair streaming down across her shoulders. Tobias was struck by how much she reminded him of La Fiancée, by Millais. He wondered if Raoul had done that deliberately, a gauntlet to the old form? Probably, he had the presumption.

He let the sculpture's essence wash over him. The texturing was superb; intricate layers of levity, malice, timidity, conceit, meekness, and many more were all stitched seamlessly together, reinforcing and complementing each other. The woman may have been angelic to look at, but Raoul had opened a channel to her heart, offering up flaws. He'd made her human. Tobias could feel her against him; warm, the blood surging through her veins, inhaling softly. Alive.

He shook his head in soft admiration. Raoul was the age's master. No one else even came close. The other sculptures in the room were appallingly crude in comparison; at best their essence merely served to emphasize a facial expression, like the heavy underlining of a pencil.

Open was the epicentre to a quiet circle of captivated people, each twinned with the sculpted woman in a private universe. He watched their souls; entranced that the sculpture reached so deep as to affect even the ultimate barometer of human expression. It was an opiate, soothing the dark naked wounds of insecurity, providing tangible reassurance that their failings were not unique, were in fact shared.

Imogen's soul was a bright burning flame within the sculpture's aureola, showing few of the dark flecks of angst common in someone her age.

If the sculpted woman was similar to La Fiancée, then Imogen was the resurrection of Goya's duchess.

She was a willowy girl in her early twenties, dressed in flared blue jeans and a coffee-coloured chunky knit sweater that came down to her knees. Her somewhat plain, long face had an almost china-like delicacy; but what held his attention was a wonderfully clear complexion, she was almost translucent.

She walked over to him. Standing in front, with her head cocked to one side taking in his appearance; thirtyish, wearing a conservative blue shirt, open at the neck, his face sharp and angular, bisected by the jet black band covering his eyes.

"You're staring," she accused.

He thought of all the opening-line gambits he'd heard in his life. The stupid and the inane. "Yes," he said simply. "Did you know you are a doppelganger for The Duchess of Alba?"

She studied him for a moment, initial belligerance muted by the unexpected response. "The lost Goya?"
It was Tobias’s turn to display a mild surprise, mingling with wry amusement. She was a student at the Royal Academy, she told him over tea, a first year struggling desperately to impress her tutors, surprised to get in, and determined to be a success.

He smiled fondly at the easy cliches and wistful enthusiasm of youth; realizing he was making a mistake in even talking to her. He could see her soul was quivering, keening faintly to itself. It was laced with haunting dark cysts of secret loneliness. She was vulnerable without even knowing.

“And you?” she asked. “What do you do?”

“Idle rich, I’m afraid; I inherited the family gallery. We present old masters, even new ones; but only paintings or physical sculptures. No technology artifacts.”

“But how can you…” she began. Stopping ashamed, and dropping her gaze.

“Appreciate textures and colour shading?”

She nodded dumbly.

“This isn’t a sensor band. It only looks like one. All it does is block ninety percent of the light.” He moved to a seat that placed his back to the bright glare shimmering off the white-coral pavement outside the chic little cafe, and removed the band.

She looked at his exposed eyes. “I’m sorry. But if the optic nerves are still in place why don’t you have a transplant?”

“That wouldn’t work. I have a rather complex rejection problem.”

It was a white lie. Transplants would function in him for a short time. His father had got himself a new set of eyes soon after rejection suppressor vaccines came on the market, in the early two thousands. But the virus crept into the new eyeballs, gnawing and subsuming. He had reverted to albino within a fortnight.

Tobias slipped the band back on, feeling it adhere to the skin. “So how come a thoroughly modern girl like you knows about Goya?”

“Background. There’s no point to essence sculpting if you can’t produce a decent image to begin with. Did you see some of those images this afternoon? God! Once I can draw properly I’ll begin to study essence reproduction.”

“That’s what you want to become?”

“Yes. More than anything.”

As with the gallery, Tobias had been left his large Georgian house by his father, who’d acquired it a century and a half previously. The leafy suburban street outside was made up of similar grandee residences, lacking splendour, but with a certain impressive austerity. The street itself had changed little over the years, although the roads and pavements were coral now, toned to match the dowdy brickwork.

The souls of his zombies lurked within; dark and silent, with none of the boiling furor of ordinary people. The viral infection had quashed their spirit, enervating any restiveness, any zestful sparkle. They were placidly happy with their shrunken horizon, obedient, serving him with smooth devotion.

The contrast between them and the effervescence of those unbound couldn’t be greater. Although he’d inherited all four from his father they were a constant nagging reminder of guilt. The power which the virus brought was not without its moral price. Sometimes he envied his father; born in an age when women didn’t even have the vote, he had no compunction about infecting people to meet his needs — women mostly. The beginnings of the myth; somewhere, somehow, a whisper had escaped.
Duncan greeted his master in the black and white tiled hall, taking his coat. Samuel and Anthea were preparing his supper in the kitchen, a vegan meal, heavily spiced. He'd found it was best for fibre and bulk, meat was anathema to him, so unfufllfiling and pasty. Instead, he drank nearly a pint of human blood each day.

It was Jason, the ex-doctor, who ran the hematopoiesis equipment, installed in the oak-panelled dining room. Tobias had bought it himself; finding direct production so much more convenient than buying blood from the hospital banks.

Still enchanted with his afternoon spent chatting with Imogen, Tobias went down the worn stone steps which led off from the hall, taking him to the cellars. He wanted to confirm he hadn't been mistaken.

The wine vault had been considerably enlarged from the original brick tunnel; the hard labour done by a team of his father's zombies. The cream of two centuries devoted to systematically plundering the art world was stored inside; the ones he enjoyed most. A van de Velde tapestry, vigil of angels, the Okyo, pine tree in snow, Carpaccio, vision of St Augustine, Bosch, the Conjurer, a couple of Picassos, Minotaure, and Le Vieux Guitariste, and two Goyas: Shooting of May, and The Duchess of Alba.

His father had begun the collection two hundred and fifty years ago. An inspiration, exploiting their unique situation. They could afford to keep a stolen painting for a century or so; while the search was abandoned, the detectives forgot the case, and the original owner died. Then it could be sold to a rich private collector, one who asked no questions.

It was the virus which made it possible, infecting the gamete before conception, benevolently symbiotic within every cell, augmenting his metabolism — always except the eyes. So very different to those he infected; with them, their established cellular structure, it merely lived, survived, subduing their minds.

His strengthened physique aged slowly, sustained by the blood he consumed, a rich concentrate of every nutrient the body used. His modified digestive enzymes absorbed it greedily, supplying his enhanced cells with the greater levels of protein they demanded.

After poring over his family's diaries, Tobias had conservatively estimated his life expectancy at around four centuries.

His father had embraced Hoyle's theories as the explanation to their condition. A space-born virus from ancient comets, a product of evolution hundreds of millions of years older than Earth's; how could it be anything but ultra-sophisticated. Adapting itself to new-found circumstances, and producing in its host the ideal milieu for its own continuation.

Recently Tobias had been having doubts about that, the virus was too clever, too integral. He suspected parallel evolution, then a drastic mutation, either in primeval man's immune system, or some other bacilli, acting like a penicillin, flowing through the bloodstream, flushing out the virus. There were certain tenuously fine strands of corroborating evidence if you looked hard: Genesis for one.

It would be the ultimate irony if his own condition was the true heritage of man.

Tobias illuminated The Duchess of Alba, smiling sagely at the young women who was Goya's alleged lover. Of all his illicit horde this was his favourite; he would never dispose of her.

Goya had painted her in a long virginal white dress, with a broad red band around her waist, another red ribbon in her wavy dark hair, even her little dog had a scarlet bow around its hind leg. Her serenity was breathtaking. Looking closely now he
could see the differences between her and Imogen, the duchess was perhaps thinner, shorter. But both shared the aloofness, the secret defensiveness hiding behind wide eyes, both in some way cheated. Again he received the impression of lonely vulnerability.

Tobias experienced a mild rush of satisfaction. Essence sculpting was good, but gimmicky, something else would soon come along to replace it. But the old masters he loved could hold their own against such tehnophilia.

Feeling somehow lightened by the discovery he decided to override logic and practicality, and see more of Imogen; driven perhaps by the fascination of this apparent reincarnation from centuries past, or more probably by the recognition of a fellow isolationist.

Tobias saw the souls of the city as a galaxy of red dwarf stars. A glory nebula, pulsing with bright organic energy, alive and expanding. It made him believe Gaia could be real; each individual comprising a single cell of the whole. As if to corroborate the concept he could even see the cancers inevitable in any living entity.

Dying embers, flecked with darkness, spilling their sourness onto those nearby. Corrupting and polluting. Raoul Frances for one. He was the core of his own little globular cluster; a powerful gravitational source orbited by worshipful acolytes, osmotically soaking up the contamination he leaked. Becoming hardened, dispassionate, contemptuously aloof. All those qualities he excelled at.

The private gallery’s lobby was cavernous and empty, decorated in some bold African weave and block-carve style. Cascade chandeliers dripped from the ceiling, stalactites of shimmering light.

Tobias handed over his gold-embossed invitation card, and was waved on to the curving stair.

“‘How do I look?’ Imogen asked, suddenly an endearingly timid creature, desperate for reassurance. She was wearing a demure powder-blue summer dress with a square-cut neck, her hair tumbled free to her waist.

“‘Lovely,’ he answered. Then they too were in orbit around Raoul.

The party was to celebrate the unveiling of his new work; all of the city’s prominent gallery directors were there, along with a smattering of media celebrities, politicians, and the super-rich.

Tobias mingled easily, warily familiar to the endemic crassness of the set; Imogen clung tightly to his arm, neck craning to catch a glimpse of the great man himself. Tobias singled out the man he wanted to see and made his way through the throng.

Lawrence Calvert was a fence, the best Tobias had ever dealt with, whose contacts extended throughout Europe and Asia. A dignified elderly man, with formal manners that belonged to a long dead age.

“So what have you got for me?” Lawrence asked, the press of people giving them all the privacy they required.

“Vecchio, Portrait of a Lady.” Tobias sipped at his wine, watching for the reaction.

“Oh Tobias, you incredible, unutterable beast. That’s been missing for eighty years. Out of all the people I deal with, you’re the only one I’ve ever come close to asking where you acquire your pieces.”

“Thank you, I think. But can you handle it?”

“There is a man in Bordeaux, I can make some inquiries, I promise nothing more.
Now I have a question for you: do you have any Picassos? There is a man who is suddenly very interested in acquiring."

Tobias thought of the two in his vault, perhaps Le Vieux Guitariste had begun to pale — or perhaps its echo of Nosferatu was a fraction strong for comfort, he admitted wryly — and there was another Picasso in Scotland that was ripe for plucking, a suitable replacement.

"Conceivably. But what kind of philistine wants Picasso these days?"

Lawrence smiled faintly. "Someone who wishes to alter the direction of his own work, incorporating a more ethereal quality. Who better for him to study from?" He glanced pointedly across the room.

Raoul was holding forth to a captivated audience. He was a big man in his late forties and beginning to put on weight, once glossy ginger hair was fading and thinning, his thick pointed beard was afflicted with a frost of white. His voice had kept its vigour, though, booming loudly across the room, laced with casual obscenities, presumably intended to shock the straight-laced. The long champagne glass clutched in his chubby hand was nearly empty; Tobias suspected he was already pretty well loaded, his cheeks were sunburn flushed.

Imogen had managed to insinuate herself near the front of the dense little crowd, her eyes bright as she soaked up the master's slurred anecdotes. Tobias nearly laughed aloud at the way Raoul's eyes kept returning to the modest display of cleavage afforded by her dress. Did he realize he was making a fool of himself, or did he not even care? The people here would go home and recount the day when Raoul Frances got drunk in public; another stone cemented in the monument of legend.

Tobias took advantage of the distraction to experience the sculpture.

It was a standard glass slab, two metres high, one and a half across. Curiously, people were shying away; it had a four metre buffer zone which they seemed reluctant to step inside.

The work was called No, another nude. This time the woman was curled up on the floor, face pressed against her knees, arms crossed over the back of her head. It was a mezzotint representation, there was virtually no colour present at all.

The visual style was a definite change for Raoul; darker, more forbidding.

It was the essence which kept people back. Tobias found it to be walking against a gale. It matched the vision, an examination of the repressed horrors within the subconscious, swamping a single thread of decency with nauseating lusts and deprivations that should never be aired in the clean light of day.

He was the only person who stayed for any length of time. It was his familiarity with souls that nullified the revulsion all the others felt, he knew people were like that, they didn't, or didn't wish to acknowledge the truism. If nothing else he envied Raoul his honesty.

Lawrence wrinkled his nose when Tobias returned. "Not my scene at the best of times," he complained. "But that ... a wallow in perversion, if you ask me. Can't think who'll show it for him."

Tobias grinned. "Can't you?" he teased his friend.

Lawrence admitted defeat with a snort. "All right. The controversy will draw them, but that doesn't make it right. It's filthy."

He brightened as Imogen returned to them, her face radiant with delight. After the introductions she said: "He talked to me. Wished me luck with my own sculpting."

Lawrence gave a fulsome groan. "Not another sculptor, please."

"You're as bad as Tobias. Pictures are all he cares about. Can't you see how
limited they are, two dimensional, lifeless.”

"Young lady," he began breezily, enjoying the old old argument. "If you spent the slightest..." he broke off, frowning in annoyance. "Damn, how did he get in?"

Tobias turned round to see the victim of Lawrence’s ire. A young man in a dapper suit flitting through the crowd with aquiline grace.

He raised an enquiring eyebrow.

"Raoul’s supplier,” Lawrence said tonelessly.

"I didn’t know."

"That he was a phyltre user? Oh yes."

Tobias watched the smiling youth, melancholic, but unsurprised. Every true genius seemed to have some kind of basic flaw; that they could ride it like a surfer was a part of their gift, the ability to balance on the brink of oblivion might be the edge which separated them from the common herd. And there were far more destructive habits than phyltre.

It was a tailored drug with no debilitating physical side effects, but it was monstrously addictive. Taken before sex it would boost orgasmic ecstasy tenfold. Its expense made it a preserve of the rich.

Imogen’s face clouded over, an obvious disapproval at being summarily informed her idol was less than perfect.

Raoul had begun to sing lustily, slopping champagne onto the white carpeting as he swayed to and fro. The gallery owner hovered anxiously nearby, his smile flickering nervously, lacking the courage to intervene. There was a general drift of people for the door.

"Looks like the party’s over,” said Lawrence, and raised his glass in mocking salute to the drunken artist, draining it in one gulp.

Night had come, and the summer dew was thick on the grass as Tobias and Imogen walked across the park. There were few clouds above, some sullen pearl wisps piled in the west, letting the starlight shine down unhindered. The city was a pink-tinged coronal halo enveloping the entire horizon.

"He shouldn’t have said that,” Imogen murmured. She had darkened after they’d left the gallery, introspective and uncommunicative.

"That Raoul had a habit? Yes he should. It was a kindness. If you are going to become any sort of artist, let alone an essence sculptor, you must learn to see people as they are. Nobody is composed from goodness and light alone. Raoul would be the first to tell you that."

"I suppose.” But they were only words, she didn’t want to believe, hating the obvious.

Their hands met, fingers entwining, a caress of promise. He relished the sensation, her light warmth, deliberate nearness, need; wondering what it would be like to carry the unspoken intentions to their conclusion. There was little effort in undressing her, picturing her naked, wishing the touch of her mouth upon his; long years quenching the fire of physical desire subsiding to warm companionship in the twilight age, sharing, knowing. Union.

Never to be.

She slid her hands up to his cheeks, raising herself on her toes for the kiss. Her blissful expectancy faltered as his back stiffened, establishing a blank insurmountable barrier between them. A pain built from the confusion and dismay
of incomprehensible rejection reigned on her face, inflicting a far greater hurt on
him.

Her soul had begun a stricken lament, writhing like a beast in torment.
"Tobias?" the tiny word was a heart-wrenching plea.

He cursed his weakness; dipping into the lives of mortals as though such
involvement could assuage his loneliness. He already had Anthea to relieve the
desires of the flesh, bidding for anything more was simple greed.
"I'll walk you home," he said quietly.

Tobias visited Raoul Frances's home a fortnight after his last farewell to Imogen.
She had left one message for him at his gallery, which he ignored; his parting gift to
her, making the break as clean as possible, the least she deserved.

Raoul had settled in a modest old manor house of understated elegance; its
rambling wooded acres providing him the quasi-seclusion he craved. Outside of his
studio, a converted stable, little modern technology had been incorporated; as
Tobias discovered, having to drive his car manually down the kilometre long gravel
drive. Nor were there any servants, just Raoul and an ever-changing parade of
models, assistants, and admirers — inevitably all young and female.

When Tobias arrived three muses were in residence. One of them was Imogen.

Raoul greeted his guest with a bluff joviality alluding to long-standing friendship.
Tobias refused to be annoyed by such grating effusion, satisfied at the rare privilege
of glimpsing the virtuoso at work — part of the price, and Raoul had agreed readily
enough.

