

# DREAM

SCIENCE FICTION



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**THE RETRIBUTOR** by Mark Haw

**Andy Smith — John Light — Andy Oldfield — John Duffield**



# DREAM SCIENCE FICTION

No. 29  
JULY 1991

EDITORS:

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# Editorial by Trevor Jones

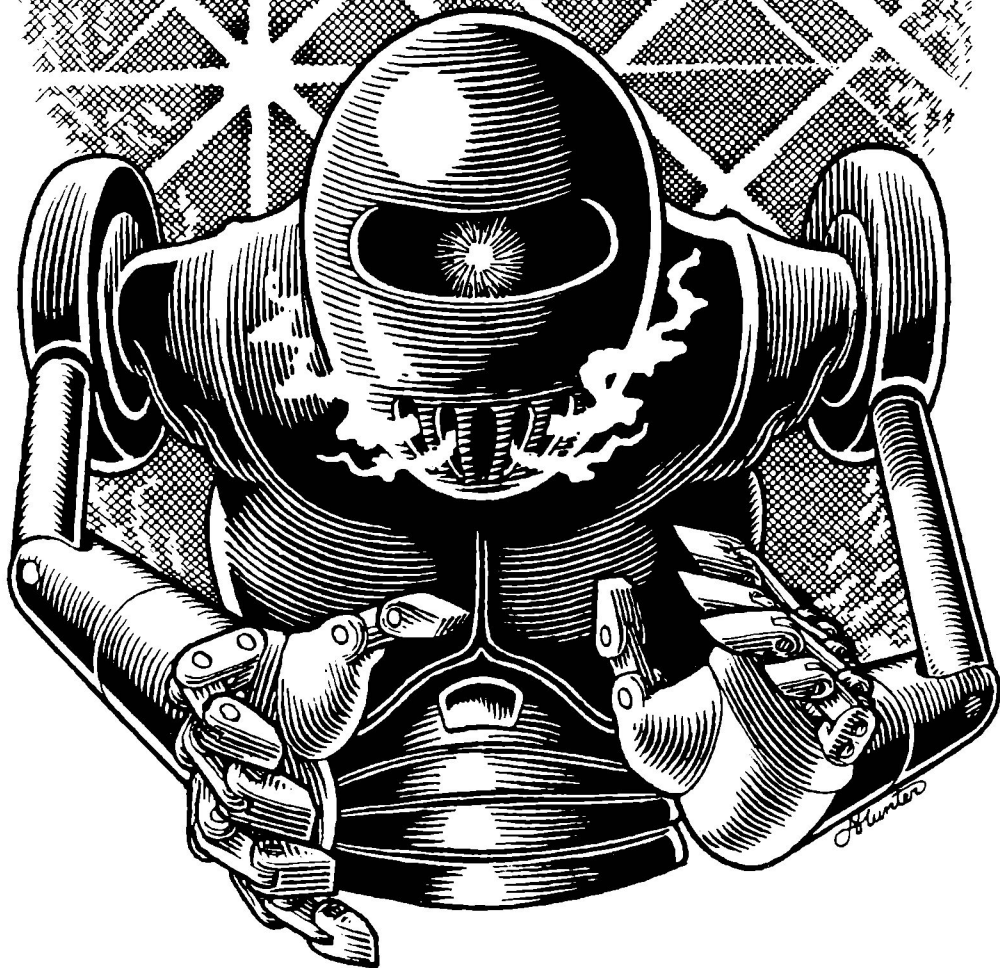
IN MANY WAYS this is a sad editorial for me to write – the last DREAM editorial ever! At such a moment it is tempting to look back and see just how far we have come along the road since that distant day in 1985 when we decided to ‘take the plunge’ and start producing a ‘different’ type of SF magazine; one that represented and applauded the traditional values of good story-telling and lucid narrative that the overblown pseudo-literary and ‘experimental’ markets of that era seemed, in the main, not to offer. We are happy to report that the experiment was a success and we are now able to take the next step forward.

We think that the time is now right for NEW MOON. So, from our next issue we will be DREAM no longer, but NEW MOON SCIENCE FICTION: Britain’s *alternative* Science Fiction magazine. The subtitle is appropriate: we intend to provide an alternative to the other magazines by continuing to emphasise those values which have got us where we are today. As I have said previously, NEW MOON will be an A4 magazine. In addition to five new, longish stories in Issue 1 we will have Sam Jeffers’ DARK SIDE OF THE MOON supplement (a pullout of at least 8 pages) and, if we can get it organised in time, a further 4-page graphic fantasy pullout, featuring Cris Gregos, Bruce Baker’s S.A.S. hero, who will be getting into his usual mess of magic and mayhem. If this is not ready for Issue 1, it will start in the next issue. So – about 52 pages of new reading matter, including fiction, articles, comment, book, magazine and comic reviews, with further developments and improvements to come in future issues.

Still, though we have come far, this is a road down which there is still a long way to travel. We consider that, with the launch of NEW MOON, we are now at roughly the same stage that INTERZONE had reached when it launched its first issue in 1982. Although we think that NEW MOON No. 1 will be a far better magazine than that first issue of INTERZONE was (for example IZ1 had no illustrations, no articles, only a tiny review section and no readers’ letters, and was only 32pp for £1.25, which is equivalent to well over £2 in today’s money. NEW MOON will have more illustrations than DREAM ever had, will be about 52pp for £2.25 – less if you subscribe and get the benefit of the reduced rates thus available and will have much else besides.) However, despite this, we still recognise that we will have a way to go to make NEW MOON into the magazine we hope for. We need your help in spreading the word about NEW MOON. Tell your friends; alert potential stockists to our existence (there’s a 33% discount for retailers) but, most of all, let us have your reactions to our first issue when you’ve read it. Only by analysing your feedback and opinions can we hope to develop in the direction you want us to. We know we can’t hope to please everyone – readers of SF are too divergent in their opinions of what constitutes good reading matter to allow that – but we hope that, by giving a good cross-section of most types of new Science Fiction we will please enough of you to allow for our continuing development in years to come. If you think what we’re trying is a worthwhile exercise, stay with us and try and bring a few of your friends along for the ride!

# THE RETRIBUTOR

Mark Haw



THREE BLOWS to the head.

A short while ago, the blood, dark and puddled across the floor, was still warm, liquid. From one of the wounds — Packer peered closely, making sure — it still flowed, slowly, seeping, leaking. The hair around the wounds was matted and black. The wounds themselves were like small, circular dents, each perhaps an inch across; one at the crown of the skull, one at the left temple, one behind the left ear. The face — Packer moved slightly, on his knees, to study it — was unmarked, calm, as if the man were asleep.

The man was not asleep.

"A hammer," Packer said, "I'd bet on a hammer."

"Some of the fellas are looking," Mitch, his part-time deputy, told him, flatly. "Maybe we'll find it."

Packer stood, slowly, feeling aches in his back. There was sweat on his face; he could feel it there, standing out, not dripping, or sliding; just standing out on his face.

For half an hour now he had been struggling to keep calm.

He glanced at Mitch, his deputy. Mitch looked calm, even bored; but Mitch always looked that way. Packer knew he was not alone, the way he was feeling, however Mitch looked. Packer had seen the faces of some of the men, outside, as they had gathered, waiting for him to tell them what to do. He had seen the shock and fear in their faces. The confusion; the remains of earlier disbelief.

Packer himself had not believed it, at first, on first hearing the alarm. And especially he had not believed it, on receiving the call. But now it was in front of him, spread across the floor, with half of its blood soaking the boards.

His blood, Packer told himself. Donald Keif's blood.

A man came in from outside, a man whom Packer did not immediately recognise. The man spoke to Mitch, not to him; he moved across, stepping over the body, and said to the man, from behind: "What is it? I'm chief here; tell me."

The man turned to Packer. His face was expressionless. "We've searched all over," the man said, his voice expressionless too. "It's definite; his wife is gone."

The settlement engineer, who doubled as a part-time teacher and librarian, did not appear to understand what was happening. Packer knew her, had once known her well, and he did not want to shout at her. But — "A man is dead!" he shouted at her. "Get dressed and get over to the machine office!" He slammed the line down, in an effort to illustrate to her that he was serious. He felt a shiver trying to escape him, and for a moment wanted to shout at himself. What do I think I'm doing? he asked himself. He turned to one of the men behind Mitch and said: "Get over there and bring her back." The man turned away, left.

"Don't get angry," Mitch said to him.

The machine office was too small. "Get out you men," Packer said to them all. "There's nothing happening until Francine gets here. Get out."

Shuffling, not talking, not even murmuring, they got out.

In the chair, Packer stared at the scratched surface of the desk. He felt fatigue gnawing at him; but he knew there was no way he was going to sleep. The night was over for him; perhaps, he thought, I'll never sleep again.

There was something in his stomach, sinking, and dissolving.

Mitch said, "Francine and Keif's wife —"

"I know," Packer said.



"Well," said Mitch, after a moment, "she ought to be professional enough not to let that —"

"How could anyone be professional at this?" Packer stared up at Mitch. "We never had a killing before. At least, so far as I remember."

Mitch was silent, standing, waiting.

Then he said: "We'll have to use the Ret —" but there were footsteps in the corridor outside, and the door was opening up.

"Is it true?" Francine asked them both, looking from one to the other, her eyes finally settling on Packer, where he slumped behind the desk. Her desk, in fact. Packer stood up, slowly, not looking at her.

Then he looked at her, and said: "It's true. Of course it's true."

"And Susanna —"

"And Mrs Keif is gone."

### Running.

Through the night silence, across the plain. Now the moon was down, making it easier, and harder. In this darkness no-one would see her; but in this darkness she could see nothing. Six, seven times she had stumbled and fallen; cuts on her knees and elbows burned at her. The rocks seemed to catch at her feet deliberately; really she wasn't running at all, but endlessly toppling, straightening, toppling.

But it was running, all the same. Running away.

Somewhere ahead the ground would begin to rise; the rocks would become boulders; dusty sprigs of bush would burst up, around spring-beds, where the water from the hills was still close enough to the surface to feed life. Somewhere ahead the plain would come to an end, and the hills and mountains would begin.

If she could make it to the mountains — by morning —

She tripped again, and flew forward, and slid, the dust of the plain tearing under her. Her shirt ripped again, her skin burned again. She dragged herself up, not stopping her forward progress; her shirt in shreds, fell from her. She barely noticed; the cold of the plain's night was already deep inside her.

Blindly she ran on.

At the end of the corridor double swing-doors led into the machine shop. It was grey and quiet in there, and the shapes of the larger machines, squat and black, menaced. Packer wiped his face with a handkerchief as they passed down the aisle. Francine was a shadow in front of him, taller than himself, walking steadily, her boots making heavy, flat sounds. The windows along the sides of the place — he knew they ought to be there — were invisible; the moonlight had fled. It'll be morning, he thought, before we get after her. Or rather, before it —

"Here." Francine had halted; he saw movement in her dark shape, and heard the subdued jangle of keys. The slide and click of a bolt. "Help me with this," she said, and to Packer her voice sounded weak. Mitch moved past him, another darkness, and he watched them pull at the heavy door. It opened slowly, he smelt old dust swirling as it came. He heard Mitch grunt.

The door open, they stood aside, waiting for Packer to go in. He hesitated, involuntarily; the darkness in there — He moved through, felt to the left for a light switch, found it, clicked it to on.

The room, small and tight and claustrophobic, bright, swam with more dust.

Inside the doorway, Packer found himself struggling to breathe; he found his handkerchief again, put it across his mouth and nose. Behind him Mitch coughed. Packer moved forward to the electric-bright centre of the cramped room. Above his head the ceiling hung, disturbingly low, the bare suspended light bulb making him want to stoop, and the walls around him — he peered through the dust — were blank brick, grey and cold looking. But for the end wall, opposite the dark doorway; glaring flat steel; he stood there, coughing himself now, facing the shiny steel facade of the Recorder.

It was this thing, this machine built into this wall of this room, which had awakened him, two hours earlier, via the alarm circuit set beside his bed. In his capacity as Chief of Police he had been informed first, of everybody. In fact, the Mayor of the settlement would generally have been alarmed at the same time. But the Mayor —

The Mayor had been the victim.

"Francine," Packer grunted, not taking his eyes from the steel face of the Recorder. It seemed to glare back at him, though there was nothing there to represent eyes, or any senses at all; the Recorder was, essentially dumb. An automatic thing; very simple electronics, Francine had once told him. "Francine," he said again, "how do we get it going?"

"You should know that," Francine said to him, but as she moved past him, another key in her hand, to the machine, "as chief of police—"

"It's my first day in the job," he said.

"After fifteen years waiting."

"You only got two years left, too," Mitch said from the doorway, flat as ever.

Francine, bending to a socket, inserted the key. Packer watched as she turned it one way, pushed it further, turned it again, pulled it out a little, turned it back.

A red light, in the centre of the steel wall, became lit. After a second it flashed, slowly, sluggishly, two, three times. Became steady again.

"It's working, at least," Francine said.

Now she turned to Packer, her face expectant and dusted, nervous.

Packer stepped forward, to the wall.

After a moment, flustered — nervous too — he said: "Where the hell — what do I press?"

"The keyboard. Under that flap. By your hand."

At waist height, a small, square pad of numeric buttons, and a larger button marked 'ENT'. He moved his right hand toward it, taking the handkerchief, still hovering near his mouth, with his left. Zero-zero-one he thought. The big one. The real thing. Coughing again, he tapped out the code, with slow careful fingers that shook in tiny arcs.

"Now — Donald's code," Francine said, artificially loud.

"Maybe it wasn't her," Mitch said, his own voice suddenly animated, almost terrified. Packer looked around at him; he stood, still in the doorway only half in the light, as if he were afraid to enter the small room. He stared back at Packer, his eyes motionless and struggling.

"Not now," Packer said, eyes back to the keypad. "Let it decide." And, from memory — Donald Keif was the settlement Mayor — he tapped in the code.

He listened for activity behind the steel. He heard nothing; he noticed the silence, suddenly; of course he heard nothing. Very simple electronics, that was all that there was behind there. And a line, leading underground, across the settlement, to a

place of far from simple electronics.

To the place where the Retributor lay, waiting. Waiting just for this.

Running. Was it getting lighter? Yes — she could see yards off now, in the grey light — and wasn't that mass of blacker-than-black ahead the humped shoulder of the hills, the mountains? And wasn't the sky above them even now fading to a bluer darkness?

Yes. Morning was coming. Dawn was whispering, from behind the hills. And behind her — the settlement would be waking, and someone, soon, would begin to scream.

Or perhaps — she ran on almost unconsciously now, the pace inside her — they had already found him. Perhaps — did he say something once, about some kind of alarm system? She tried to remember, then gave up, deciding it didn't matter. And — she tried not to think about it, but it came — and the Retributor.

She ran on. It was too late to be feeling tired now; she had passed some barrier, some critical point, and could no longer stop. She rounded a large boulder, a shadow, the largest she had seen — and didn't the ground seem to be leading up? Half of her said no, keep moving until the sun comes over the edge — and that half won. Run, run, run, she thought mindlessly, staring at the dark forms of her feet as they pushed in front of her, fell back, pushed in front again. The cold was in her, and the sounds of her heavy feet in the dust, and the silence around them, broken by her jagged breath — and she no longer noticed these things.

She ran on not looking back. There was nothing to see, nothing but the lifeless expanse of the plain, in dawn darkness.

"I can't understand," Francine said, talking mechanically, looking tired, her lined face still dusty, not alive. "I can't believe she —"

"The Ret — it will want to have a look," Packer said. Abruptly he glanced at Mitch, in the doorway again — a different doorway, the doorway to the machine office, now. "You put some men on to watch the scene?"

"It's as we found it," Mitch said. His face was flat again, now.

Packer looked across the desk at Francine, slumped in her chair the way he had been slumped there, earlier. But he no longer felt tired; he sensed the morning approaching; he sensed a moment approaching. And it, approaching, he thought. "I'll check it for myself. But I think I know what it'll decide."

"They were happy. Weren't they happy?"

"I don't know," Packer said.

"It doesn't matter," Mitch said. "Whatever, she couldn't hope to get away with it. Not with —" He gestured, nowhere.

"A hammer," Packer said. "That suggests she just did it. Without planning, I mean. A sudden thing. Maybe," he said, "to protect herself."

"It won't care," Mitch said.

"They were happy," Francine murmured, like a machine, staring at nothing.

Across a mile of plain it came, striding.



"I suppose we ought to call it 'him'," Mitch said uncertainly. "I mean —" To the edge of the settlement, as the sky was moving to blue, in the east, above the dark mountains.

"—It's essentially Don, in terms of mind."

Two, three people, about early work, stared, something in their faces. It strode by them, through the settlement, toward the scene.

"It's him," Francine said, blankly. "In all but human body. The Recorder sent his pattern over there; he's inside it now. He —"

It stared. He stared. He stared at himself, his body, lying half twisted on the floor of his kitchen, dried black blood forming a halo about his battered, dented head.

"But not quite him," Packer pointed out. "I mean, the pattern in the Recorder — all our patterns, since the last census — it was taken nine years ago. So it doesn't have the last nine years of —"

For a moment, angry. Then, as suddenly, calm. Then observing, carefully, scanning across the kitchen, absorbing through seven hyper-sensitive senses; moving, slowly and silently, around, gazing at everything in those seven ways. Absorbing. Not thinking; not yet.

"It'll — he'll go there first, to the scene. The recorder will have told him that much."

"Maybe we should —"

"He'll come here. He'll have to."

Their faces questioned Packer.

"You haven't thought it," Packer said. "He'll have to come here. He'll have to connect up to the recorder again. *He can't know who did it.*" He looked at them, Francine then Mitch. *"Nine years ago he wasn't married to Susanna. He doesn't even know Susanna."*

He realised that he didn't recognize the house. None of the things in it, at least in the kitchen — he moved, silently, through to the living room. Yes, a painting, that he recognized, a portrait of Juliana. Juliana — where's Juliana? he wondered. Well, not here. Another painting — this he didn't recognise — sunrise, over the dark mountains, east of here. Like he thought, this morning. He felt uncanny — he felt as if he were shivering. But I can't shiver now, he thought.

I'm in the machine, now.

"Christ," Mitch said.

"We're going to have to tell —" Packer began.

But stopped, hearing heavy, echoless footsteps in the corridor outside the room.

Fatigue, an absolute, malignant weariness, attacked her, as soon as she sat down in the dust. It was all she could do to drag herself a few yards further up to the shelter of a cleft between house-sized boulders. From all points, her bare skin burned, now. She lay back, half-twisted inside the cool shadow. Further up the side of the rock dusty morning sunlight sat, along a rough line. Under the back of her skull grit ate, and at her shoulders, and through the ragged remains of her skirt. Her knees, both of them, throbbed. Her eyes hurt, even out of the sunlight; she closed her eyelids gingerly; and her eyes rasped. She opened them again, blinked trying to bring tears — but nothing came. She ceased blinking, stared upward, at the dark rock, the sunlit rock, the pale morning sky.

From here she could see no more of the mountains, or of the plains.

She was glad, of that.  
For a moment, she began to think back.  
She stopped herself, stared at the sky.

Its — *his* — confusion somehow clashed with his — *its* — darkened steel body, the hard angles, the mass, the obvious solid power of it. Packer felt his spine wanting to tingle as he faced it — him — him/it and tried to explain. Irregular, sudden impulses hit him, to step back, to turn and run, as he talked. Conditioning, from childhood, of course; there were no monsters on the plains, so all the stories dwelt still, now, no doubt — upon the vengeful power of the Retributor. Do some wrong thing, little one, and it will come after you. And there will be no escape.

"Then where is Juliana?" him/it/Don/the Retributor questioned him, in a voice as steel and sharp and big as the eight foot body. "What happened to my wife?"

"Juliana — your wife — your old wife, Don." He forced himself to call it 'Don'.  
"Juliana — Juliana is— "

It seemed to shift. Despite himself Packer flinched, behind the desk. Then, after a moment, it said, "Juliana is dead."

Packer nodded.

Francine, slightly behind it, at the doorway to the office, said nothing. Packer glanced at her, saw that she was not even looking at it; she held her eyes to the floor. "Juliana," Packer said, looking back to the Retributor, "died five years ago, Don. From some disease. We don't know what. You know how it is, Don — "

For a moment, anger. Then that faded, left a small fear behind it, before the fear fled too. All of it invisible, behind the steel. "Okay," it said. "Listen, Packer, it's hard inside here, okay?"

Packer stared.

"I mean I'm having trouble adjusting. To being dead. To my wife and me both being dead. Inside my head — inside here it seems like only yesterday — minutes ago — that I kissed her goodbye and left the house for the council building. And now I find — how long has it been?"

"Nine years, about," Packer said.

"So I feel like I missed nine years. Like I went to sleep and — woke up dead." Suddenly the thing, or part of it, was in motion; the head, huge and conic, swivelled around, soundlessly, almost all the way round — making Packer feel sicker than ever — to gaze at Francine. Francine did not look up. The head swivelled again, finishing the 360 degree turn, to regard Packer once more. "So who did it? Do you know who did it?"

Packer opened his mouth, no sound came, he closed his mouth, opened it again, closed it again. How —?

"Your wife did it," Francine said, in her own flat voice, without looking up from the floor. "Susanna."

Once again it swivelled, but all of it now, the whole body, the enormous legs and feet planting themselves, so that it towered over Francine. "What? Didn't he just say —?"

"You married again," Francine told it. Now she looked up at it; and there was nothing in her face. "You married Susanna. And she did it. She killed you with a hammer."

The head swivelled to Packer.

"Take me to the recorder," it said. "I want to know who this Susanna is."

He had to go back for Francine, when he discovered that she had not followed them through the machine shop to the Recorder room. Then she would not come; she held out her keys, the Recorder key pointing at him, still nothing in her face. "Francine —" he began.

"Perhaps it wasn't Susanna," she said. Cold, frightened irony in her voice. "Perhaps he killed himself."

"Francine, I —" But she was gone.

And it was calling, from the back of the machine shop. "Get here Packer," it shouted. He heard its voice, as he turned toward it; the same flat spoken voice, amplified electronically; not a shout at all. But louder than anything. "Hurry, Packer," it said loudly. "She's getting away. I can feel that."

He moved through the corridor, through the swing doors, along the aisle, past the squat ugly machines lined up there. They were made from the same steel as the body of the Retributor; he saw that. And ahead it waited, stooped down inside the Recorder room, the electric bulb pushed aside, balanced absurdly against its conic head, oblivious.

"Hurry, Packer," it called.

It seemed to be getting a taste for this.

Releasing itself from the connection with the Recorder, it said, "Ah." As if sighing. Then, suddenly more like Don, "I was married to her?" Packer nodded.

It — he? considered. "Was she nice?"

"Couldn't you tell?"

"I suppose I know her better now than I ever did. Through the pattern, I mean."

"I've often wondered," Packer said slowly, "what it would be like, to read somebody's pattern, from in there."

"I feel real," Don said.

Then it moved forward, out of the recorder room, and it straightened to its full, enormous, dark height, and it said: "I'm going back to the scene. Now I know about her, I'll be able to tell where she went. Which way she ran."

Watching it stride away, through the ranks of machines, Packer thought, it doesn't matter. Whichever way she ran — you'll find her. Don, or Retributor, or whatever you are.

Through the swing-doors, it disappeared, footsteps clumping away.

As she was falling asleep, something black came into her left eye. For a moment she thought she was dreaming; but then her eye reacted, and she began blinking, and pain seared. Clumsily trying to sit up, she put a hand to her face, and her fingers came away black. She looked closer, with her right eye, and saw that it was red, red blood. She felt across her forehead, found some more warm blood there. In seemingly great quantities; fleetingly she thought of his body, his matted hair, his blood coursing — somehow she had cut her head, in one of her falls. Struggling again to sit up straight, inside the tight angle of the cleft between the rocks, she took a corner of her skirt — her only remaining clothing — and pulled at it. It would not



rip; she took a better grip, with both hands, and pulled in another direction; this time a ragged strip came away, with a tearing noise that shocked her, seeming to reverberate around in the cleft. Involuntarily she looked up; the silence returned as she tried to scan the blue, empty sky; both her eyes blinked now under the seeping blood. Her arms jerking and shaking, she wrapped the strip of her skirt around her head once, twice; tied it, at the third attempt. Her forehead was numb, feelingless. Her fingers were slippery with blood.

Then she tried to stand. And something hit her, from inside, and she collapsed, and could not move.

Already closing on midday. The settlement, behind, across the flat plain, was a small clump of dusty shapes, under the enormous sky. It strode on, not looking back, while the heat of the sun beat down and the heat of the f-source in its gut beat out, through the steel. The small rocks and pebbles littering the plain shone; the horizon, to the left, wavered and swam; the grey shapes of the hills, ahead and leading around to the right, sat still, solid, not feeling the heat. It strode on, its heavy flat steel feet planting themselves in the dust, sending miniature swirls up and around, leaving a track of haze. It listened and watched, through its seven sensory systems. It would have liked to track via i-r, but the sunlight washed out all traces. It drew in air and analysed, chemically; lifeless air. It observed, with flat sweeps of its conic head, the wide plains, the lifeless plains. It listened, tuning out the clump of its footsteps, and listened to the silence, the enormous, lifeless silence. It watched, for other footsteps. In one place, coming upon it suddenly, it found signs of disturbance, a fall. Halting — declaration throwing a curtain of dust up around it — it knelt, studying the ground. There, on that rock — blood? Well, what else? And — it sniffed again — slightly too much carbon dioxide, hanging on the still air. Perhaps. But the blood. The lifeless plain — who else?

It straightened, and strode on. The hills, the mountains, glared.

Standing over the body, feeling like a solid, dead object. Feet bare and cold on the floor. Grit — the rest of her body, burning — something burning her, clinging and burning — and blinding orange somehow behind the walls — through —

She woke, moving suddenly and a corner of rock digging into her thigh, and it was the sun, burning, right above, at midday, pouring into the cleft. Her skin was screaming, her eyes too, and the back of her head, and her back and shoulders on the rock, and even through the ragged remains of her skirt, and her legs — burning.

Driven by the pain, she dragged herself up, dragged herself out of the cleft between the rocks. To a tiny, tangled patch of shade, under an overhang, where she collapsed again. But her skin did not become cool; still she burned.