His studio was nothing exceptional, a large open space with a blank glass slab as its
nucleus, flanked by the image imprinter computer, and essence formatting system, a
featureless black column one metre high. A sprawling pile of cushions had engulfed
one corner, seven easels, all holding large canvases, formed a wide ring to one side of
the slab. The floor and walls were simplistic bare stone.

Raoul placed Le Vieux Guitariste on one of the easels and stepped back, grinning
broadly at his bleak skeletal prize. "Worth it." He sucked in his cheeks. "Most
definitely worth it. And only fitting that one master should help another, despite the
years which separate us; it would be utterly wasted on the brain-dead trooping
through museums. Eh?" he glanced at Tobias for confirmation.

"I'm glad you believe you can use it. Do you envisage embarking on a large
variance from your current style?"

"Not at first. I shall have to study this old boy carefully; but with the fresh vistas
he'll hopefully unveil to my jaded eye, who knows what might be accomplished."

Imogen and another girl entered the studio, holding hands in a sunny
companionable manner. The second girl was introduced as Nadine, who barely
acknowledged Tobias in return, treating him with mild disdain, her well-spoken
accent indicated some kind of aristocratic background. She wore a plain white gown
with a wizard's hood, thrown back; her hair was straw-blonde, long and wild.

Tobias hadn't recognised Imogen's soul as she approached, its constituency was
firmer, reflecting an underlying purpose and determination absent before; yet still no
deep contentment, he noted. As she came through the thick oaken door he was
reminded of the duchess once more; but inverted this time. Imogen was dressed in
black, a wrap-around cotton skirt and gauzy vest.

She registered a temperate satisfaction as his eyes were drawn to the swell of her

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breasts under the transparent material, as though she'd won some undeclared war.
He felt only sadness, this negative print of the duchess was alien to him, a brutal case of spraypaint vandalism. He had no doubt Raoul was responsible; both girls' sexuality was deliberately provocative, a male's idol.

"Nice, eh?" Raoul clapped him on the shoulder, chortling roughly. "Let you into a secret, can't work without 'em, not unless I was a bloody homo." His laugh became a full-blown gale.

Tobias saw the gloating anticipation in his soul, and refused the bait, remaining impassive; wondering exactly what Imogen had been saying about him.

Raoul's bluffness abated slightly. "I'm serious. All my sculptures are of women. That's the key, you can't fudge up an essence of something you know nothing about."

"And the opposite sex is all you can ever know?"
"Of course. Those other sculptures in the National, pure crap. Their essence is just guesswork, that or insipid imagination. Those sculptors don't actually know how to portray an essence that'll complement their image. Happy for a smile, sad for a frown. Pathetic." He shook his head in disgust, and took Tobias over to one of the sketches. It was an impressively accurate drawing of Nadine, with her musculature meticulously detailed by a firm confident hand.

Raoul snapped his fingers impatiently, and Nadine slipped out of her gown in a smooth well-versed motion, standing in the centre of the circle of easels, adopting the same pose as the one in the sketch; straight-backed, legs slightly apart, arms slack by her side. Her beauty mesmerised Tobias, she had a perfect body, with the hard compact build of a dancer or athlete. Although the circumstances of their location and her obvious professionalism conspired to make her strangely unerotic.

"Now," said Raoul, and began to show Tobias round the other easels. Each of them had a different view of Nadine. "Half of the problem is that most would-be-sculptors just use a hologram direct, feed their image straight in. It means they have no proper understanding of their subject."

"Whereas you..."

Raoul smiled. "I have learnt her, completely. Her body holds no mystery; only when that state has been achieved should you begin to use the machine. It must remain your tool, your palette, never your governor." He activated the image computer. A small figure materialized above it, obviously a generated graphic composite of the sketches.

Nadine began to move; extending her arms and legs, stretching, bending, and twisting with eerie silent grace, a gymnastic routine performed in slow-motion.

The holographic figure began the same routine, speeding up until its motions synchronised with hers.

"You see," said Raoul. "I have lettered myself in the contours every muscle, every tendon will assume for any posture she adopts. The animation program will ensure that however I ultimately visualize her the image will remain in context, it will always retain an integral element of truth. People recognize this, subconsciously or otherwise. They believe."

Nadine danced on, keeping perfect time to some inner music, eyes closed, totally unaware of the outside world; her little simulacrum mimicking her perfectly.

"And the essence?" Tobias asked, although he already had an inkling of the answer.

"As for the body, so for the mind," Raoul replied. "I explore her thoughts; her
desires and hatreds. Test her responses to both the ordinary and extraordinary, what fascinates and what repels. It is a process which demands we become lovers; sex is the final conclusive honesty, a validation. All she has thought, all she has dreamt, all she loves, all she fears; is given willingly to me. From that knowledge I can distil an essence to match the image; the perfect sculpture is a synergistic fusion of mind and body."

Anyone else would've believed him, the conviction was undeniable, the commitment searingly intense. But Tobias watched his soul as he spoke; it was turbulent, buffeted by raw gusts of discord. There was a truth in what he said, but a tenuous one, twisted and contorted by a cold unhealthy core of remorseless obsession.

Nadine finished, folding into a lotus position, bowing her head; her entire body glistened under a thin layer of perspiration. Raoul walked over and laid a hand tenderly on her head. She looked up adoringly.

"Well done," he said. It was a benediction.

Tobias was faintly repelled by her dependence on his approval. "I don’t understand," he said. "You are orientated to portraying intrinsic reality. Picasso cannot help you along those lines."

"Oh but he can. To date all art has originated from the past, a collage of the artist’s memories, even aspirations are formulated from bygone cruces. I want to delve into the other end of the tau stream. Today’s techniques coupled with the kind of insights Le Vieux Guitariste demonstrates will allow me to extrapolate the progression of thoughts into the future, not merely wishful fantasies, but fundamental truths. A liberation from static portraits, I will show my subjects blossoming."

"However unpleasant their destiny."

"Or beautiful."

Imogen and Tobias walked back to his car together, silent at first, as though testing each other’s resolve.

Tobias heard a faint shout coming from a little lake at the bottom of Raoul’s rambling chaotic garden. The third girl was standing in the water up to her waist, waving. Imogen replied with a quick pass of her hand, embarrassed.

"How long have you been here?" Tobias asked.

"Ten days." It was a verbal challenge, goading him.

"What does the Academy say?"

"I jacked it in."

He stopped walking, the beginnings of exasperation manifesting. "Imogen!"

"I’m learning far more here than I could back there," she shot back, unrepentant.

"This is living art, not just vague dusty theory."

"And you pay your own way?"

"I earn my keep. I’m going to be Raoul’s next sculpture."

He looked up at the thick white clouds drifting overhead; seeing the bed on which Raoul would mount her each night, smiling unseen in the dark, coaxing out secrets which should never be spoken; while she, striving to please in the name of art, confessed.

Her pose was drawn, proud defiance. "And you were wrong about the phylitre, he doesn’t use it. He doesn’t have to," she taunted, blatantly relishing the twist of the
knife. Her soul shone with malice-tainted hauteur; she'd discredited his words, humbled his refusal of her love.

He wouldn't meet her eye, too ashamed by his role in her predicament; driving her here, to the private ignominy of the artist's bed, the public exposure and exploitation of her candour.

She must've realized the extent of her triumph, relenting in the face of his obvious distress; in spite of everything some of her gentle nature remained, too ingrained for Raoul to burn out. She took hold of his hand, squeezing to emphasize her words. "Be happy for me, Tobias. Think what a boost it'll be for my career, one of Raoul's subjects. People will notice me."

"Is it worth it?"

"Oh God yes, Tobias. I'm not just observing him create, I'm part of the process involved, there's no limit to what you can learn that way. Nadine is teaching me the dance, and I can build on my experience with Raoul. He's quite extraordinary at breaking down reticence; sometimes tender, sometimes strict, he always knows exactly how. Afterwards, you wonder how you could ever cling to such stupid modesties. He's a catharsis, nothing you reveal about yourself shocks him. God, it's such an opportunity."

"I'm happy for you."

She studied him intently, troubled. "No. But you're a gallant liar, I ought to have expected that. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come on such a bitch."

"Doesn't matter," he kissed the crown of her head. He desperately wanted to fill the void between them with words, but it would only lead to more hurt. She was under Raoul's enchantment now; he would let the spell run its course, wait until she was discarded like all the others. Perhaps there could be a genuine rapprochement then, if she wasn't too bitter; although that magic spark of initial infatuation would never be recaptured.

"Friends?" she asked as he climbed into the car.

"Friends."

The car's rear-view sensor showed her waving until the drive took her out of sight.

Start and No had been set up at opposite ends of the National Gallery's exhibition room. Like magnetic poles, one attracted people as the other repelled.

Again, Tobias was the only person who could withstand No.

It had begun to worry him. Raoul should never have been able to conjure up such sincerity, not from questions, not even intuition would provide such a wealth of detail. And its composition was perfect, impossible to orchestrate unless you could see souls.

He moved to Start. Despite its lighter theme the essence's hierarchical complexity was unmistakable. Real.

The night had changed Raoul's manor house, depriving it of the reassuring friendliness it exuded in the daytime. It was no longer the open house of a boisterous libertine, but a shadowed, solid massif, impenetrable.

Tobias could see only two souls in the vicinity, a familiar bright primary eclipsing its oddly blenished satellite.

He lifted the heavy iron latch of the old stable door and walked in.

The great artist was wearing a loose fitting silk robe, open at the front, exposing a
flaccid hairy paunch. He swung round at the intrusion, face snarling in rage and fright, abandoning the radiant angel sprawled on the pile of cushions.

Imogen glowed a warm rose-pink from toe to crown; the massive overdose of phyltre had fluoresced when it hit her bloodstream, lighting the spiderweb filigree of capillaries from within. Veins and arteries were lambent highways of light. The corona's intensity fluctuated obscenely, pulsing with the rhythm of her heartbeat.

Tears from the well of guilt stung Tobias's eyes, blurring Raoul.

Instinct dominated. He reached out, embracing the artist's hysterical soul, folding it towards him. A small terrified thing, fluttering wildly against the implacable prison of his eldritch grip. He nursed it with delicate caresses, pouring a compassion balm into the gaping chasms of deprivation, soothing, calming.

Raoul smiled rapturously as the deluge of tranquility invaded him; discarding his robe, and walking wilfully into Tobias's welcoming arms.

Tobias felt the press of soft flesh against him, the sweat and animal heat pungently oppressive. He bent forwards and bit the base of Raoul's neck; teeth puncturing the coarse freckly skin, tasting the sticky salt tang of the blood bubbling from the shallow lacerations onto his tongue.

He let go.

Raoul screamed in mortal horror, jerking free with a surge of manic strength; fleeing into the night.

Tobias watched him go, a pale mirage of jouncing flab swallowed by the darkness. The virus was in him now, multiplying, percolating through his neurons, subduing him; by morning he would belong.

Imogen was moaning softly, squirming on the cushions, running her hands over her body, searching ever more frantically for a release from the phyltre's arousal high.

"Tobias," she rasped. "Oh God, please, it feels so good." Her breathing was harsh, becoming laboured. "Please," she screeched.

He picked up the essence formatting receiver, a plain gold tiara the width of his thumb, and performed the coronation of his duchess. She stared up at him through the thrall of her ecstasy-stupor. "It's wonderful," she sobbed. Her blood light was a daybreak sun rising. Glorious.

"It gets better," he promised, and began to unbutton his shirt.

Death and darkness had become a providence for Tobias, supplying him with the expression he wanted to immortalise. Her face was placid, imbued with a quiet reserved dignity which she had always failed to achieve in life.

He worked with calm deliberation to capture the vision, an incisive, almost pedantic, recreation of the duchess, imprinting it within the waiting glass slab.

The white dress was wrong, Tobias decided, Imogen might've shared the insecurities of the original duchess, but their circumstances were far apart. He walked up to the slab, experiencing the essence. He'd discarded the filters Raoul employed to shape the theme of his sculptures, allowing a raw impregnation, a summation of the thoughts expelled from the caverns of her mind by that last nova-burst of ecstasy. Her true essence.

There was a hard external crust of bitterness, wrought from the time spent with Raoul, but sheltered within was the fragrant sweetness, loneliness, and tenderness which was Imogen.
He remembered the only time she'd ever come close to fulfilment: excited at becoming one of the artist's coterie, and happy at making her peace with him.

Tobias went back to the imaging computer, and turned the dress to black. When he looked up he found the animation program had curved the corners of her mouth into a soft haunting smile.

Coming in DREAM 29

The final issue of DREAM SCIENCE FICTION (see editorial) will lead off with Mark Haw's THE RETRIBUTOR, another fine story from this up-and-coming author, but this time not so experimental as his previous story. Also present will be John Light, with a story that spans eternity and infinity, and Andy Smith with a new long story THE CYVERNIAN WAY.

Lots more, of course, including all our usual features and full news of the line-up for NEW MOON No 1 in our biggest-ever issue of DREAM. Don't miss it!
I COULD TELL SHE WAS A FIRST-TIMER by the way she tried the impossible, looking at me while at the same time searching the room with her eyes.

"No, Mrs. Lucas, I don’t have a couch."
She looked startled.
"How did you know that’s what...?"
"I don’t have a Viennese accent either."
I smiled and gestured her to the hot-seat. She strutted over to it on her special-occasion heels and settled noisily into the leather. I sat behind my desk.
"Should I call you Doctor?" she asked.
"Call me anything you like — Dr. Kohn, Sir, Manny — so long as you’re happy with it. May I call you Delia?"
She nodded and opened her wicker handbag. She took out a chequebook and asked: "Should I pay you now or ..."
"Get your money’s worth first. I’ll invoice you."
She gave me a white envelope that had already been opened. I laid it beside my blotter. I seldom read GPs’ letters. I let the patients talk; I would soon find what was wrong with them.
"I took the doctor’s letter down to the hospital, but they said they couldn’t see me till September, so ..."
"Whatever your reasons for coming here, Delia, I’m sure you’ve done the right thing."
I slid my desk drawer open and took out a consultation form. I noticed Delia trying to peer over my desktop.
"There’s no tape recorder in there," I said. "I’m not Herbert Lom." I clicked my biro into action. "Shall we begin?"
She pointed to the well-stocked bookcase at the other end of the room. "Have you read all those books?"
"Most of them."
That wasn’t true. I read magazines a-plenty, but I lacked the staying power for books, unless forced to read them at medical school — and those American tough-guy novels; I liked them. The bookcase was merely for effect, reassuring my patients that their fragile minds were in the hands of an intellectual.
I regarded my new patient. She had light-brown, wavy hair reaching to her shoulders. Her face was heavily tanned, but her skin was leathery — she had been to Tenerife too often. I studied the so-called windows to the soul. Like the canary in the song, she had circles under them — insomnia, perhaps. The size of her pupils told me she might be on anti-depressants. The eyes themselves were mud-coloured — brown, tinged with green — which I found intriguing, if not attractive.
"What appears to be the trouble, Delia?"
"Well, I think I’ve got something of an inferiority complex. I’ve always been an introvert ever since I was at school. The other kids used to laugh at me and tease me because my father was in jail ... he died there ... and they wouldn’t let me join in their skipping games and that. I was an outcast. They used to make me feel really miserable. My husband thinks ..."
"Delia."
"... that not only have I got an inferiority complex, but I’m paranoid, too. You see, his mother and I ..."
"Delia."
"... don’t get on well together, and I always think she’s up to something behind..."
"Mrs. Lucas, please!" I thumped the desk, and she thankfully broke off. "If you’re able to diagnose yourself, why come to me?" I found my palms facing upwards in the gesture associated with the Emmanuel Kohns of this world. Annoyed, I let my hands drop on my desk — which hurt a bit.

"For a cure," she answered, twisting a forelock round her forefinger.

"Well, please leave the diagnoses to me. If I had a mother-in-law, I dare say I would suspect machinations. It wouldn’t mean I was ill."

"I’m sorry, Doctor, by my husband ..."

"Your husband is a psychiatrist too?"

"No, he’s in advertising, you see, and ..."

"Delia, can we get on with your symptoms, please. Your first session is only fifty minutes long. You’ve arrived more than twenty minutes late, and either you — or your husband, who’s in advertising — are paying for it."

"I’ve had this dream — this nightmare."

At last we were getting somewhere.

"Only once?"

"It recurs."

"How often does it recur?" I began filling the consultation form.

"Almost every night."

"Good God! What happens in this dream?"

"I’m walking down a dark alleyway," she said, releasing a twisted strand of hair so that it hung like a prayer lock. I found it fascinating to watch it slowly uncurl. "It’s foggy — a real peasouper — like in those old Sherlock Holmes films with Basil Rathbone and Nigel ... Nigel ..."

"What happens then, Delia?"

"I can hear footsteps; strolling, echoing footsteps." Her body tensed. Her eyes widened as though she were listening to the steps at that very instant. "I start to walk down the alleyway, away from the approaching footsteps." She began using her finger as a Carmen roller again. "But I’m still being followed. As I quicken my pace, he quickens his. He’s catching up. I break into a run, but I’m not fast enough. He catches me tightly round the waist. He’s squeezing the life out of me. I’m gasping and struggling for breath. Then I scream to wake myself up."

"Do you ever see your assailant?"