Her head throbbed. And she thought, midday.

Have to move, she thought, perhaps a minute later.

The Ret—

Moving again, climbing the steepening slope, between twisted boulders, over hot dust and rock — somehow, it was cooler. Somehow it was easier.

So she climbed on, upward, the mountain hanging over her, and the sky and the sun.



Somewhere inside it, he — part of him — wandered across his memories, of Juliana. He found he could remember exactly what she looked like, but for her eyes; in there she stood before him, complete, but he could not see her eyes. Or perhaps it was that he couldn't meet them with his own. And he remembered her voice, her laughter — the fascination with which she met every new thing. And he felt, at the back of him, I'm remembering as if I hadn't thought of her for years. When I saw her only this morning. Sort of.

I can't — she can't — we can't really be dead, can we? Isn't this a dream? Perhaps this is what happens, to patterns, when they're recorded; random voltage surges in the machine cause some kind of fantasy-process to start up. I'm my pattern, inside the Recorder, dreaming that I'm outside and inside this Retributor. This other machine. And the real me — the real me, and the real Juliana, they're still perfectly alive, out there living like they always did, she with her sculptures of animals out of those pre-flash books, and me with my Mayor job, that I've held for five years already because nobody else wants it — nobody else wants to preside over the settlement while it dies — while the plains climb all over us, and the lifelessness finally gets us too — maybe I am dead.

Seeing the endless plains, and the brooding mountains, through the seven senses of the machine, he felt something huge and black descend on him.

I am dead.

Juliana is dead.

We are dead.

"How long will it take?" Francine said, in a thin voice.

"I —" Packer stared at Mitch, until Mitch blinked and turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. — "I don't know. As long as it needs. It'll — take as long as it needs."

He went toward her, uncertainly.

She looked at him, and he saw himself, in her own uncertain, frightened face.

The ground sloped at almost forty degrees now. The boulders seemed to thin out, and then she came upon a patch of brown grit, an expanse of dark gravel-like stones, stretching up to the sky; to a horizon, a ridge. For a while, scrambling up the hill, she thought she was nearing the top; but always another ridge appeared, sky-lined, two, three times. A fourth time; she continued to scramble upward, her bare feet aching and hurting, probably bleeding, slipping back and sideways; twice her legs went from under her on the steep gravel and she fell flat on her face. And always the sun burnt down at her, in the endless blue sky; regularly she glanced up, over her shoulders, as if following instructions. Her naked upper body became black with the dust and small particles of gravel. And her legs, and her bare feet.

Perhaps barely conscious — not conscious enough to know, herself — she struggled on upward, across the dust.

Finally she reached the final ridge. And, above it, after a gentler slope sparsely peopled with thin, thirsty bushes —

A wall of rock. Towering up, hundreds of feet, hanging over. Glaring.

If Juliana is dead — then I don't want to live. Even — like this.

He could not stop thinking about Juliana. It was making him feel guilty — he knew that for what it was; a feedback circuit built into the Retributor pattern system, designed to make sure that he concentrated on the task ahead; that of avenging himself upon his murderer. Of course as Mayor he had known all about the Retributor, the whole system, how it worked — in a vague, operational way, at least. That engineer, he thought, she could tell me more. Francine. Yes, Francine — and of course she and Packer —

For a moment, he felt a strange idea approach him. Something about Packer — but it disappeared, as suddenly the semi automatic systems of the Retributor were sparking him, making him concentrate on the ground ahead.

It knelt again, peering. Here the ground began to rise; the rocks became boulders, further up. The plains became hills, and then mountains. It needed to know where she had started up; otherwise it might spend days searching the slopes, the crags, the clefts. The sun was behind it now, throwing shortened shadows behind the boulders in front of it. Its own shadow, compressed, squat and angular and black, lay before it.

It studied the ground, the atmosphere. It had travelled on a straight line between the first two definite traces of blood; it had found two more, on the same straight line; then she should have started here. All of its senses working to maximum, it began to move up the slope, keeping low, swinging to the left and to the right, sweeping the ground ahead. Once, it looked up, to scan the rising panorama of boulder-strewn dust. But unless she had stopped around dawn and had not moved again, it would not see her now; she was still too far ahead.

I'll catch up with her soon, he found himself/itself thinking. Now she's moving uphill, and bleeding, and tired, and scared.

He tried to wonder what she was like, this unknown wife of his. But something — the feedback, the controls — stopped him.

I have her pattern, it thought. Isn't that enough?

"What if —?"

He knew what she was going to say. He held his hand up, took her hand with his other. He looked at her. "He won't, That's the way it's designed. You know that. Of all people, you ought to know that."

After a moment, staring back at him, she said: "Yes, I suppose I —" But her eyes refused to calm.

She slept and dreamed toward sunset. While liquids leaked from her and congealed across her skin and across the dust and rock, while pain ceased to penetrate. While the sun slipped down the western side of the sky, she stood again over the body, all of the things inside her motionless. Unable to move, even her eyes unable to move, like a statue, while light brought the image of him to her, twisted and bleeding and dead. Like a fallen statue. And the grey shades of the dream became amplified, growing outward through shapes, until all was a curving grey contour, like a blanket, laid over everything. Like a sheet laid over furniture left behind, in an empty large house — she remembered, somehow, whilst still dreaming, and the scene shifted, sideways and back, in time and in her — now she was small, and could not understand, and behind the furniture through the enormous drawing room window, out on the cold snowed driveway, their grey car was sitting, waiting,



like a flattened, sleek, expensive animal — and her mother, or some woman, standing at one open door, looking back at her, through the big window, from within another sleek animal — her mother's breath steaming, fast and anxious, clouding, like a train, like the exhaust of the car, clouding and grey, against the white background and the trees — white is falling — the roar of the aeroplanes, overhead — falling now, back to grey — blanketing again, so that the features of things are gone — now she blinks —

Dreaming, she blinked, and found that the grey was the blur of tears. She blinked again, and suddenly able to move, she wiped at her eyes with a hand. For a moment she felt small again, seeming to shrink — but she flicked her eyes once more, and then standing before her, across the body, was —

The sky, opening her eyes she saw the enormous sky, leading smoothly from pale blue to pale pink to thin white to pale orange to bright orange, and shadows, the undersides of clouds, and a big fat sun swimming at the edge, sending a line of red to the right and the left, across the plain, and something, a small close shape, eating a piece from the sun.

She sat up, seeing the silhouette, and her body howled. Her head spun, making the world spin, making her throat tighten, and her stomach jerked upwards, but there was nothing there. Her skin all over flamed.

More of the sun was eaten.

Panicking, throwing staring eyes behind her, she struggled to edge back, until she was hard up against the rock face, and the cliff towered over her, making her think, when she stared upward, that it was all going to topple onto her, crushing her. She crouched, cringed, into a niche in the rock, pushed against the rock, her bare feet slipping on the dust as she tried to force herself further back.

Then as the figure climbed, its shadow leapt forward, licking at her like black fire against the orange of sunset. And it, itself, grew larger, becoming an enormous, angular giant, its feet breaking the thin bushes and the silence, moving in and out of the sun, sending the shadow flicking again, making the orange flash in her eyes, as if she were blinking again. And the tears came and she could not blink them away.

Small, fallen, broken, up against the rock, she was almost invisible. But it had more than one way of looking, and it saw her, in seven ways. She appeared asleep. In the silence of the evening it strained and heard her breath; regular, fast, asleep. And it smelt blood, and it saw blood on the trail. And it saw the end approaching.

Unfortunate for her, it thought, to run up against this cliff.

A mile to the left, it knew the cliff crumbled to a slope, an easy slope.

It moved on up the slope, across the dust, flattening the small, dry, dead looking bushes under its feet, seeing its stretching shadow lunge before it, making no attempt at concealing itself. There is no escape, it thought. And, there was never any escape.

She awoke. She stared, straight at it, for a moment, two moments, and it saw, in the orange sunlight reflecting from her face, fear. Enormous fear; terror. It saw her move back, into the rock, pushing back with her feet. She was naked — no almost naked, but for a rag around her waist. That's to be expected, it told itself. A day away from the settlement, and she is barely human anymore.

God, he thought, inside.

It closed in on her, and soon its shadow fell across her, so that even its eyes could not pick out her face. It closed, staring at her, and towered over her, enclosing her in

a pool of blackness.

"Why did you kill me?" he said to her.

He felt sick, looking at her crouching there terrified, and thinking that he had once been married to her. Or rather — well, anyway there was some connection between them. "You were my wife," he said, wanting to move closer and bend down to her, but feeling trapped in the steel form of the Retributor. "Why — "

Her eyes were red and mad with fear; her mouth was closed; her face was solid, like the rock behind her, above her.

In control, he leant forward, put out a slow steel hand, a claw, watching it shake slightly. "Perhaps you didn't mean —"

Before he saw her move a piece of rock was coming at him; sensors he had known nothing about jerked him sideways, away. But it had been too sudden; the rock hit him, in the steel conical face, smashing a visual receptor, even as he whipped away. Half of his vision flickered, died, and suddenly everything became flat, like a picture; he swayed, it swayed, while systems howled alarms and automatic battle routine cut in across his mind. Stepping back and to the left, it lowered itself into a crouch, and came forward again, as she tried to crawl away, flat on her front, dragging herself across the dust. Tensing, hurriedly trying to approximate, to extrapolate distances into the flat image, it leapt, steel arms out. But it had miscalculated, somehow; it knew as it flew upward through the swirling air, as falling sunlight flashed across its remaining vision, it saw her figure, below, as it descended. And it landed astride her, its feet driving into the dust at her sides, scraping her skin, and its central mass coming to rest directly upon her spine. With its ears it heard the crunch of bone, almost immediately a small, fast, surprised gasp. And then, it knew she was dead. Still moving forward, it halted itself with its steel claws, driving them into her shoulderes, hearing more bone, dead bone, crumble, and more flesh, dead flesh, pulp.

It remained there, across the body, for a moment, making sure.

Then he tore himself away, and began to run, wanting to be blind, wanting to be sick and to die and not being able to do anything but run.

"Should it take this long?" she said.

By now her face had taken up a permanently shadowed, worried cast, lined and grey. To Packer she almost looked a different person; periodically he glanced at her, sitting across the room from him, his room, wondering whether she was ever going to recover from this. As to himself, he had ceased to worry; it was done, now; possibly the Retributor had finished already, and already Susanna Keif was dead. Will it bring the body back? he wondered. And if it doesn't — how will we ever be sure that she really is dead? To Francine he said nothing.

Final darkness had fallen two hours before. He had watched the sunset from his window, waiting for Francine to call, as he had known she would. "I can't stand it alone," she had said to him over the line. "The waiting. The not —" He had watched the sky darken, waiting for her to arrive. He had begun to think over other sunsets, all like this one, but none like this one.

"Shouldn't it have — gotten — her, by now?"

He shrugged, still at the window, not turning.

He heard the silence of the night, and thought, when it —

"Will you see it, if it comes back?"

— kills her, will we hear her screaming? "I suppose it'll go straight back out to the bunker," he said. Now he turned to her, moved toward where she sat, her back straight, her hands between her knees, her eyes staring. "It has nothing more to do, once it —"

Francine stood, came abruptly close to him, stared levelly at him. "We won't have to —"

He shrugged again, hearing her fast breath under her voice. "How do I know what it'll do? This has never — happened, before."

Then, he saw, she was crying.

He watched her tears, slipping slowly from the reddened rims of her eyes, sliding, even slower, down the curves of her cheeks. Then he put his arms around her, her head falling to his shoulder, and he said nothing, staring at the blank wall of his room.

There was nobody there, at the machine shop, in the Recorder room. He found that he did not know what to do. Shouldn't the machine be telling? Wasn't it — wasn't it over, for him? Wasn't this the end of his life's extension?

Packer, he thought. Packer would know. Or perhaps that engineer, Francine whatever-her-name-is. And he thought, they'll be together anyway; they have something going on, don't they?

Though that was nine years ago, he reminded himself. Who knows what's happened since?

Moving silently, hugely, out of the machine shop, into the dark settlement streets, he went in search of Packer, in search of what he should do now.

"I'm sorry," she was saying. Irrelevantly, it seemed to Packer; there was no one to be sorry to. No one left alive, at least. Should I run and tell Susanna, he thought, before it kills her? Tell her that you're sorry, Francine, you're sorry all of this had to happen. And that I'm sorry too, I suppose, for what I had to do with it. "I'm sorry," she said again, murmuring, into the cloth at his shoulder. Then she straightened, still holding onto him, the way — the thought reached him, as irrelevant as anything else — the way she used to, he thought. "What have we done?" she said, in a soft voice.

Suddenly angry — the fear, submerged, and now springing up somewhere else, he supposed — he pushed her away, stepped back himself, so that there were yards between them. He saw her face surprised. "That isn't the question," he said, loudly, getting angrier. "It's not 'what we should have done' at all. Don't you think we should be a little more exact? What we should ask is; what have you done, and what I have done. Let's get this straight, Francine; we're not in this together. We're in it separately."

"But —"

"That's how it is!" Now he was shouting. He turned, paced, turned back.

"What have you done? You've murdered Donald Keif, you've bashed his head in with a hammer. And what a piece of detection that was, of mine. A hammer, I said.

What have I done? I have listened to you cry over it, and I have devised from my position as Chief of Police in this settlement, a way to get you out of it. Which of course has involved passing suspicion onto another person, and which has gotten Susanna Keif murdered in turn by the Retributor. You have killed Francine, and I've adjusted evidence, and the machine listened to me and has by now killed too, I should think."

"I —"

"So you didn't mean to kill him. He wouldn't leave Susanna, wasn't that it? You wanted him and he wouldn't leave Susanna and we both know you can get violent, Francine, when you don't get what you want. Don't look so surprised, Francine."

Now he moved close to her, stared her in the face, looking up at her. "Don't you think I didn't know about you and Don?" He saw her streaked face, dry and stretched, lined, her eyes wide and still red. "Christ, Susanna probably knew herself." Then his anger left him, or it mutated back into fear; he turned from her and moved back to the dark window, staring out again. He heard the silence slip in, under his thick breath, after the shouting. Through the window he saw the plain, in weak moonlight, in shadow, in blackness.

"Maybe," he said quietly, after a moment, "she realised what had happened. Maybe she tried to tell Don — the Retributor, maybe she tried to tell it that it had been fooled. That he had been fooled." Maybe, he thought, she didn't realise that what was in there was not her Don; that it was nine years ago Don, who had never known of her existence. Who certainly could not have — have loved her, or anything like that. "She probably tried to convince it. Maybe she succeeded." If so, he thought then —

"She was there," Francine said, from behind him, in a small, tearful voice.

"She saw me."

Packer turned. "She saw you do it?"

"Not do it. But she — she appeared — after. When I was still there. I couldn't believe — I was in shock — I was standing there, and she appeared, from somewhere, I didn't even know she was there, I thought — she — I don't know if she — she —"

Behind Packer, bursting the wall and window asunder, sending pieces of plaster and brick and stone and glass and plastic flying in all directions, the huge dark steel figure of the Retributor entered the room. "She didn't," it said, in its flat, metallic voice. "She didn't know anything," he said, while their faces and bodies froze.

"She was too frightened to know anything," he said.

"What have you done?" he said to them, feeling tired and crushed, though his body was of steel and his energy source would never die. Though he — though he/it had been designed to live and last forever, and not to need sleep, and not to feel anything but the need — the need for vengeance. "What have you done?" he said, to them.

Francine's mouth was twitching, flickering.

Packer, only half turned toward it, was solid, but for one hand, which flickered back and forth, tinily, and his face was blank.

"What have you done?" he shouted at them, at the top of his amplified voice.

Parts of the room shook.

Behind it darkness lay, just outside of the jagged enormous hole in the wall.

Slowly, dust settled, and around its steel feet, small shards of glass sparkled.

"Don —" she whispered, her voice broken, like the glass.

"I heard you," he said, quiet again, feeling everything seep out of him, sensing approaching emptiness, like a feeling of doom. "I heard it all, what both of you said."

"Don —"

"Why? Do you know what you've done?"

Footsteps, outside, faint, seemed to approach; held a level, for a moment; moved away again, past, oblivious.

"I didn't mean to, Don," Francine said.

"You killed me,"

"But Don — you lied to me! You said you were going to leave her! You said —"

"You killed me,"

"— you said —"

Suddenly, absurdly, Packer was laughing. Francine stared at Packer, madness in her face. He continued to laugh, an unsettled, wild laugh. Then he said, to Francine, "You're trying to reason with it!" Laughter. He moved closer to her. "You're treating it — don't you see? That isn't Don in there!" Laughter. "It's a machine! Christ, Francine, don't you see, it has only got one thing on its mind. It wants to kill. It wants justice, and it's going to kill to get it. I altered the evidence to make it go after Susanna, and it went after her, and it killed her. Now it's back and now it thinks we did it and it's going to kill us. It's a killing machine, Francine. It's not Don. It has no —"

"You're wrong, Packer," he said. But his metal voice could not convince. And he lacked the energy, the desire. Inside, the last things went from him, and he was finally empty. Perhaps now I am what Packer says, he thought. But he said: "You're wrong."

"But you are going to kill us." Packer stared at him, flatly, his thick neck angled upward. The laughter was gone. Behind Packer Francine stared from one to the other of them, then to the dark tall hole behind him.

"You killed me," he said to Francine. And, to Packer: "You made me kill Susanna. My wife, who I apparently loved."

"So get on with —" And Packer's defiance left his face, as his head left his body, chopped away by one swing of a steel arm, flying across the room and hitting the wall, smearing blood, falling.

Francine began to scream. Moving forward a step — it had gotten used to the lack of direct distance perception — it rammed the other claw into her face, driving her back against the opposite wall, taking furniture with her. Her scream ceased, and silence returned.

Empty. He turned and left the house, by the hole in the wall, walking through the darkness, around and through the settlement, seeing by six senses in the darkness.

The sun was rising, behind the mountains, as it crossed the plain. The night had been short, somehow shorter than it had expected. Now the sky along the rim of the black mountains was light, blackening the hills further. Pale oranges swam in pale blue and dusted white, as it neared the rising ground. A strange, sourceless feeling of recognition came over it, as it gazed at the flat view of the sunrise through its good eye. Like a painting, it found itself thinking. It tuned out the clump of its footsteps

and listened to the silence.

Lifeless.

The ground began to rise; it began to climb, effortlessly, gazing up through i-r to discern its destination. Yes, there was still a small trace, remaining, even now. It clambered over boulders, not bothering to go around. It dug its feet into the dust of the gravel slope, not having the patience to slide. It brushed through the stunted, dead bushes. It did not stop, at the i-r trace, at the rock face; without pausing it began to climb, quickly, calmly, confidently, easily.

It reached the top, and through a cleft in further cliffs, it saw the white yellow sun, rising, its tip still touching the lip of the next flat, lifeless plain. It watched, for a time, as it felt heat growing, as more and more of the eastern sky flamed.

It turned, back to the cliff it had climbed, peered down. Protected from the sun, cold air hung still down there. It saw her body, in grey light, crushed, naked and crushed. It saw that, at last, there was no longer any discernable trace in i-r.

Clearing its mind, it crouched, and jumped away from the cliff, and fell, gracefully, in a curving line, and hit, and crumpled up, and broke apart, on the dusted lifeless ground, beside her. ●







# THE CYVERNIAN WAY

Andy Smith



*I TURN MY WORRIED GAZE from the window to her pale yellow skin; it's warm to the touch. Her large round eyes are a benevolent, mahogany colour. I see myself reflected in them and turn away. She puts her hand on my shoulder and I shrug it off.*

*I don't feel in control.*

*The bed rises ever so slightly as she leaves it, and she limps to the window. I can guess what she is thinking, and although I can sympathise, I hate her for it. Somehow that makes it all much worse.*

*I'm not in control.*

*I can't even recall the last time that I felt in control. I suppose it would be .... yes, yes it would be just before the portrait, just before meeting Velky, my pale skinned Cyvernian, and Lacomb's pale skinned Cyvernian. Therein lies one of the problems.*

I'd only been on Cyvernia for about three months, and I must have heard all the stories and tall tales that there were about Henry Lacomb. He was by all accounts something of a disreputable character. Yet ever since I'd left Earth I'd made a conscious effort not to listen to rumours, for it was precisely that that had driven me away. If I were to make any snap judgements they would be my own. That's why when one of Lacomb's Cyvernian employees called me to tell me that Mr Henry Lacomb would like to commission a painting by me, I thought, right, okay, the perfect time to practise my open-mindedness. Especially when a price was quoted that I couldn't believe.

In all my silken finery, well I had to look the artist, I walked up his drive and hesitated; believing that all the dark rumours would jump out and bite my head clean off.

The door opened to reveal a small, yet imposing, Cyvernian servant. He beckoned me to enter. The first thing that greeted me in the hall was a grandiose statue of the man himself. It was made out of Bask, a local highly expensive, ivory like rock. I tried not to snap a judgement, but it snapped; whatever he was he seemed to be something of an egotist.

The place was big, not just big, but BIG. As I followed the servant I tried to prise the occasional aside out of him. Apart from some broken English that I could hardly understand, he wasn't very forthcoming. If I were to judge the rest of the house by the small part that I had already seen then I was in for a veritable aesthetic feast. I half expected the dust, if it dare to drift down in so imperious a setting, to be gold dust.

We came upon a large door. The servant pushed the heavy Cyvernian wood with some exertion and stayed behind as I entered. I found myself in a spacious, long room, that had a window running the whole length of it. Being one for a dramatic view I made straight for it, and wasn't disappointed. It was breathtaking. Everything about that I'd seen up to now was breathtaking; and expensive. Rumour had it that Lacomb had made his money from a sort of yellow-skinned slave trading. That he'd sold Cyvernian females to the boys back home on Earth at exorbitant prices. Maybe he did but that alone wouldn't explain the obvious, and supposed, wealth. I didn't want to work for the type of man who looked upon life as only something else to be marketed. Tomorrow I wanted to hear a slightly more guiltless rumour, one that wouldn't compromise what virtues I had left.

As I pondered on my principles and balanced them against my need to eat, I gazed out of the window. I wondered if it was the view that he wanted me to paint. If so I would gladly oblige. The Cyvernian rainforests stretched out below on a plateau that

touched a horizon over one hundred miles away. I could see the purple and silver hill of Kratoka balancing on the edge. The sun was setting and changing the silver to gold.

"I paid a lot for it," a voice said, startling me.

I turned and the statue came to life, Henry Lacombe, entrepreneur and recondite character. He didn't look as grandiose as the statue. In fact he looked a very meagre little man. Balding and rotund are the descriptions that immediately sprang to mind, which was a shame because I was expecting to be impressed.

"A pleasure to meet you Mr Jolsh," he intoned, stretching out a pygmean hand, "I've admired your work for a long time."

I smiled. A lot of people said that, that didn't.

He took his hand away and I couldn't get over how small it was.

"I must congratulate you on your choice of view," I said. "It's magnificent."

"Yes indeed, cost me an absolute fortune but worth it I think you'll agree."

I nodded

So this was it; I'd finally met the man. A small ineffectual little character who didn't look very dangerous, but then again danger comes in all shapes and sizes.

He asked me to follow him and we walked through the doorway into a crystal passage way, then into a smaller room (so he did have small rooms), and then out into the garden.

"There she is," he said, gesturing towards a figure walking amongst the alien orchids, "your subject."

That was my first glimpse of her. The indigenous yellow skin seemed paler than the usual Cyvernian, subtler; and the long magnificent hair, what a subject! It would be a joy to paint her. As she walked closer and I could see her more clearly, I decided in an instant that her eyes, her so sad, glorious, large eyes would be the focus of the painting.

"Well Mr Jolsh," Lacombe asked, "What do you think? Is she worth a work of art?"

"Oh yes," I replied, "absolutely."

*I've watched her silken silhouette at the window now for what seems an age; she's just staring, staring at the view or perhaps her dark reflection. Her place beside me in the bed is now cold.*

*Taking in a deep breath, she bends down and opens a drawer. I see her take a pair of silver scissors out and, taking hold of her long black hair, she cuts it, and cuts it, and cuts it; severing it, to leave a spikey memory of what it once was; so soft and long and midnight dark.*

*I look down and see it scattering the floor. I think of lost opportunities. What we could have done together. I ache to pick it up and put it back, yet even if that were possible she wouldn't let me.*

*She's severed it for the end of a new beginning. She's moving on.*

*I'm not in control.*

*I'm not sure if I'm even in control of what I'm going to do next.*

*I think of Lacombe again and remember his threat.*

After the garden, Lacombe and I went back to the room with the view. I should

have known that his warning didn't augur well for the future, but he did it so nicely. He said the view was glorious, but nothing if you didn't share it with somebody. He shared it with Velky and asked who I shared it with. Myself, I answered. I had a feeling he already knew the answer. He warned me very nicely just to paint her.

The first sitting was two days later and my mental picture had dimmed somewhat. But when I finally got to see her close up I had an idea of how Botticelli must have felt when first setting eyes upon his model for *The Birth of Venus*, or da Vinci and his *Mona Lisa*. This would be the one, the best, the art. It had nothing to do with money, I was compelled to paint Velky. It wasn't just that layer of beauty, it was a sadness below. Like the *Mona Lisa* there was something mysterious and enigmatic, something down deep that showed in the eyes, the mouth. If I was a good enough artist then I could show it, but oh, only if I was good enough.

She sat there with a serene and proud show to the world; not until the end did she relax it to expose what lay screaming beneath.

I had commented several times on her beauty but got no answer. It didn't help the situation that a Cyvernian by the name of Sumio was sitting cross legged in the corner of my studio. He was no doubt Lacomb's assurance. He had the opposite effect on me.

Towards the end I said that I had never had a subject that was so perfect in that she didn't fidget, or move, or talk incessantly. It was a relief to have someone who was so calm. She looked straight at me for the first time and laughed. It wasn't a happy laugh, but a disturbing laugh of mockery and fear that seemed to jump out all of its own accord. It was a laugh that said keep your opinions to yourself. A laugh that said I am anything but calm. A laugh that said you do not begin to know my situation. I felt that she had looked in me in the soul and found me wanting in the courage that she needed.