"Not till the last moment. I can’t see him through the fog."

"When you do see the figure, do you know who it is?"

"He has a black stocking over his face."

That was interesting. I wrote it down. "His face, you say. A man. How do you know?"

"By the way he’s dressed — the trench coat, the trousers, the Oxford shoes. And he’s so strong - grips like a vice."

Time was running short. Curse Freud! Because of him, my patients expected instant interpretations of their pet nightmare.

"Have you any children?" I asked, fishing for information I could use.

"Two. One girl, eight ..."

"Still at school?"

"Tell me, Delia, do you have a job?"

She shook her head.

Aha!

"No, my husband ..."
"Your husband! You feel as though you're living in a prison, Delia, don't you?"
"Well..."
"With your husband as your jailer."
"No, not really."
"That is what your conscious says. You've tried to trick yourself into thinking you're happy when you're not. But your subconscious is objecting, and this manifests itself in your recurring nightmare."
She smiled disbelief.
"I think you'll find the identity of the mysterious attacker in your dream will be your husband. The black stocking signifies that deep down you think he regards you as little more than a sex object. The discomfort you feel as he crushes you symbolises the four walls you live your life inside as a housewife. As you long to break free from the attacker's grip, so you long to be free from the drudgeries of motherhood and housework."
"I can't see..."
"Think about it. You'll see I'm right."
I looked at my watch. Time was nearly up.
"What anti-depressants are you on?" I asked.
She looked startled again. "How do you know...?"
"I am a doctor."
She searched her handbag again and produced a bottle of Prothiaden 25mg capsules. I read the dosage instructions on the label: 150mg a day.
"Continue taking these till the nightmares cease and you start to feel better. Then you can stop — but not abruptly. Come off them three, two, one, like that. Another thing I want you to do is to try to take command of your dream."
"How can I do that?"
"If you can wake yourself out of your dream — like you say you did by screaming — you can do other things too. Instead of running away, try to turn round and face your attacker. When he grabs you, unmask him."
She nodded.
I opened my bottom drawer, took out one of my stock relaxation technique leaflets, rose and handed it to her.
"Try these. I do them myself. They work wonders."
She rose to go.
"See Mrs. Shipley, my secretary, and make an appointment for two weeks' time," I said at the door.
Three minutes later, I peered out at her through the venetian blinds as she waited at a Harley Street kerb. As she stooped into the cab, she suddenly darted a glance up at my window. I quickly drew back.

She was thirty-five minutes late next time. I hadn't expected to see her again: by the time the next appointment came round, her nightmare would have stopped by itself and she would either cancel her appointment or not bother to turn up. But here she was, still looking as though she was having sleep difficulties. Or was there another reason for her attendance? Bored housewife. Handsome young psychiatrist — maybe loaded with money even by her husband-in-advertising's standards. Her hair was tied back, revealing all her bronzed face, and that skirt was at least four or five inches shorter than the last.
"Well, Delia, how have you been doing?"
"I did the relaxation exercises, like you said."
"And did they relax you?" I asked, showing her to her chair.
She shook her head as she sat and placed a burdensome black handbag on the floor beside her.
"What about taking control of your dream?"
"I've tried standing my ground in the alleyway."
"Good. Did it work?"
"Sort of. Look, Doctor, I've been doing some thinking ..."
"Did you get the mask off?"
"... about what you said to me last time about being a housewife and not having a full-time job and that."
"Yes, but..."
"You know, you're absolutely right. I had no idea my life was in such ..."
"Delia."
"... a mess. I seem to create my own sort of reality."
"You're diagnosing yourself again, Delia."
"Let me give you an example. Do you know anything about tropical fish?"
I tried to suppress a smile by biting my lip. "Not a great deal."
"My husband keeps them. He's a fanatic. He has a shed in the garden full of tropical aquariums. He's even had a power line stretched out there from the house — did it all himself."
"What has tropical fish to do with ...?"
"I was just coming to that. Do you know what a zebra fish is?"
"I think so — those little ones with the black and white stripes."
She laughed and a smile illuminated her leathery face. Her super-sheer tights made a long sweeping sound as she crossed her legs so that her dimpled left knee was clearly in my line of sight.
"That was exactly the point I was trying to make," she said. "I thought the stripes were black and white too. You must suffer from the same problem as I do."
I resisted the urge to comment.
"My husband said they weren't black and white at all. They were blue and yellow. So I looked again, and he was right."
"That's interesting. I'll have a close look next time I see one. Now, about the mask..."
"But isn't it amazing? We've been conditioned to think the word zebra is linked with black and white stripes: the African horse, the pedestrian crossing..."
I tapped my watch strap with my biro.
"Delia, we're running out of time again."
She uncrossed her legs. "Oh, I'm sorry. Was there something you wanted to ask me?"
"Well, now that you mention it."
With her hair tied back she could no longer make prayer locks with her forefinger, so she started to fiddle with a button on her blouse. She twisted it like an Arab play bead till it came off, revealing enough of a black see-through bra to hold my attention. Suddenly I could feel my pulse pounding inside my head. I didn't dare count its rate.
"In your dream," I asked, "did you successfully pull the stocking off your assailant's leg — off his head?" Freudian slip!
"No. I try to pull at the mask, but the harder I pull, the tighter he squeezes me. It’s got to the stage now when I’m too frightened to go to sleep. Can’t you do anything, Doctor?" She stared at the button in the palm of her hand, then held the blouse together with her thumb and forefinger.

"I can only give you advice, as you know. I only wish there was some way I could enter into your dream and ..."

I fell silent. She let go of her blouse before asking: "Is anything wrong?"

"Do you ever get Mind and Spirit — the magazine?"

She knitted her brows and closed her blouse again.

"It’s a magazine that gives news from the psychology fringes: parapsychology, various pseudosciences, psychic phenomena, that sort of stuff."

She wanted to say something, but smiled broadly instead, displaying her dentist’s intricate bridgework.

"About eighteen months ago I saw an article in Mind and Spirit about this man in Hertfordshire who claimed to have built some kind of machine that decodes alpha waves or something. The long and the short of it is that it might be possible to have someone — me, for example — monitoring your dreams."

I looked at my watch. The session was nearly over. I rose, and so did she, clasping her heavy handbag with one hand and her blouse with the other.

"I'll dig out the article and try to contact the chappie who invented the machine. You don't have to pay for that part of the treatment, as it's strictly experimental. You don't mind being used as a guinea pig, do you?"

"No."

"Come back in two weeks' time. I should have some news for you by then."

159 Harley Street,
LONDON W1N 1DJ

Dear Mr Robertshaw,

I was interested to read an article about you and your dream monitor in MIND AND SPIRIT magazine. MIND AND SPIRIT have kindly given me your address, and I hope you do not object to me contacting you.

I am a psychiatrist and I have a patient who is currently being plagued by a recurring lucid dream. I think she could be helped by your device. Perhaps when I am in Welwyn Garden City I could call on you and we could discuss the matter.

Yours faithfully
E KOHN
MD DPM FRCPsych

43 Starkfield
WELWYN GARDEN CITY
Herts.

Dear Dr Shrinkie Winkie

You’re a liar!

You think I don’t know you you really are? This is all a ploy by Management and that damned welfare officer, whose only concern for my health and welfare is the copious amounts of mileage allowance and day subsistence he can claim every time he visits me while I’m off sick. His prime function is to
put a glistening spit-and-polish shine on the jackboots of Management.
I know what you’re all trying to do. You’re trying to get rid of me by premature retirement on grounds of ill health. But I won’t give in without a fight.
If you are ever in the Welwyn area, don’t bother calling on me. You will not be admitted to the home of

CRAIG ROBERTSHAW

I rang the doorbell of Craig Robertshaw’s maisonette and watched him through the front door’s glass panel when he appeared in the vestibule. His jeans were faded at the knees, and he had a shabby black Iron Maiden vest. His hair looked as though he had cut it himself with a pair of blunt scissors and no mirror, and he looked as though he had shaved with a blade from the same scissors.

When he had opened his door, I showed him his letter.
"Hi! I’m Dr. Shrinkie Winkie."
He seemed taken aback; then he started to close the door.
"Please," I insisted. "I’m not connected with your employer. Can I come in? I really do want to see you about your invention."
He hesitated, then let me in.
"Did Harry Cartwright send you to see me?" he asked.
"Harry who?"
"My shrink."
"I didn’t know you had one."
His maisonette had one main room that acted as both sitting room and bedroom. Judging by Craig’s appearance, I thought the place would be like a demolition site, but it was quite tidy, although the bed was unmade.
"You want coffee?" he asked.
"I wouldn’t say no."
He led me to his kitchenette.
"I can’t keep calling you Dr. Shrinkie Winkie." He checked there was enough water in his electric kettle.
"Try Emmanuel. Only one I, and no e at the end."
"I’m Craig."

We shook hands. His was damp.
He selected two mugs from his draining board, opened a cabinet and took out a bottle of Camp.
"Can I have tea?" I asked.
He reached inside his cabinet for a lidless Bird’s custard tin and took out a crumpled teabag.
"You’re not really here to see me about my dream machine," he accused.
"Why else would I be here?"
"To try to have me committed."
"If it’ll make you feel any better, I’m in private practice, and you haven’t hired me to examine you."
"I’m sorry," he said, pouring out the hot water. "My management have resorted to all kinds of tricks."
"That’s the way it goes: I have only one employee and I find myself resorting to all kinds of tricks too."
"I thought I’d be safe from them on the club," Craig went on, "but they won’t leave me alone. This staff welfare officer keeps coming round when I least expect him — ‘I just happen to be in the area, Mr Robertshaw’ — and they keep stopping my sick pay for stupid reasons, like if my doctor’s certificate arrives a couple of days late in their personnel department’s office."

“What exactly is wrong with you, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Milk?”

“A splash. No sugar.”

“The quack puts ‘Psychosis’ on my certificates. Biscuit?”

“Only if they’re garibaldi’s.”

“No biscuit then.”

“Your management doesn’t sound too bright. I would have thought all the worry of having your sick pay stopped isn’t going to help your psychosis much. Have a word with Harry Whatchisname. He might be able to stop them annoying you.”

He gave me my tea — still with the teabag in the cup — and I sat uninvited on his vinyl sofa.

“They’ve been trying to get rid of me for some time. I’ve got the whole management lined up against me. They can make life very difficult for you. That promotion — if you want it — can be a potent weapon. They dangle it in front of you like remission on a stick in a prison. But I didn’t really care much about the promotion anyway, so once they took it away from me I soon found that the threat of the punishment was worse than the punishment itself. They still tried it on, of course; but you can’t kill a man who’s already dead, can you? So I was doing all right. Then came the Midnight Men.”

“Sorry. Who are the Midnight Men?”

“Management move in mysterious ways their blunders to perform. They want to know what’s happening in their disorganisation, so they give the Midnight Men keys to all the rooms, drawers and filing cabinets. Late at night, when all the staff have left, when all the cleaners have gone home even, they come round. While I was working on my dream machine, I neglected things at work a bit. They found some engine component design I should have been slaving over, but I’d folded up the drawings and stuffed them in my bottom drawer. After that, things started getting really hot for me.”

“Well, I’m sorry to hear you’re having such a hard time. What about this dream machine of yours? I’d like very much to talk about that.”

“You’re not from the government, are you?”

“That’s hardly likely: I’ve got the Midnight Men from the Inland Revenue after me right now.”

He lowered his voice. “The government want to know about my dream machine. I haven’t told them anything though.”

“Good for you.”

“You see, the powers that be don’t want people to have dreams.”

“Whyever not?”

“It gives people too much freedom — worlds of their own to escape to. Why do you think they allowed twenty-four hour radio and television? To stop people from going to sleep and from dreaming, of course. But I — one clean soul against the whole rotten-to-the-core British Establishment — not only dream myself, I can tune into other people’s dreams too. With my little machine, I can look into people’s innermost secrets.”
"Anyone? Anywhere?"

"Well, they've got to be hooked up to the machine first."

"Are you sure you have such a machine?" I asked carelessly.

He gave me that suspicious look I had seen at the front door, when he found out who I was. I quickly changed the subject.

"Do you live with your family?" I asked.

"No, I'm all alone. My mum comes in about once a week to clean the place up a bit — make sure I don't become the neighbourhood health hazard. Then she goes back to Oxford where she cleans up the universities after the students have messed them up with their drugs parties and their orgies and their..."

"Aren't you married? A good looking..."

"Who'd have me?"

"Engaged?"

He shook his head.

"Going out with someone?"

"I can't seem to get a girl to go out with me. I've given up trying. I ask them on a date and they don't want to know. I tell them that my psychiatrist says it would be good for me to have a girlfriend, but they still don't change their minds. I'll never understand women. Hey! Why are you asking me all these questions?"

"Sorry. Force of habit. Does your machine decode alpha rhythms?"

He looked out the window. "Never mind my machine. What about that fancy machine out there? That is your Merc, isn't it?"

"It is. But I came here..."

"You came here at the request of the welfare officer. I've just figured it out: Management are paying your fees."

"Don't start that again."

"I know when you're lying; I'm a humsn polygraph."

"Craig."

"Does my machine decode alpha rhythms? Or beta particles? Or gamma rays? Or deltawave Toshiba microwave ovens?"

"Craig."

"You — you almost had me fooled: the Harley Street address, the professional couchside manner, the murky Merc, even the three-button suit handmade by the handmaiden hand of your tailor from Savile Row. 'Ow's about that, guys and gals? Ooh-oh-ooh-oh-oooh-oh-oooh!"

"Craig! For God's sake tell me about your machine. I have nothing to do with your welfare officer and I don't want to hear about your wretched employers again." Did I — a practising psychiatrist — really lose my temper? Oh, dear!

"If the welfare officer didn't put you on to me, who did?"

"I told you in my letter. I saw that magazine article. I had lunch at my club last week with the journalist who wrote it... what's his name?"

"Mohammed Butt."

"That's the chappie. He gave me your address."

"I'll bet he's hand in glove with the welfare officer too."

I must have scowled at him, because he changed the subject.

"My machine does decode alpha rhythms."

"Next question: how can they do that? I didn't know an alpha rhythm could be decoded."

"A television signal can't be decoded till it's picked up by an aerial and fed
through a television receiver. So it is with alpha waves: you can’t decipher them — till you feed them directly into someone’s inner ear; that way they go straight to the brain."

He wormed his hand into his jeans pocket and pulled out a jingling bunch of keys. "Follow me."

He led me out into the street and round the corner to a cluster of lock-up garages with graffiti daubed on their up-and-over doors. He fitted a key into a dented scarlet door, swung it upwards and flicked on a flourescent light. There was no car in the garage. Instead there was a long bench covered with a tangle of circuitry mounted on a haphazard array of Eurobreadboards. There was what looked like a crude electroencephalograph on top of an old Formica-topped table. An Amstrad computer was perched precariously on a Workmate. "Now will you believe me?" he demanded. "I never doubted you for a moment."

A week on Sunday, Delia and I motored up to Welwyn Garden City. What remained of the morning after we had arrived, we spent helping Craig move his equipment from the garage into the living room. It was early evening when it was ready.

Delia furrowed at the jumbled equipment surrounding her and asked Craig: "Are you sure you’ve used this machine before? Does it work?"

"Of course it works. That guy from the magazine — Mohammed Butt — he slept, and I received his dreams. I could see everything he saw. I could even influence what he dreamed to a certain extent. There was this girl ... never mind." Craig picked up an object that looked like a racing cyclist’s helmet with a cable attached. "The alpha waves are filtered and amplified through my machine — it’s all controlled by computer — then fed into the inner ear through this special Bonephone. The person receiving can then see all the images — if he keeps his eyes closed."

"Sounds far-fetched to me," I remarked.

"Sounds even more far-fetched to me," said Delia."

"Are you calling me mad?" asked Craig.

"No, no, of course not," I said. "It just sounds strange. But we’re perfectly willing to try it out in the interests of science."

"I’m starving. What about some supper?" said Craig. "I’m afraid I’ve got nothing in and it’s Sunday. I’ll have to go out for some fast food, although I’ve had so much fast food this week, I must have eaten a whole pack of rats."

Delia said she wasn’t hungry, so she pulled off her jumper and her boots and climbed into Craig’s stinking bed. While Craig was out getting the food, I fitted the EEG electrodes to her head.

When Craig came back I didn’t feel hungry either — such was the power of Craig’s suggestion. He seemed pleased to have a double helping. He helped me into the helmet and we sat waiting for Delia to fall asleep.

She spent most of the evening tossing and turning. In the early hours she was still awake, but Craig and I were almost asleep. We tried drinking strong black Camp to stay alert.

"Can’t you K.O. her with sodium amytal or something?" asked Craig. "You’re a quack: you’ve got a black-bag-load of goodies."

At the mention of drugs, Delia’s form flinched under the bedclothes.

"I could use a soporific," I agreed, "but that would affect the alpha rhythms."

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We'll just have to wait." I yawned. "What time is it?"

"Nearly half past three."

I sat as far back as the Bonephone would allow and I don't remember much till I heard Craig's voice from afar.

"Alpha waves coming through now. Frequency's about 12Hz. Emmanuel! Emmanuel!"

EMMANUEL KOHN
MD DPM FRCPsych

It was the plaque outside my consulting room in Harley Street. I could see that the door leading to Mrs. Shipley's desk was open.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Lucas," said Mrs. Shipley. "Do you have an appointment with Doctor?"

"No," came Delia's voice.

"I'm afraid Doctor's asleep. He's having his afternoon nap and can't be disturbed."

Delia now turned and descended the stairs.

Suddenly I realised what the elusive sixth human sense was: dreamsense. People — like the ones who read and wrote for Mind and Spirit magazine — had been looking at things like clairvoyance and telepathy, when the sixth sense had been lying in front of them the whole time — on their own pillows. Here I was. None of my other senses was functioning: I could neither smell, taste nor feel; my eyes must have been closed, yet I had sight; I couldn't listen, yet I could hear. I was descending the stairs from my consulting room, but there was no familiar smell of polish. I couldn't feel my — or rather Delia's — feet on the stairs; nor could I hear footsteps echoing on the stairwell. Real world senses no longer applied: I would now experience a sense only if it was relevant to the dream.

Delia went through the front door and out into Harley Street. She rounded the corner into New Cavendish Street. It had been light in Harley Street, but it darkened suddenly. A thick fog began to draw in. Visibility was soon like a turkish bath. She turned into an alleyway — which one, I couldn't be sure. It was then that I heard the sound of the footsteps behind Delia, leather soled shoes, their crisp sound muffled by the fog. Delia began to quicken her pace. So did the follower. Her shorter pace sounded slightly faster and the pursuit continued for some time, the footsteps clicking like a pair of differently-set metronomes.

"Turn and face him!" I ordered. But it was Delia's face that said it.

She stopped and whirled round. The footsteps became louder and the dark outline of a slim, fog-shrouded figure came into view.

"Who are you?" Delia said.

The figure said nothing and continued to approach without hesitation. His long arms wrapped around Delia's waist as he started to squeeze. Although I had no sense of touch, I could feel pain. I could hardly breathe. I tried to move my arms upwards and I could see Delia's arms where I reckoned mine should have been. The hands rose to the top of the assailant's head and began tugging at the stocking mask. I couldn't make out the face but I noticed a distinct grimace beneath the condensation-soaked nylon mesh. Slowly the stocking began to slide off. The
grip round Delia’s waist tightened.

Then the mask was off with a jerk. Delia screamed. The grip around the waist relaxed. Facing Delia was a middle-aged man I had never seen before. Even through the fog-filtered amber streetlight, his tousled grey hair and his ruddy complexion were noticeable.

"Are you Delia’s husband?" I asked. The question sounded stupid being asked in Delia’s voice.

I was surprised when the stranger shook his head.

"Then who the hell are you?"

"Oh! Inspector Rick Haley of New — New Scotland Yard." He reached inside his trench coat pocket and took out an identification card.

"What do you want with Delia?"

"In her case, just a — just a routine inquiry — about her — about her father. In your case, you’re nicked."

"Me? What for?"

"Oh! Impersonating a dreamer. Carries a — carries a long sentence."

I woke up. It was daylight and Craig was leaning over me like a dentist. I felt strange, as though I was someone else, and that someone else was me. The effect soon wore off though.

I looked about Craig’s machinery-strewn room. Delia was just waking up. My gaze reached the sofa. Sitting with a cup of steaming Camp was Inspector Haley.

I turned to Craig.

"What’s Inspector Haley doing here?"

"Oh!" said Haley, frowning. "What — what am I supposed to be inspecting?"

"You’re a police inspector," said Delia.

So we had been sharing a dream.

Haley seemed lost for words.

"He’s not the police," said Craig. "He’s the welfare officer from my work — come on a flying visit."

Delia was on time for once and was looking a lot better. A cursory glance at her mud-coloured eyes told me she was off anti-depressants.

"I’m feeling healthier than I’ve felt for a long time," she volunteered as she sat in the hot seat for the last time. "I didn’t know I had a fear of the police."

In the car, returning from Welwyn Garden City after our session on Craig’s machine, I had confronted her with the suggestion that she had a subconscious fear of authority, and of the police in particular.

"That’s the subconscious for you," I answered. "Your father was dragged away from you when you were seven. That by itself is traumatic. The fact that your father died in prison made things ten times worse. You started to blame yourself. Irrational, but then guilt complexes often are. You lived with the complex for years till your subconscious said: ‘Enough is enough’, and that’s when your nightmare began. Your guilt complex was your assailant in your dream. Once you turned round and faced it, you started to recover."

This time a different kind of smile showed that she believed me. Without the circles under her eyes she looked radiant. Even her skin had lost its leatheriness.

"And we’ve made advances in medical science into the bargain," I continued, "although it’ll be a while before we see the machine in common practice. Psychology
is like any other institution: there's a lot of prejudice and inertia to overcome before anything new is taken on board. Let me give you an example. There's a colleague of mine — Eric Marvel — just up the street — very well known psychiatrist — maybe you've heard of him."

She shook her head.

"I sent him a written synopsis of your case — omitting your name of course — because I thought he would be interested in Craig's machine. He sent the case back a couple of days later with a covering note saying that I was a little late for All Fools' Day; he doesn't believe such a machine exists, and, even if it does, it wouldn't be possible to monitor someone's dreams like that. He follows the theory that a dream is rather like the plughole in a sink: the pressures and the tensions of life build up during the day, and at night the plug is pulled and everything is dreamed away. Eric wrote that a person monitoring a dream on a set-up like Craig's would be — in his words — 'Like a limpid stream with the sludge from a London sewer cascading into it.' It would be, he says, enough to drive any sane man insane."

"Maybe that's what happened to Craig — why he's like he is," Delia suggested.

"If that was true, I'd be that way too. But I'm not, so Eric Marvel's wrong. He often is: he's one of these libidoless behaviourists.

"Now, Delia, are there any more problems?"

"No, Doctor, I feel just fine."

I rose. "Then I wish you good luck. If you have any more bad dreams, you'll know where to come."

I shepherded her to the door. We shook hands before bidding each other farewell. I then returned to my desk and opened her file. It had grown quite thick during her treatment, mostly with details of Craig's machine. My mind began to wander as I thought about other patients who could be treated in the same way, about the money I might make, about the whispering at gatherings of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. ("There goes the man who pioneered dream monitoring.")

I got up and headed for the window. Through the venetian blinds I watched Delia step out onto Harley Street. I expected her to wait at the kerb for a taxi. Instead, she turned and headed northwards. Where was she going? To that alleyway in the dream? A voice inside my head told me to follow her. I grabbed my raincoat and hat from the stand on the other side of the room. I went out through the door past my secretary's desk. I said to her:

"Just going out for a deck of Luckies, Velda...."

"Velda!"

"... be back before the next client comes."

I slammed the outer door behind me, nearly shattering the frosted glass panel. On the panel big black letters told the world:

MANNY KOHN
PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

At the bottom of the stairs I hitched up the collar of my raincoat like a tough guy should, lit my last butt and stepped out onto the sidewalk.
Mother Love

KADE pulled the cover over his head, shutting out the bright beam of morning sunlight in an attempt to prolong sleep. It was no use. His body was slept out; his mind refused to switch off. Cursing, he kicked the cover to the floor, swung his feet round and sat, naked, on the edge of the bunk.

The room was a wreck. Scattered clothes mixed with the remains of a meal on the floor. Beer and soft drink cans, some empty, some only half empty, dotted every level surface. His mother's voice came back to him.

"You won't be able to live like this when I'm not around, Kade. They'll be nobody to clean up after you then."

Well, she wasn't around, and he was still living like this. So stuff her, and all the other senes. He smiled slightly. Gotta get up.
The card, he knew, was all but empty. Have to get down to the arcade to top it up before he could do anything really exciting — like eating.

The mauve one-piece with the yellow stripe didn't look too bad. He pulled it on. Hair was OK, even if it was drooping a bit. He could fix it later, after work.

In the arcade, several occupants of the active booths looked up from their screens and grunted an acknowledgement of his presence. Nobody offered to break off and talk, which suited him fine. Like them, he was here for one reason only, to get some credit rating for the day — and night — ahead. He settled into a booth, slipped his card into the slot beneath the screen, and sat back. Hands fell naturally on the sensor plates in the armrests; he knew, vaguely, that laser scanners would monitor his eye movements, while other devices checked out heat rate and other body functions. But who cared? Just as long as he could get through what was left of the morning with enough credit to avoid coming back here today.

The screen lit. Sweet Jesus, Kade thought. Another bloody coffee ad. Why the hell did I have to pick this one? But he knew there was no point in bitching — just as there was no way to tell in advance which ads would be played in which booths. Just have to sit back and tolerate it, while the machine ran a series of holo ads past him, monitoring his response and feeding back data to the agency. At least he was getting paid for watching this crap; enough to make all the difference between basic subsistence handout and being able to enjoy life a little. It wasn't that he didn't want to work, as Kade would explain to anyone who expressed disapproval of his lifestyle. But how many jobs did you see advertised for juves, these days? And he was damned if he was going to have his hair plucked and lie about his age.

Two hours was just about as much as anyone could stand of that crap. Kade released his grip on the sensor plates and pulled his card from the slot, cutting off the machine before it could start on another ad. The telltale in the corner of the card glowed yellow. He'd have preferred a healthy green, but yellow would do. If he was careful, he'd get through the day without dipping into the red.

He stepped out of the booth, stretching and shaking his head. Time to eat. But first, maybe a coffee. It wasn't that bad, after all. He walked briskly towards the snackshop, humming, slightly out of tune, a jingle that was running round his subconscious.

In the snackshop, he inserted the card, keyed for coffee and a Danish (well, he could always eat properly later) and scrolled through the complimentary newspaper. The bill to raise the voting age to 40 looked like going through. Well, shit, what could you expect? Senes knew when they were on to a good thing. Plenty of them around to vote in favour — and most of the 35-40 age group that would be disenfranchised would probably vote in favour anyway, figuring it was only a few years until they would be enjoying the good life. Worth putting up with a couple of years hassle, for them. Life expectancy up to 115, now; so they still had 75 years of good life to enjoy. But a juve like Kade? Hell, the way things were going he'd never make a voter. By the time he was 40, the franchise would probably be up to 60.

He skipped to the sports pages. Kays of stuff about golf and chess and other sene shit. Bugger all about the big juve hi-football game. And why? Because all the reporters were voters, of course. Bloody sene voters. No jobs for juves on the news, oh no.

Angrily, Kade pulled the card, swigged down the last of the hot coffee. With a mouth full of Danish, he elbowed his way to the door. There was a car outside. A for
real, private car. A limousine. Stopped, here, by the edge of the road. The rear windows were mirrored, the occupant — some high-up sene — concealed from view. There was a human driver, a juve, didn’t look much older than Kade, and a woman, a girl, sweet Jesus, a girl younger than Kade, in some kind of uniform, holding the lead of a small dog that was peeing in the gutter.

"Hi, doll." Kade leered at the girl, running his fingers through his hair to try to make it stick up properly. Not that she’d be interested. "How’s your lord and master?" He gestured at the dog. The girl looked the other way, colouring. "Glad to see some juves can still get good jobs, with prospects."

"Leave her alone."

The voice came from behind. Kade turned, eyeing the man who had followed him out of the snackshop, Tall, wearing a conservative green twopiece. Flat hair. Kade sniffed, vigorously, spat on the pavement. A tame juve. Take the handcuff, keep yourself clean, keep practising your "yessirs" and "no madams", and by the time you’re 35 — no, 40 — the world’s your oyster.

"Hey, who plucked your rubber band, juve? I was just talking to the lady. Or maybe you got a better idea?" He tried the leer again. "Some of us young people got to do something about the population problem. Ain’t you heard? Birthrate’s way down; sene’s’ll be running out of body slaves, before you know it."

The man took a pace back, eyes darting as he looked around for support. The small crowd that had gathered to watch the commotion showed no signs of providing it. Happy to see someone else give a punk juve his comeuppance, none of them were ready to help in making the commeuppance stick.

Kade turned his back on them.

It was a mistake.

The rock hit the back of his head, just above the right ear. He staggered, fell to his knees, clutching at the limo for support. Two kicks thudded into the back of his thighs. His brain scarcely had time to register his surprise at the crowd’s bravery — only about six of them, getting up the courage to hit a singleton from behind — when it was overwhelmed by a bigger surprise.

The door he was leaning on slid back; he slumped half into the limo. Weird.

"Get in." A woman’s voice; controlled, slightly disgusted. "And please, try not to bleed on the carpet."

The kicking had stopped, the incipient mob obviously immobilised by this unexpected turn of events. Kade, brain fuzzy but not so fuzzy he wanted to give them a second chance, pulled his legs in through the opening, which slid shut behind him. Using his sleeve to mop the oozing graze on his head, he took a look at his benefactor.

Nice legs, which was mostly what he could see from down here. Young looking, but poised, confident. Not like the juve bunny with the dog. A sene, for sure. Regen could smooth the wrinkles, but you could still tell. He wondered how old she really was. A hundred? One-twenty? And why she’d picked him up. Whatever, he probably wouldn’t like it.

"Uh, thanks, but I’m okay, really. If you’d just let me out of here I’ll —"  

She was ignoring him, speaking softly to the driver. The doghandler was back inside, complete with her beast. Kade scrambled to perch on the rear-facing seat as the limo pulled smoothly away from the kerb. Sitting together opposite him, the two women looked almost like sisters. Or mother and daughter? You heard about such things — but no, surely not. She was a hired hand. Juve, or she wouldn’t blush like
that when he looked at her legs. Some kind of lacky. Not like the sexless sene beside her at all.

The woman spoke. "You’d better drink that." The merest tilt of her head indicated a glass of amber liquid that had appeared on the console beside him. She smiled, faintly. "It will make you feel better. Then we will drop you off, away from any trouble. I disapprove of violence." And anything this lady disapproved of, it was clear, soon got swept out of her way. Better drink the drink and get clear of her; especially since it seemed to be whiskey, and might, for all he knew, be the only chance he’d ever get to taste the real stuff.

The taste was certainly in a different league from the stuff dispensed in the bars Kade usually visited. It was also the last thing he remembered of the ride.

THE ROOM he woke in had "hospital" written all over it. Which is to say, there was nothing at all written on the walls, no smell in the air, and the bed — a proper bed, not a bunk — was clean and neat. He closed his eyes again, and swore quietly.

"If there is anything you require, we will be happy to supply it."

Kade opened his eyes again, looked around. Nothing. Just the featureless walls. Some computer monitor, keeping tabs on him.

"I’d like to get out of here." Whatever was going on, he just had to be in deep trouble. The voice confirmed it.

"I regret that is not possible. But you will shortly be receiving a visitor."

He sat up, examined his arms. There were no traces of any injections. But with a spray, there might not be. How long had he been here? Was it already too late? Or could he make a break? He certainly felt just like he always had. But did that mean anything? Would you know, if you felt different? Or would you still just feel like you?

There was a slight hiss as the door opened. Must be a fault in the tubes.

"Kade."

It was the sene woman from the car. So, she knew his name. So maybe he hadn’t been picked up at random — or maybe she’d done some checking while he was out of it.

"What are you doing to me? What do you want?"

She smiled, coolly. "So you really don’t recognise me. And after all the trouble I’ve gone to for you."

There was something in the tone, a once-familiar echo of martyred self-righteousness.

"Mother? Oh, shit."

The smile vanished. "That’s no way to speak to a lady, Kade. Especially your mother. But I’ll overlook it, this time." She gave a little pirouette in front of him. "Well, what do you think?"

"Yeah, sure. Great." He leaned forward, elbows on knees, running his fingers back through his hair. "So what’ve you done to me? Is it too late? How long’ve I been here?"

"Only a couple of hours. Nothing has been done to you. But everything is arranged." She smiled again. "You can join me, here in the complex. No more squalor. No more topping up your card at the adbanks."

"Jeesus, ma. You’re crazy. I won’t even be thirty until next week. I won’t be a
voter for ten years — even if they don’t raise the age limit. You can get the chuck for this. And I don’t even want in. I’m happy the way I am. For Chrissakes, I like girls.”

"Think of it as a birthday present, Kade. But a selfish one. As soon I knew about the franchise change, I knew I couldn’t wait that long for you to join me. Five years more would have been bad enough, but ten ... And you needn’t worry about the girls. You won’t, after the treatment. And I can assure you there are much more interesting things in life."

"Yeah, sure." Which is why the world’s gonna end up full of sexless senes, happy to swap excitement for security, afraid to move out of their complexes in case the outside sprung an accident on them when they were too far from the hospital and rejuve centers. "Rejuve", for chrissakes — when the main thing it did was take away the one thing that really mattered to a real juve. Sure, he could have a pretty new body, even younger looking than he really was. But at the price of his manhood.

"Look, ma ..." he caught the frown, decided it was in his best interests to be tactful. "Uh, mother. I need some time to think about all this. Can you leave me alone for a bit? Please?"

She smiled again. The old bat was probably on the happy juice. "Of course, dear. Everything is ready, as soon as you make your decision." She stepped closer to him, leaned forward. Oh God, he thought, kiss on the cheek time. But he complied with as much grace as he could muster. Anything, to get her out of here, and give him a chance to act.