Sumio was up like a shot, and seemed to me as though he was going to hit her. I got between them and stopped him. I'm not sure, looking back, if that was what he was going to do, but whatever it was I could feel her relief when I intervened.

He sat back down and the fact that I was there made him realise that he couldn't behave as usual. I think he had thought before, that seeing I was working for his boss, my point of view would be the same as his. I'd shown him that I was master of my own studio.

After the incident I could feel him watching me all the more intently, and was all the more relieved when the sitting finally finished and he left. Although later, as I sat watching the sati-screen I had the feeling I was still being watched, as if he'd left his eye behind to keep a check on me.

There wasn't anything original on the sati-casts to keep my mind off him, they were disappointingly the same as they usually were. Made up of celeb gossip and repetitive rumours of revolt. I wondered why I watched them. The insurrection news was, in my view, ridiculous, because the Cyvernians were only exploited when they wanted to be. They populated the rainforests in tribes that spanned the whole steaming planet, and if they didn't like life on our small part of the planet, they could go back to those tribes. Surrounded by the indigenous species made people with a lot to lose very nervous, and that was where the scared and unfounded rumours of revolt had begun.

I decided that outside would be a good place to contemplate my superior knowledge of the news. I could do with a breath of fresh air, and besides, that feeling of being watched was still hanging around.

If of this whole affair I could go back and stop one action that would be it. If I hadn't gone out, then I wouldn't have helped her; and if I hadn't helped her, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to follow her.

What suprised me first of all was that she was on her own, no Sumio tagging along as Lacombe's eyes. And then I noticed the bruising on her face. It didn't take a genius to realise that Sumio had told Lacombe about her hysterical outburst, and she'd paid the price. The way she was walking was as if she had collapsed vertically but still shamled on. I called out but she didn't hear. As soon as I reached her and put my arms around her for support (and pleasure on my part, well I can't help it) she gave up any pretence of walking and let gravity take its toll. She didn't know they were my arms, so obviously anybody's arms would have done. I took her home and laid her on a couch. Brushing hair back from her eyes I saw several bruises on her forehead that made a matching set with those on her cheek, and neck. She was shaking. I fetched a face cloth and wiped her face. Her eyes opened. She looked up slowly and recognised me.

"Thank you," she said after coughing.

I was suprised, I didn't think I had heard her talk before.

"That's the second time you've helped me, you're a good man."

It was my turn to say thank you.

I didn't know if I should ask or just accept her condition. Well dammit she was in my home so I thought I had a right.

"What happened?" I asked.

She looked away. I thought perhaps I didn't really have a right and anyway I could give a good guess.

She was weak and needed food so I made some soup. She drank it and seemed to relax. She looked about my place and at some of my paintings on the walls.

"Your own work?" she asked,

I nodded, humbly.

She drank some more soup, and then must have decided to tell me what had happened.

"Lacombe told Sumio to beat me for what had happened in your studio."

I'd thought so. Possessiveness often comes hand in hand with power and riches.

I asked if he often beat her.

"Only when I look other men in the eye.." she answered, ".. or seem to show them some emotion."

I shook my head.

"He's always like that, always wants me, always just him."

I took hold of her hand and she smiled. It was the first smile of hers that hadn't seemed forced.

"You need sleep," I said.

She shook her head. "No, no. I.....", and then stopped. "Okay," she finished, "you're probably right."

I closed the blinds and left her to sleep.

It was just an hour after, because I can remember checking the time and it was 20:30, when I heard the door quietly close and realised that she had left. I watched her through the window and don't know why I didn't ask her where she was going, but I didn't. I followed. It was when we started to leave the safe areas and get into the poorer, hazardous areas of the city that I thought I might have been a bit hasty.

I was just about to shout out when she seemed to reach her destination. I thought I

might as well stay about; and (although it shames me to say so) listen.

*The silhouette turns and she doesn't look like herself any more, or my idea of what she was doesn't match up with reality. The newly shorn hair gives her an aggressive look. I turn away and get out of bed. My clothes litter the floor. I can't find my watch but don't want to wait around trying to find it, she has people coming that I don't want to meet.*

*I can sense her tension as she waits for me to get out of the way. It disturbs me but I try not to let it show. When I leave I've got to be careful not to look anybody in the eye. I hope I make it.*

*Why the hell did I have to follow her that night, and to listen to things that weren't any of my damn business? Why the hell did I have to listen, and then stay, and then confront her?*

Everything in the neighbourhood seemed to be in the slow act of falling over. The house that she had entered was nearly accomplishing this dexterous feat. I leant on its wall, waiting, and heard whispers that nearly tore the top of my skull off.

I couldn't believe it.

I couldn't believe what was being said.

I couldn't believe that she was involved, although I realised that I knew hardly anything about her, and I couldn't believe what was said about Lacombe and three other men. I waited, more in frozen amazement than from an urge to talk to her, yet when she left I followed.

It was as we were leaving this shabby part of the city that I managed to forget the coward in me and shout out: "Velky, wait, it's me." She stopped and for a second she didn't recognise me. When she realised who it was I got the distinct idea that she wished I wasn't there.

She smiled when I reached her. It was obvious that she was wondering what I was doing here and if I had heard anything. I got straight to the point.

"How long have you been involved?"

"In what?" she asked, still keeping the smile.

"Let's not play games. You know what I'm talking about."

"I don't."

"The revolt," I said.

The smile dropped and she looked at me with anything but attractive eyes. She was quiet for a while and then decided on what path to take.

"It's none of your business."

"My people live here. I live here. Of course it's my business."

"You live here..," she said with bitterness, "...but it's not your land, although you try and claim it. It's ours."

"Maybe so, but we only inhabit a small part," I said.

"Not for long."

Here we go I thought, time for the fanatical aspect to jump out screaming. I asked her what she meant. She just smiled. I asked again.

"You know your species' history, never content with what it's got, nev.."

"But that's only the powerful individual..," I interrupted, "the powerful leader. We can't be fooled as easily these days into following. It's a true democracy back on Earth now." I heard myself sounding like a true patriot, which I most certainly wasn't, and wondered why because the system back home did indeed seem to work

for the moment.

"Then even more reason for people like Lacombe to come here," she said. And although I hated to think about it, she was starting to make some sort of sense. I'd heard talk about Lacombe and some other men, and asked her about it.

"Have you any proof about Lacombe and the cartel?"

"That's where I came in.." she said, "... being his mistress meant that I already had a foot in the door."

"So you became his mistress for the cause?" I asked.

"No, I already was. I was approached by someone and shown what help I could be. I didn't know of anybody, or group, actively planning revolt. People had always talked, and never acted. But this time there was action, and I was pleased to have a part in it."

"So what proof have you got?" I asked.

"Enough," she answered.

It was starting to get dark. I didn't particularly want to get caught in this part of the city when night arrived.

"Don't you think we should get away before nightfall?" I asked.

"You're no different to the others..." she said with sudden contempt. "... You think that just because it's a run down area that it's dangerous. Well, it's not, and it's because of your people that it is like this."

I was startled.

"We stand on what we call the border. Look about you ..." she said, stretching out her arms. "... On my right we have the part of town that we Cyvernians live in, and on my left we have your part, the nice part, the comfortable part. The part with no litter, no disease. The part where four corrupt men live who have a stranglehold on Cyvernia. Who control what comes in and what goes out. Mr. Jolsh, the man you are working for at the moment, is a man who has plans to control the whole economy in another two years, an economy that he, with the help of the three other men in the cartel, brought into existence."

"You know what his first export was...?" she asked, not waiting for an answer.

"Me..., that's what. Slave trading is how he first gained money and power. I was one that he found on one of his many forays to the Kratoka hills, took a fancy to, and kept."

Somehow none of this surprised me. What did surprise me was that I should have listened to rumours, for the worst had all been true. But if it was common knowledge through these rumours that he did these things, then why wasn't he stopped, arrested? But then again everybody has their own pet vice, and no doubt everybody's little vice was common knowledge to him. It was always the same with men like Lacombe; they built their empires on the weaknesses of others.

"He came here.." I said, speaking aloud to myself, "... because it was a place where he could exercise his want of money and power."

"Indeed," she said, "and in doing so he has exploited us, used us to his own ends. But let me correct you on one point. It is not the money that is important, but the power. He plans to use this as a stepping stone to greater things. If he can make this planet important enough then it will be accepted into the U.F.A.S. and, as the leader or president or governor of Cyvernia, which he will naturally make sure he is, he will be included in the meetings of the U.F.A.S. board. From there he will no doubt go from strength to strength in his own inimitable way."

She painted a not very pretty picture. The thought of him influencing the meetings



and board of the United Fellowship of Alien States was a disturbing one.

"I never knew," I said.

She smiled, and nodded. The sadness had come back into her eyes. I felt sorry for her again.

"Where are you going now?" I asked.

"Back to Lacombe before he knows I'm missing."

I felt like taking hold of her and stopping her, I didn't want her to be dominated by him anymore. I went towards her and she stepped back.

"Please don't," she said, "...it's best if you don't get involved."

I already am, I thought, and said it.

"No," she replied, "...you're not really."

I wondered if she knew what I had been starting to feel for her. "I am," I said, "and what's more I fee..."

She put her hand up to my mouth. "Don't say it. I have no room for it. I have to go."

With that she turned towards the cleaner part of town and set off back to Lacombe.

Tomorrow would be her second sitting, and I didn't know if I could keep up the facade that would be needed if Sumio was there.

I didn't know then the second sitting wouldn't take place.

*She has gotten dressed and is waiting. I can't find my watch but it doesn't matter. It is time to leave, and although it is a relief it is also a wrench.*

*I'm leaving by the back door.*

*I don't know how to say goodbye to her, so I just pick up the parcel and turn and go. I hope that she will say something, but she doesn't.*

*I close the door and it is as if I have sealed that part of my life away for good. Up to now I had always thought I could have come back once things had settled down, but now I'm not so sure. I see in the distance, hanging over the city, the space liner that I'm to go home on. It docked earlier today to deliver passengers and cargo. It leaves in just over an hour's time and I aim to be on it if I can make it through the streets.*

*I button my coat up and keep my eyes to the ground.*

I didn't sleep well that night, I had too much on my mind. When morning finally came it was a relief, although apart from spreading light on the day it didn't spread much light on any thing else such as my problems. Who said things seem better in the morning?

I was just getting up when there was a buzz at the door. I hoped that it might be Velky. It was Sumio. It didn't take E.S.P to realise something was wrong. He entered without an invitation and got straight down to business.

"Mr Jolsh," he said, "...I've been sent by Mr Lacombe to request your company for breakfast this morning."

I was just about to decline the offer when he stopped me.

"There are things you need to know Mr Jolsh..." he said, hesitating, "...such as, err, well, my position in all this."

I asked him what he meant by 'his position'.

He stood for a few seconds not saying anything, then carried on.

"Do you care what happens to Velky?"

Of course I did, but I didn't know why he wanted to know so kept quiet. So much

for my deceptiveness. He seemed to take this as a yes and carried on.

"Lacomb has known for a while now about this planned revolt and Velky's place in it."

I was not surprised. After all he was a clever man, but why was Sumio telling me this?

"Lacomb has used me as his eyes and ears for a while now, he trusts me, and that is his mistake. He dispatches me to follow Velky and report back with what I find. But I have no reason for loyalty towards him. I know what he has done to my people, and although I am not with the revolt I am not against it. I have money and quite a good life; it could be much, much, worse. I try to stay on the winning side and up to now that was with Lacomb, but from what I've found out, the revolt is getting stronger so it's time to cross sides."

It struck me that no matter where you are, you always meet the sort that are involved in something for only what they can get out of it. That will betray even their own kind to stay afloat. At the moment his safety just happened to coincide with the right thing to do. I told him to carry on.

"He knows that you were with Velky last night, but not about her meeting with the revolt group. I had to give him some destination and thought it unwise to mention the meeting seeing that it was about certain key details of how they shall go about the revolt."

"Very commendable," I said, "...and at this moment I think I hate you, and your mercenary attitude to life, more than I hate Lacomb's."

He shrugged his shoulders and I couldn't see in his attitude the slightest sign of remorse. He genuinely didn't care about anything other than his own safety; which would no doubt be guaranteed when, probably at the next meeting, he would swear his allegiance. He would tell them what he had patriotically kept from Lacomb, but not what he had given when he thought Lacomb was the safer, stronger side.

"I've told you this Mr Jolsh because I was forced into it. I didn't want you to accidentally expose the revolt, which meant you had to know a few new facts about what Lacomb really knows. Now you must come with me and meet him."

The drive there was quiet. Nothing else was said about it.

Lacomb was sitting in the garden eating breakfast. When he saw me enter he rose and gestured to a seat next to him. The past twenty four hours had certainly been different. When I sat, I wondered what was to come next.

"Would you care for some breakfast?" he asked.

I certainly didn't, but if I said no he would have won a point. The only trouble was to complete the show of innocence I would have to eat it.

"Yes," I replied.

While I was waiting for it he asked what I had done last night. There was no point in denying that I had met Velky because he knew it was a fact.

"I bumped into Velky while out walking," I said.

"Indeed," he said nodding, "...and you did a damn sight more than that didn't you?"

What had Sumio told him, I wondered? I doubted that it was about the revolt, so what was it?

"I don't know what you're referring to," I said.

"You do, and it's precisely what I warned you against."

All of a sudden I knew what he was thinking, and although I would have liked to, I hadn't.

"You were seen," he carried on, getting increasingly enraged, "... you were seen with her. You were seen naked together having ... having ...," at this he faltered and then spat the next word out as if it tasted foul, "...sssex. You can't deny it."

I was sure I couldn't, Sumio would have made sure of that. I could guess he'd told Lacomb all of this because he saw me as a threat. I was right in the middle of a triangle made up of the revolt, Velky, and Lacomb. Up to now Sumio had been able to manage it all to his own best interests, but when I got involved I was something that he couldn't control, an unstable element. He had no way of telling what I would do, and how I could upset his delicate balance. He therefore wanted rid of me, and by telling Lacomb this pack of lies, made Lacomb want rid of me also. It was all very neat and clever. No matter what I told Lacomb about Sumio he wouldn't believe me, because he would think I was trying to wangle my way out of it by discrediting him. It was so neat that I couldn't see any way out.

"And what connection," he asked, "... do you have with the revolt?"

I had to be careful here. I didn't know exactly what he knew.

"None," I said truthfully.

"I still don't believe you."

Sumio had done a good job. He had Lacomb doubting everything I said that didn't agree with his version of things.

"I believe that you're a traitor to your people," he said quietly, leaning forward. "If this uprising takes place a lot of innocent people will get killed."

He didn't know it all. The only people that were to get killed were the men in the cartel. I'd heard a lot through thin walls. The revolution was planned to be more in the minds. By getting rid of the illness, the cartel, the relationship between our two cultures would become more balanced and healthy.

I felt like telling him this but the less he knew the better.

"You should have taken notice of my warning, Mr. Jolsh," he said, standing up.

I decided that I should have when I saw the gun pointed at me. He told me to stand up and walk to the house. I had no alternative.

"I'm a man who just can't abide things getting in my way," he informed me, "... so to make my life easier I simply get rid of them."

Sumio was waiting when we entered the house. He was obviously very confident of Lacomb's trust in him. He winked at me and followed us. We went through the same crystal passageway as before, but through a different door and down a flight of steps. I could feel the gun at my back all the time. We finally emerged into a small, brightly lit room, and to one side of it sat Velky. She had been beaten again and when she saw me she stood up.

"Ahh, what a touching scene," said Lacomb. He went over and slapped her down.

I clenched my fists. There was no point in trying something now, I'd only get shot. I had to bide my time.

"Sit him on that chair and tie him up," he told Sumio, who gladly did so and made it painfully tight.

"Now then," he started, "... here is a lesson in life, of which sadly you haven't got much left. Never have complete trust in those closest to you."

He held the gun to Velky's head.

"Nobody is indispensable..." I saw him put pressure on the trigger, "... and least of all ..." she closed her eyes, and jerked sideways when with an almighty report the gun went off, "... those who think they are indispensable."

Sumio's head snapped back onto the wall and left a red smear when he fell.

Lacomb had moved the gun at the last moment and shot him.

"Sumio was very stupid to think he could fool me," said Lacomb and I couldn't help agreeing, "...just as you were very stupid Mr Jolsh."

It was a small room and I could smell the fired gun mixing with the smell of Sumio's sweet blood. It had a heady, claustrophobic effect.

"I know everything about your ridiculous little revolt," he said to Velky "...and what's more can quash it as easily as stamping on an ant."

She looked away from him.

"Sumio made the same mistake my darling as you and many others have; that of underestimating me. I have a whole string of informants and pride myself on knowing everything that goes on on this small, paltry planet."

While he lorded it over Velky he didn't realise that he was standing right next to me, leaning over ever so slightly so as to emphasise his points. The moment had presented itself, it was time to stop biding my time. I stood up very quickly, with the chair tied to me, and drove the top of my skull into the underneath of his jaw. He was talking when I made contact and there was nothing he could do to stop his teeth from slamming shut and severing the front of his tongue. He stepped back, dazed, dropping his gun to put his hand up to his mouth. I bent down and charged at him, hitting him in the stomach with my shoulder. He fell to his knees, winded, and as I angled round to bring the chair leg in hard contact with the side of his head, I heard a gun go off. His eyes flickered as if somebody had pulled the OFF lever and he fell.

Velky squeezed the trigger and shot him again, and then again, until she'd emptied the gun. I told her that he'd died with the first shot. She said she knew, but he deserved more bullets in him for what he'd done to her. This time I decided I didn't have the right to ask her, but as before I could guess.

The lens of the active camera re-focused as Velky untied me and I heard its slow whine. The active light was on. We had been watched. I grabbed her and made straight for the door. When I opened it I expected to see somebody on the other side. There wasn't, but I could hear the alarms. We made it up the stairs and through the passageway into the garden before we saw anybody. But it was too late for them; once in the garden it was only a few seconds before we were amongst the trees and difficult targets.

We could hear them behind us for what seemed an absolute age, but I'm sure that the chased run faster than the chasers, because they have terror to spur them on and make them faster.

We made it to safety.

We walked the streets, making good use of the dark corners, to finally find the house of someone she thought she could trust. A safe house. She had my things brought from my apartment. There wasn't much because I hadn't accumulated much. It looked kind of sad just waiting in the corner, my life packed into two small cases that took up hardly any space. We were left alone together and she said that I must go in the morning. I didn't argue, but asked her to come with me. She said she'd think about it, but I knew she had already made up my mind. These are the events that have led to me leaving rather hurriedly.

*These are the events that last night wound themselves like dark silk through the fabric of my dreams. And now as I approach the liner that will hopefully ride away in I feel like throwing away the false identification papers that they gave me and*

*going back. But I know it's no good.*

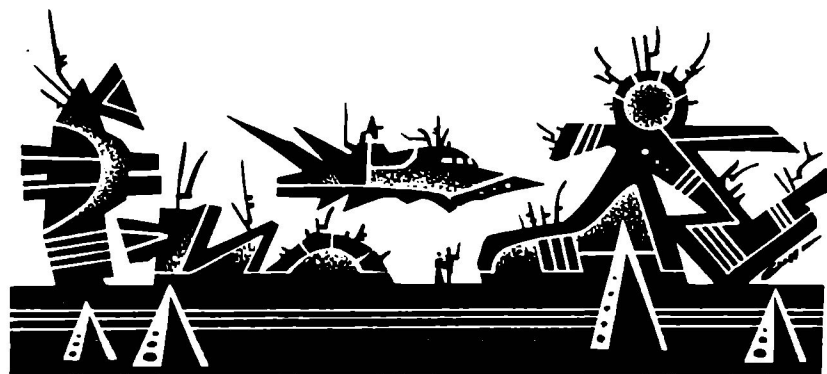
*I show them the papers and they haven't the slightest idea that I'm one of the two most wanted people on the planet. Wanted for the murder of the biggest magnate on Cyvernia, the biggest of four wheels.*

I think that on that last night she might have felt something for me. We made love and, although I know it might have been a response to me as someone who actually cared about her, after a life of being used, a comfort and reassurance that I was hers, I do honestly think that she felt something for me. But that it was one of those three in the morning feelings that at that moment seem written in stone, but are dissipated when hard morning light shines on them.

She arose just as the morning light was stretching its limbs, and as, is the way with all Cyvernians when they decide to go the way of change, she made a physical change to herself. By cutting her magnificent hair, she was saying: I have thought hard and decided on change. That's why when I saw her take the scissors I knew that she was going to stay and actively, totally, join the revolt. What I had foolishly thought could be our new beginning together was still-born, killed before it had a chance to draw breath. From then on I selfishly didn't want anything to do with the revolt. It had gotten her not me.

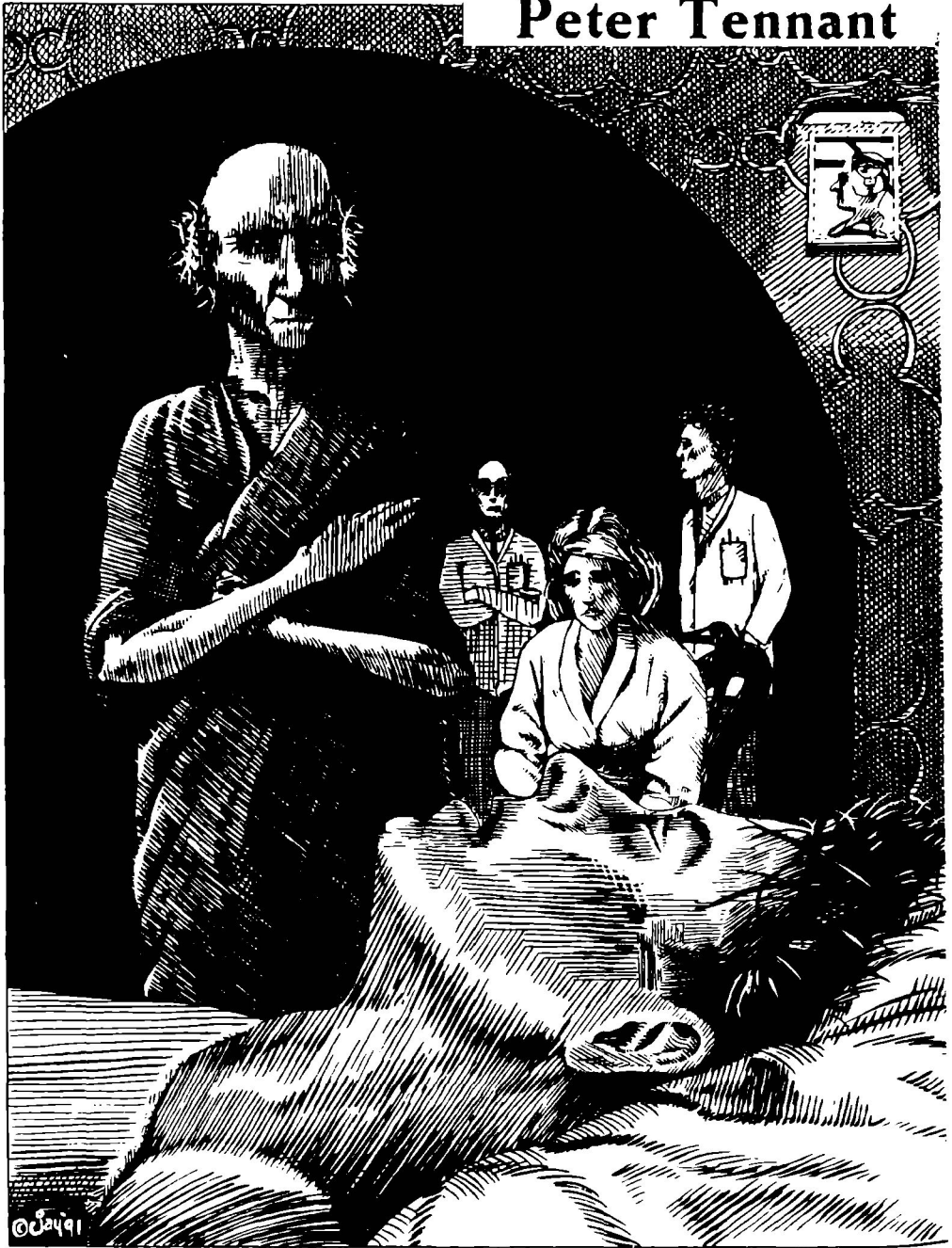
*I board the liner and take my seat. The only luggage that I have is the portrait I plan to finish when I'm back home on Earth. On my way through the streets I saw several Cyvernians with newly shorn hair. I guess it's not long till revolt, and wonder if I'm naive to think that only four men will be killed; that this revolution should be different from other revolutions. I look out of the window and realise that I never felt the liner move, for below me is the sprawl of the city making the lives seem so small, and the hopes of the revolt nothing more than the insurrection of ants.*

*I wonder if later I'll be able to remember her clearly enough to finish the portrait, or if I'll just put it away and forget it/her. I also wonder that if when I get home all contact might have ceased with Cyvernia, and that the revolt will be in full swing. I'd like to know how just high up in the pecking order she will be. Somehow I think she'll be giving plenty of the orders..*



# THE HEALER

Peter Tennant



AT THE FAR END OF THE GALAXY an old man is dying of an incurable disease. In the normal course of events it would not matter, just one more death among countless millions who die each and every hour of every day. Ben Gars, however, is no ordinary man, and thus his death will have a significance beyond the statistical. He is the founder of Galactic Consolidated and its largest shareholder, which means that he is the richest man in The City On Stilts, perhaps in the entire galaxy. Many people have a vested interest in keeping Ben Gars alive.

The disease is unknown, contracted during a hunting expedition to a distant and largely unexplored world. The call for assistance goes out from The City On Stilts and the galaxies' most renowned physicians respond, tempted by a promise of wealth beyond imagination. They do everything that is in their power. Numberless scans and tests are performed. New drugs are found to ease the dying man's pain. Life supports prolong the agony of his death. Yet not all the physician's science and skills can vanquish the grinning spectre finally. They are helpless to cure Ben Gars, unable to heal the ugly blue sore on his chest through which the man's life is slowly ebbling away.

There comes a time when Gars realises that he is going to die and accepts it as a fact already accomplished. He asks for his wife and three sons. Summoned into his presence they stand silent and fight to hold back the tears.

"Father," the youngest whispers.

The old man's eyes seek out his favourite. "Yes Ramone. What is it? Speak up boy, I can hardly hear you."

"Father, I have heard stories of a man who lives in the undercity. They say he can heal the sick with a touch of his hand. They say that he can restore the dead to life."

The famous doctors start to scoff, but a look of rebuke from Ben Gars is enough to silence them. Ramone is not to be mocked. "Find this man. Bring him to me."

And with those words vast machinery is set in motion. A thousand agents scour the many levels of the undercity, spurred on in their endeavours by the thought of the reward to be had. The healer is sought and eventually the healer is found. They bring him to the Gars' citadel on the uppermost level of The City On Stilts. Ramone himself ushers the healer into the dying man's sick room.

The healer is an old man, thin and emaciated. He is dressed in sackcloth. His skin is white from never having seen the sun. All his life has been spent in the depths of the undercity. There is madness in his eyes. The famous doctors stare at each other and shake their heads in sorrow at the illness which has reduced their patient to clutching at unlikely straws.

The healer stands beside the bed. He looks down at the dying man and sighs, rolling up the sleeves of his black robe to expose scrawny arms. Family and doctors lean forward to catch his every move. Only the patient seems disinterested, as if already resigned to a unhappy outcome. The healer places a gnarled hand on the dying man's chest directly over the blue sore. He starts to chant aloud in the ugly patois of the undercity dwellers, a harsh sound that sets the teeth on edge. His face is screwed up in total concentration. The veins bulge on his forehead and beads of sweat trickle down his features. The fierceness of his will holds them all spell bound as the moment stretches uncomfortably. Finally it is Ben Gars himself who pushes the hand aside and murmurs: "Enough. Enough."

The effort has drained the healer. He doubles up, clutching his stomach and moaning in pain. Ramone pulls him back from the bed and clears a space for him. Water is brought and pressed to the healer's cracked and bloody lips. Once he is



recovered the healer turns to Ramone, speaking in the musical language of the upper city, his pronunciation and delivery perfect.

"There is nothing I can do for this man. He does not believe in my power to heal him and so I am helpless."

The famous doctors smile at each other, unable to hide their relief at this admission. For a moment it had seemed that their rival might succeed where they had all failed, but now the crisis is past. Science has been vindicated and superstition put to rout. The patient is theirs again and the healer is exposed as an object of ridicule. It seems silly to have ever thought otherwise. Ramone whispers urgently to the healer who nods his head in agreement. He rises and moves to the bed again. The doctors try to bar him from their patient but the look in the healer's eyes is warning enough and they fall back in confusion.

"Ben Gars!" The words are like the sudden crack of a whip. The dying man looks up. His frail body seems to snap to attention.

The healer's voice is strong and confident. "Ben Gars, I can heal you. But you must meet my price."

And then he names a sum so enormous that the doctors' mouths drop open in astonishment. Even Ramone turns pale. Only the richest man in The City Of Stilts is unperturbed, nodding his acceptance of the outrageous demand.

The sore has begun to fade even before the healer lays on his hand. ●



## RATINGS — DREAM 26

Christopher Howard did well again. If he wasn't so busy engraving mirrors and swanning off to South Sea Islands we might see more of his work. Oh, well, you can't have everything... Here's the result.

1:	STARLOVE	Christopher Howard	2.20
2:	AWAY ON OLD DUSTY	Keith Brooke	2.68
3:	A SCENT OF HEAVEN	David Gomm	2.87
4:	DEAR MUM	D.F. Lewis	3.47
5:	THE SINGULARITY MAN	Graham Andrews	3.65
6:	CUT PRICE BARGAIN	Dorothy Davies	4.00

Recent delays in production etc. mean we've got a bit behind with the ratings, but we'll try and give you a double helping in NEW MOON 1 to catch up a bit! Incidentally, we had several letters congratulating DREAM for running the first D.F. Lewis story they ever understood! (I think they were only joking, Des. Honest!)

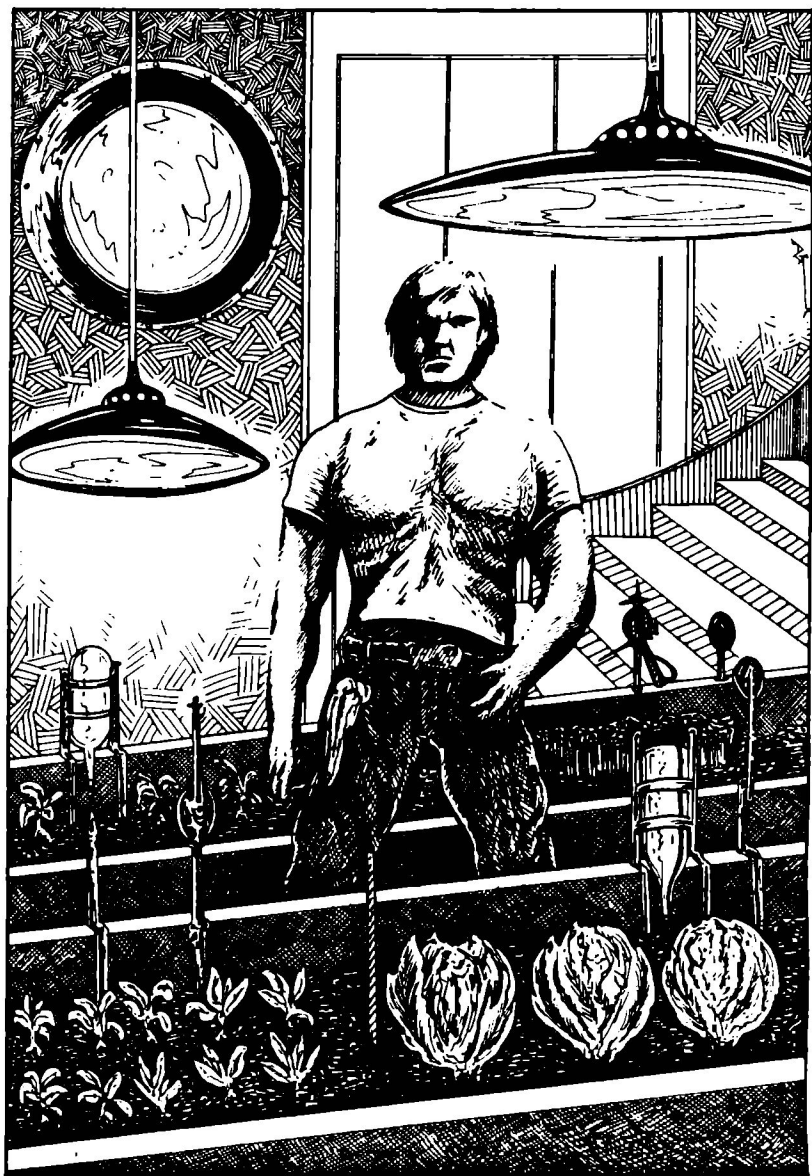


SMALL AD.

**WANTED:** 'DREAM' Nos. 6 — 14. Top price paid if in good condition. Chris Oliwa, P.O. Box 556, Liverpool 2170. N.S.W. Australia.

# SATURDAY NIGHT

## John Duffield



I PROP MY FEET UP ON THE DASH and wait for the diagnostics. I get a green for go.

"Hi guys," I say. "Hello Larens. Blair here. You'll notice the frequency's down a little. Stay tuned here on in."

Of course nobody can hear me. The signals will take a long time to get back. But I'll wear the ear mike and keep on talking to the end.

"The aberration is beginning to show." I raise myself to flick the switch. The view on the number monitor changes to that from the point of the nose. I flick again to recall an earlier picture. I flick back and forth. The stars jig in and out from the centre of the screen.

I ruminate, and rustle up a cigarette. Maybe the Decker Corporation will come after me in one of their Hardies, to prove what a swell bunch of guys they are. And maybe they won't. I clear my throat.

"Had a near miss a little while ago. A nine megaton greaseball. Worth a fortune. And it's headed your way. Check it out in about a thousand years."

I get a grip of myself. It isn't so easy anymore.

"And now, for my entertainment, here's a track from an old favourite. It's the Fairway Brothers, and it's Cornfields".

I push a button to start the data transmission and hit the tit for music. A bass guitar starts thrumming and I close my eyes.

I've been alone now for over two thousand three hundred hours. I don't reckon in days, for there are no days. A day is a shadow on a rolling ball of rock. It doesn't even last twenty four hours. There are no days. Up here it's everlasting night.

I am reclining in the pilot's chair. Above me the ceiling is slightly rusted iron. The Hertzero is made entirely of iron. On the pad it looked like a lighthouse in a life jacket. Flared at the bottom with boosters round its waist, and a garland of dishes and booms round its neck. Two thousand tons of soft iron, and made in Hong Kong.

I grind my cigarette into the console. I get up. I leave the music and the twittering data stream and go down to the garden. My feet slap on the spiral staircase.

The plants grow under a circle of lights. I have radishes and lettuce, watercress and tobacco. I walk between the knee high troughs of dirt looking at the indicators. A little more water here. A little more light for the lettuce. Hmmn. A yellow spot. I know it is not a fungus. Molybdenum deficiency. I bend down to pick off the offending leaf for a closer look. Then I drop it into the digester. It will join my wastes to emerge downstairs in a neat dry block of purified dirt.

I pull a radish, brush it down, and pop it into my mouth. I am crunching along at a hundred and forty thousand kilometers per second. The ship has been accelerating for five thousand six hundred and eighty three point oh five chronometer hours. It's the only time I have, because the last fix from Cape York was way out of date when it reached me. I don't know what day it is back down on Earth. God, it's a long way down, and Marrkis is falling all the way. No, of course he's not. I shake my head, but in my mind the image persists. Tsotuga is still in the engine room of course. I stay away from the engine room. I haven't been lower than level four since the blowout.

We were on a run up to Io to pick up a barge when we sprang a leak. Plain old water. It filled up the main ductway in the engine room and must have shorted the flux gauge and later on the back up. That's why we didn't notice the reactor running hot in the Jupiter tailfield. Tsotuga went down to have a look. Maybe he overrode the flow pressure safety, I don't know, but there was a bang and by the time Markis

and I were up from our couches the hatches were sealed and the engine room was fizzing. It was too late to go down to the engine room and save my life.

I toyed with the idea of that destruct sequence. I've thought of turning off the lasers and scintillating in the dust. But I'm not ready yet. I'm alone in my lonely iron tower, like a lighthouse keeper waiting for something to happen. And it will. It's only a matter of time before I hit something too big to go round the field. There won't be time to kick around it. I definitely won't see it. Ha, I remember the old films. Whoosh, and the starship goes by at warp nine. But in space there's no sound. Up here there isn't any moonlight. The sun is just another pinprick. That starship would go by like a bat out of hell in a cellar. A silent bat out of hell. And if it hits me, blatt, and it'll be all over for Paulo Blair.

So I'm going up. Up and up and up into space, and I can't stop. The controls have gone and the engine room is hot. I'm all on my own and the only way is up. In space up is the acceleration at your feet, and down's the same turnaround time. Up is down and down is up, it's all the same whichever way you go. No up, no down, no day, no night. No right no left, no light no sound. And oh boy, the stars don't glide by. No way.

I wipe my eyes and go up to the flight deck to check on the transmission.

The sand is warm and the sound of the surf is in my ears. I close my eyes and feel the sun on my back. The air is fresh. I can hear children laughing and splashing in the shallows. I roll over to see Helen oiling her thighs. She smiles at me, I smile back. My erection swells. Helen's hair is bleached and her skin is as brown as a nut. She oils her belly, rolling and slow.

She reaches round her back to unhitch her bikini. It falls away and she turns, leaning on her elbow. Her hips are curved. I stare at her breasts. They are white and full, with large pink nipples like finger ends. I can smell her body. She rubs lotion onto her breasts. They move heavily under her slow hands. She looks at me and breathes through her nose. I can hear the children playing as she rubs oil onto my stomach. I am naked. I move closer towards her, her fingers are soft on my chest. She breathes sweet and her lips are parted. Her arms welcome me. Suddenly I hear a raucous sound. It's a seagull. I look up to the sun to see beating wings. Auk, Auk, Auk, it cries. Helen shifts beneath me, and then again. I begin to slide off her. I fall. I fall with my hands outstretched, like Markis.

"Paul-ohhhhh..." The voice is Helen's, and Markis's, and my own.

I jerk awake, half out of my bunk, still hearing the seagull.

AURNK AURNK AURNK. It's the alarm. The lights are flashing and the alarm is hooting. AURNK AURNK AURNK. The ship lurches sideways, spilling me to the floor. In my locker my possessions shift and something breaks. I leap to my feet and run naked out of the door. I fly up the stairs. In the garden my tobacco plants have collapsed. AURNK AURNK AURNK. I sprint barefoot up to the flight deck and leap into the chair. The monitors are flickering white. The console is alive with readout, the radar screen is spotted. The ship kicks and I grab the arms and strap myself in. Above me the gas is roaring in the laser supply tubes. There is a boom as a particle impacts and the main monitor goes dark. I punch for camera two and am thrown against the belt as the ship dodges. The image returns and is alive with flashes. The hull is ringing. The speck counter is hammering like a machine gun. The lights grow dim as the lasers roar louder. The flashes on the screens light up my face. They quicken. Warnings are pulsating in red. My body feels light and the headphones

begin to float in the air. The console shows a falling field. It begs for instruction. Attend, Attend. The field goes to zero.

*Oh my God, the field is off.*

I hammer the attitude jets on full. I feel the ship begin to lean. The field is being drained by the oncoming ions. *Come on you bastard* I scream. The hull is peeling like a bell. AURNK AURNK AURNK cries the siren. The lasers are roaring. The headphones begin to drift to the right. I am appalled when suddenly they stop.

*Manual attitude adjustment countermanded* the console says. The viewscreens are a rippling blaze. My mouth is dry with fear.

"Turnaround God damn you," I shout. But the ship can't hear me. My fingers fly over my number one key board:

*Turnaround procedure T+0.*

*Denied*, the computer responds.

So *Override 9*, I frantically type.

*Warning* it says. *Guard Abort. Ionising Lasers 5/6/7/8 not operational.*

I wail, but it's lost in the storm. The ship won't turn over. The understern guns are dead. There's only one way.

*Charge Prime T+O Authority Blair 120292455 Markis 239493473 Tsotuga 435213894.*

*Please Confirm*, the computer says.

I have to do it again. *Countdown T+O Destruct Authority Blair 120292455 Markis 239493473 Tsotuga 435213894.* The guard will stand down when the countdown starts.

*Accepted.*

I reach for the destruct lever and heave it down. AURNK AURNK AURNK, the siren goes on.

*Countdown commenced. Detonation 100s.*

AURNK AURNK AURNK. My heart is frantic. I enter the command.

*Turnaround procedure T+O.*

*Turnaround procedure initiated.*

The headphones drift again on their cord. I feel the ship beginning to turn over. The alarm bellows as I tremble because I'm on the way home. The view on the monitors shifts sideways. I'm going home God damn you. The numbers roll on the screen as the declination increases. Come on, come on. AURNK AURNK AURNK. But above me the roar lessens. The lights brighten as the flashes on the monitors grow patchy, further apart. The hull quietens. The turnover slows down as the field spreads its wings again. The headphones descend to the floor. They clatter. The ship lurches back upright in its direction of motion. It is once more an iron bar locked in its climb. The viewscreens flash once, twice, are clear.

AURNK AURNK AURNK.

*Turnaround procedure aborted*, the console explains. *Field inhibition. Detonation 17 seconds, 16, 15, 14..*

I abandon the countdown and weep.

I don't know if you received all of that. There will have been some interference. But I'm still sending, and the ship's still holding together. Soil had flown around the garden and plants had been uprooted. The recorder that was in my locker is now no more. Camera one has gone and there is a temporary fault with the radar. I presume

the nose is pitted for there are shadows on the display. I think I've lost laser number twelve.

Downstairs the stores are a shambles. Partition B has collapsed, throwing containers into the aisle. Marker glasses show rough handling. The white plastic cubes contain laser tubes and computer components, industrial diamonds and useless medicines. I stand and stare, then slowly retrace my steps up to accommodation. The lobby forms the rec area, with loungers and screens, and the games closet set in the curve of the wall. Once we laughed together here, and broke the rules with smuggled whiskey. Now the black cushioned seats are vacant. I look around at the cubby doors bearing each of our names. Tso-tuga. Markis. Blair. Tso-tuga the company man, formal in his ways. Markis the young spaceman with stars in his eyes. Paulo Blair, me. Me me me.

I go to my cubby and step inside. There is an odour. The smell of my body and my sweat. The walls are stuck with pictures of home. My bunk is dank, and the covers are crumpled. Opposite is the window that looks out into the exercise room, a sop to the claustrophobia. I walk forward and pull down the blind, then stand at my locker to undress. My ribs are bruised. They are tender to my touch. I strip off the coveralls and kick them under the bunk. I search in the top shelf for my bottle of SleepEasy and pull it from the foam padding. I take two tablets, no three, four, then take off my shoes and throw myself down on my bunk. I turn off lights down and close my eyes, not knowing whether it is the loneliness or the hopelessness or the drugs that make my dreams so vivid..

"Kinny, this is Blair. Paulo Blair."

Somehow I know I'm dreaming. It's the deprivation I suppose. I'm at the door of an apartment, with Calvin at my side.

"The spaceman?" Kinny says.

"Yeah, the spaceman," his brother replies.

Kinny's eyes are wide. He ushers us in, directs us out onto the balcony. We sit on the chaise looking out over the glittering harbour. Yachts are skiffing under the bridge, and far away the quay is busy with people. Kinny brings us beers. He pours. I say thank you. I lift the glass to my lips. It is a long time since I tasted a beer. It is cold, and it is so very good.

"What's it like in space Paulo?" Kinny asks. His face is earnest. "I mean really like.?"

I look to the sky. There are clouds, white amidst the blue.

Calvin answers for me.

"It's lonely Kinny. Time passes slow. It's dark."

Kinny has another question on his lips, but Calvin shakes his head.

We sit for a while. Calvin and his brother talk low, I savour my dream. Then Calvin downs his beer and stands. He tosses his keys in his hand; they chink.

Calvin has promised to take me to the beach. To Barbour's. He leads the way to the door, opens it. I go on through and press the call button of the elevator. It arrives and the doors open. Calvin and Kinny are behind me; I enter. It is dark. The doors close. I am alone. The elevator starts up instead of going down.

I feel the acceleration at my feet. It goes up and up and up. I cannot see, am blind in the dark.

Then I see pinpricks in the ceiling. Bright dusty pinpricks, far far above. I stand and look at the frozen stars. Nothing moves. Nothing happens. Time does not pass. I exist. I am alone. God knows how lonely I am. God knows, for He too is alone.



I turn over in my bunk and sleep on.

"Paulo." Calvin steps back. "I thought we'd lost you."

"Nope," I say, keeping my thumb pressed on the *Door Open* button. "Barbours you said. I'm going to hold you to it."

They get in, and we ride down.

"You still with the bank Kinny?" I say. Kinny is so young and fresh in his innocence. So much like Markis.

Kinny pulls a face. "Yeah."

I ruffle his hair. "Stick with it boy. You've got a lot. One hell of a lot."

Calvin nods. He pinches my flesh, hard. "I hope you're getting enough to eat Paulo. Hang on in there."

We walk through the hallway and out into the sunshine. The air is still warm. I drink in the colours and the smells. There is greenery and ocean, birds and insects. We climb into the buggy. Calvin lets me drive. The wind feels good in my hair. My hair is long. It flows in the slipstream.

"Cal," I say. "What day is it?"

He smiles at Kinny in the back, and says:

"Saturday. It's Saturday Night."

I drive through the suburban avenues. There are sprinklers, and the evening air is fresh. I drive fast and smooth, the engine responds to my foot. We rise over the final hump and see the ocean. We descend, and I turn left along the beach road, to Barbour's.

We pull up outside. There is music coming from within. It sounds familiar. I see jeeps and convertibles. Men are tanned, some in their shorts. Women wear halters. We get out. The white arched entrance beckons. Helen is standing on the steps. Calvin and Kinny flank me as we walk up.

"Paulo." Helen says. Her face is stricken, but she is as beautiful as ever. "What are you doing here?"

"It's dreamtime for spacemen," I say holding out my arms.

Her brows are crazed. I bury my face in her neck, and hold her tight.

I am awake, lying on my bunk. I can still smell Helen's perfume. The Hertzero hums softly around me. I turn up the lights a little. It hurts my eyes. I have a headache. I roll over and up and pad out through the rec area to the bathroom. I urinate into the pan. It is a standard fitting, the same as on a plane. I look at myself in the mirror as I shake myself dry. I am gaunt. There are hollows under my eyes. My hair is lank. My T-shirt is faded, and smells of me. I show my teeth, and move close to study my gums. I manage to smile. A trillion clicks from home and I'm worried about my teeth. Hah.

I flush the pan. The plate drops down and the water gushes. *Warning*, says the sign. *Do not use in Null-G*. I wish I had half a chance. I walk back through the rec area and up the spiral stair. The garden is still a wreck. I continue up to the flight deck. The console is slowly flashing an amber *Damage Report*. I fall into the chair and check the speed. One hundred and seventy two thousand kilometres per second. I know that soon the lasers will be useless. Molecules will be impacting before the ship has time to fire. A speck of dust would leave a mirror-smooth crater a yard across. A sandgrain would burrow a hole I could drive a truck through. Anything bigger would blast the Hertzero into a white hot crater of plasma spreading gloriously in the firmament, a new star for a little while. I'm going to fry, and it could be in the very next second. That's the worst thing. The fear that my life will be

snapped out of existence and I won't even know it. Shit, I don't even know why I'm still sending. Yeah yeah it's because I'm one of the good guys and it's what my father would have liked. But for all I know Overtop station have already gotten tired of unravelling the pulses. Maybe my messages are beaming back to empty space. Maybe my times gone apeshit and they're all dead and gone.

I decide to play the last message again. There ain't going to be any more because they fizzled out of my dish a long way down ago, swamped by a Sun I can't pick out any more. Maybe they're going to come back in loud and clear with a blasting hello fired specially for Paulo. Fired from the chaser piling on the G's towards me. But Paulo isn't banking on it. No Siree, Paulo isn't banking on anything anymore, because the next second could be my last.

I punch for dictation. The computer reads out the words as they scroll up the console. It emulates Larens' voice.

*M13203 GMT 209305241832:15 CY/HZ1023 Larens. Hello Paulo and Roger. I hope you're holding up well. We received your message of forty three fifty zero loud and clear. We estimate your distance should be 917Gk and your velocity 113 zips by the time you get this.*

The computer has him to a tee. The clipped precision and the zzz- on zips. If I close my eyes I can imagine his slow blink and his deadpan stare.

The computer hesitates over a word it has guessed.

*T-differential? is down to point nine two and counting in your favour at an incremental rate. The longer you continue to accelerate the more time we have. You're putting on nearly twenty K kilometres a second per month. You're limited to nine months subjective; meanwhile we haven't been idle. Funding for a two-G drive has been approved by the CEC. It's merely a matter of time. We're speeding up relative to you every day. The schedule is that by your month seven we'll be docking alongside.*

It isn't quite the truth. Markis had received all the texts and not one of them gave a direct intent of rescue. They would hardly say "So long boys, you're on your own. We'd like to entertain a rescue, but well, you know, the budget's a little tight and the accountants say no, so go shaft yourselves." Everybody in training knew the score: if you got lost in space nobody comes looking.

*Please continue to transmit so we know you are well,*

*(the risk of collision is tactfully avoided)*

*Send back what you can, and continue the metronomic bleep for our celebration? and measurement.*

The Hertz zero is not the first runaway. When I was a trainee there was the Odine. I remember the word that it was important to keep their spirits up even though a chase was out of the question. The public statement was that it was lost with all hands, even if O'Brien did turn up working in a bar. He didn't have the guts to admit his buddies were covering for him and taking a piece of his pay.

*We would like you to find out anything you can regarding extra-planar bodies and the heliopause boundary,* Larens voice continues.

I'll bet. Somebody down there is itching even now for a fireball, hoping for iridium amongst the emission spectra.

*Surface composition, density, metallicity, mass, dust composition. Anything you can determine. Pictures would be welcome. Please accumulate all you can and despatch everything back down here.*

Here comes the levity. All of the messages end on such a note. I can see the grin on Larens face.

*Oh, and by the way. Just in case you guys didn't know you're on overtime rates. Our time. Double pay going on treble. Sit pretty and think of the bank account, and thank heaven for relativity.*

*Message Ends.*

Piss off Larens, I say. I zoom camera two to look at Prox. It's at seventy four degrees altitude. I can't resolve a disk. It remains a bright orange point overloading the surrounding area of screen. Despite the distance I've travelled, it seems no closer. I've come a tenth of a light year and Prox is four light years from Earth. Such is the vast emptiness of space that travelling towards the stars is like climbing a rope to the moon with one hand. And for me some bastard's up there sawing away with a fish knife.

I wrench the joystick and career along the Milky Way. I crank up the magnification. There are so many stars, too many. They flow past, a glowing milk of millions streaming across the screen punctuated by Regor, then the blaze of Sirius, and then Rigel. The coalsack is a misshapen clot of black cloud, a blankness that is not a blankness, but a reality of scattered matter. It spans three light years across. To travel its width would take years. It is so vast, and yet it is but a swirl in a blot in the vastness in space. I think of crawling on hands and knees from Townsville to Sydney, I think of dust, of soil and blood on my hands. I am tired, so very tired. I lie back in the chair. I close my eyes, perchance to dream.

"Paulo." It is Markis's voice. "Tсотуга is here."

There is a stir in the air behind me. I'm still on the flight deck but the instruments are dark. I turn my head slowly. An armoured figure is standing in the centre of the floor. It wears a mask, and thick leather and steel gauntlets. The sword is long-handled and curved. The helmet is ornate. The figure grunts behind its mask.

"Tсотуга," I say, "Get back in the engine room. You're dead."