AS SOON as the door closed, he tried to swing his legs down on to the floor. Nothing happened. Sweet Jesus, Kade thought, selective blockers. Arms OK, head fine; but from the waist down, nothing. A faint click behind his head could only be a panel opening in the wall of the surgery. The appearance of a spray by his right elbow came as no surprise. Damn you, mother; always so bloody sure you know best. The image of his comfortable room flashed before him as the spray hissed. He’d never have to worry about getting credit, or food again. Or girls. Cursing, he slumped back down on the bed as the spray took effect, switching his consciousness off as the surgeon set to work.

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**STORY RATINGS — DREAM 25**

Thank you to our readers for our biggest ever vote. Whether it was the ‘New Writers’ theme or not I don’t know, but we had a bumper response. It finally settled down like this:

1: BUGS
   Chris Amies 2.00
2: BODYWORK
   P.F. Hamilton 2.11
3: SAN DIEGO DEADLINE
   David Slater 3.09
4: ONE BORN EVERY MINUTE
   Stephen Blyth 3.54
5: LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE
   Mark Haw 4.03

The ‘experimental’ style of LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE didn’t go down very well with you, apparently. Sorry! We still like the story, but such stuff is obviously not for DREAM.

If you want your vote to count remember to send us a card or letter listing the stories in the order you liked them best. We’ll average out all the votes and publish the results in a future issue.

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I GUESS most people think U.F.O. societies are full of weirdoes, freaks and birdbraims. I must admit I always did. Why I ever became a member of one, I'll never know.

Well, I guess that's not true. I do know. Like most things it was a combination of reasons. Mainly, I guess, it was because of my old mate Johnny Morris. No, not the one in 'Animal Magic', though he did take a fair amount of stick on that particular subject. Once you've heard a joke for the thousandth time, it begins to lose the sparkle of spontaneous wit. Maybe that's what made him go funny. Well, to be honest, he always was a bit weird. Not REALLY weird, not like Jason Johnson. Now he really was weird, but then that's a matter that will be decided by an Old Bailey jury.

Johnny always was a bit odd. It didn't really come as a surprise when he formed a local U.F.O. society. It was more of a surprise that anyone joined it.

It must have been divine inspiration to hold meetings in the local pub, just by the entrance to the Snug Bar. I and the other regulars had always favoured propping up the Bar by the dart board, but then that was before the team had enlisted Monica. It wouldn't be fair to say that she wasn't any good at darts, it would be a compliment! The thing was, and I don't want to be sexist or anything here, she had certain assets that the team's organisers were looking for. Talk about double top! She used to be the barmaid and she had, how can I put it, an easy way with her. Yes, she was easy! The trouble was, few of her darts hit the board. After Frank was rushed to hospital to have one removed from his skull, we decided to move to the other end of the Bar, just where good old Johnny was setting up shop.

Let me say right here and now, Johnny is a great bloke, the sort of guy you'd naturally gravitate towards in a pub. He was quite well off and would insist on buying round after round of drinks. Well, it was worth listening to him prattling on about aliens and spaceships in return for getting drunk gratis. Not only that, but he insisted on giving me a lift home in his Golf GTI. This was a real bonus, as I'd suffered a devastating blow to my driving career when the judge failed to accept my plea that I'd been drinking Carlsberg Special Brew under the misapprehension that it was non-alcoholic lager.

But the third reason was Helga. Yes, she really was a Swedish au pair. She looked like that blonde bit from Abba, only bigger and better, if you know what I mean! She was the only one who turned up because she was actually interested in U.F.O.s. It turned out she'd been molested by aliens while living in Amsterdam. It was pretty clear to us, as her story unfolded, that she'd been groped by a crowd from a New Year's Fancy Dress party, who were the worse for drink, but then we didn't particularly want to dispel the poor girl's cherished ideals, particularly as if we did she might not turn up again.

So anyhow, that's how things were. Every Wednesday evening we'd get drunk courtesy of Johnny while leering at Helga. Now here's the really sickening thing about it all: Helga was really crazy about Johnny, but he couldn't care less! Just 'cos he gave me a lift home, Helga decided there was something more to our relationship than just being friends. My attempts to prove I wasn't bent came to a very abrupt end when she clouted me round the face. Seems like you just can't win!

In a way it didn't surprise me that Johnny didn't take an interest in Helga. He'd got this thing about Filipino women. No, not like that, well perhaps it was, but he was convinced that they were aliens and that was one of the reasons why they came over here as maids, to infiltrate the big houses, where the important members of
Society lived.

He was in no doubt that Cori Aquino, the Phillipine President was the alien leader on Earth, and was pretty sure that Benazir Bhutto was an alien as well, an idea that extended to all women leaders. Well, the whole thing seemed bizarre to me, but then Maggie Thatcher never did really strike me as human, you know.

Those ideas about Filipino women got him into all sorts of trouble, mainly with the police, for sexual harassment. It was really embarassing, even when drunk, to be in the car, when suddenly Johnny would spot a Phillipine girl walking along the road. "Triple wow!" he'd exclaim, a nauseating expression he'd picked up from a Radio 1 DJ.

Down would go the window and out would go Johnny's head. "I know all about you," he'd say. "Take me to your leader! I want you to show me the way. I have money. Reveal all to me."

Well, it sounded pretty bad to me, so you can guess what the police thought. Luckily he got off with a severe warning.

The fact that he liked Radio 1 seemed to be reflected in his choice of music, which was, to say the least, limited. He had a tape in his car of the Carpenters' "Calling Occupants Of Interplanetary Craft" and that one by that group with the big black bald guy. Yea, Hot Chocolate. You know the one. It went: "Wooah, no doubt about it, w o o a h no doubt about it." I'll get the title in a minute. Ah, that's it! "No Doubt About It."

Well, he thought, these were the best two records in the world and kept playing them over and over to try and decide which was the best. Oh yes, needless to say, he believed Karen Carpenter was an alien as well and that she hadn't died, but had been recalled to her home planet.

My attempts to educate his musical taste met with little success. He was even lukewarm to "Mr. Spaceman" by the Byrds and "Flying Saucer Rock N' Roll" by Bill Riley and His Little Green Men. The trouble was, he was one of those people who just couldn't make their minds up.

Then disaster struck. Johnny suddenly vanished. This was a triple disaster (as against a triple wow). First, we had to buy our own drinks on Wednesday evening. Second, Helga indicated that if Johnny wasn't there, she wasn't going to bother coming any more and third, I'd lost my lift home and had to go on the bus. What's more, I was surrounded by three French girl students, jabbering away in frog talk for the whole journey. Now although three French girl students had always been a good basis for a fantasy to me, the reality was different. All garlic, B.O. and hairy armpits.

Next Wednesday was looking no better. No Johnny. Helga was definitely getting restless. Well, more than restless. She left after half an hour, saying she wasn't coming back. I followed her out into the car park, trying to persuade her to come for a curry with me, when suddenly from the shadows we heard a voice. "Psst!"

"Not yet," I shouted, "but hope to be later." Not an original reply, but one that always goes down well when everyone has had about ten pints of lager.

It was Johnny and there was someone with him. It was a Filipino girl. They were both dressed rather oddly, as if they were ready for the oven and had been wrapped in designer bacofoil.

Johnny looked elated. "This is Xan," he hurred. "I've had a close encounter, captured by aliens, been up in their spaceship. I know no one will believe me, but tomorrow the mother ship is going to land to pick up Xan. You and Helga must be
there. Bring the press: everything is as I predicted, The Phillipines is the alien centre on Earth." He pressed a piece of paper into my hand. "Here are the details of the landing. I'm counting on you." Then they vanished.

I studied the details. The landing was to be at the deserted airfield just out of town, early the following morning. Surprisingly, Helga agreed to go with me, but my attempt to convince her she'd need all night protection from alien marauders proved fruitless.

Armed with a photographer/reporter from the local rag, who'd only agreed to go out of loyalty to Johnny's cause and the fact that he felt morally obliged after being one of the main recipients of Johnny's hospitality in the pub, we went to pick up Helga. I got to her place early in the hope that she might not be dressed yet, but, unfortunately, she was.

It was a pretty dreary, misty, old morning and we arrived at the airfield even before the sun's first rays were showing through. Bill, the reporter, was killing time listening to the radio on his Walkman, when suddenly he uttered a phrase for which he immediately apologised to Helga. I wondered what was up. Bill informed us there was an item on the news of U.F.O. sightings all across the south east of England!

Well, even I felt a bit uneasy. This was somewhat alleviated by Helga holding my hand for reassurance. I gave it a little squeeze, wondering if this was the right moment to offer more reassurance, when suddenly we were blinded by a huge beam of light playing down on us. Through the glare we could see hundreds of other flashing lights on a big globe in the sky. It was heading straight for us.

I threw myself on top of Helga, dragging her to the ground. This was partly to protect her, but mainly because I thought that if I was going to die, I might as well enjoy myself in my last few brief moments. By the time Helga had forced me off her, the flying saucer was touching down in the early morning mist with a huge glare of lights. Bill was snapping away like there was no tomorrow, each click adding another digit to his bank balance.

Then out of the glare and mist stepped Johnny and five women, all dressed in this bacofoil stuff and, with a big whoosh, up went the spaceship back into the early morning sky. Helga was overcome by the sight of five aliens and promptly fainted.

Now I don't know that much about first aid, but I'm pretty certain that if someone faints the first thing to do is loosen their clothing. It was a damn shame it was such a cold day that Helga had felt it necessary to dress for a Polar expedition. There was layer upon layer of it. By the time I'd got to the interesting bits, she'd come round and given me a good old clout round the face.

Bill was still taking pictures as if his life depended upon it. Johnny was standing there revelling in every second of it, surrounded by these five aliens posing like a row of hookers in some seedy downtown bar.

Helga had just about managed to do up her clothes before all hell was let loose. Phantom jets screamed overhead, rows of helicopters appeared from over the horizon, parachutists were dropping from the sky. There were men in uniforms everywhere. Johnny saved his speech until the Field Marshall and the tanks arrived. I just knew he was going to say: 'take me to your leader'.

Well, it's amazing that with modern day communications you can become a world celebrity in a matter of hours. Yes, that's what Helga and I became. Johnny remained more of a mystical figure. By the time the hard hats released him, it was all over.
Twelve hours of fame. I went for the quality press. Helga seemed to naturally gravitate to the tabloids. Mind you, I kept those cherished page three pictures of her topless with the accompanying story: ‘My Spaceman Lover. Helga Laarsen tells of steamy nights of lust with her alien beau.’ It was all fiction of course; she’d never even held hands with Johnny. It was just her fantasy. Just like Johnny himself.

Yes, twelve hours of fame. Then they found the hot air balloon and the pilot. It had all been a hoax. A very expensive, sophisticated hoax. Old Johnny had done a Richard Branson on us. Seems he’d won a ton of cash on the pools. He’d hotfooted it over to the Philippines to discover the U.F.O.s and when he didn’t find any, hired some erotic, I mean exotic, no I DO mean erotic dancers from a nightclub and decided that if he couldn’t find a U.F.O. and some aliens, he’d invent his own.

So that was it, the great U.F.O. hoax. Yes, details of Helga’s confessions went all round the world. Even old Sven got to hear about it back in Sweden. Sven. No, you’re right, he hasn’t been mentioned before, especially by Helga and she was his fiancee. Well, he was not only a big man, but he seemed a pretty unreasonable sort of chap as well. He didn’t bother checking his facts, came straight over on the ferry, found Johnny and bashed him up good and proper. It was hospital for Johnny and the clink for Sven.

Helga ditched Sven and went to visit Johnny in hospital every available moment of visiting time. Johnny appreciated it as well; her dedication touched him deeply. Now, I thought the nurses had to do the bedbaths, but with all these N.H.S. cuts you never know what’s happening.

Well, by the time Johnny had recovered, it was true love; He and Helga were inseperable. This gave him a bit of a problem, namely the five Filipino ‘dancers’ he’d hired. They were on a year’s contract.

I’ve said it before about Johnny’s generosity; it knows no bounds. He knew how I felt about Helga, or had done my best to anyway, and so by way of consolation, gave me the five girls.

“Johnny,” I’d said, “what can I do with five Filipino girls?”

“Triple wow!” he’d replied. “Use your imagination.”

So there we are. We all lived happily ever after. Well I did anyway. Five girls. Wow! Not triple wow either, quintasextahupule wow! Those girls may not have been aliens, but what we get up to is sure out of this world!!

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BOOKS OF INTEREST

The following is a list of books in the SF/Fantasy/Horror fields notified to us by publishers and which we feel may be of interest to our readers. Mention here does not preclude a full review of the book appearing in this or a subsequent edition of DREAM.

DRAGON WING — THE DEATH GATE CYCLE — VOLUME 1 by Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman. Paperback. Bantam. Published 14.2.91. £4.99.


PEGASUS IN FLIGHT by Anne McCaffrey. Hardback. Bantam. Published 21.3.91.


THE PORTFOLIO COLLECTIONS. Dragons World. £9.95 each. Limpback. 64pp each volume, containing 28 colour plates apiece. The following are published 24.1.91:

THE RODNEY MATTHEWS PORTFOLIO (ISBN 1 85028 137 8)

THE BRUCE PENNINGTON PORTFOLIO (ISBN 1 85028 138 6)

THE JIM BURNS PORTFOLIO (ISBN 1 85028 140 8)

THE CHRIS GOSS PORTFOLIO (ISBN 1 85028 140 8)


JASON'S TALE
DUNCAN ADAMS
MY CHILDHOOD was a loveless affair. Father had been born with the proverbial silver spoon, which I was assured I would inherit one day. But wealth does not bring happiness. Father busied himself in the city making even more money, and at weekends he shot pheasants. Mother was at home almost less than he. Neither of them had any time for me.

Ordinary people would have said I was lucky, but they would have been wrong. Sure, I had a huge house with servants, and five thousand acres of private English countryside to roam. But I didn't have the most important thing of all. Love.

Nowadays, I find it difficult to remember my mother's face. It is easier to visualise my governess, or the cook. That's how little I saw of my mother. Sometimes I go into the 'great gallery', and stand looking at her portrait. They said she was very beautiful, and I suppose she was, but nothing like the Goddess Aphrodite.

Aphrodite? I have a copy of Botticelli's famous painting of her in my study, but it is nothing like the real Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, whom I worship. Botticelli got it wrong. She is far more beautiful than in his painting.

How do I know? I met her when I was only seven years old, on the day my loveless childhood reached its nadir. Yes, you have every reason to doubt what I say, and you are in good company. Psychiatrists, hypnotists and clerics would agree with you. But it makes no difference. I know what I know. I'll tell you the story. Like I said, it happened when I was just seven years old.

It was a beautiful summer morning. Cook had placed my breakfast in front of me on the oak table in the servant's quarters, where I took most of my meals. It was early, perhaps around six-thirty, and I could hear the birds chirping outside. This was a Saturday, and the day was my own. I was draining my orange juice, planning exactly how to spend my time, when the back door opened and my mother slipped in.

I didn't realise until years later that an evening gown, worn first thing in the morning, suggests the wearer has spent the night away from her own bedroom. I ran to her in greeting, but she ignored me.

"Is he up?" she asked cook anxiously.

"I don't know, ma'am. Would you like me to check?"

"No need," said my father's dark voice from the doorway.

None of it made any sense to me. My mother seemed to freeze with a shocked expression on her face. Cook whispered: "Better go to your room, Jason." Then my father walked swiftly in front of my mother and swiped the back of his hand across her face.

Cook pulled me away, out into the garden, but I could still hear my parents shouting at each other. Mother was using bad words she had told me never to say, and my father kept shouting 'slut' at her.

"Go and play, Jason," said cook, a worried expression on her face.

But I didn't. Instead, I went away to cry. I sat on the swing at the back of the croquet lawn, sniffing and watching the house. The shouting died away, then Watson came to take my father's car out of the garage, and soon after that my father left the house.

Nothing else happened. My mother didn't come out of the house to see me, and cook seemed to have forgotten I existed. So I wandered away into the woods, perhaps hoping the warm day and the buzzing of the insects could comfort me. I made my way to my favourite place — a place I pretended no one else in the world, except cook, knew about.
A stream runs through the estate, and at one point it falls down a low cliff into a lush pool. I often sat by that pool, the sound of the water relaxing me as it poured down and dripped from the ferns that overhung it. Once, when I told cook about it, she said it sounded an enchanted place, and that was how I thought of it. Enchanted.

It was with a mixture of disappointment and anger that I discovered someone was already at my pool. Father had always told me to be strict with trespassers, but I had never met any, and I didn’t really know what to do or say. There were four of them, all ladies, and none of them were wearing any clothes. How dare they bathe in my pool! I suppose the silver spoon dispenses courage as well as caviar, because I confronted them boldly, despite the fact I was nonplussed.

"This is private property," I said in a voice that I imagine trembled a little.

But they didn’t seem to notice me. I said it again, more loudly, stepping right to the edge of the water. They ignored me. Then I saw there was something strange about them. They were, how shall I describe it? Hazy? Indistinct? One of the ladies, the one with long, fair hair, was actually sitting in the shallow water while the others bathed her gently with their hands. She was crying, and seemed as sad as I was.