The figure stands motionless in its rigid skirt. Its arm rises, trembling as if fighting against a pressure. The glove slowly creaks open.

Markis's voice comes to me again. "Look Paulo, see what he had."

I hear Tсотуга's fingerbones snapping. The glove flies open to show something in the leather palm. I see a wasp-banded device with red warning caps. It's a demolition charge. There's a timer in the middle, counting down the seconds.

The armoured figure grunts again, and slaps its feet.

"See Paulo, see." Markis tells me.

Tсотуга's palm rises, quivering against an unseen force. On the charge the seconds are counting down. There are ninety nine hours and fifty eight minutes to go. Ninety nine hours, fifty eight minutes before an explosion that would demolish one of the coolant circuits and seal off the engine room. Time enough for the Hertz zero to loop past Io and for Tсотуга's turnaround relief to come on board. A low sound is coming from somewhere. Tсотуга's palm rises still further. The low sound is rising. It's coming from my throat. The seconds count down: 17, 16, 15, 14.. Tсотуга's voice is guttural.

"I. Am. Be-trayed."

I look up to the mask. It's not a mask. It's Tсотуга's face.

9, 8, 7, 6..

Tсотуга's face is ragged tatters and bone. There are holes instead of eyes.

3, 2, 1,

I look back down to the object in his palm.

0.

The bomb explodes in my face. I wake up screaming.

I carry out an inspection of the lasers in the cramped space of the attic. I am clumsy, and so very, very tired. I disable the lasers one at a time, and draw them down their spiral tubes, hearing the brief hiss of escaping air before the seals close. They are the length of my bent-over body, and are heavy with glass and metal. My fingers are numb, and I carry out the procedures slowly. I feel detached, as if I'm watching the training film. Tube number twelve is clouded. I put it back and slowly screw it up into place. It climbs upwards, vibrating slightly, and finally clicks home. I press the test button on its rounded base. The tubehead light ripples through rainbow colours before it settles on red. I move slowly to number thirteen. I pause to rest my head, for the ship is swimming in front of my eyes. Every passing second moves me closer to the time when I won't know what hit me, and it's tearing me apart.

I climb down the ladder dead on my feet. The control room is silently aglow, tell tales winking as usual again. I look to the place where Tsotuga stood in my vision, and in my mind I see Larens standing there, his eyes cold behind his spectacles. I descend through the garden level to the lobby of the accommodation deck and its black seats. The thoughts that have been swirling in my head go clickety clickety click into place. I enter Tsotuga's cubby. I search it. I rip the place apart. I turn it upside down. I smash it. And I find another wasp banded charge in the leg of his bed.

I feel tired. So very tired. The environment of the ship seems distant as I seek my own cubby and slump to my bunk...

The music is loud around our table. Helen sits at my side holding my arm. Calvin and his brother sit opposite. I order a steak, with bernaise sauce, my last supper. The beer is good. The waitresses sway amongst the tables with plates on their palms. The lights are low, and in the corner a couple are kissing in a booth. It is Saturday night, and I am at Barbour's.

"So." I say to them all. "What's new?"

Helen bites her lip, then bends to her bag hanging off the back of her chair. She unfolds a newspaper, and hands it to me. It is a Times. It is dated eight months after the accident that was no accident.

I read the newspaper, squinting to make out the words. They fade. I close my eyes. Of course I cannot read the words, for it is only a dream. I stir on my bunk in the darkness of my cubby. I feel the dank sweat in my T-shirt. My ribs hurt. I am hugging myself, my own hand pulling at my arm.

"Paulo?" The arm becomes Helen's. The newspaper is before me on the table, and I can read it. There are names and faces, some of which I do not know. I turn to the inside page. It carries the science report. There is a small article at the bottom. It carries the brief caption: "Iron Emissions from the direction of Hertzero." Larens is mentioned, and he mentions my name. He says the company is rethinking its extraction policy in the light of received information, and states that Markis, Tsotuga and I will be remembered as heroes. I read the word that stops me cold, that makes me seethe inside. The word is *probe*.

I put the newspaper down and touch Helen's hand.

"Paulo, what happened?" she whispers.

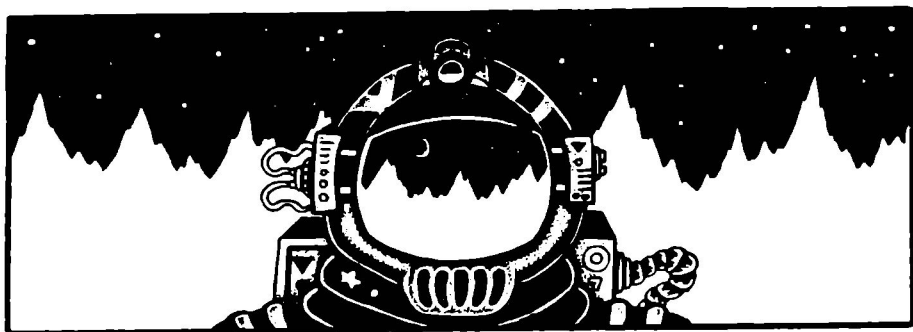
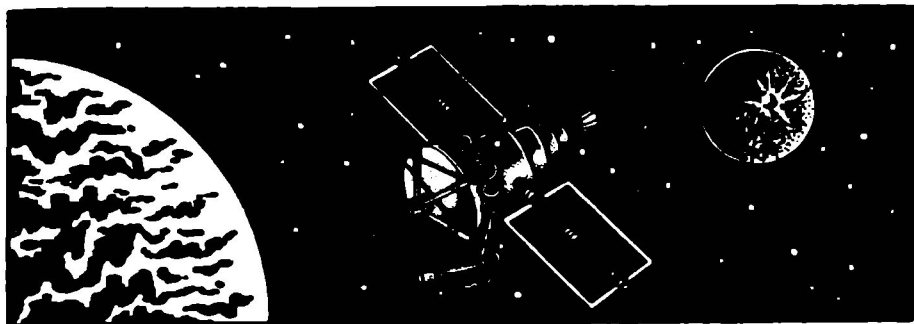
They all watch as I reach into the back pocket of my jeans and pull out something banded like a wasp, with red caps on each end, and a timer. I place it on the table. Calvin covers it with his hand when the steaks arrive.

"It was planned," I tell them. "Larens needed a fully maintained ship and the Hertzzero was old."

They shake their hands in sympathy, and then I wake up.

The soft hum of the Hertzzero is all around me, and I am alone again on my bunk, microphone behind my ear. Ahh, I hope you're getting all

ROARRRRRRRRRRRRRRR .....





# ACROSS INFINITY

John Light

JAGRATH, EMPEROR OF TEN PLANETS, Lord of fifteen moons, Suzerain of the wandering tribes, Admiral of the Star Fleets, Commander of the Berserkers, Principal scientist, and Hereditary Master of the Guilds, no longer had all he could possibly desire. Phelotrope, his beloved, was dead and all efforts to restore her to life had failed.

Jagrath walked the wilds of Amanse and cursed the universe that had given him everything, and then stolen away that which he cared for most. At last hunger and thirst drove him from the moors, down through the woods and back to the silence of his court, where red swathed attendants averted their gaze from the grief of their liege. But Jagrath was a strong man; strong in spirit and used to strife; for he had not been born to the imperial throne, but had wrestled it from a tyrant hated and feared.

Once, Jagrath had been a tribesman and Phelotrope had shared his raft as the vagrants voyaged between the worlds of Sirasper. He had learned then to be resilient; to mourn but briefly; to fight fate. Persecution of the tribes had welded them together and made Jagrath their leader. War had made him Lord of the Moons; revolution, Emperor of the Ten planets. So he absorbed his despair and hardened his heart against sorrow.

Jagrath's rule was just, but with Phelotrope no longer by his side it was without mercy; his rule was wise, but without the vision of Phelotrope it lacked hope; his rule was strong, but without the understanding of Phelotrope, it was uncompromising. The people respected their Emperor and loved him, but above all they feared him, and the fear drove out respect and murdered love.

Priests came to Jagrath and spoke of forgiveness, but he could not forgive the universe; philosophers came to him and spoke of acceptance, but he drove them away; once a courtesan approached him, but his anger and contempt at her desire to console his deprivation were terrible to behold. So he grew sterner, lonelier and more isolated. Yet he trusted those around him and employed no spies nor eavesdroppers, so that when men murmured he did not hear; and when a conspiracy to free the Empire from his iron rule took shape he did not know of it.

It was not a conspiracy of force but of subterfuge. Even now men could not contemplate violence against the leader who had delivered them from the horror of the old Emperor's tyranny. It was a conspiracy even of compassion, for it sought to tempt Jagrath with hope.

The Court Cosmologist gained audience with Jagrath who would never refuse an applicant, although his wrath at those who abused his accessibility was notorious.

"My Emperor," began Etwal Storn, and Jagrath stirred with impatience, so that the Cosmologist abandoned courtesy, and launched into the argument he had prepared. "The Universe is infinite, on this all are agreed, and in an infinite Cosmos all things that are logically possible must occur somewhere, somewhere." He did not wait for any signal of agreement. He knew that Jagrath listened, otherwise he would have already been dismissed. "And more than this; all things possible must occur not just once but an infinite number of times in an infinite Universe." He detected a flicker of interest in Jagrath's expression, and pressed on eagerly. "Somewhere in the Universe there will be another Sirasper, identical to this one in all respects. But more importantly for yourself, somewhere there must exist another Sirasper in which Phelotrope still lives."

Jagrath rose. The Cosmologist's logic was simple and irrefutable. Jagrath's need blinded him to the fatal flaw in that logic.

"I will find her," he said. "Prepare a fleet. Proclaim this quest, and call for volunteers to go with me."

Of volunteers there was a plentitude. No tribesman worth his raft would ignore the call of his elected suzerain; and many citizens of the settled worlds and populated moons were eager for the adventure. Jagrath curbed his impatience to embark and took time over the selection of his travelling companions. It was a task he refused to delegate. Choose the right men and all else would be taken care of was a tenet of his faith. As men and women were chosen he assigned them to the work of readying the argosy. One huge ship, the Behemoth, was to be accompanied by thirteen smaller vessels. They assembled in orbit about Amanse, and the Behemoth was so immense it shone like a moonlet in the sky.

Now that Jagrath was to leave them, his subjects forgot the stern rule of recent years and remembered their gratitude to him for deliverance from the old Emperor. They voiced concern for their future. Jagrath was mindful of this, and commended to them as their new ruler a cousin who had long been his Viceroy to the Outer Worlds, and who had served him loyally, even to the point of proffering advice he knew would be unpalatable, if he considered it his duty. Jagrath had no qualms about resigning his realm to him.

The expedition sailed from Amanse, heading towards the galactic centre. As it went it released clouds of probes on paths that would take them in great circles round the galactic disc, to rejoin the Behemoth at the opposite pole. As ships gathered momentum, the crews went into hibernation, leaving the tireless machines to watch over them, and to analyse the data collected. The information poured into the Behemoth, most of it to be dumped into eleven dimensional matrices, for eventual dispatch to Amanse. But any evidence of systems resembling Sirasper was retained for Jagrath's future inspection.

The Behemoth flew across the Galactic hub, giving the massive central black hole a wide berth, and as it approached the further rim it gathered up its offspring, the probes. The master system considered all the data it had collected and decided that none of it justified rousing the humans. Without pause it launched the argosy from the starry shores of the home galaxy across the dark gulf of inter galactic space. Now even the machines slept, apart from the master system itself and the lowly mechanisms that tended the hibernating crew. Monitoring systems were re-activated when they passed an isolated planet in the depths of the void, a stray from some disintegrated system, but the world proved sterile.

At last the fleet entered a new nebula, where the machines came back to life and resumed their search.

So the quest continued from galaxy to galaxy, while Jagrath slept, dreaming infinitely slows dreams of Phelotrope.

When the call came his mind and body rejected the summons but the machines persisted and woke him from the sleep of untold millions of years. To Jagrath it seemed that he had indeed slept for millennia, but as his body gradually took on new feeling, as each cell suffered and survived its resurrection, the feeling faded and was replaced by its opposite; that it was but yesterday he had embarked on his search, and all the pain and grief of his loss came flooding back. He consulted the master systems report with growing impatience. There was a world ahead, a world so like Amanse that he wondered if they could have come full circle. His newly awakened companions were eager to see this strange doppel-ganger of their home, but they



were careful to avoid trespassing on Jagrath's obsession.

Jagrath over-rode the master-system's caution and ordered the fleet to take up orbit beyond the bounds of this new Sirasper, while he journeyed on in a scout vessel. It was an eerie feeling, navigating space that seemed so familiar, yet could not be. Even the star winds that blew between the worlds were identical to those he had navigated when he plied his raft from planet to planet.

Jagrath piloted his boat through the darkness of the neo-Amanse and set it down on a bleak moor which memory told him should be within walking distance of the palace. He stepped into the first fresh air he had breathed for billions of years. The darkness was alive with small sounds, and the breeze was warm. Only now was he almost overwhelmed with a conviction of the futility of his endeavour. Faced with the enormous coincidence of place, he was suddenly struck by the unlikelihood of temporal congruence. Yet the machines believed this was the time and the place. He had nothing to lose by investigating, or so he thought.

He walked from the moor in long easy strides that carried him towards twinkling lights. His confidence returned. There was a palace just like the one he had left so long ago. He came down through a belt of trees just as the sun rose above the horizon, filling the sky with green gold. Where the wood gave way to the flowers of the park he halted.

Before him a broad path of blue turf wound away through banks of multi-coloured flowers and shrubs. Here and there lone trees raised fragile white branches decked with orange leaves, and in the distance the morning light now revealed a pale building crowned with spires and minarets. Home-sickness welled up in him, and he felt the reality of the aeons of hibernation.

He was about to step from the cover of the wood when he saw a figure approaching, striding furiously along the grassy avenue. A dawn breeze caught his garments and his cloak swirled about him. The man looked up and raised his clenched fist to the pellucid sky. The face was Jagrath's own, and he could read in that twisted countenance all the despair and anger he himself had known on the death of Phelotrope.

Immediately the door in his mind he had kept locked and bolted flew open and the logic he had refused to examine stood naked before him. He had crossed infinity to find a replica of Amanse at the same point in its history as the world he had left, and having found it, discovered what he knew but would not acknowledge, that in this world too Phelotrope was dead.

His doppelgänger strode on towards him, anguish in every line of his body, a desperation that mimicked Jagrath's own so sharply that he could not bear to watch it. Abruptly he turned and fled, almost unseeing, back through the wood and across the moor beyond to the waiting ship, stark against the everlightening sky, pointing like the dead finger of fate towards infinity.

As he entered the Behemoth, his companions sensed the disaster which had befallen him. He strode without utterance to his cabin. For a long interval he stood staring out at the stars and the distant nebulae, while it seemed the whole ship held its breath. Then wrath rose to drive out despair.

"The Cosmologist," he ordered in a voice quiet but ominous.

Etwal Storn attended him.

"Did you deceive me deliberately?" asked Jagrath without preamble.

Etwal Storn did not lack courage. His contemplation of the immensity of the cosmos had given him the strength of detachment from human concerns. He was not

afraid of his Emperor's anger, and he answered calmly.

"I do not believe I have deceived you. We have found an almost exact replica of Sirasper."

"It is exact," interrupted Jagrath. "In every detail, especially in the most important detail of all — Phelotrope is dead. Our quest has been futile; my life has been futile."

The Cosmologist dared to shake his head.

"We must not see a set-back as a catastrophe," he said. "We erred in seeking too close an analogue. We ought to be looking for a world where there are tiny differences. I have checked the near-misses recorded by the machines, and none of them is close enough, but I am sure if we persevere we shall ultimately be successful."

Jagrath regarded him stonily, but he was impressed by Etwal Storn's argument.

"Very well," he agreed. "I shall go on. But anyone who wishes to stay here or return to the real Amanse will be free to do so."

"It would be no use any of us returning to Amanse," pointed out the Cosmologist. "Everyone we knew died long ago. The planet itself may well be in ruins by now. So much time has passed."

"Nevertheless, each man shall make his choice." But none would desert their leader.

The quest was resumed. The men slept. The machines watched and worked, ceaselessly repairing and refurbishing the ships and themselves, interrupting the journey when necessary to mine the materials they needed from barren planets. The years rolled by in their billions, and then the machines began again to detect large scale similarities to the records they carried with them from the galaxy where Sirasper had once been, and might be still.

The fleet slowed its progress, and this time the master-system delayed waking the human crew until it had completed its investigations.

Jagrath woke to the view of familiar constellations. He stood in the forward observation tower watching as the Behemoth edged into the group of systems which resembled Sirasper in all but the absence of a single moon. The Cosmologist attended him.

"The prediction of the results of near coincidence is difficult," he warned. "The analogue of Amanse in this grouping appears identical to our home planet from long range, but the absence of a moon from its nearest neighbours will have had effects which it is impossible to calculate. You must be prepared for disappointment."

"I am not a child," answered Jagrath. "I have myself consulted the machines. The chance of success is small, but the Universe is infinitely large. I will continue until I find my Phelotrope, however many disappointments it takes."

Jagrath piloted the space boat through the darkness of the new Amanse and set it down on a bleak moor which memories told him would be within walking distance of the palace. He stepped into the first fresh air he had breathed for billions of years. It had a spicy tang he did not recognise, the first warning that this world was not as like the real Amanse as had been their first choice. The darkness was alive with small sounds and the aromatic breeze was warm.

He walked from the moor in long easy strides that carried him towards twinkling lights. He came down through a belt of trees just as the sun rose above the horizon, filling the sky with emerald fire. Where the wood gave way to the flowers of the park he halted.

Coming towards him along a broad grassy path was the figure of a woman. She had not seen him, and she moved slowly and gracefully, stopping at intervals to

breathe the perfume of a flower, or stroke the soft fur of a shrub. The lucan light lit her face, the soft violet skin, the silver eyes, half concealed by the long sweep of copper hair that moved in the dawn breeze. It was Phelotrope. In a moment Jagrath would step from his concealment, but for a space he was content to see her again, to feel the tension drain from him, to let the vision of her loveliness wash away his misery.

His eye caught a movement farther back along the path. A man was approaching. The cold hand of premonition clutched at Jagrath's heart. He stood, seemingly unable to move. All was silent, except for the breath of the breeze across the garden.

The woman half-turned, and saw the man. She waited for him, and as he came closer, Jagrath saw himself.

Bitter realisation welled up within Jagrath and drenched him with despair. In a world so closely resembling Amanse, that Phelotrope could exist, his own doppelgänger must also arise. He had found his lost love, but she had no need of him. She already had her Jagrath.

Soundlessly he turned and climbed swiftly up through the wood, leaving behind him the ruin of his hopes. With his mind in turmoil his body took over, carrying him across the moor to the waiting ship, stark against the ever-lightening sky, pointing like the dead finger of fate towards infinity.

The Behemoth and its attendants sped through immensity. At regular intervals pulses of data were emitted in the computed direction of its origin, although there seemed little chance that anyone or anything would remain to receive them. System after system, galaxy after galaxy, super-cluster after super-cluster were combed and rejected, but there were always more to be searched.

At intervals the search was halted while the master computer rebuilt itself in its original image. Emerging from such a reconstruction the master system prepared to resume its journey when warning came of spaceships approaching. The Behemoth remained in orbit around a dying red dwarf as the unknown craft came on. It seemed certain that they were heading straight for them. The master system ordered the awakening of Jagrath and the emergency crews, and set in train the procedures for reinforcing the minimal armament which the fleet normally deployed.

Jagrath arrived on the bridge as the master system completed his briefing on the development. The man was not pleased to be woken from his long dream of Phelotrope to find himself becalmed in a desolate system.

"We may have to fight," continued the master system as though sensing his unspoken criticism. "It may be necessary for you to abandon the ship if it is struck. These are decisions I am not programmed to make".

"Wake the rest of the crew too," commanded Jagrath. "Every one of them would sooner die fighting than sleeping. And let me know when you have any pictures of the aliens."

He stared out at the blackness, alleviated only by the distant glow of the dying sun, and the dust of stars that burned cold in their unimaginable isolation. Days passed and the ships filled with newly awakened crew men, resuming their activities as though no more than a night had passed. At last the master system informed Jagrath that images of the approaching fleet were now available. He studied the screens with disbelief, for they showed vessels that were the mirror image of their own, a vast flagship that was twin to the Behemoth, and thirteen lesser craft that appeared indistinguishable from those of his own flotilla.

"Can we establish contact?" he asked the master system.

"I have initiated a systematic programme on all frequencies and systems of communication."

"Have you tried plain speech?"

"I have not yet reached that mode."

"Then try it, never mind the scientific approach; try some commonsense. Those ships appear identical to our own. Their occupants can't be so very different."

"Very well. What language family do you suggest?"

"Our own, of course."

"The odds against that are astronomical."

"This is an astronomical expedition."

"As you command."

There was a lengthy interval while the message winged its way across the void to the strangers, and while Jagrath and his companions awaited a possible reply. At last it came.

"I am Ferotope. I command the Bee-Moth. We are searching for one who was lost, and we have no hostile intent. If you can help us; if you have information you would be willing to share; we should be grateful. Otherwise we wish only to continue in peace."

There was a long silence. The crew waited with bated breath for the reaction of their liege. At last he spoke in ringing tones.

"I am Jagrath. I seek one whom I lost, one called Phelotrope. If you are she, then tell me."

The image of Jagrath accompanied his words across the void, and once again all waited in silence for a response. When it came it lit up the ships' screens with the countenance of that Phelotrope sought for so long, and the voice, now free of distortion, was the voice that Jagrath loved.

"Perhaps I am she whom you seek. Long have I searched since the death of my husband Yagras, and maybe my quest is now at an end."

Then Jagrath ordered the fleet to move out of its resting place and towards the approaching squadron.

To his crew his visage was impassive; there was no sign of jubilation; outwardly he appeared calm. And within he felt empty. Before long he would meet this Ferotope who might be his Phelotrope. Would she seem different from the one he had lost? Soon he would know, but perhaps it no longer mattered. Perhaps the past was dead at last, and the time for a new beginning was at hand. ●



CHIPWRECKED



Andy Oldfield

ONE OF THESE DAYS Alex was determined to throw his computer away.

His health was shot to pieces. Hours, days, months, seeming life-times hunched over cursor keys and joysticks. And all the time living on fast food and tinned lager.

It wasn't as though his addiction was rational; even Alex couldn't work out his motivation. Every single game he'd ever played had been dull, boring and predictable. But he couldn't help himself, he had to keep on buying the latest software releases in a desperate quest to find one day a truly satisfying and challenging game.

Reaching across overflowing ashtrays and empty cans, Alex picked up the latest waste of money.

The disk case was decorated with fantastically surreal art work. It was that which had first caught his eye. And when he read the blurb he was hooked. The game described itself as the ultimate mind blowing fantasy adventure, complete with high-res graphics, autonomous and intelligent creatures, plus unique ESP features. This was one game he had to see.

He flipped the cassette out of its case and into the recorder, tapped a few keys and settled down to watch the screen.

After the initial rainbow displays and the interesting legend 'Abandon hope all ye who enter', the screen turned dark blue and the words 'Weirdsoft 1991: Loading' appeared, shimmering in more colours than Alex knew existed. At the bottom of the screen was a little animated scenario: a man banging his head against a brick wall. Ten seconds later it disappeared to be replaced by the cursory message 'just joking!'

Alex decided he could do without this. He closed his eyes and listened to the irritating, yet mesmeric digitised soundtrack as the programme carried on loading. It seemed to be taking a very long time. Must be a real heavyweight database at the heart of this game, he decided.

Senses dulled, he slipped into the dreamlike state which is the lot of those who listen to the sort of stuff that games programmers think of as entertaining music. He was torn between opening his eyes or finally drifting off to sleep when an ear-splitting beep and a short burst of digitised Mussorgsky's 'Night On A Bare Mountain' jolted him into awareness. The programme had loaded.

"Hi there!" a voice sounded. But Alex wasn't listening, he was far too startled.

As far as he could make out he seemed to be on the wrong side of the VDU; either that or he was staring at an amazingly lifelike graphic representation of his living room. He could see his lager — almost a full can and he couldn't reach it.

"Hi there!" the voice repeated. "You can call me Eric if it helps you relax."

"Huh," said Alex. "Hey, don't I recognise that voice?"

"Probably not."

Alex searched his memory, trying to recall the voice of every patronising computer in every third rate science-fiction movie that he had ever seen. Eric's voice was an amalgam of them all, seasoned with a liberal dash of vintage 'Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy'. Alex spoke. "Listen..."

The voice didn't listen. It launched into what sounded suspiciously like bad advertising copy. "Welcome to the game. I'm Eric your guide in the micro-maze. This game is brought to you courtesy of Weirdsoft Productions and utilises the very latest ESP spin-offs from the very latest military research."

Alex couldn't remember reading about this in the software reviews.

Staring about him he couldn't help but notice that his living room had gone. He was floating in what appeared to be pink fluffy clouds. Reasonable questions began

to filter through his still stunned brain. "Where is this?" he demanded.

"It's a little difficult to say," came the far from soothing reply. "My programming leaves quite a bit to be desired — over-budgetting on the artwork and marketing! But as far as I can make out, the interactive psychic input to the game rather suggests that we're in ... limbo — a sort of almost organic, almost silicon no-man's interface. It's all very ethereal. Rather clever too, the racket which blurts out when the programme's loading contains hypnotic commands that drag you out of your usual world and dump you into this one."

"Wonderful. When can I leave?"

"Any time you like. The game awaits."

"No. I meant go home."

"Ah! That's difficult."

Alex thought for a moment. "What's the problem? Just whisper subliminal endearments and boot my ego back into the world where it usually hangs out."

"It's not that easy," said Eric apologetically. "What we have here isn't merely a subjective state, it's an enforcement of intersubjectivity — not at all democratic, I'm afraid. The ESP side of the software sort of binds you to the rules. You have to boldly go where others before you have only thought."

"Which means?"

"You can't get out unless you play the game."

"Fine." Alex settled down to sulk.

It didn't do him any good. The pink clouds turned to thunder clouds. Lightning flashed. Wagner's 'Ride Of The Valkyries' flooded through his ears. And with a terrifying, crazy spiralling motion, he hurtled down to what in normal circumstances would have been earth.