I was only seven, remember, so female beauty was something I didn’t properly appreciate. Yet even then I could tell there was something very special about the one who was crying. Loathe as I was to admit it, she was far more beautiful than my mother, and so were the three who tended her. There was something else as well, but I didn’t appreciate it for what it was. Looking back, I know it was love. My enchanted pool had, for a short time, become the very centre of love itself. The love of the three Graces for their sad mistress, Aphrodite, and the love that poured from the Goddess herself. Of course it wasn’t the love of a mother for her child, or I would have understood it. It was far more adult, and therefore alien to me.

"You are trespassing!" I said loudly after standing awkwardly for a few moments.

"You must go."

Nothing.

Perhaps the trauma of my parents’ fight had injected rashness into my veins. I don’t know exactly what it was. Anyway, I kicked off my shoes, pulled off my socks, and began to wade out to them. As soon as I stepped into the water, something very strange happened: the haziness that had been around them evaporated, and they seemed to become more real. I could actually hear the sobs of the sad one, and the soft sounds of her attendants as they tried to comfort her.

Then they saw me. It was though stepping into that pool had placed me into the same world they were in, whereas previously I had been outside, and therefore invisible. At first I was shocked by the transition, then by the fact that the three attendants seemed to become aggressive. They turned to face me, and one of them gasped the words ‘a mortal’. I was suddenly afraid.

There was something else that disturbed me as well. I once walked into the bathroom when my mother was naked. She quickly covered herself with her hands, then shouted at me as though I had done wrong. None of these four did that, and I suddenly realised my mother would be angry at me for seeing them without their clothes. But they didn’t seem to care.

"Mortal, how dare you?" demanded one of the attendants. "Zeus will hear of this. Begone. Immediately."

"This is private..." I never finished the sentence. The woman moved quickly towards me, her feet kicking water over my shirt. Her grip was not strong, but it was authoritative, like my governess’s, and she dragged me to the side of the pool,
then out on to the grass. As we emerged from the pool, something seemed to startle her. She caught her foot in a root, and together we tumbled forward, down the slope that fell away from the pool. We came to rest against an oak tree, not far from the pool. The woman rose quickly, brushing leaves and twigs from her wet skin. "You must never return," she said finally, then she set off back up the slope.

She took only two paces, then stopped. "Where is it?" she asked, her demeanour altogether different. Gone was the arrogance, and in its place was fear.

I looked up the slope, and was about to point, when I realised the pool had vanished. Well, 'vanished' isn't quite the right word. It had 'gone misty'. That's the best I can do to explain what had happened to it. Looking back on it as an adult, I supposed that because I knew exactly where it should be, I could almost see it. The woman didn't know, and therefore it was invisible to her. As a seven-year-old, I didn't realise this, but I certainly knew I had an advantage.

"Where are we?" she asked uncertainly. "This isn't the usual place."

"Who are you?" I demanded, now less afraid of her.

"Euphrosyne," she said softly. "One of the Graces. I tend the Goddess, Aphrodite. But where is she?"

I could have pointed to the place where the pool was, but I did not. "What are you doing here?" I demanded. Her words about Goddesses meant nothing to me, and 'Aphrodite', even less.

"Oh, there has been such a calamity," sighed Euphrosyne. "Aphrodite's husband, Hephaestus, caught her making love with Ares, God of War. Hera and Athene laughed out loud at the spectacle — Aphrodite and Ares caught up in a fine net Hephaestus had fixed over the bed. Poor Aphrodite. What is she to do? Such ridicule!"

"Where are you from?" I asked, none of it making any sense.

"Olympus, of course. Mortals are so foolish, don't you know anything? But where is my mistress ... this is not Paphos..."

"I'll show you," I said. "Then you must leave."

I was no longer afraid as I led her back up the slope, then into the misty pool that cleared as soon as we entered it. Euphrosyne hurried to her mistress, and all four of them talked sadly together while I just stood and watched, wishing they would go. I caught snatches of the conversation:

"I will never love another man," said the one called Aphrodite. "All men are pigs..."

"But mistress, you are the Goddess of Love..."

"Men do not deserve me..."

"But if not men, who will you love, mistress?"

It was then that Aphrodite's eyes fixed on me. They were so blue I felt I could see the sky through them. When she rose to her feet, I saw she was not completely naked; she wore a string of pearl-like objects around her slender waist, and they seemed to shimmer. The tears were gone now from those lovely eyes, and in their places was something I had always longed to see on my mother's face. Undisguised love. Even a young child could recognise that love, for it was universal. It was divorced from sex and matters of the body.

"I will love this mortal child," she said softly to her Graces. "He has not yet learned the meaning of lust."

Then began my strange day. Aphrodite and the Graces left the pool, and the Goddess put her arm around my shoulders. We walked in the woods, the Graces
chattering about the English flowers that were so strange to them, and yet so familiar to me. And all the while. Aphrodite loved me. How do I describe that love? How do I explain what she did? She just loved me, that's all I can say. I could feel it pouring through me like sunshine into a dark crystal. She was like I wanted my mother to be. Like I imagined Jesus's mother was to Him.

She talked to me a lot about love, and she soon learned my mother gave me none of it. That was when she sat on a grassy bank and held my head between her breasts while I cried. She made me cry, but I felt much better afterwards. Later, back at the pool, Aphrodite told the Graces to bathe me. So I bathed in love, with the Goddess of love.

When they went, my world felt empty. I stood alone in the pool until the sun began to dip, and a chill wind rustled through the wood. I reluctantly began the journey back to the loveless house that was my home.

Even as I crossed the croquet lawn, I could see something was amiss. Three police cars stood in front of the main entrance, and my father was sitting on the steps, his head in his hands, while a policeman wrote in a notebook. Cook was running towards me, tears on her cheeks.

"Oh, Jason," she gasped. "There's been such a terrible accident! Your mother was cleaning one of your father's guns..."

After my mother's suicide, my memories become rather blurred. I think I deliberately repressed the memory of Aphrodite. Perhaps I felt guilty that I had been with someone who loved me more than my mother, while my real mother was killing herself. Anyway, I forced Aphrodite down into my subconscious and almost forgot her.

I think my father tried to get closer to me, but it was far too late for that. I remember him trying to have a 'man to man' talk with me, but his breath stank of whisky, his words were slurried, and anyway, I wasn't a man. I was a young boy.

On my eighteenth birthday, he blew his own brains out. The family solicitor said he was sure he had waited until I attained my majority, so as to ease the legal burdens that would fall on me. Thanks, dad! All I ever wanted was a bit of love. Thanks for delaying killing yourself!

So I inherited. My father had said I was to go to medical school, but I decided not to. I didn't need money, so why work? Instead, I went in search of love, and at only fifty pounds a time I foolishly thought I might find it. I didn't, and whores soon bored me. So I found myself a wife. She proved to be after my money, so there was a quick divorce and she got a little of it.

Then I allowed the repressed memory of Aphrodite to resurface. It was such a bitter-sweet memory. In just one day I had seen my father hit my mother, been loved by Aphrodite, then become motherless. It was a confused memory, but it was the only time I had known true love in my life, and it was important. Having found that neither whores nor a wife could fill my life, I naturally turned to the only possible refuge. Aphrodite.

So I read the myth of Aphrodite, and to my astonishment I discovered there actually was a place where legend said she used to bathe with her Graces. The story of Hephaestus catching her and Ares in a net was also 'true', and the chronicle said that afterwards she had fled to her bath with the Graces, where they had comforted
her. Perhaps it was true. Perhaps for a short while she had loved a small boy instead of men. But it hadn’t lasted. As soon as she returned to Olympus, she was bed-swapping again, and it seemed that adult sex must have regained its attraction for her.

That’s when I bought the Botticelli copy, even though his Aphrodite was nothing like the real thing. But I gazed at that painting for hours, seeing my Aphrodite, not his, and knowing I had to find her again. But how?

I started in Cyprus. There I visited the beach at Achne, where she was ‘born’ when the west wind blew her ashore in her shell. Then, of course, it was Paphos, and the bath.

Visiting that place sent shivers down my backbone. In the same way that people can have doubles, so it seems, can places. It was almost exactly the same as my own pool back in England. Concrete had been laid to accommodate the thousands of tourist feet, and the grotto was heavy with the scent of cyclamen, but otherwise it was identical. I spent hours in that sacred place, willing her to come to me, but nothing.

I returned to England and began to wonder if the whole incident had been an hallucination caused by the trauma of my mother’s death. But how could it have been? Why were the pools so nearly identical? I saw a psychiatrist, and he said it was hallucination. I saw a hypnotist, and he regressed me so that I relived the whole, wonderful experience, then he too said it was pure fantasy. I saw a priest, and he said it was a distorted vision of the Virgin Mary, then he asked me for a donation to the Church.

Finally, I saw a witch. It was in Athens, in a poor apartment lit by a sweet-smelling candle. Well, they said she was a witch, but frankly she seemed nothing more than a kindly old lady who happened to know more than most about Greek mythology, especially Aphrodite. She spoke no English, and I no Greek, so I paid for an interpreter.

"It could have happened," she said when I finished my tale. "The string of glowing pearls around her waist was the girdle with which she enchanted men. Botticelli missed it from his painting. It sounds like Aphrodite."

"But how?"

"Who knows?" She shrugged her ancient shoulders. "Who knows how time works? Perhaps today is tomorrow, and yesterday will never happen. Our consciousness is nothing more than a window through which we view time."

"But it was only a myth!"

At this she laughed a kindly laugh. "But many people believe in that myth," she said. "And they have done so for centuries. Myths can come alive if enough people believe in them."

"Then tell me how I can see Aphrodite again. How I can experience that great love."

So she told me what to do, but she also told me that the chance of success was remote.

That is my story. Believe it or not, as you wish.

It is good to be alone again. I have surrounded my pool with cyclamen and doves. Doves are an attribute of Aphrodite, so dovecotes are all around. My pool is as like her pool as it is possible to make it. I do as the witch told me: I sit by the pool, and I
think of her lovingly. I have been doing this for fifty years, but Aphrodite does not come.

My life is almost over now. I have only one servant these days, and he fusses me about my heart, summoning the doctor I insist I do not need. "Jason," my doctor says to me, "you'll die by the side of that pool unless you take care."

But what does it matter now?

Snow falls around me as I sit by the pool, a flask of hot tea untouched by my side. I know that Aphrodite is accustomed to the balmy Cyprus air, and is unlikely to visit England in winter, yet still I sit and wait. I brush the snow from the lap of my heavy overcoat and stand, stretching my legs. My arthritis is worse, and I know my manservant will nag at me when I return.

Sometimes, when the weather is more clement, I stand in the pool itself, but not today. Ice covers its edges, only the place beneath the waterfall unfrozen. The ferns hang heavy with icicles, and my breath freezes as it rasps from my lungs.

I move closer to the frozen water, standing on the very edge, and feeling tired. So tired. Then there is pain. Sudden, crippling pain in the region of my heart. I begin to fall and time seems to stand still for a moment, then the ice at the edge of the pool cracks under my weight as I fall on to it. Freezing water touches my body and my heart spasms more violently. When I breathe in, I feel water entering my lungs. Darkness envelopes me, and there is blissful peace.

When I regain my feet, the pain is gone. So too is the ice, and instead a warm breeze dries my naked body. I look down, and I see that I am a young man again. I am in my prime, and I feel as strong as I ever did. The shallow pool I stand in, is not my own. It is Aphrodite's pool in distant Cyprus, but without the concrete apron and the tourists.

There is a rattling of chariot wheels. Zephyros, the west wind, reins in his horses, and bids me climb aboard. Then we are flying to the misty mountain I know is Olympus. Zephyros says nothing to me. He takes me to the entrance of a fine temple, and there I take his leave.

Aphrodite is waiting for me. She lies on cushions, the Graces around her. I feel tears of joy on my cheeks as she holds out her arms, and I fall gratefully into them.

Then there is love. Love in all its aspects. She is my mother, loving me as a mother ought, and she is my ex-wife, filling my bed with pure passion instead of greed. In just a few hours she makes my meaningless life worthwhile. She justifies every sacrifice I have made for her.

Then I feel fear. I start in her arms, and she looks into my eyes.

"What troubles you, my mortal?" she asks, gently touching my forehead with her lips.

"Hephaestus," I reply. "Your husband will be jealous. There will be trouble..."

"No, my husband cares nothing for what I do with mortals," she says happily.

"Only when I dally with the Gods does he become angry."

"So can I stay with you?" I ask anxiously.

"You have been a faithful servant," she says. "I have seen you sitting by that pool for half a century — a long time for a mortal. You have earned a reward. But there are other mortals, Jason, and you are but one of many. Perhaps, from time to time, there will be an opportunity for us to make love again. Especially if you serve me well."

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"Serve you? I'll do anything. Tell me what to do, Aphrodite."
She thinks for a few moments, then she smiles at me. "I have a mortal friend in distant Thessaly," she says. "His name is Pelias and he has been usurped from his throne. He needs a young man to help him in a great undertaking, and you will be the man, Jason. You will recover the Golden Fleece for him. You will have a great ship called the Argo, and your Argonauts will be selected from the finest warriors..."
Armageddon: The Musical by Robert Rankin

Armageddon: The Musical is a comic novel adapted from a stage show of the same name. According to Corgi, it places Robert Rankin in the same league as Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett. For me, it fails to reach such heights.

Let's start with the plot. The twentieth century ended in nuclear conflict and now, fifty years later, the bulk of humanity spend their lives in tiny apartments watching the broadcasts of the three television companies which run the world. These companies are headed by a lecherous Dalai Lama, known as Dalai Dan, a female Pope, Joan (of course) and the twenty-third L. Ron Hubbard, and they contrive between them to keep most of the population in a kind of drugged stupor. If I add that Jesus Christ himself makes an appearance, his first words being “Hi sis”, you will realise that “Armageddon” is not recommended for readers with strong religious views.

What the Earth dwellers of 2050 do not know is that the whole of human history has been broadcast as a soap opera on the distant planet Phnaargos and that the television executives of that world have not been averse to a little ‘tampering with the plot’. Now, with viewing figures for ‘The Earthers’ at an all-time low, one of the Phnaargos, Fergus Shaman, has an audacious plan.

Inspired by the infamous ‘dream’ in ‘Dallas’, Fergus intends to wipe out the last hundred years of Earth history and replace them with a revised plot. To do this, he will make use of a talkative, time-travelling brussels sprout (!) to send an expendable junior, Jovil Jspht, back to 1958. Here, Jovil will persuade Elvis Presley to dodge the draft, thus starting a train of events which will lead to Elvis becoming President of the United States and preventing the nuclear war. Naturally.

Inevitably, the plan goes wrong, mainly because everyone involved has other ideas. Thanks to the machinations of, among others, Rex Mundi and his sister Gloria, the sprout, the Dalai Lama, who is more than he seems, and assorted deities, the world is eventually subjected to more than one version of ‘Armageddon’.

So, the novel is certainly peculiar. But is it funny? There are excellent scenes, such as the materialisation of Elvis before the dropout upper class cannibals led by Rambo Bloodaxe, and there are also some good jokes: “He checked his chronometer. It was still on his wrist”. Equally, some jokes don’t work at all and some were clearly better suited to the stage version. Sadly, the novel’s best joke is wasted:

“Elvis delved into a golden pocket and brought out the small black contrivance he had lifted while on Phnaargos.

“Figured no-one would ever believe a Goddamn word I said”, said the King, “so I took me a souvenir. Cop your whack for this, our kid”.

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry me? It’s the time travel. I’ve picked up all sorts of weird stuff”.

Incredibly, the idea of Elvis’ out-of-character phrases never reappears, despite its obvious scope. Pratchett or Adams would surely have flogged it to death and rightly so.

Towards the end of the book, the author begins to address the reader directly and some of the characters speak of themselves as figures in a plot. I do not like this idea. In such a lunatic roller
coaster ride of a novel I feel the characters need to be as deeply involved as possible. If they can’t believe what’s happening, why should the reader?

My personal verdict on “Armageddon: The Musical” is that, while it has its moments, it could have been funnier. Some sections did produce laughs, but more often whole chapters passed without so much as a titter. Of course comedy is very much a matter of personal taste, so another reader may well disagree. My advice is, if you like the plot, try it, but be prepared for anything from total bilge to a masterpiece.

Stephen J. Wood.
The Door Into Fire by Diane Duane
Published by Corgi. Paperback,
332 pages, £3.99, ISBN 0552 13861 1

Now here’s a funny thing; I had intended to start by saying this isn’t a Sword and Sorcery fantasy. However, one of the major themes is the forging of a sword to contain the Power of Flame; and the main character is a sorcerer called Herewiss. Worse, Herewiss is deeply involved in a quest to put the rightful king back on his throne. Standard Heroes, Maidens, Cute Creatures, and Dark Power trilogy epic crapola, right? Wrong.

True, all the usual fantasy ingredients are there in the book, but Duane has kept them strictly away from centre stage, illustrative adjuncts for the real quest, which is one for self identity, or Name.

Herewiss is a nobleman and sorcerer who has been given the Power of Flame, or rather the seed of the Power. It’s almost a sort of super-sorcery, one which gives him visions of setting the world to rights. His problem is in learning how to channel it properly before the Flame within him dies. When we join him he’s forging a sword as a focus, his fifty-fourth, and it bursts apart just like all the others. Herewiss has a seriously flawed personality, brought about by ancient guilt, which prevents him from finding the correct method of channelling the Flame.

Before he can start on number fifty-five he’s off to rescue his friend and unthroned king, Freelorn who’s been cornered by a mercenary army in an old keep. On his way he hears a rumour of an ancient hold in The Waste which is said to have doors into Otherwheres. He also discovers a fire elemental, Sunspark, a creature which can move at will through the universe; and rescues it from the rain, binding it to him.

With Sunspark’s help, and his own sorcery, Herewiss rescues Freelorn and his companions, then leads them all into the Waste to the hold, hoping it will have a door into a previous age when people understood how to use the Power of Flame. What he finds are hundreds of Otherwheres doors, opening into scenes of other worlds, ranging from the beautiful to the terrifying. His naive meddling in probing a door he doesn’t understand frees a hralcin, an entity so dangerous that even Sunspark fears it.

The nature of the universe in which all this takes place is one that has been crafted with extreme care by Duane; it has been created by a Goddess who accidentally let in Death, and will suffer until her construct ends because of her original failure. Herewiss gradually comes to terms with this, and its implications, during his own search for knowledge, and it’s the unravelling of this mystery which forms the bulk of the book. The reader’s enlightenment of this all-pervasive religious structure comes from several large, and nearly self-contained, tracts, in which Herewiss analyses himself with the help of dreams, and a soulsearching drug given him by the Goddess herself. These eloquently written passages dictate both the theme and tone of the novel, imaginative and thoughtful, but always retaining a sense of sadness for the original catastrophic mistake. His exploration, which takes place entirely within his own mind, is always upstream, a struggle of acceptance.

His journey towards mastery of self, and therefore the Flame, has a profound effect on both himself and his friends. They change as he does, in both actuality and his own perception. Freelorn’s love is realized as being partly selfish. Sunspark is transformed from a resentful chattel to genuine lover, their changes throwing almost as much light on Herewiss’s character as his own discoveries.’

I wouldn’t want to give the impression of a dark novel. Herewiss is never without hope, and love is all pervasive, seemingly bestowed by the Goddess as an anodyne for death.

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The resolution of the story is exciting and satisfactory, deliberately avoiding any taste of a commercial cliff-hanger. But it does pave the way for Freelon to regain his throne at some future time. Whether or not you wish to follow his quest depends entirely on the appeal the characters and world have exerted on you during The Door Into Fire; the sign of a very confident writer. Volume two of the series, The Door Into Shadow, is promised soon.

Minor quibbles: some of the spelling in my copy was still in the original American. And the copyright date is 1979, which does force the question why such a distinctive work (Diane Duane was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for The Door Into Fire) has taken so long to come out over here.

P.F. Hamilton

When Gravity Fails by George Alec Effinger
Published by Bantam, Paperback, 276 pages, £3.50, ISBN 0 583 25655 X

The Title comes from a Bob Dylan lyric, the plot from 1930’s detective fiction, the setting from the Middle East, the atmosphere from cyberpunk. The end result is superb.

“Chiriga’s nightclub was right in the middle of the Budayeen, eight blocks from the eastern gate, eight blocks from the cemetery. It was handy having the graveyard so close at hand.” So says Marid Audran, describing the seedy suburb where he lives. It’s the sort of place where being killed in a brawl is called death by natural causes. Says Marid of one particular nightclub owner: Jo-Mama had no scruples against pulling her needle gun or her Solingen perforator and creating general peace in gory heaps all around her.”

Marid never states what he does but private detective is a fair description. (A fairer description would be “private detective with a taste for designer drugs.”) While most of the rest of the denizens of the Budayeen have been artificially modified in some way he has a reputation as a man who lives off the brains and body he was born with.

Cosmetic surgery is common, so are sex-change operations of various varieties — when Lieutenant Okking tells Marid “Spread it around the six or eight sexes we’ve got in these walls ...” he is not overestimating the number by that many!

Another popular modification is ‘amping’ or amplification — having your brain wired and a socket stuck in your skull. (I did mention cyberpunk, now didn’t I?) The socket accepts plug-ins of two types: moddies and daddies. Moddies are personality modules. (“... she’ll have her moddy plug, too. ... she’ll show you the personality you like best, hardcore slut or tragic soiled dove, ...”) Daddies are add-ons. (“... I noticed she was wearing a single add-on ... must have been an Arabic-language daddy, because I knew she couldn’t understand a word of it without one.”) All sorts of moddies are mentioned during the book: recordings of specific personalities (“just got Honey Pilar’s new module, ... dying to try it out. You ever want to jam Honey Pilar?”); general personality types (“... was wearing a moddy ... not a particular person but a particular type — he was being strong, silent, rough trade today ...”); even cleverly programmed simulations of fictional characters such as James Bond.

Now down to the plot: when an exceptionally sadistic murderer manages the feat of actually shocking the Budayeen with his crimes the local “godfather” decides it is bad for business and ‘hires’ Marid to track him down and ... if you want to know more then read the book. I’ve used the word ‘hired’ loosely, it may be better to say that the ‘godfather’ makes Marid an offer he can’t refuse ... not if he wants to have at least a little pleasure out of life anyway.

The killer uses two moddies during the book; one is the James Bond, he uses it to improve his killing technique; the other is for Xarghis Moghadhil Khan, a psychopath who literally butchered hundreds of people before he was caught. And does Marid achieve fame and fortune by catching the killer bare-brained? No! The ‘godfather’ forces Marid to get wired himself, with some new and highly experimental amping. I’m not giving anything away by telling you this as the blurb on the back of the book does it
anyway. What I am not going to tell you is what happens when Marid tries out some of the experimental moddies he is given to go with his experimental amping; it would spoil one of the nastiest (and to my mind, most amusing) scenes in the book.

That brings me on to George’s humour, his ‘wry’ humour according to some of the quotes. ‘Wry’ I’m not sure about, sardonic is closer, warped ... yeah! If people are under the impression that your sense of humour should have been shot at birth (mine certainly should have been) then you should find some of George’s writing to be extremely funny, even if you can’t explain why. My biggest chuckly came when Marid was talking about the habits of male-to-female sex-changes. He quotes the nightclub owner Jo-Mamma: “Just ‘cause the cat had her kittens in the oven don’t make them biscuits.”

This is the sort of book that could appeal to a lot of people: experienced science fiction fans; newcomers to science fiction (There almost none of the confusing jargon that can sometimes put them off); fans of detective fiction, even. It is a pleasure to read and deserves more than one reading. I’m looking forward to the sequel, ‘A Fire in the Sun’, due out in May.

Simon Amos

Sorceress of Darshiva by David Eddings
Published by Corgi Books, Paperback, 396 pages, £4.95, ISBN 0 552 13020 6

The Forth Book of The Malloreon, by the author of The Belgariad, it is probably easier to follow if one has read the preceding books, as there are rather a lot of characters with which to contend, as the story opens. It is unusual in this respect; often these heroic fantasies centre on just the hero and his companion, most of the time. In Sorceress we find the hero, Garion, wielder of the magic sword Irongrip, travelling with his wife Ce’Nedra; a giant mute; a smith; his aunt, and even a stray wizard called Senji, self-taught. There are yet others in the party, all on the trail of the evil Zandramas, who has stolen Garion’s baby son for probably black-magic purposes. Garion and his aunt can shape-shift into wolf and owl respectively. The pommel of Irongrip serves also as a direction-finding device called the ‘Orb’ and the entire party follow its lead. Zandramas the sorceress plans to fulfill the Dark Destiny, a gruesome prophecy, and the good folk make for Kell, where they learn from the Malloreon Gospels that their ultimate destination is ‘The Place Which Is No More. Senji, the self-taught wizard, has a complete copy of the Ashabine Oracles, which contain a message from the evil god Torak intended for Garion. David Eddings writes well, and I would recommend the reader to obtain Books one-two-three, Guardians Of The West; King Of The ‘Murgos; and Demon Lord Of Karanda. This would clarify Book 4, for David has avoided repetition, trusting to a faithful readership, no doubt.

The world in which these characters live and move and have their being is perhaps Earth in remote times, in the past or distant future, not a technological society but one in which magic ‘works’. We find horses and hens, wolves and owls. It would have been fun to have had alien creatures as beasts of burden and for food, but this is rare in sword and sorcery epics. It is not entirely impossible, as Pauwells and Bergier say in Eternal Man, that vanished races might have inhabited the Earth on continents long gone (or split up by the Continental Drift), maybe contemporaneous with dinosaurs, hence the persistent dragon legends. One day a brontosaurus skeleton may come to light with a houndah still in place!

The narrative is clear and the dialogue very good, although perhaps a trifle racy for the setting. Edgar Rice Burroughs, with his ‘Mars’ stories, tended towards Biblical English! There is humour in the dialogue and characterisations and small, neat descriptions.

The shape-shifting of Garion into a wolf is described well. He starts with the wolf-image in his mind and the metamorphosis feels like a melting of one form into another. Mind over matter with a vengeance! I am reminded of the supposed shape-shifting of a woman into an ass. The local saint said it had not happened, but the warlock responsible had persuaded everyone, the woman
included, that the deed had been done. The saint unpersuaded everyone, so to speak, and everyone lived happily ever after — except for the irate warlock! What Colin Wilson calls ‘thought-pressure’; a variation on hypnosis.

Anyway, Garion convinces himself and even the tactile sensations of wolfishness, such as cold nose and long wet tongue, and furriness, are all there. His petite wife is convinced, too. If it is voluntary self-delusion involving others, Aunt Pol’s owl impression must include the ability to levitate.

As to magic swords, the steel used by the Huns, for instance, was superior to standard issue Roman weaponry. Roman soldiers feared only their own superstitions. But superior barbarian steel meant better armour as well as swords that remained sharp longer. A slight exaggeration and you have ‘invincible’ foes! Bad news travels fast. The Celts favoured long blades; the Saxons glorified knives; ‘seaxes’. (Hence ‘Saxon’, men of the long knives.) Arthur’s Excalibur might have been a steel sword handed down from his Samatian (Barbarian) ancestors. (See Blues In The Knight or Warriors Of Arther - by John Matthews and Bob Stuart (Brandford Press).

Summing up, Sorceress is a rattling good read, exciting and funny by turns. But do read the first three books, too!

Bruce P. Baker
BETWEEN OCTOBER 17th and 19th, 1990, the University of Maryland was host to a major event — the First International Hypersonic Waverider Symposium. It represented the rebirth of a concept of major scientific and political importance, long associated with Glasgow University, and something of a triumph for an amateur group, which continued to push for the concept’s recognition when it had largely been forgotten.

The Waverider re-entry vehicle was devised by Prof. Terrence Nonweiler, Professor of Aeronautics and Fluid Mechanics and later Dean of Engineering at Glasgow University. It was intended to be the manned spacecraft in a British space programme based on the Blue Streak missile in the 1960’s — cancelled by the Macmillan government, and largely forgotten thereafter. Its basis is a shape known as the ‘caret wing’, which generates a plane shockwave, attached to the leading edges, instead of the sonic boom generated by conventional wings at high speeds. The high-pressure area trapped under the Waverider wing generates lift, and the vehicle functions as a very high-performance glider.

Waverider was conceived as a space shuttle, and its job is to deliver payloads from space to the surface of a planet with an atmosphere. In the 1970’s, discussions at ASTRA (the Association in Scotland to Research into Astronautics) brought out a number of major jobs for the vehicle in the exploration of Mars, Venus, Jupiter and the rest of the outer planets. In the longer term, when we come to practical exploitation of the Solar System’s resources, it will have to be on an international basis and with safeguards for the rights of developing nations. Waverider has a major role to play because its low wing-loading allows it a landing ‘footprint’, descending from space, which literally envelops the Earth; and also allows it a touchdown speed of less than 160 kph. A delivery vehicle which can land anywhere on Earth, on ordinary runways, will be of great political importance. Other ideas from the ASTRA discussions suggested that in late 21st century transport Waveriders could have a role comparable to that of Containers in the late 20th.

In 1981 ASTRA’s Waverider study took a practical turn, and by late 1984 Gordon Dick of ASTRA had achieved the first free flights of hand-launched Waveriders. (Gordon Dick is a designer of sails and hang-gliders, now working as a technician at the Glasgow School of Art). The first rocket launch took place in 1985, witnessed by Dr. Jim Randolph of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, which is responsible for the Mariner/Viking/Voyager series of space probes. Dr. Randolph is head of the
Starprobe project, which is intended to place an instrumented probe within two million miles of the surface of the Sun — described in some quarters as the most important scientific mission of the century. No rocket in existence can achieve that, so it has to be brought about by planetary slingshot — what’s termed an ‘aerogravity manoeuvre’, in which the probe would fly through the atmospheres of Venus and Mars to redirect its path towards the Sun. In April of this year Dr. Randolph paid his third visit to ASTRA in Scotland, and confirmed that he regards Waverider as the prime candidate for the Starprobe carrier.

The setting up of the Waverider conference in October is due in large part to Dr. Randolph’s support for the concept, since he first learned of it from ASTRA in 1984. At his urging the University of Maryland undertook computer studies which resolved the major problem with the Waverider design, eliminating turbulence on the upper surface of the wing, thereby confirming work done in Scotland by Gordon Dick. This result was announced at a small Waverider symposium last year, and the effect was dramatic: the Call for Papers for this year’s conference has been answered by no fewer than 78 speakers, and the American space agency NASA is now officially co-sponsoring the event. ASTRA will be represented by Duncan Lunan and Gordon Dick, who will unveil the latest version of his Waverider space shuttle design — including a control system which he hopes will be valid for all Waverider applications.

Jim Randolph’s Starprobe project will not go before the US Senate and Congress for funding until 1994. Meanwhile work in ASTRA continues, with radio-controlled models and wind-tunnel tests, with the future possibility of rocket flights sponsored by NASA; no amateur society has ever pushed a space project so close to official acceptance before, and the October conference was a very big forward step in that direction.

I was at the Waverider Conference in my capacity as President of ASTRA, the Association in Scotland to Research into Astronautics, which has been trying to promote Waverider development for many years. My colleague Gordon Dick, himself a Past President of ASTRA, gave a presentation on our ideas of Waverider’s future importance and the practical work ASTRA has done on the concept.

Prof. Terence Nonweiler, the originator of the Waverider concept in the 1950’s, is an Honorary Member of ASTRA, as is Jim Randolph, the head of Advanced Deep-Space Mission Planning at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena. Aleta Jackson, also an ASTRA member, was there as Editor of the Journal of Practical Applications in Space, so the ASTRA presence was significant although the delegates present numbered nearly a hundred.

In one respect we were very much in the minority: no-one else was there
to report on flying real Waveriders. When Gordon showed a slide of his first six Waverider models lying on the grass, a voice from the audience said: "My God, hardware!" Almost everything else we were shown in the intensive three days of the conference consisted of computer graphics. A great deal of theoretical work has been done, not all of it as recent as we supposed; we learned for instance that the University of Maryland had been working on Waveriders independently of the interest showed by Jim Randolph at JPL.

There were claims that Waveriders had been flown in the past, however. The hiatus in hypersonic research over the last twenty years was clearly shown by the age of the speakers covering programmes early in Waverider's history. Alfred J. Eggars gave a paper on work from the 1950's on, in which he claimed that the XB-70 hypersonic bomber had been a Waverider, although the terminology wasn't in use in the USA in the 1960's. History will have to judge on that one: the XB-70 had flat wings, tipped with downward-projecting vertical stabilisers, which would have given it some Waverider-like characteristics in test flights at three times the speed of sound. But whether this was true Waverider performance depends on questions of definition, since one normally thinks of Waverider's attached shockwave being contained by a downward-folded wing. For the moment, I'm not prepared to surrender ASTRA's claim to have conducted the first Waverider free flights in 1985!

It was also noticeable that many of the theoreticians had quite different ideas from the intending designs of flight hardware. The theoretical studies concentrated on generating wing shapes which would fit within the shock cones produced by a point source travelling at hypersonic speed. These produce a scalloped contour for the Waverider underside, and as a family are becoming known as 'lips'. Gordon Dick and several other speakers had considerable doubts about the validity of this approach, pointing out that in real life the shockwave would be generated by the leading edge of the wing and might well not have a conical shape. The 'lip' shapes would also be very unsuitable for low-speed flight and landing, a key factor in ASTRA's efforts to design a workable Waverider space shuttle, though not one affecting JPL's interest in Waverider as a carrier vehicle for interplanetary transfers — the forced-orbit aerogravity manoeuvres which ASTRA now calls 'megasonics'.

For instance, one of the most interesting papers was by Dr. Pike of Cranfield Institute of Technology, on the Waverider work at the Royal Aircraft Establishment in the 1960's, culminating in the design of a Mach 6 Waverider airliner. We had never seen a detailed overview of this programme before, and it was very interesting to trace the reasoning which had led to a shape so like the one Gordon developed (independently) as the first possible configuration for an ASTRA hypersonic test. Two more steps had brought that design to the present proposed shuttle version, and we
were encouraged to see that some other papers, at least, followed a similar reasoning.