A sinister castle atop even more sinister mountains came into view. In the distance, over the noise of the storm, he could just make out Eric's voice yelling "Geronimo."

As the ground approached Alex closed his eyes in anticipation of sudden, violent and messy death. When he felt nothing, he opened his eyes.

He was in a dark, dense forest. Tied to the nearest tree he could just make out the silhouette of a rope. He pulled it. Instantly the forest was bathed in gentle moonlight. A fawn trotted towards him, it stopped and licked his hand. "You're doing well," it said before galloping off into the undergrowth.

Eric's voice whispered: "Admit it, that was the biggest thrill you've ever had with a micro."

Alex couldn't deny it, his head was still swimming and his stomach felt like it had just served a life sentence in a centrifuge.

Seized by a feeling of guilt for standing around doing nothing, Alex groped his way through the trees. A luminous compass hovered in the forest canopy. Purposefully, Alex decided that north was a good direction to head in — towards the sinister castle. Perhaps it would hold some answers.

The march began.

His eyes were firmly fixed on the heavens, which probably went some way to explaining how he suddenly found himself lying face down and winded.

Picking up the bow and arrow which had sent him sprawling onto the ground he noticed a faint gleam in the bushes a few feet to his left. Cautiously, he made his way over to it. It was a sword, a mighty blade with fiery runes that danced in the moonlight. At its side was a silver goblet. Alex drank; the mead trickled down his throat. He threw the goblet over his shoulder. There was a sharp clang.



He crawled over to where the goblet had hit, landed with a metallic clang and found a fully loaded semi-automatic machine pistol. Tucking it into the top of his jeans he resumed his northward trek.

After some time a wide, murky river stopped his progress. "Enchanted, I shouldn't wonder," murmured Alex gazing at the castle on the other bank.

"You betcha." A large green creature with three arms loomed into view. "Who are you and where are you going?" it asked.

Alex leaned on his sword. He was getting into this game now. "I am Alex and I go to yon castle, there to do all manner of heroic things."

The creature regarded him suspiciously. "Alex in wonderland! Is that so? Well I'm the hideous ferry-man. First you must pass me."

With his left hand Alex held the sword aloft. It glistened like an immense gemstone against the velvet night sky. With his right hand he raised the gun and shot the creature. Smugly, he stepped over its carcass and into the boat. Pulling on the oars he made his way to the castle gates.

Alex had a pretty good idea of what he'd find. Mazes full of ogres, magical rings and keys protected by terrifying trolls, the odd bottle of restorative wine — that sort of thing. He was right.

He was in the castle for about a fortnight, locked in mortal combat with the forces of darkness. By sword, by arrow, and when all else failed, by the judicious use of firearms, he laid them all to waste. Emerging victorious into the light of day he staggered, pockets full of jewels, keys, rings and anything else that had looked important.

Eric's voice greeted him. "Well done, you've achieved the highest ever score in this section. Mind you no-one else has ever found that gun; didn't know it existed myself! We must have had a deviant programmer on top of all the incompetent ones! Lay down your arms and prepare for greater glory."

Alex's regard for software authors had risen since he'd loaded this game. Modestly, he threw away his weapons, except for the pistol — that was far too precious.

The forested landscape evaporated leaving only a crimson glow. This was better than pink cloudscape — but, unfortunately, short lived. The glow dimmed and then it too was gone.

Alex never really got the hang of the next game. It was something to do with discriminating between treasure and trivia — not one of Alex's strong points.

Alex sighed, set about his task, and failed miserably.

One of the penalties for miserable failure appeared to involve losing things. Piece by piece, his treasure disappeared, even that which he'd brought out of the sinister castle. Soon Alex found himself in the position of having only one ring and his gun left.

"I want out of this game," he muttered.

A voice inside his head grated: "Hi there! You really want to quit? You'll lose points."

"I want to quit."

"Okay, just think of a line."

"Sorry. I meant queue — we had an American programmer, you know, refused to compromise on language."

"I see. Any queue in particular?"

"Yes. A bus queue, a long one getting shorter, when it's your turn to get on the

bus you'll automatically leave the game."

It worked. It was also irritating. Just the sort of cheap gimmick that fuelled Alex's resurrected cynicism. Sitting on a double decker London transport bus amongst a bunch of imaginary people, with nothing to look at except those sickly pink clouds.

Alex resorted to expletives.

The series of games got worse. Alex longed for release. He sat in the now familiar pink clouds as Eric enthused about the next game.

"I'm not doing it," said Alex.

"It's the last one!"

Alex was suddenly interested. "Really?"

"Really."

"Let's go."

If this was the last game, it certainly wasn't a memorable one. Groping around a dark, muddy tunnel Alex bumped into a toad. Of course, it wasn't an ordinary toad, it was a magical toad. An ex-wizard with a penchant for riddles. Sitting, bored in the dark Alex fingered his gun. Only one bullet left! He'd had to use most of them up escaping from a maze full of psychopathic barbers in a game called 'Snip-Snip'. He wondered whether one bullet would be enough for an enchanted toad. The shot echoed around the tunnel, the riddles ceased.

Back in the clouds, an ecstatic Alex contemplated imminent release. Eric gravely intoned: "Congratulations, you have completed level one of this game. You have collected one magic ring and scored three thousand points. Think any pleasant thought to proceed to the next level which is approximately 15 per cent more difficult."

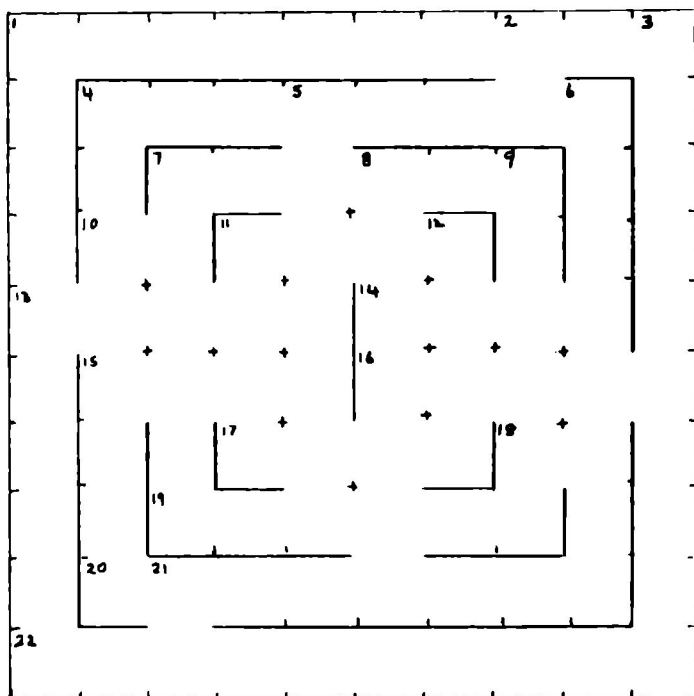
The words 'pleasant-thought-next-level-more-difficult' reverberated sickeningly around Alex's mind. Adrenalin surged and subsided as he defiantly refused to think of a pleasant thought.

Alone, surrounded by pinkness, Alex brooded, prepared to exude malevolence — for ever if necessary. ●



# WORD GRID 12 by John Light

Answers on page 76



## ACROSS

- 1 Amis's change. (10)
- 4 Thomas and Wilhelm wrote this. (3,5)
- 7 Exoneration from this author. (6)
- 10 Iluvatar's "Let it be." (2)
- 11 Came with a gold watch and everything. (4)
- 13 Barbarella director. (5)
- 14 Alias "The Lost Millennium." (4)
- 15 Frayne's was a very private one. (4)
- 16 Used by the Vogon captain to torture Ford and Arthur. (5)
- 17 Games player. (4)
- 18 Gordon's kind of Man Friday. (2)
- 19 Qua and hyper for example. (6)
- 20 Elendil was the first of Arnor. (4,4)
- 22 A rare stunt at the end of the Universe! (10)

## DOWN

- 1 From Ultruria perhaps. (1,9)
- 2 Wells: The First Men — the Moon. (2)
- 3 Nocturnal displacement for King's collection (5,5)
- 4 Borges' hath peel. (3,5)
- 5 Barth's race him. (7)
- 6 Holdstock: — The Blind. (3,5)
- 7 Sub-ether ones for instant communication. (6)
- 8 ET from the Mrs' pocket. (2,5)
- 9 Grant's were of the moon. (6)
- 11 Dickinson's present. (4)
- 12 Of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz. (4)
- 21 "Placet — a crazy place. (2)

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**Grass** by Sheri S Tepper  
Published by Corgi. Paperback.  
533 pages. £4.99 ISBN: 0-552-3540-2

WRITTEN BY A PUTATIVE FANTASY WRITER, this SF novel comes heavily touted by the publisher. It has been nominated for a Hugo and, at the time I write, this Corgi edition has already reached number seven in the SF bestseller list.

Chapter One begins with a description of the idyllic, grassy prairies of the planet Grass. The more you know about prose, the more you can appreciate the authoress's opening. You finish the first chapter and say: "Ah! A SF writer who can write." But half way through Chapter Two you amend the statement to: "An SF writer who can write descriptive prose." The dialogue seems stilted, and the narrative plods like a picador in a quagmire. But in the third chapter, you begin to notice a 'feeling' – an ambience of menace. It is then you realise what Ms. Tepper has done: she has eschewed the usual pacey 'thriller' method of writing SF, and opted for the slower 'romance' method.

Information is fed to the reader like icing through the nozzle of a forcing bag. The wonderful world of Chapter One is gradually ... gradually ... turning hostile.

We are many centuries into the future. Humanity, who has colonised many deep-space planets, is dominated by a neo-Mormon theocracy. A gangrenous plague, whose existence is denied by the theocracy, threatens to wipe out humanity. There is no cure, but the planet Grass seems immune. The central character's husband, Rigo, is sent to Grass under diplomatic cover to find a cure for the plague. The central character, Marjorie Westriding Yrarier, goes too; along with her son and daughter; two – yes, two – chaplains; and a stableload of horses. They find Grass populated by a feudal society of Earth colonists' descendants, with an aristocracy preoccupied with foxhunting.

The hunt epitomises Ms. Tepper's forcing bag technique. At first, you think that, apart from the absence of placard-waving hunt saboteurs, the hunt is just like the Quorn, right down to the red riding jackets and the stirrup cup. But as more icing is piped to the reader, that feeling of menace comes with it: the hounds are not canine, and the fox is not vulpine. The mounts are not horses but "hippae", grotesque, with razorlike spines. We find it is the hippae, not the riders, who are the hunt masters. Girls vanish during the hunt, only

to reappear later in the planet's chief town, their bodies stripped of clothing, their minds stripped of personality. Later still, the reader is told about the life and food cycles of the Grassian fauna: there are good reasons why the hippae should hunt ... and there are good reasons why they shouldn't. There are added subplots involving monks, artisans, Marjorie's crumbling marriage, and the ruined city of an extinct intelligent race.

The main plot comes to a head when Marjorie's daughter rides in the hunt and vanishes. Marjorie, without Rigo's knowledge, gathers a small band of followers, saddles up the horses and sets out on a perilous mission to find her daughter. On the way, they pick up Sylvan, a local aristocrat's son, who is in love with Marjorie. When Rigo finds out what has happened, he follows Marjorie, but finds himself having to fight a hippae-orchestrated mounted duel with Sylvan's father. Rigo goes, using a laser knife, and several hippae are killed. The plot then explodes as thousands of hippae go on the rampage.

As if the plot and the subplots aren't enough, there is a superabundance of subtext to make GRASS ideal for the school – if not the university – literature syllabus. Many subjects are treated: misogyny, authoritarianism, why we go to war and "people who are too good to be good". But the authoress's main thrust hits at the Catholic Church. Ms. Tepper's involvement with American family planning organisations over the years may have brought her close to the stake a few times, but her attack is not a bitter tirade: she strikes precisely at canonical deadwood like the concept of original sin.

GRASS is a rich, intellectual and effective novel. Take it on the train to work; make sure your boss sees it lying beside your sandwich box; place it on your coffee table when visitors come: GRASS will be the book to be seen with in 1991/92. I further predict a clamour for a Grassian trilogy.

Definitely recommended reading. ● **Gerry Connelly**

**Eight Skilled Gentleman** by Barry Hughart  
Corgi Books. Paperback.

256 pages, £3.99. ISBN 0-552-13401-5

THIS NOVEL HAS ITS MOMENTS, one of its best being at the beginning when a vampire ghoul interrupts a beheading execution. The scene is both cruel and funny, a difficult

combination which Hughart brings off brilliantly.

The book is the third in a series and, having not read the previous two, I was wondering whether anybody picking it up as a single read (which, on first appearances, it seems to be) would lose out. I, for one, certainly understood the plot (and I'm not usually very good with complex plots), but I did question whether its apparent diffuseness might be obviated by the background of its antecedents. Fundamentally, I suspect it is self-sufficient; take this as an example:

"I've described Wong's in previous memoirs and it doesn't play a significant role here, so I'll simply say..."

The style is well crafted; a fact that cannot be maintained about many new books in the fantasy genre. The plot draws on several influences most of which have had a positive effect on me during my long reading career: the outlandish humour of Jack Vance; the rascally heroes of Fritz Leiber; the orientalism of Ernest Bramah; the heroic goriness of Robert E. Howard; the gem-sculptures and sorceries of Clark Ashton Smith etc., etc.

The story unfolds as a picaresque quest with a quartet of genuinely believable characters, but with several seemingly irrelevant offshoots: puppet shows, wet dreams, literary jokes, horrendous creatures, oriental philosophies, religions ... The two main male characters are built up nicely (reminiscent but not derivative of Fafrid and the Gray Mouser). The beautiful young lady adds spice. The protagonists' journey takes them into bandit country and realms of early magic and, as well as being hootingly funny and rumbustious, there are many touching moments and scenes of spiritual beauty. The most lasting image for me was an elegant crane flying up against the full moon ...

The characters develop, the love interest grows, the plot sprawls and, meantime, the reader enjoys himself. The ending is genuinely moving and surprising – well worth the effort in arriving there. As well as being an example of high fantasy with all the trappings one expects, the book also has an appealing intellectual edge which reminds me of John Barth, Thomas Pynchon and Anthony Burgess. The syntax often echoes that of Lawrence Durrell and Anita Brookner without, of course, the story being anything like theirs otherwise. I hesitate to over-emphasise this element, in case it puts some off, but the occasional poems and verbal trickery are on the whole masterly.

Hughart is billed in the adverts as a fantasy cult hero. From my experience, the American Swords & Sorcery market is over-laden with mostly rubbish. Every catalogue bulges with Tolkien derivatives, a never-ending story of loose-limbed lovelies borne upon priapic dragons, brawny Conans defeating nasty monsters, demons, unicorns and so forth. Without having delved too deeply into such a morass in recent years, I genuinely believe that Hughart IS something special, but perhaps not quite special enough to attract me back to that genre.

Like the cage which is one of the best items in the story, it may have been wondrously provoking, but what counts more is its contents; and such the reader must judge for him – and herself. ●

D.F. Lewis

## **Soldier of the Mist and Soldier of Arete by Gene Wolfe**

Orbit/Futura. £2.95. 335 pages. ISBN 0-7088-8225-0

New English Library. £12.95. 354 pages. ISBN 0-450-51334-3

GENE WOLFE CAME TO SERIOUS WRITING rather late in life, from a background in engineering, but as a young man he had the confidence and the understanding to correspond with J.R.R. Tolkien about his own speciality of linguistics. He also has the peculiar talent, deployed most spectacularly in *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, of being able to represent convincingly the thoughts and emotions of beings (humans and otherwise) whose *Weltanschauung* is radically different from the conventional, but at the same time proper to themselves. There are no sixties-style drug-induced revelations or confusions of the profound and the pathological here. Finally, he has the necessary talent of a great story-teller, both in his original plotlines and in the retellings of well-known tales with which he embellishes his books and illustrates his characters. This enabled him to embed artistically satisfying re-workings of Theseus and the Minotaur, The Nun's Priest's Tale, and the Parable of the Wicked Tenants within the fabric of *The Book of the New Sun*. All the elements of this formidable combination are present in *Soldier of the Mist* and its current 'sequel' – in fact, volume two of the novel, and is so often the case.

Both books are excellent value, though Orbit has had to sacrifice the quality of the paper to keep the price down. There's a faint hint of 'fur coat and no knickers' round *Arete* as well; good quality print and paper, fair binding, but no map, no contents page, and no fresh pages for the chapters, which Orbit could manage. NEL would have done better not to skimp, and charge an extra 5p if necessary.

The central character, Latro, is a Roman mercenary of early Republican times, caught up in the final attempt of the Persian Empire under Xerxes to establish hegemony over the Greek states – the period of Salamis, Marathon and Thermopylae. He takes a head-wound in an assault on a temple of Demeter, which leaves him not only with very little of his memory, but unable to retain more beyond those of the current day. Consequently, each day he is effectively reborn out of the 'mist' of the tide, and must recreate his relationship with the friends, principally a black man and a little girl who regards herself as his slave, who attach themselves to him. Others who pass through his life include a sinister necromancer, the madam of an Athenian bawdy house, a troop of Amazons and the poets Pindar and Simonides.

His motivation is simple; he needs to recover his memories, if he can, to find his old friends, if they still exist, and his home, if he can discover where it lies. None of these can be achieved without the help of Demeter, the goddess whose temple he has violated, and to whom he must therefore make atonement. Here we have the ingredients of a classic quest.

His only way of keeping track is to write down his experiences at the end of each day, to read in the morning if he has time. He doesn't always have time to do either, let alone both, and of course the account keeps getting longer.

The two scrolls on which he does this constitute the books.

This sounds like a clumsy and unconvincing plot-mechanism. In most hands it would fail, but Wolfe is not able to control it, he raises the ante by having Latro pursued by a Lamia, and making him a factor in a game being played among the classical gods. He encounters some of them, as well as sundry ghosts, and he records their warnings and promises, but these gods are very unlike the stock figures of eighteenth-century classical allegory. Their values are inhuman, which makes their motivation obscure, though always logical within its own constraints; moreover, their personalities are fluid, for each has many aspects. Dionysus may manifest himself today as patron of wine and music, tomorrow as lord of madness. According to phase, the Moon may appear as Cynthia or Hecate. But whichever dominates, Wolfe brings a rare quality of conviction; his world is not a mere backdrop for psychological allegory, but one full of its own very earthy (and bloody) conflict.

The structure is necessarily simple as far as Latro is concerned, but much of the pleasure of the book derives from Latro's differing observations of the same character, which we can compare with previous ones but as a rule he can not. This is particularly well handled in the case of Io the slave girl, who is obviously in love with him and striving to live long enough and grow big enough to make him her own. Meanwhile, she must take an unselfish view of the various encounters he enjoys on the way.

And how does she get him in the end? The question is left open. Latro's last act is, by a combination of cunning and bravado, to steal a ship which may, perhaps, carry him to his native land. But he is separated not only from Io, who remains in the care of Pindar, but from his scrolls, in which Pindar makes the final entry. So there's ample scope for another sequel, perhaps written from another viewpoints – Mr Wolfe, please take the hint!

There are a few faults I hope he may avoid next time. Though the combination of realism and fantasy is difficult to control, Wolfe falters only in the far simpler area of linguistics; *kybernetes* should have been translatable as 'steersman', even to an unseamanlike Roman (the Latin word is *gubernator*, and you don't need to be a philologist to see the similarity), and no Greek woman of that time, however strong-minded, would describe herself as a citizen – she wasn't. On the other hand, to translate Eleusis as 'Advent', Piraeus as 'Tieup' and so forth is simply irritating. You either knew already, and gain nothing, or had to look it up, which breaks the thread. He should also not have attempted to translate verses from the Greek Anthology into English rhyme. Few achieve the mediocre, and some would disgrace a Christmas cracker. But such minor defects aside, this double novel constitutes a genuine and successful experiment. The approach is very different, but the results are fit to stand beside the more conventional achievements of Mary Renault, Alfred Duggan and Tom Holt. ●

C.N. Gilmore

**Lion of Macedon** by David Gemmell  
Century Legend £6.99. 420 pages. Paperback.  
ISBN 0-7126-3482-7

I SUPPOSE ALMOST EVERYONE, at some time or other, toys with the idea that his life is being guided or manipulated from behind the scenes by super-natural powers of playful or malevolent intent. The mood passes, and we do not, on this occasion, fall into solipsism or paranoia – or at least, not all the way; to offer prayers to St. Jude, or to allow Russell Grant's productions to set the tone of the day, does not indicate serious insanity.

Even so ... what if it were true? David Gemmell's latest book concerns the life of Parmenion, who later became one of the generals of Alexander the Great. It is his misfortune that from his earliest years he is singled out for high destiny by the witch Tanis. She requires him to develop an iron resolve, and to this end ensures that his childhood and adolescence are almost lethally character-building. To the routine horrors of life as a Macedonian halfbreed in the Spartan barracks she adds a hate-charm, which only people of the highest integrity are able to surmount. Being constantly derided, set-upon and cheated by all the rest, Parmenion comes to an early recognition of who his (few) friends are, and a toughness deriving from a constant battle against self-pity.

Which of us, however pampered, cannot see himself in Parmenion? Gemmell's writing is fluent and atmospheric – he compels sympathy, as much in the scenes where Parmenion is absent but being talked about or plotted against, as in those written from his own viewpoint. Better still, Gemmell is not blind to the unattractive side of the character that he develops. Parmenion becomes devious; he nurses grudges; when he gets the better of his enemies he gloats; this being noticed, he makes more enemies.

His mother dies of cancer, his only friend recoils against his increasing hardness; his search for love is no less blighted than any of his other emotional experiences. By the age of twenty Parmenion is sustained entirely by suppressed rage, yet the passion of Gemmell's writing saves the book from any tinge of gloom. Having become what he must, Parmenion makes the most of himself, and the conflict for which he has been created draws near.

It is a magical but extremely symbolic conflict conducted between forces of Harmony and Chaos, spanning the physical world, the astral plane and the realm of the dead. The prize is to control, from the moment of conception, the incarnation of Alexander himself: will he be a human hero, or an avatar of the demon *Kadmos*? The development is reminiscent of Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* in places, though the writing is incomparably better. For the dangers of this sort of writing are notorious – it could so easily degenerate into a self-indulgent morass, as wonder piles on wonder under the law of diminishing returns, but Gemmell manages to avoid the potentous on one hand and the *faux naïf* on the other. He gives recognisable hopes and fears to all the protagonists, however supernatural. They use every sort of emotional, psychic or physical weapon, with total

commitment and total ruthlessness, so that the story takes on a subtext on the perennial topic of ends and means. On the mundane level, Parmenion is no less single-minded. Here he prepares to humiliate a political adversary with a test of self-inflicted torture.

The leather binding on the grip of Grigory's blade twisted and cracked, then smouldered, black smoke rising from it. Slowly it peeled away. Parmenion's sword had a metal grip, bound with fine gold wire over snakeskin. The skin burst into flame, the wire falling loose.

'When you are ready,' said Parmenion, 'take your sword and begin.'

Grigory licked his lips and stared at the smouldering swords.

'You first,' he hissed.

'Perhaps we should do it together. Are you ready?'

This is not a book for the weak of stomach, or for those who reject battle, murder and sudden death as having nothing to do with real life.

Whether by accident or design, Gemmell has produced a book that neatly fills the gap between Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine* and *Fire from Heaven*, and in much the same spirit, though the treatment could hardly be more different. There are absolutely no longueurs, and hardly a redundant sentence. The only false note sounds when Aristotle appears, not as the philosopher who later became Alexander's tutor, but as a magus. Gemmell has some explaining to do, and I trust he will in the sequel. By the end of the book, Parmenion is still a little past forty, and he was seventy when he died. The sequel, of course, will bring Gemmell's vision of Alexander into direct comparison with Renault's. I think he's big enough to give her a run for her money, and praise doesn't come a lot higher than that.

C.N. Gilmore

**Dragon Wing** by Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman  
Bantam Books. Paperback.  
432 pages, £4.99. ISBN 0-553-40265X.

AN EXTRAORDINARY collaborative fantasy novel, Tracy Hickman being a fellow, by the way. It is very difficult to summarise, because the 400-odd pages contain an astonishing wealth of ideas.

It is high drama and high comedy by turns, the mild-mannered 'revolutionary' leader of the Dwarves' Trade Union, idealistic, absent-minded, absurdly kind-hearted, dreamy but disarmingly honest, in stark contrast with the well-named 'Sinistrad', the evil warlock, who is so plain awful that he puts my 'baddie', Pendlebury K. Wackett, right in the shade! Sinistrad is the kind of villain who ENJOYS being evil. He has the cold, calculating intelligence ascribed by the Persian Magi to 'Ahriman', the very principle of evil incarnate. Love does not enter into his life at any point; like Soames in *The Forsyte Saga*, he claims his 'conjugal rights' from the hapless Iridal and then places his eerie offspring in the place of a human king's son. (Sinistrad is 'human' only in the strictly zoological

sense!) So the unfortunate King Stephen has a 'changeling' of strange charm on his hands. Stephen's own son is whisked away to the High Realm, where the thin air is fatal to him.

The Weiss and Hickman world seems to be an alternate Earth from such names as Stephen, Ann and Hugh. Even a Sartan (one of a race of brilliant sorcerers of ancient times) is called 'Alfred'. (In Anglo-Saxon, 'Aelf-red' means 'Elf-Counsel'.) The lands of this strange world orbit magically in the sky, the High Realm being beyond the Firmament, which is a zone of aerial icebergs. The islands and continents are kept aloft by coralite.

The humans ride dragons, the elves use magic airships. The 'hero', of sorts, of the story is High the Hand, an assassin, who normally just kills beddies but is embittered and cynical enough to agree to murder the changeling. The boy has an eerie beauty and magical charm and High is unable to fulfill the contract. The boy's servant, Alfred, poses as a buffoon and a clumsy clod-hopper, but is in reality one of the Sartan, the wizard-race who 'sundered the realms', so that the inhabitants of each had only their local magic and were ignorant of other varieties. For some reason I could not make out, the race of Patryns were imprisoned in the Labyrinth in the Low Realm, and forgotten about by their Sartan jailors.

The dwarves, or 'Gegs' are slaves to the magico-scientific Kicksy-Winzeys, a sprawling machine-complex which manufacturers water as an after-thought, but serves other purposes which the Gegs do not understand. There is a 'Struction Manef' but this is holy writ to the Gegs and they follow its 'teachings' blindly. Once 'Mangers' deigned to walk the Geg lands but none has put in an appearance for centuries. The 'religion' includes the belief that, if the Gegs prove worthy, they will be translated to the Paradise of the Welves, from whence came the Mangers in times long past. The corrupt English-sounding words suggest to me that this strange magical world may lie in our distant future, which would explain why the colloquialism 'coppers' is applied to Geg Policemen. The Gegs have names which reflect their religious technology, the Trade Union leader being called 'Limbeck Boltightner'. He is on a collision course with the High Forman - a corruption of 'Foreman', I take it - and hopes for a suitable martyrdom. When the Coppers arrest him, he defies them to cast him into their 'worst rat-infested dungeon', whereupon an indignant Copper says they have nice clean cells, and not a rat to be seen, thanks to the patrolling Police Cat.

One of the Patryns finds his way out of the Labyrinth at about the same time as the rebellious Limbeck is 'executed': the soft-hearted Gegs eject their malcontents in a sort of glider to the island below theirs. There is much controversy as to whether the Patryn whom Limbeck takes back with him is a god or not. Some feel that the fact that Limbeck returns at all proves the gods found him Not Guilty. More god-like is Prince Bane, the changeling, who arrives in the Geg country and charms everybody magically. He is in telepathic contact with his father, Sinistrad.

High the Hand, Haplo the Patryn, Limbeck, Prince Bane, and Alfred, along with the captain and crew of an elven

dragonship, are lured to the High Realm, a domain of illusion, where Sinistrad is gaining ever-increasing power. In the Geg unrest he sees a chance to extend that power further. Haplo the Patryn is also in telepathic communication with a mysterious master and Haplo's psychic dog telepaths the conversations of everyone.

It would take many pages to do justice to this intricate and compelling saga, which has mock-learned footnotes and an article on the theory and practise of primeval magic, even a song of sorcerous import with music, and it might in the end be a disservice to the reader, who I would urge to read DRAGON WING for himself. It is a rival to the Tolkien works and is not only thrilling, and sometimes chilling, but gloriously funny in sections. In the juxtaposition of the humorous, the tragic, the poignant, the poetic, the sad and savage, DRAGON WING is very true to real life. Sermons could be written on it; there is a wonderful basic philosophy running through it. In short, I recommend it without reservation.

**Bruce P. Baker**

### **Planet of the Apes by Pierre Boulle**

Mandarin paperback.

223 pages. ISBN 0-7493-0600-9

AS IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1964, it is quite a remarkable effort, with a good easy style, but with a few points that date it. A space-suit is called a 'diving suit' and all the planets of the Solar System are presumed to be inhabited, but this could be read as 'colonised'. As the book opens, we find wealthy but adventurous Phyllis and Jinn disporting themselves in their space-yacht with its solar sails, neatly and convincingly described and entirely possible. (A solar-powered Mars-voyager is on the drawing-board, and there is some hope that she will set sail in 1992.)

Phyllis and Jim find a message in a bottle, drifting about in space, and from this they learn about the Planet of the Apes, where the humans are without speech or reason and are naked, and the dominant species is the apes, who behave like humans on Earth and wear clothes.

The bottle-manuscript was penned by astronaut Ulysse Merou in the year 2500 or thereabouts, and begins with an interesting account of the near-light-speed spacaship which travels to Betelgeuse. An Earth-like planet orbits about the giant star. The time-dilation effect of light-speed travel means the voyage takes only a few hours of ship-time, but two years are taken with acceleration and deceleration. As the ship's designer, Professor Antelle says, it would take just as long to go to Proxima Centauri, and he thinks Betelgeuse is more interesting. Of course, centuries pass on Earth, which Antelle dismisses as a minor inconvenience. The style of the book reminds me of Jules Verne, an earlier science-fictionist.

There is an excellent twist to the story at the end which I will not reveal, not wishing to spoil the reader's enjoyment.

I called the narrator of the bottle-story an 'astronaut' but he is not strictly that, being a journalist whom Antelle takes along because he can play chess! Ulysse thinks his account will be all the better received because of its antiquity. Professor Antelle is a delightful eccentric French savant of

the 'Jules Verne' variety.

PLANET OF THE APES inspired a film starring Charlton Heston as an astronaut and Roddy McDowell as one of the intelligent apes.

Professor Antelle and his two companions meet a beautiful but dumb (almost literally) female and try to win her over. She reacts like a frightened animal, but also with a certain curiosity. They play games with her in a lake at the foot of a waterfall. Being naked like her, they are 'acceptable'. She brings more of her kind, as nude as she. When the explorers dress, their attitude turns to hostility. They rip the clothes off the explorers but seem mollified immediately this is done, but then they turn on the launch, or shuttlecraft, and wreck that. Evidently they hate all signs of civilisation.

The dominant apes go hunting for the humans, killing some and capturing others. Gorillas are in charge, with chimpanzees as beaters and as gun-loaders. One of the Earthmen is killed, whilst Ulysse is captured and put into a cage along with some of the best-looking humanoid natives. The hunting party stop at an inn for photographs of the kills and for the lordly gorillas to regale their females with tales of the hunt.

Some of the captives are taken to what seems to be a hospital and are put through tests like laboratory animals. Ulysse realises that his main hope of freedom is to impress the ape scientists with his superior intelligence. A female ape scientist, Zira IS impressed but her superior, an orang outang, is not. The idea of an intelligent human is a contradiction in terms, he declares.

It is impossible to do full justice to the humour and sensitivity of Pierre Boulle in about about 600 words: I hope I have whetted the readers' appetite.

Various internal features, old-fashioned terms, suggest to me that PLANET OF THE APES was written around 1956, or even earlier. Professor Antelle may have been based on a French savant called 'Ananof' who hoped to harness cosmic rays for interplanetary flight.

The narrative is stylish and very French. Vernian. Excellent.

**Bruce P. Baker**

### **Voyagers 111: Star Brothers by Ben Bova**

Published by Mandarin, Paperback.

341 pages. £3.99. ISBN 0-7493-0532-0

"VOYAGERS III" is, as you will have guessed, the third volume of the Voyagers trilogy. I had not read the earlier volumes, but in this case that does not matter. "Voyagers III" is a self-contained novel in which relevant information from the first two books is gradually and neatly woven into the plot.

The time is the early 21st century. Fifteen years ago an astronaut, Keither Stoner, was revived after eighteen years in cryonic suspension, originally on board an alien starship which had penetrated the solar system. The revived Stoner proved to have apparently superhuman powers, which only Stoner himself and a handful of trusted colleagues know to



be due to a very advanced form of nanotechnology added to his body while on the alien vessel. Along with these powers, Stoner has obtained the knowledge of the starship's builders, including details of how the introduction of nanotechnology has in the past led to the destruction of countless races. Knowing that Earth is close to the same scientific breakthrough, Stoner is devoting his energies to gradually changing the world's political and economic organisation in an effort to prevent disaster.

His main collaborator is his wife, Jo Camerata, a beautiful Italian who is president of Vanguard Industries, one of the multinational corporations who are the real powers in the world. She is also the creator of the International Investment Agency, one of Stoner's most important tools.

Ms Camerata's chief rival is Li-Po Hsen, head of Pacific Commerce, a megalomaniac whose ambitions are to take over Vanguard, thus coming very close to ruling the world, and to acquire Stoner's powers for himself. With the dual aim of destroying Jo Camerata's power and discovering Stoner's secret, Hsen hatches a plot which places Stoner, his wife and their children in great danger. Hsen's plot, and the efforts of both Stoner and his wife to stop it, naturally involve plenty of industrial espionage and an assortment of trusted colleagues and double agents.

Meanwhile, the survival of the human race itself is being put in doubt as a deadly plague known simply as 'The Horror' inexorably sweeps the globe. The truth about this plague, revealed only gradually, is an integral part of the novel's climax and leaves Stoner facing the possible destruction of all he has tried to achieve.

There are two subplots. One, about the South American drug pedlar Paulino Alvarado, seems to have no connection with the main plot until Paulino arrives at Vanguard's secret base on the Moon, where the novel's climax will take place. The second, about Yendelele Obiri and her experiment in mental communication with a gorilla, has no connection with the rest of the book and could really have been omitted.

"Voyagers III" is a fast-moving novel, switching constantly from one plot thread to another and from one location to another, on all the continents of Earth and in time on the Moon. Similarly there are roles for a host of minor characters, including a small but significant part for the President of Hungary. Sometimes Bova drops apparent hints of events to come; some of these are genuine and some are red herrings, which is no bad thing in retaining reader interest. In effect, the novel has the feel of an action thriller.

Ben Bova does suffer from an occasional tendency to moralise, stating ideas where demonstration might work better, and it is something of a disappointment that this proves to be the only point of the previously mentioned subplot about the African woman and the gorilla. On the whole, though, "Voyagers III" is a pleasing science fiction adventure which should go down well with traditionally-minded readers. It also leaves the door open for a possible "Voyagers IV", though this would require a judgement of Stoner's chance of success or failure which is perhaps best left to the reader. ●

Stephen J Wood

**The Rowan by Anne McCaffrey**  
Published by Bantam Press, Paperback  
335 pages. £7.99. ISBN 0-593-02339-0

THE ROWAN is a (vastly) expanded version of McCaffrey's 1959 short story *Lady In The Tower*, her first professional appearance in print. It starts with the heroine, Rowan, as a three year old girl being discovered after an accident which wipes out the rest of the small mining community where she lived on Altair. Rowan is a telepathic Talent, and as such immensely valuable to the small colony world. In this universe it is the topnotch, and extremely rare Talents, The Primes, who teleport starships, although they themselves apparently suffer from acute agoraphobia and are unable to teleport themselves over any distance.

Part one of the book (there are no individual chapters) follows the orphaned Rowan's childhood from her rescue through her training and emergence as a Prime Talent. She's given a foster family who love her, and as a counterpoint, her tutor Siglen, Altair's Prime. All nicely handled by McCaffrey to produce a slightly awkward and somewhat lonely girl. Rowan is isolated emotionally from other people by both her Talent and circumstances. Her small circle of friends are nearly all limited to fellow professionals working for the Federal Telepath & Teleport organisation. Even the man, Turian, who eventually becomes her lover, is a loner. A sailboard captain who won't give up his ship for her, a situation she is quite content with.

Part two deals with Rowan's life after she is appointed as Callisto's Prime. It is here she comes into contact with Jeff Raven, a raw Talent from the colony on Daneb, who calls on her to help when the planet comes under attack from aliens. With her help, and that of the other Primes, he manages to defeat the invasion force.

The first few pages of this section are a virtual reprint of *Lady In The Tower*. And in comparing it to the original I noticed that almost the only alteration McCaffrey has made here is to put a stop to her cast's earlier suicide-through-chain-smoking mania. It does make me wonder how many other authors are suffering withdrawal symptoms from the removal of that particular trusty standby writing device in our health-conscious nineties, especially as a society that's mastered FTL starflight really ought to be able to produce cancer-free ciggies.

Back in the plot – Rowan's anxieties over the injuries Jeff Raven sustained from the residue of the alien attack enable her to overcome her phobia, and teleport herself out to Daneb in time to heal him.

Part three has Rowan on Daneb, and for the first time in her life leading an almost ordinary existence. She lives with Jeff's family in a cramped house; has to make do with dodgy equipment when previously all she did was clap her hands to receive the best of everything; she even holds and feeds an infant for the first time in her life. It's the immersion into these everyday experiences which prove the making of her, or rather completing her long-stunted emotional growth.

McCaffrey seems to be making the point here that in order to be human you cannot cut yourself off from other humans. The tower which Rowan lives in and operates from at

Callisto is metaphorical as well as physical.

In part four we have Rowan and Jeff settling into married life, and the first ever child born to a pair of Primes. The conception brings a few qualms for Rowan to muse over, she doesn't welcome the idea she's breeding Prime babies for F T & T. An issue I felt was never quite satisfactorily resolved in the book.

It all progresses smoothly to the return of the aliens, in much larger numbers this time, whereupon Rowan and Jeff have to lead the Primes once again in the final showdown.

The book spans a period of some twenty years, so the narrative tends towards the episodic. We dip in and out of Rowan's life to sample all the crucial events as they happen; fortunately McCaffrey's skill and prose allows it to slip down easily. Although I did feel some disconcerting lapses in continuity. At one point we jump ten years, from Rowan aged eighteen to Rowan aged twenty-eight, yet with little alteration in personality. Yet, I would've said that the early twenties is when a person's behavioural traits change the most.

These jumps also tend to leave the more minor characters as mere cyphers; one tries to latch onto her to advance himself, another tries to bully her, another is weak and needs comforting. It's very much learning about people by numbers. Even Jeff Raven is an archetypal strong male figure. And her boss at F T & T, Reidinger, spends a good ninety per cent of the book shouting angrily, rather overstating the case of a gruff, but secretly loving, old warhorse.

Flaws aside, and the nineteen-fifties origin does show, it's an easy read; interesting in parts, a little too cute and homely in others. I just wish it was more substantial. Anne McCaffrey at her best, is a lot better than this. ● P.F. Hamilton

### **As On A Darkling Plain by Ben Bova**

Published by Mandarin, Paperback.

184 pages. £3.99. ISBN 0-7493-0556-8

ALTHOUGH I WAS GIVEN a 1990 edition to review, Ben Bova holds the copyright from 1975 and two parts of the novel (The Jupiter Mission and The Sirius Mission) appeared in magazines as early as 1970.

Mandarin seems to have released this edition solely as a way of making money; I see little chance of it improving Ben's reputation as a writer. The price per page is a bit steep, even by today's standards, but it may have been worth it if the writing was any good. A little of the writing is very good but the plot does not do it justice. As On A Darkling Plain is a group of short stories loosely tied together to make something longer ... but the knots are so loose the plot is in danger of falling apart as you read.

The book is mostly about Doctor Sidney Lee and his obsession with the mysterious machinery that some intelligence has left on Titan. Nobody can guess what it is for, several generations have died trying to discover how it works. Mankind has united in fear.

You see, there is a suggestion that (somewhat flimsy) archaeological evidence to the contrary, mankind had a flourishing interplanetary civilisation about fifty thousand

years ago. Then, very suddenly, it disappeared and left very little evidence behind. One theory is that mankind was involved in a war against a race known as the Others and lost so badly they were quite literally thrown back into the Stone Age. Hence the fear: what if the machinery was left by the Others and if so why did they leave it?

The story starts on Titan, then goes to Earth. Then it switches to Jupiter and the mission to see if the life under the cloud layers is intelligent. Then it goes on one of the four interstellar missions to explore the planetary systems of neighbouring stars for signs of the Others and finally goes back to Titan and the machinery again.

If this sounds like a lot of location changes to handle in 184 pages, you're right. This jumping all over the place does nothing but make a loosely structured plot seem even looser and more insubstantial.

Still, there is some good stuff in there. Here's an example of some of the best:

"I am the ship.

We're cruising okay now, just under the cloud deck. Wind velocity still brutal, gusty. Makes us buck and shudder like a glider in a thunderhead. My infra-red eyes see the ammonia clouds above us as cold and gray. Lots of turbulence.

Took a helluva beating getting through the clouds. Scientists must've been scared. So was I on that one jolt. It hurt."

That's how co-pilot Robert Donovan O'Banion opens the story The Jupiter Mission. He's describing what happened as the exploration vessel he is connected to (Bova uses the term "part-time cyborg" to describe how the crew UNPLUG and PLUG IN to the machinery.) plunged through the topmost of Jupiter's cloud layers.

And here's another:

"The Earth was the same, yet completely changed. Sidney Lee finally returned from Sirius, years after the other members of the first expedition. He came back to a world of twenty billion strangers. The cities felt bigger, more crowded, colder than he had remembered them. The university was hauntingly different: buildings where he remembered groves of trees, a gymnasium where the off-campus bar used to be, unfamiliar names and faces who spoke in words and expressions that seemed almost right but not really."

This may be a good place to start if you're new to Ben's work. It's an easy read and after finishing As On A Darkling Plain you can only go on to better things. But really it's only for Ben Bova completists. For anyone else there are other, better books you can spend your money on. ●

Simon Amos

### **Our Children's Children by Clifford D. Simak**

Published by Mandarin, Paperback.

186 pages. £3.99. ISBN 0-7493-0592-4

WITH A UNIQUE blend of rustic simplicity, human warmth and genuine compassion, Clifford D. Simak carved out his own special niche within science fiction. In a career that spanned nearly sixty years Simak produced over forty books and won every major award the field had to offer. Some of those books, such as "City", "Ring Around The Sun" and

"Way Station" are deservedly acknowledged as classics of their kind. To many Simak stood for human values and optimism in a genre increasingly devoid of either. His death deprived science fiction of one of its more reasonable voices. Mandarin are to be applauded for their efforts to keep his work in print, though it must be admitted that the very comprehensiveness of their list could undermine his reputation and, like most prolific writers, Simak produced plenty of duds along with the gems.

"Our Children's Children" was written in 1974, by which time Simak was past his best but still producing good work. The concept at the heart of this slim novel is one of his most staggering. Five hundred years in the future mankind faces extinction at the hands of a ferocious alien predator. To escape they utilise their technology to build time tunnels and transport their entire population back to the last quarter of the twentieth century. With the world reeling at the sudden influx of nearly two billion refugees the unthinkable happens: an alien breaks through to the present day and eludes the military. A biological killing machine, supremely adaptable and capable of preproducing parthenogenetically the monster represents the greatest threat mankind has ever faced.

This is a small book but it manages to cover a lot of ground, with Simak's seemingly effortless prose keeping you turning the pages at a rapid rate. It has something for everyone, from ferocious monsters to romantic human beings, from military action to the give and take of international diplomacy, from scientific and philosophical speculation to social commentary.

What distinguishes this book from so many other potboilers though is the Simak angle on human nature. The hero is Steve Wilson, White House press agent, and several other major characters are journalists, though you won't recognise them as such if your expectations have been shaped by the antics of the less creditable tabloids. Simak, once a journalist himself, sees the fourth estate as one of the bastions of freedom and that's how he tells it. It's par for the course. When the refugees first arrive, before the government step in, shelter and food is provided by ordinary American citizens taking them into their homes. Industry and trade unions rally round to help. Of course this is only part of the story. There are those – politicians, businessmen, evangelists – who try to profit from the emergency. Simak isn't naive about human nature. It's simply that, wherever possible, he likes to give our finer feelings the benefit of the doubt.

Reading Simak makes me think of that other journalist turned author, P. G. Wodehouse. Simak's books bear the same relationship to science fiction in general as the latter's do the the novel of social realism. They are not great literature and they are not strictly accurate about many things, but more often than not they are highly readable and great fun. That sums up *Our Children's Children* to a T, so if you've got £3.99 to spare and want a few hours of undemanding entertainment in a science fictional mode go out and buy the book. ●

Matthew Dickens

**Seventh Son** by Orson Scott Card  
Published by Legend, Paperback.  
316 pages. £3.50. ISBN 0-09-958930-3

NOW HERE'S A NOVELTY, the first volume of a fantasy trilogy and it doesn't have a cover blurb comparing the author to Tolkien (collectors please note). Someone in Legend's publicity department must have been asleep at the wheel, or maybe they decided that, in the absence of Dark Lords, cute dwarves, magical rings et al, such comparisons were inappropriate.

I liked the first book by Orson Scott Card that I came across and I've enjoyed every one that I've read since. He's stamped his mark on the science fiction genre and has a shelf full of awards to prove it. Now with "Volume 1 of The Tales of Alvin Maker" he seems determined to carve out a similar niche for himself in the field of fantasy, a career move foreshadowed by his earlier novel "Hart's Hope", a gutsy tale of revenge and high adventure.

Actually there's a case for claiming "Seventh Son" as science fiction. It's set in a world where history has taken an alternative track, one of the genre's favourite themes. The pivotal event isn't pinned down but clues litter the novel. A Lord Protector rules England at the start of the nineteenth century while a Stuart King rules over the Crown Colonies. In America it's the great age of the frontiersman. While some states have successfully broken away from the Crown Colonies large areas remain under the yoke of the English, Spanish, Dutch and French. There are independent and strong Indian nations, some of them Christianised and avidly picking up on the new technology that filters through from Europe. Ominous references are made to a gun factory producing native weapons. Science itself seems to have got short shift in this alternate world, fighting a desperate battle against superstition. You see, this is a world where magic works.

The Millers are a typical frontier family, packing everything they own into a covered wagon and striking out for parts unknown where they can start a new life without having to sacrifice their personal beliefs to the demands of civilisation. There's nothing typical about Alvin though, the youngest of the Miller breed. He is the seventh son of a seventh son, a rarity who in this world may be the possessor of great magic power, a Maker.

This is the story of Alvin, the strange events that attend his birth and the stranger events that punctuate his boyhood. It is about the possession of great power and the need to use it responsibly. It is, like that great classic of American literature "Huckleberry Finn", a tale about growing up.

Stated so baldly this all sounds rather cute, like an episode of "The Waltons" with special effects thrown in. Card knows how to tell a story though and can hold the reader's attention. His prose seems effortless, the mark of a real craftsman. His characters are larger than life and immensely likeable. Nor does he starve the reader of action. Alvin has enemies, among them a dangerous elemental capable of turning the boy's own father against him. Civilisation too catches up with the Miller family, and civilisation has no place for a magical seventh son of a seventh son. Alvin must

struggle not only to grow but to survive.

This is the first volume of a trilogy and, good as it is, there are hints in the text of much better things to come, resonances of a mythic and messianic nature. Alvin may well develop into a Christlike figure and given Card's Mormon beliefs it will be interesting to see how he handles this theme. I intend finding out.

Coming back to the cover blurb, the author they compare Card to is Stephen Donaldson. If, like me, you thought the Thomas Covenant books were derivative and badly written, then give this a try instead. ● **Matthew Dickens**

#### It by Stephen King

Published by New English Library, Paperback.  
1,116 pages. £5.99. ISBN 0-450-41143-5

STEPHEN KING is one of the world's most successful writers and deservedly so, as he always delivers the goods. Some books may be better than others, but without exception they are all entertaining and highly readable. King always keeps the reader in mind and that's the secret of his popularity.

Weighing in at over 1,100 pages, "It" is a novel that those in search of a few quick thrills might find daunting, yet its basic plot has all the beauty and simplicity of a fairytale.

Once upon a time a terrible monster dwelt deep in the sewers beneath the city of Derry, Maine, emerging every thirty years or so to feast upon the flesh and souls of young children. Able to take on any shape the monster could insinuate itself into the dreams of the town's children and lure them to their destruction. For centuries this reign of terror endured, only dimly suspected by the adult population of Derry, until seven brave children banded together to defeat the monster. Unfortunately they only drove it away and did not destroy it completely. Thirty years later the monster comes back to feed again. The children, now adults and successful figures in the world, must return to Derry to confront this ultimate evil.

That, more or less, is all there is to "It", but on this schemata King assembles one of the most compulsive page turners ever written, packing in enough excitement and invention to fill half a dozen normal books. 'Hardly a page is without its shocks and surprises' reads one of the cover blurbs and for once you can believe what they say. King plumbs the depths of his fertile imagination and then some, to throw a whole menagerie of monsters at his characters and the reader. From page one the tension never lets up. This book is a roller coaster ride culminating in a climax to tax the ingenuity and resources of half a dozen big Hollywood studio's sfx departments and leave the reader as emotionally exhausted as the characters must be physically.

King's greatest strengths as a writer are his ability to convincingly recreate small town America on the printed page and a gift for totally believable characterisation, both of which stand him in good stead here. The small city community of Derry is perfectly realised and given extra depth by a series of historical flashbacks that flesh out the central scenario. You can see the grim architecture and smell the rancid air along with King's characters. And what

characters they are, recapturing the spirit of childhood camaraderie and adventure that made his novella "The Body" so memorable. You live with these people as adults and children, you identify with their hopes and fears, you learn to care deeply about their concerns. You come to see them as flawed human beings yet capable of great nobility, trying to do the best that they can in the face of awesome odds.

Bill Denbrough, the leader of the seven, is, like King himself, a successful writer of horror stories. As a teenager Bill opted out of writing school because he simply wanted to tell stories while his teachers were only concerned with adopting attitudes that were politically and artistically correct. One suspects King of thumbing his nose at the literary establishment here. He's entitled. The differing character perspectives and shifts in time, with events that are years apart merging seamlessly in the narrative flow, that typify "It" would put many critically acclaimed writers to shame.

Stephen King has emphatically denied that he is a great artist, but he is reputed to be a modest man and this could just be a fiction like most everything else that he writes. Why don't you pick up "It" and judge for yourself? You won't be sorry, even if you normally don't like horror or shy away from so-called blockbusters. ● **Matthew Dickens**

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS

#### So You Want To Be A Wizard by Diane Duane

Published by Corgi. Paperback.  
238 pages. £2.99. ISBN 0-552-526452

THIS IS A SCIENCE FICTION BOOK, but you don't have to like science fiction to like this book.

In this story a girl called Nita finds a book about wizardry in the library. She takes it home to read. While reading in the forest one day, she meets Kit, another young wizard-to-be. They meet a white hole called Khairilikoblepharehulukimeilichephreidos'enagouni who they call Fred. They have to find The Bright Book to preserve the universe. On the way they meet wolf like creatures and men eating taxis.

A thoroughly good book, and I would recommend it to anyone. ●

**Deborah Jones**

# THE WEATHER ON THE PLANETS

Duncan Lunan

AFTER INITIAL DIFFICULTIES with the onboard computer, the Magellan spacecraft orbiting Venus is now returning excellent data. Being unable to observe the surface of Venus because of the clouds, both US and Soviet spacecraft have concentrated on mapping it by radar from orbit. The very successful Pioneer Venus Orbiter, which mapped almost all the surface between 1978 and 1980, established that Venus is mostly flat granitic plate, with huge volcanic plateaux building up where the thick crust is pierced by heat from below.