A great deal of similar thinking had gone on in the 60's, relating not to Waveriders but to lifting body research vehicles and the flat-bottomed X-20 Dyna-Soar, cancelled shortly before it was due to begin glide tests. Lifting bodies were flown manned and unmanned, the manned programme including the famous crash of the M2-F2 which appears at the beginning of "The Six Million Dollar Man" — the crash actually caused by avoiding a helicopter. Flat-bottomed vehicles were launched by Thor and Thor-Delta rockets in the ASSET and PRIME programmes; the films of these had us drooling with envy because they so closely resembled what we'd like to do with Waverider. We learned that they had been taken off the secret list only a week before in order to be shown at the conference. Interestingly, the Thor boosters were available cheaply because they were reconditioned missiles originally sold to the Royal Air Force and deployed in East Anglia. If only they'd left us one....!

Another show-stopper on October 20th, which was a one-day 'special' on the History of Hypersonics organised from the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, was the revelation of a class of vehicles designated FDL. Scribbling notes, often in the dark, I don't seem to have caught what that stood for. But I did grasp what it WAS — an evolving family of lifting body re-entry vehicles, the FDL-5 envisaged as 100-200 foot single-stage-to-orbit vehicles with detachable leading edge fuel tanks, like the Lockheed 'Starclipper' proposal. FDL-7 and 8 were to be launched into the atmosphere from the Space Shuttle; FDL-7 was to be manned!

These were the vehicles which Al Eggars had mentioned cryptically during the Waverider conference, as being able to match Waverider's shuttle performance. Actually they weren't as good as that: from a given retrofire point, they could choose a landing site anywhere in the hemisphere ahead, but Waverider could land anywhere on the planet. And the landing point has to be picked beforehand, whereas with Waverider there is 'time to enquire' before touchdown. Nor could these vehicles be used for 'megasonics'; as Dr. Mark Lewis of Maryland had confirmed earlier, only Waveriders could provide THAT performance. But the FDL vehicles had another encouraging hint for ASTRA: the mockups of the later re-entry versions had upper surfaces very like Gordon's designs for the Waverider shuttle.

During the Waverider conference, we had learned that there's another class of re-entry vehicles now in the game, giving Waveriders a possible military role. These are termed 'Evaders' — very loosely defined, but intended to perform high-stress, high-temperature manoeuvres during atmosphere entry. Tests to date have been performed with 'conventional' biconic designs, like those envisaged by NASA for aerogravity manoeuvres in the atmosphere of Mars. But Waverider shapes might be used, and there
were people (in civilian clothes) casually saying to us things like: "of course, we've cracked the control surface problem you're working on, but we can't tell you about it."

In this situation it seems unlikely that ASTRA can participate in any US government programmes, as Jim Randolph had hoped. But there's no need to despair (even if we don't solve the problem independently, as has happened several times already in the ASTRA project). After all, it will be twenty or thirty years before the Waverider comes fully into its own as a large-scale cargo carrier from space to the Earth's surface; and in that time, as we saw on the last day, a military programme can be de-classified for the benefit of civilian studies.

What is crucial is that Waverider is fully back on the map: the conference proceedings are to be published by the American Institute of Aeronautics & Astronautics. At the midpoint of the conference, referring to the virtual ending of Waverider work in the 1960's, Professor Nonweiler said: "I never dreamed, twenty years ago, that today I should be attending a conference of this magnitude devoted solely to Waverider." And in the final discussion he said: "What I feel I've chiefly learned is an awful lot of confidence in the future of Waverider. Surely this time it won't die away."

**SPACE NEWS**

When I came back from the United States in October 1984, I reported on the successful launch of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* which I had witnessed. Two flights had just been performed, a month apart, and the next was due a month later. At last, I reported, the freight line to orbit was open.

Well, we all know what happened to that. Strangely enough, however, NASA has just achieved what it didn't achieve then: three launches in three months. The reason is that having solved the variety of problems which were causing fuel leaks in the various Orbiters, they found themselves with three Shuttles which were ready to go in every other respect. So they flew them. They even brought one back to Kennedy Space Centre, due to bad weather on the other side of the country — they hadn't planned to do that until emergency braking systems including a parachute had been installed, but having had to do it, they gain a bonus of at least two weeks on the turnaround for the next launch.

The third launch brought about an all-time record of 12 people in space at one time: seven in the Shuttle and five on the Soviet Mir space station. The Shuttle crew includes the oldest man to fly in space — the Commander, Vance Brand, is 59 — and the Soviet one includes the first fare-paying passenger in space, the Japanese journalist Toyehiro Akiyama. There was a dramatic moment early in the two missions, when they passed within 33 miles of each other on December 4th, before the Soyuz ferry had docked.
with Mir. The Americans were able to see both with binoculars.

The Shuttle complement of seven is the same as on the ill-fated Challenger, and that’s not entirely coincidence: the ASTRO scientific payload was originally to have flown in March 1986, to include observations of Halley’s Comet in its programme, and the Challenger was carrying a precursor payload called Spartan. After so long a wait, it’s galling that the mission is in difficulties due to problems in the telescope-pointing computer.

There was another close encounter on December 8th, when the Galileo spacecraft passed Earth at 590 miles over the Atlantic. This is the first of two flybys to redirect Galileo’s path to Jupiter, after a successful loop round Venus in February. This elaborate flight plan was made necessary because the Shuttle wasn’t ready to send Galileo via Mars in 1972, and after the 1986 launch was cancelled, the liquid-fuel Centaur booster which was to have sent it direct was removed from the programme. In December 1992 there will be a still closer encounter with the Earth, providing the final boost away from the Sun.

These events have provided fresh ammunition to the environmental groups in the USA which tried to prevent the launch of Galileo and the European Ulysses, on the grounds that their onboard RTG’s (Radioisotope Thermal Generators) were dangerous. On December 3rd the Daily Telegraph examined the question in detail and relative calm, giving chapter and verse for the claim that if the power units burned up in the atmosphere, the plutonium release would be half as much again as that due to nuclear tests and accidents over the last 45 years.

The release from a similar generator on the Transit 5BN satellite in 1964 is quoted as evidence; but, as the Telegraph points out, nuclear generators since have been protected against atmosphere entry. There was no release from the RTG on the Apollo 13 Lunar Module, which entered the atmosphere after its service as lifeboat in that crisis. In 1979, speaking on nuclear waste disposal in space, Capt. Chester Lee of the Space Shuttle programme assured a Scottish audience that release into the atmosphere was not a threat, even in the event of a Shuttle explosion: the canisters had been designed to withstand even an explosion of the much more powerful Saturn V. But in any case, the question is academic — the final course corrections for the Galileo flyby were made on November 28th, so it was already impossible for the probe to re-enter Earth’s atmosphere.

On a more positive note, it’s been realised that Galileo’s flightpath and instrumentation will allow it to look into a long-versed question. When the Moon was photographed by the Lunar Orbiter spacecraft in preparation for the Apollo landings, a small area near the lunar south pole was left uncovered. A full-scale Apollo mapping mission in lunar polar orbit was lost when the programme was cancelled — attempts to provide an unmanned counterpart called Prospector have been turned down by
Congress and Senate every year since. There has been an amateur programme to complete the mapping, with the name Luna Incognita, but from Earth the angle of view is very unfavourable even at maximum libration. The Soviet Union and Japan have both announced plans for lunar orbital surveys, and space advocates in the USA are so frustrated that they’re trying to set up an amateur lunar satellite project.

Polar photography could be just as important, because there is a hypothesis that water vapour from cometary impacts on the Moon could have collected as ice in ‘cold traps’ near the poles, where the ground is always in shadow. (As the late David Profft remarked in his ‘Climber’s Guide to the Solar System’, “the foothill approach to the Mountains of Eternal Day can only be attempted before sunrise”.) Such deposits would be very useful for future lunar settlement, since moonrock has no hydrogen, carbon or nitrogen compounds and shipping them from Earth is very costly. So much has been made of that, that many commentators (for instance, the Telegraph reviewer of Nigel Calder’s “Spaceships of the Mind”) assumed that such deposits were essential to the human future in space.

In fact, there are other answers. It depends on the scale of your programme, and if there ARE ice deposits in Luna Incognita, there won’t be enough for large-scale settlements in any case. But they’d still be very useful. And here’s Galileo, having to pass through the Earth-Moon system on its altered flight plan, and with all that lovely instrumentation for close-up study of Jupiter’s moons. And yes, it will pass close to OUR Moon, going over the south pole. So we may find out about Luna Incognita sooner than we thought, perhaps learning something really useful. As I’ve said before, stay tuned!
Dear Sam,

I want to thank you (sincerely) for all the publicity you've given, recently, to my publications. It certainly helps, considering DREAM's obviously large readership.

I did want to explore one or two points you made in DREAM 26 in greater detail. Referring to my note in WORKS, I still have to stand by the general theme of the letter. The readers do not pay the bills for a magazine. Trevor and George said in DREAM 20 (interview) that DREAM still runs at a loss, as do most small magazines (certainly NOVA SF does). So it is the publisher (who in most cases is also the editor) who 'coughs up the dough' for the publication, not the reader. The main point I was trying to make was that a magazine wouldn't promote work that didn't suit the general tastes of the people who put the magazine together. Would Trevor and George print experimental work and nothing but if the readers demanded it, despite the fact that it obviously doesn't appeal to them? I print NOVA SF (at a loss) as a 'labour of love', because I enjoy the generally wide scope of SF that I print, including the relatively experimental (surely a subjective term) work, and feel that it deserves to be promoted.

When I first started reading small SF magazines (DREAM, BBR, WORKS, etc.) I immediately wanted to get involved. I've always loved SF (in its widest sense, which, yes, does include some traditional stuff) but have never found fandom appealing. (You and me both, brother — GPT). So it was genuinely exciting to find something that I could join in with, something which seemed like great fun (if expensive!) My main aim is to promote the work (and thus the writers of that work) that appeals to me. Perhaps that is an ego trip, after all, but the emphasis there is on the work, not me. To promote work that the readers like but I don't is mere commercialism (would it be pretentious to call it prostitution?)

As for SWEET DREAMS BABY, I'm at a loss to understand why you found the fiction incomprehensible. Perhaps a simple explanation is your dislike of very short prose. I had some pretty favourable comments all round really (including people who have appeared on DREAM's letters page). Are you sure you didn't attack SDB because of its experimental feel? Did you really give it a fighting chance? You ask about the market it was targeted at. People are not quite so easily categorised. Many people have a fairly wide-ranging approach to fiction and poetry. SDB didn't represent a waste of paper; of the 300 copies printed I have sold 143, representing almost 50% sales in about four months. So there is a 'market' of sorts for the less conventional story.

All that aside, I appreciate your tolerance in commenting on work that doesn't really make the earth move for you, and, of course, for promoting NOVA SF. SDB has folded, simply because I can't keep two magazines going, though I should be able to enlarge NOVA SF a little. Paradoxically, NOVA offers me more freedom than SDB since its scope is that much larger. So when I am better off I probably won't resuscitate SDB, but improve upon NOVA. Thank you for bearing with me.

Adrian Hodges
(Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham)

- We really feel quite loath to get involved in this debate too much. No doubt Sam will reply to those particular points he wishes to, but we'd just make the following comment:

  Firstly, the fact that DREAM runs at a loss, doesn't mean we're not dependent upon readers' cash. There's a vast difference between making up a slight deficit and
ignoring subscription income entirely as though it doesn’t matter. No subscriptions, no magazine! For DREAM, certainly, 50% sales would be a financial disaster, particularly as we now have to fit our sales into a bi-monthly schedule. Where you’ve only put out one issue you can, of course, go on selling more or less ‘ad infinitum’, until it’s sold up to its maximum figure. We feel this also is the reason why many SF magazines don’t come out too regularly — they wait for a new issue until the old one’s maximised its sales potential. Nothing wrong with that!

Lastly, just what’s wrong with being ‘commercial’? Surely it just means meeting demand with supply. What’s so noble about catering to minorities? Nothing wrong with it, mind you, but nothing particularly meritorious either. However, we do agree with Sam that NOVA SF has the potential to be a damn good magazine and we wish it well. And, anyone, who like Adrian, puts their money where their mouth is, deserves encouragement and backing. Sock it to ‘em, Ade! — GPT

Dear Trevor,
In DREAM 26, Sam Jeffers in his column says of EXUBERANCE’s contributors: ‘D.F. Lewis ... the names are depressingly familiar.’ I think the reasons why these writers spread themselves about is because they don’t seem to write anything more than a few pages long. I have the opposite problem; I would like to spread myself about, but I can’t produce stories fast enough! DREAM publishes them at about the same rate I write them. I like stories between 5,000 and 9,000 words; to write a vignette is, for me, like shoving a Routemaster bus into a matchbox. REM I will not send anything to until I see it. The way Arthur Straker has handled his advertising campaign reminds me of a training film on management that I once saw. Brutus, played by John Cleese, runs through Rome declaring that Julius Caesar is dead, only he forgot to check that Caesar had actually died. No more news from THE GATE.

THE MELTING POT in DREAM 26 was interesting — it usually is. Arabella Wood’s letter was sad. Here a writer was so sensitive that she felt she had to defend her work in the letters column. Unfortunately, if she wants to get published she will have to get used to being fired at, even if many of those doing the firing can’t shoot straight. But her natural ability to edit will tell her which criticism to greet with: “Now why didn’t I think of that?”

and which to stick two fingers up at.

Now, which of those two reactions would I make to the comments of Chris Amies? Does he write to the BBC and say: “I saw an episode of ‘YOU RANG M’LORD’, but I didn’t see the first one...?” Pity he didn’t say in his letter what he expected me to do.

Gerry Connelly,
(Corby, Northants.)

Dear Dream,
Re. LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE: Can somebody please explain to me why this type of story is popular? I notice in THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON Sam Jeffers praises LOVEGUN by the same author, yet I failed to find anything enjoyable in ‘.SHREDS.’ which came across as a collection of meaningless words strung together in a manner designed to impress editors. I do not doubt that I am probably in a minority over this. I have been subscribing to INTERZONE for over twelve months and have yet to read a story in that mag. that I could recommend anybody else to read, yet INTERZONE sells and so this sort of stuff must be popular with somebody. I am, however, tempted to postulate that this sort of intellectual rambling could well be the reason that magazine circulation in this country is so low.

My humble theory is that the vast majority of readers in this country would prefer a story that is easy to read and has a readily identifiable plot. Most of my friends and colleagues happily read Terry Pratchett or David Eddings, but wouldn’t even make an attempt at any of the magazine short stories I plough through. Now I admit that the two authors I have mentioned are a cut above the average and not really true SF writers. One cannot expect new writers to rise to such high standards, especially within the confines of a short story, but I cannot help but feel that if the occasional simpler short story were to be included as a balance, small magazines might well attract a larger circulation. I for one enjoyed MURDER BY MAGIC in issue 23. I know it only rated fifth out of six in your readers’ poll, but I might also say that your actual readership is not representative of your potential readership.

The other problem, of course, is reaching the mass of potential readers. To my knowledge the only mag. available at any of my local newsagents is INTERZONE (and that at but a few). This, given its content, is hardly the type of material which is going to appeal to the incidental reader. At least with
DREAM there does seem to be some sort of attempt to reach a balance.

S.P. Birch
(South Wirral)

- We tend to agree with Mr. Birch. We do try and give a representative sample of various types of SF in DREAM. We hope to give readers even more of the type of fiction they want when we change to NEW MOON.

Our 'New SF Alliance' colleague, BBR, will shortly be available in newsagents also, but we would like to see a more 'traditional' magazine also available nationally. Perhaps NEW MOON will be it! In any event, if you want NEW MOON to be a success, spread the word amongst SF fans that (a): we exist, and (b): we want to give SF readers the sort of material they want. But do the mass of our readers agree on just what it is they do want? Write and let us know your opinion! — GPT.
Await the Coming of the NEW MOON

Sam Jeffers’ column THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON will be back next issue with an overall look at the British SF small-press scene. We apologise for the non-appearance of this issue’s column which is due to illness.
DREAM SCIENCE FICTION
No. 28
APRIL 1991
(A member of the New SF Alliance)

DREAM is published at:

1, Ravenshoe,
Godmanchester,
Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE.
to which address subscriptions should be sent.

Editorial address:

7, Weller Place,
High Elms Road,
Downe, Orpington, Kent, BR6 7JW.
to which address submissions, letters for publication etc., should be sent.

Contributors' guidelines are available from the Huntingdon address. Please send
a s.a.e. (or 2 I.R.Cs) with your request for guidelines.

Manuscripts accepted for publication will be paid for at between 1.5p and 3p per
word, according to story/author etc. Payment is on, or slightly prior to,
publication.

Writers of all published letters will get an extra copy of 'DREAM' at the end of
their current subscriptions.

DREAM SCIENCE FICTION is designed, typeset and printed by K.D.S., Chattisham, Ipswich,
Suffolk. IP8 3QE.