Pioneer—Venus was to have been followed by Venus Orbiting Imaging Radar, a very advanced design. Budgetary restrictions forced it to be cut back to the Venus Radar Mapper, named Magellan, and long delayed because of the loss of the Challenger. (How many times I've had to type that line in one context or another.) Throughout this period Pioneer—Venus has gamely remained operational, almost unnoticed by the world except for its valuable studies of Halley's Comet.

As it happens, nothing so drastic has happened that it's been crucial. But it might have done. One of the important aims of the planned VOIR was to search for dried up shorelines on Venus, to try to verify that Venus had reached its present superheated condition owing to a runaway greenhouse effect on a world much more like Earth. It's doubtful that Magellan has sufficient resolution to find shorelines, but then it was a long shot anyway, since other evidence suggests that the greenhouse effect on Venus was severe enough to melt the original crust altogether.

But in all the concern being expressed about the greenhouse effect on Earth, it should be noted that all scientists are not convinced. Others believe that the present global warming can be attributed to cyclical changes in the Sun, which appears to have undergone many minor but significant changes in the last few thousand years. Some observations of Uranus and Neptune suggest that the Sun varies much more than we suspect, because we're so close to it that the subtler effects are masked. And this is where it becomes important that we now have a continuous record of solar observation, not from here but from Venus, over a full solar cycle of eleven years.

When the compilation of that record began, we had the still more useful comparison of observations from Mars. The Viking Orbiters ran out of fuel not long afterwards, but Viking Lander 1 unexpectedly remained operational on the Martian surface until 1982, when unfortunately we lost it owing to a mistake in computer programming.

The spacecraft was running on short-term memory by then, and was facing another crisis, so the inexperienced operators can't be too strongly blamed — unlike the one who turned off the Soviet Phobus 1 on its way to resume observations at the red planet. The subsequent failure of Phobus 2 in Mars orbit was still more frustrating in consequence.

At that time, too, we had reports from earlier Pioneer probes, still operational in solar orbit since the 1960's. One by one, these too have fallen silent. We still have International Sun-Earth Explorer 3, renamed International Comet Explorer when it left its station between Earth and Sun and went off to chase comets in the mid-80's. We still have Pioneers 10 & 11, and Voyagers 1 & 2, but they're now too far away to notice minor variations in the Sun. At their distance the Solar Wind is a smooth, even flow, not turbulent and shocked as it is 'down' here, and they're looking for its boundary with the interstellar medium.

But because of Challenger, again, the stations we should have had by now are still en route. Ulysses is successfully on its way to Jupiter, to loop back towards Earth's orbital distance but going over the solar poles. Galileo is still trailing around the inner planets, gathering energy for its journey to orbit around Jupiter. It's a pity that it's not there now, because this year Jupiter is extremely active, with the disappearance and reappearance of the South Equatorial Belt. The Saturn orbiter Cassini is still on the drawing board, so we have to rely on the Hubble Space Telescope for details of the Great White Spot which has appeared on Saturn. These are seen from time to time, but are rare; is it a coincidence that Jupiter and Saturn are active together, or is some change in the Sun stirring them up? We don't yet have enough weather stations among the planets to tell, and as we try to come to terms with the damage we ourselves are doing to Earth's climate, the more outside information we can have the better.

## SPACE NEWS

The Waverider re-entry vehicle, backed by ASTRA ( the Association in Scotland to research into Astronautics) for so many years, is now solidly back on the international map. Following the recent highly succesful conference at the University of Maryland, we have received three more significant pieces of work: a summary of wind-tunnel tests at NASA's Langley Research Centre, a design study of a Waverider aerospace plane from the University of Oklahoma, sponsored by NASA-Langley; and now a paper by Prof. Lewis of Maryland and Dr. MacRonald of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, examining in depth

JPL's plans to use Waveriders for aerogravity manoeuvres around the planets. This comes to the rather frightening conclusion that in a Venus atmosphere flypast, Waverider temperatures could reach more than 14,000 degrees K. This is a rather daunting requirement — although, as the authors point out, it's not vastly greater than the 11,000 degrees to be reached by the entry probe on the Galileo Jupiter mission.

That said, the differences are major. As I've often pointed out in the many years since 1977 in which Galileo, too, has struggled for survival, the two missions are very different indeed. Galileo's entry probe will plunge vertically into the atmosphere, shedding heat constantly into a detached shock-wave generated by the blunt face of its aeroshell, while it decelerates at many hundreds of gravities. Everything about Waverider is different: sharp leading edges, gliding entry, attached shockwaves, low deceleration — that's what makes it attractive for aerogravity manoeuvres, where the aim is to redirect velocity, not to lose it. How much 'technology transfer' can occur between different programmes, remains to be seen.

Many years ago I learned from a science-fiction novel that the rocket engineers' term for such a direct entry is 'bald-headed'. I've remained mystified by this for many years, never having come across the phrase in any other context. But from the Feb 2nd Daily Telegraph I learn that it's an old military term. Its origin was at the Battle of Warburg in 1760, when the Marquis of Granby lost his wig in a charge upon the French. This gained him a portrait in the National Gallery and many pubs named after him — in any of which I supposed I might have learned the explanation much sooner, had I not lived in Scotland.

Meanwhile, one must admit, Galileo is the one up and flying. Protests from environmentalists groups notwithstanding, the first of the probe's flybys of Earth took place successfully on December 10th, 594 miles above the Atlantic. Photographs of both Earth and Moon were taken during the pass, but although the Space Shuttle *Columbia* was in orbit at the time, I haven't heard of any observations the other way.

In October 1991, Galileo will make the first close observations of an asteroid, passing Gaspra at only 1,450 km. At that distance, the spacecraft's cameras will be able to provide very detailed coverage, a fascinating comparison with Deimos and Phobos. There's a lot of evidence that those two moons of Mars are captured asteroids, or pieces of one; but also it's clear that their surfaces have been heavily modified during their many millions of years in planetary orbit.

In October 1993, if all goes well, Galileo will also photograph asteroid Ida, on its way towards Jupiter. First comes the second Earth flyby, on December 8th, 1992. That will be the REALLY controversial one, because it involves passing the Earth at only 300 km. The protestors

who have made so much of their fears about the radioisotope power generator on the probe (none of which have caused any problem since 1964 — and that was a 'never again' case) will no doubt continue to insist that the spacecraft cannot be reliably controlled with such accuracy. However, its entire mission is built around the necessity for such accuracy — and the December flyby proved it, with an accuracy of five miles in space and half-a-second in time. With more time to work on it, the next pass will probably be MORE accurate.

Talk about failures and problems continues in the news, nevertheless. The latest scare is that the Salyut 7 Soviet space station is coming down, due to unexpectedly high solar activity. With its attached Cosmos cargo carrier — the biggest space docking in history — the total mass coming down is 40 tons. This is very embarrassing for the USSR, because it's exactly what happened to the US Skylab in 1979, accompanied by heavy Soviet denunciations. Salyut 7 has already been saved once, by a heroic crew in 1985, but is now out of control and beyond saving, even if the budget would allow. However, it's unlikely that any large fragments will reach the ground to cause damage.

And meanwhile — did you notice — the attitude control problem with Magellan has been solved. It was attitude control, not communications; the onboard computer was parking the spacecraft in a 'safe' mode which pointed the transmitter away from Earth. That solved, the mapping of Venus by radar is proceeding apace, and with fascinating results. Already it seems clear that large areas of the Venus surface were melted when the greenhouse effect 'ran away' there — but not apparently all of it. So the search for the shorelines of ancient oceans may after all be successful; and if so, the lessons for Earth today will be so much the more important.

## SURPRISES ON VENUS

As I said earlier, the radar mapping of the planet Venus by the Magellan spacecraft is producing spectacular results, now that the early problems with attitude control have been resolved. To understand fully the importance of what's being learned, it's important to know how our knowledge stood before.

The previous mapping of Venus by the Pioneer 11 and Soviet Venera probes revealed a surface apparently the reverse of Earth's in composition: a single large granitic plate, like one huge flat continent, broken by islands of volcanic basalt where volcanoes had built up to great heights — quite unlike the situation on Earth, where the basalt of the ocean floor covers three-quarters of the surface and is thrust apart by upwelling along great faults, forcing the process of



continental drift. These discoveries about Venus led to a new theory about the planet's history.

Venus rotates much more slowly than Earth (and in the opposite direction). The theory is that the early Venus was much like Earth, but the oceans evaporated under the strong, constant sunlight. Water vapour generates a very powerful greenhouse effect and the crust of Venus melted, combining with the water vapour to produce a crust of hydrated rock much thicker than Earth's, perhaps as thick as sixty miles. Volcanic upwelling at a few weak points then built the high volcanic plateaux, while the gases released reacted with the remaining water vapour, and oxygen produced as it was disassociated by sunlight. The hydrogen escaped into space and Venus was left with its present carbon dioxide atmosphere, sulphuric acid clouds and surface temperatures still high enough to melt the softer metals. One of the aims of the Magellan mission was to look for ancient shorelines: confirmation of the theory would be very relevant to the greenhouse effect question on Earth, because although we are further from the Sun, the Sun is 30% hotter now than it was in the early history of the Solar System.

What has now been learned modifies the model considerably. It seems that the basalt outflows were much more extensive than had been supposed, so that vast areas of the Venus surface would at one time have been awash with molten rock. The original record is not to be read as plainly as we thought. One question which immediately occurs to me concerns the shallowness of Venusian craters: hypotheses to date have supposed that this was due in some way to the high water content of the surface rock. Is it instead that the craters have been drowned by lava, like those in the Moon's basalt 'seas'? If so, then like the Moon's these great flows occurred AFTER the bombardment which caused the cratering throughout the Solar System, 600 million years after the formation of the planets. So when did the Earth acquire its ocean basins? And what bearing does that have on the origin of life, which seems to have been very rapid after the bombardment ceased?

In the meantime the Magellan mapping has raised a more trivial question, which *The Glasgow Herald* referred to me for comment. NASA has announced a wish to name a crater on Venus after Mary Queen of Scots — probably as part of a suite of Scottish names, since the highest mountains on Venus had already been named after the great physicist Maxwell. (I have often wondered, when we name distant parts of the Solar System after historical figures, whether their ghosts move there to haunt them. Mary might well find the surface of Venus less congenial than Fotheringay.)

The International Astronomical Union, which decides on the naming of heavenly bodies and their features, has still to comment. The

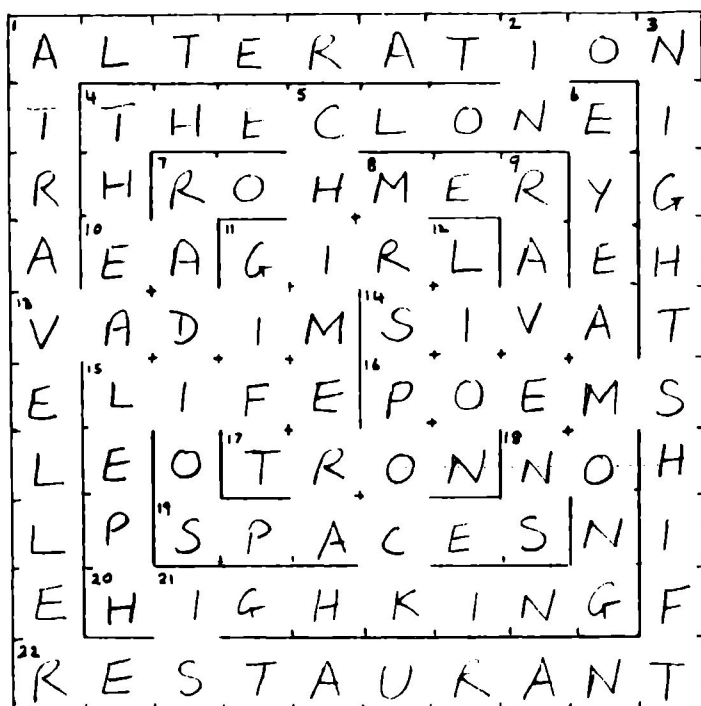
historian A.L. Rowse, however, has weighed in already, maintaining that instead the honour should go to Queen Elizabeth the First.

Scottish nationalists should be happy enough with that, though if it looks at the matter closely the I.A.U. may well object. The rule is, you see, that to qualify for a celestial naming, you must have been dead for a hundred years. But in Scotland, that is not the case for Elizabeth the First. There has only been one Queen Elizabeth of Scotland, and she is on the throne to this day.

Duncan Lunan

## WORD GRID 12

Clues on page 61



# THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

**SAM JEFFERS**



AS THIS IS THE FINAL ISSUE of DREAM I thought I'd slightly change the format this issue to give an overall summary of some of the better small press publications currently available. The inclusion or otherwise of a magazine in this listing should not be taken as a recommendation, and the opinions expressed are obviously mine only.

I have given each magazine two marks (out of 10) for presentation and content. These are purely subjective and based on my opinions as to what makes a good magazine and the comments as to the nature of the contents of each publication are designed to help in this respect. Right, here we go!

**FEAR:** Monthly – £1.95 per issue. Subs: U.K. £18 (12 issues), Europe £25, Air Mail elsewhere £38. A4 84 pp. Presentation 10, Content 7. Newsfield Publications, Ludlow, Shropshire. SY8 1JW. Available on bookstalls. Impeccably designed with colour cover and interiors. Story content is good, thought it may be a bit on the 'horror/macabre' side for the true SF fan. If you're into the 'grue', then this is the mag. for you. Totally professional in every respect.

**INTERZONE:** Monthly – £2.25 per issue (?) (The price suddenly went up with Issue 47, but I could find no explanation so am not sure if this is a permanent change or simply because issue 47 had extra colour in the interior of the magazine. I suspect the former). Subs: U.K. £26 (12 issues),

overseas £32. Lifetime sub. £260 (U.K.) £320 overseas. A4 72pp. P – 8, C – 7. 'Interzone', 124, Osborne Road, Brighton, BN1 6LU. Available on bookstalls. Colour cover, usually b/w interior. Current (as I write) issue (No. 47) is a 'swap' issue with the American 'zine 'ABORIGINAL SF', reproducing the contents of an issue of that mag. IZ is now moving towards a more 'mainstream' brand of SF, but retains its slightly superior and aloof approach. Fiction veers towards the 'literary' side of popular, but some of their worst excesses seem to have been forsaken. (John Clute's book reviews are the exception; his unutterably superior literary approach gets on my wick!) This magazine represents the British SF establishment at both its worst and best.

**R.E.M.:** Quarterly, £1.95 per issue. Subs (4 issues) £7 (no overseas rate quoted). A4 48pp. Mauve cover for Issue 1, b/w elsewhere. P – 7, C – 7½. 'R.E.M.', Arthur Straker, 19 Sandringham Road, London NW2 5EP. Only one issue has been published as I write, and that was very late. Presentation is a bit fussy in places, with the contents page almost obliterated by the background. Seems determined to be 'hip', and the first issue's contents seem a bit 'cyberpunk', which make it seem a bit dated, but this may be due to the delay in production. Seems likely to encourage new authors, which is a big point in its favour. Standard of fiction is overall, pretty good. 'DREAM' readers would like much of it.

Let's hope it can survive.

**BBR:** Quarterly, £1.95 per issue. Subs (4 issues) £6.30 U.K. Europe, £11 elsewhere. NSFA member. A4 56pp. B/w throughout. P – 7, C – 7. Chris Reed, P.O. Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY. Available on bookstalls. If SF was a pub, BBR would be a good pint of 'real ale', strong and dark with a slightly eccentric image. Favours experimental fiction, with the occasional more traditional piece thrown in. SF/fantasy/horror are all included. Chris Reed does, however, have the knack of choosing the best of the more experimental work that he espouses, so 'DREAM' readers may like much of what is included, although some will not appeal to the more traditional fans. A magazine on the upgrade.

**NEW MOON:** Quarterly, £2.25 per issue. Subs (4 issues) £8, 6 issues £12, 12 issues £22.50. 60 issues (or all to end of 1999, whichever is greater) £70 to 1.9.91, then £100. NSFA member. A4 52pp approx. Some colour on cover, otherwise b/w throughout. P – 8, C – 8 (based on a mock-up of Issue 1). Trevor Jones, 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE. Printed on slick 'art' paper throughout and professionally printed rather than DTP. First issue out September. Features the best new young British writers (Baxter, Brooke, Brown, Darlington etc. etc., plus many DREAM favourites including new 'star' P.F. Hamilton). Judging from what I have seen and been told, a major new entrant in the British SF field. We await its birth with bated breath.

**EXUBERANCE:** Quarterly, £1.75 per issue. Subs (4 issues) £6.50. A4 65pp, b/w throughout. P – 6½, C – 5. Jason Smith, 134 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts. WD4 9PA. Good value for money pagewise, but the standard of fiction falls a bit short of all those listed above, with a strong emphasis on 'small-press' stars. (Issue 3 was a D.F. Lewis special, for instance). This is a magazine with the potential to do well, but there is still room for improvement in the fiction department. Good range of art, from the excellent to the not-so-hot. One to watch.

**AUGURIES:** Irregular, £1.75 per issue. Subs (4 issues) £7 U.K., Europe £7.75, Elsewhere £10. NSFA member. A5 72pp (Issue 13). B/w throughout. P – 6, C – 6½. Nik Morton, 48 Anglesey Rd., Alverstoke, Gosport, Hants. PO12 2EQ. Very much with an atmosphere of its own, 'AUGURIES' leans toward the more traditional SF, but with the occasional lurch towards the less conventional. Using the pub analogy, it probably represents a good, clear, pint of lager. Some of the regular small-press crowd can be found within its pages, but the worst excesses of experimentalism are notable by their absence. Notably better produced in recent issues, with nice typeset layout, but still a short way behind the best produced zines. Like an old friend, dependable and reliable – you know what you're going to get and most DREAM readers will like a lot of it.

**THE SCANNER:** Quarterly (but now defunct). Current issue (No. 11) is the last, as 'THE SCANNER' sinks sadly below the horizon. (Although Chris James hopes for a relaunch if the financial climate allows sometime in the future.) £1.50. A4 24pp. NSFA member. B/w throughout. P – 5, C – 4. Chris James, 4 Dover Road, East Cowes, Isle of Wight. PO32 6RG. Probably the nearest thing to a fanzine in the NSFA and very much its own publication. Pagewise, rather poor value compared to some other magazines and this, plus its rather idiosyncratic range of fiction (typified by its 'Johnny Zero' tales, very much a Jerry Cornelius spin-off) may have led to its downfall. Sometimes rather juvenile, but always with a 'high-energy' output, 'THE SCANNER' was unlike any of the other magazines listed above. Despite not being a particular fan of its fiction (too heavily into Alan Garside for my taste) I shall miss it. R.I.P.

**NOVA SF:** Irregular. £1.25. Subs (4 issues) £4.50. A5 40pp. NSFA member. B/w throughout. P – 7, C – 7. Current issue (No 3) is a 'Green' special. Adrian Hodges, 3 Ashfield Close, Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 4LG. A fairly wide range of material in this magazine and, although Adrian Hodges is a firm proponent of experimental work, the contents have included many stories

that DREAM readers would have felt quite at home with. Rather thin in terms of page-count, but interesting nonetheless. If Ade can build it up steadily and restrain himself from leaning too far into experimentalism, this publication could built up into something good. A strong supporter (with 'WORKS') of SF poetry, a good selection of which is included in the current issue.

**WORKS:** Quarterly/irregular. £1.60. Subs. (4 issues) £5.50. A5 52pp. NSFA member. B/w throughout. P - 7½. C - 3. Dave W. Hughes, 12 Blakesstones Rd., Slaithwaite, Huddersfield. HD7 5UQ. Strongly favouring the 'mood' and experimental type of fiction, this is the least conventional of the NSFA magazines and probably the least likely to appeal to traditionalists. Strong on very short pieces (not always totally comprehensible to an average guy like me,) and SF verse. Nice range of illustrations and features occasional work by 'big-name' authors, usually (though not always) in an experimental style. Dave Hughes is a strong defender of less conventional fiction, but seems to me to lack Chris Reed's knack of sorting the wheat from the chaff. If BBR is a pint of real ale then 'WORKS' sometimes seems like the froth on the top. Nevertheless, if you like the less conventional type of fiction, this is very much the place to find it. Also, encouraging to new writers.

**PEEPING TOM:** Quarterly, £1.50. Subs (4 issues) £5.50. A5 44pp. B/w throughout. P - 6, C - 6. David Bell, Yew Tree House, 15 Nottingham Rd., Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire. LE6 5DJ. A horror/macabre magazine, rather than SF, the contents would have been more highly rated if it were not for this. Stories are all competent to excellent and the small (though clear) print means that you get more for your money than the page count would indicate. Has been a bit lightweight on the artwork side, but this is gradually improving. The layout of the back cover is an outright 'pinch' from 'DREAM', but this is a magazine which seems to be pacing its improvements wisely, and, because of this, seems likely to survive and prosper. One for fans of the macabre.

**OVERSPACE:** Bi-monthly (?). 75p (!!) per issue, subscriptions by arrangement. B/w throughout. A4 48pp (and increasing). P - 6, C - 5. Sean Friend, 25, Sheldon Rd., Chippenham, Wilts. SN14 0BP. How Sean Friend manages to put this magazine out for the price I don't know, especially since he donated 15p a copy to charity from sales of Issue 11. However, the moral must be: try it before the price goes up - you won't get any better value! The contents are not always SF or even fantasy, an example being Dave Hughes' story in Issue 12) and sometimes lean towards the egocentric (e.g. the recent serial featuring a band of 'OVERSPACE' contributors as heroic fighters against a repressive government (oh, dear!!!). However, it is very much in a class of its own. You'll like it or hate it, but I doubt you'll be indifferent. Heavy on Bruce Baker, incidentally, and just as idiosyncratic as this author. Worth a try and improving steadily.

**RATTLER'S TALE:** Bi-monthly. 6 issues £5. B/w throughout. A5 40pp. P - 4, C - 5. Anthony North, BCM Keyhole, London WC1N 3XX. A mixture of short-short fiction, 'New Age' articles and features. Covers SF/fantasy/horror/supernatural/green/new age all in one small zine. Rather cluttered format in places. Very much a publication to dip into rather than one to sit down with for a good long read. Something of an eccentric image about it, but you could try it and see what you think. Certainly not without its adherents.

**AUREALIS:** An Australian SF magazine, now available through the NSFA. (See address for BBR above). A5 80pp. Some colour on cover, b/w interior. Nicely typeset but no artwork. Rates from NSFA. Included as it seems very much a 'traditional' magazine, likely to appeal to 'DREAM' readers. Distributed commercially in Australia. Worth a read.

● Of course, there are a number of other SF publications available, plus many critical etc. magazines not covered in this round-up. These include 'THE GATE', irregular but professional and promising improvements in printing etc. If a magazine is not covered above it is probably

because I don't get to see it regularly.

In the first issue of 'NEW MOON', we will be back to our more usual format of small-press reviews. Please send all magazines for review to either the Huntingdon or Downe address. *The*

*Dark Side* will also include a number of new features and our regular book reviews. Mind you, they're still not paying me, the damn cheapskates! See you in 'NEW MOON'.



TOP QUALITY ARTWORK . . .



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in **NEW MOON No. 1** — out September



## The Melting Pot

### Readers' Letters

(Let's start off with a few comments from Peter Hamilton, who has some views on the 'doom and gloom' controversy)

Dear Trevor,

It was quite an enlightening experience reading the letters in DREAM 27; they're the first feedback I've had and no two opinions on 'BODYWORK' were the same. I do wish Alan ? (now revealed to be Alan Garside — GPT) had been a little more specific in his criticisms, but I suppose there's only so much you can cram into a few lines. But I must admit to being puzzled by his comment on the ending.

As to the comments (and complaints) on Doom and Gloom stories, I'm not so convinced. Outside of the ghetto in my story, the world seemed to be doing all right for itself, and even the main character was trying to put a halt to the appalling exploitation he'd uncovered. If I'd written it from the other side of the tracks, showing determined technocrats making damn sure they got their new limbs no matter what, would it have made it an upbeat story? Writing about the underdogs and mavericks of life is nearly always the best way of describing the intricacies of a society. Flaws make a world; the kind of paradises where pain, suffering and struggle have been eradicated would have a very few stories written about them. In our present form they'd be nearly impossible to achieve anyway; and evolution to a state where arguments about nuances of philosophy occupied all the entities all of the time

would be insufferably boring.

Of course, this argument can go on forever. But if nothing else I'll be studying future plot lines for excessive despondency. If the characters go down then at least they'll go down fighting.

I told you that I'd sold a story (DEATHDAY) to 'FEAR' (oh, dear, another story that could be described as gloomy). Well, apparently they published it in their February issue, (though I haven't seen a copy yet).

Peter Hamilton  
(Oakham, Rutland)

● *We agree that a good 'mix' of moods is what is required. Personally, we like stories about misfits and oddballs, but we do like to see them come out on top just once in a while. Incidentally, Peter's new story 'SONNIE'S EDGE' will be in NEW MOON No. 1. We think it's his best yet. We also understand that Peter has been approached by publishers recently, so his may be another name you'll be seeing in the book racks in the coming months.*

Dear Trevor,

It's good to have that satisfied, full, feeling when you finish a meal and 'DREAM' 27 had that effect on me.



Each story had its own way of concluding, some more successfully than others. A story needs an end, but need it have an ending? It's true that it has to be read linearly, but the final shape it leaves inside your head can be quite different, just as the parts of a sketch needn't be looked at in the order in which they were drawn, though only one line can be drawn at a time. The end of a story can be closer to the beginning than the final paragraph. 'MAJOR'S CHILDREN' was a 'good old' space story, which took off at a brisk 'hard-SF' pace. The last paragraph had no table-turning punchline, but successfully lands the story; my favourite in the issue. Next best was the circular-plotted 'GODDESS WITHOUT LOVE'. Even had I the imagination to write this, I wouldn't have had the nerve to buck current trends. (*Let's have a few more trends bucked, you authors — GPT*). The rules of whodunnits dictate the shape of my third choice, 'MR. PEMBERTON'S BUTLER'. The last paragraph is the pay-off for diligent spadework, but I felt that there were too many uninteresting cul-de-sacs on the way, instead of potential trails to follow. It's with 'AN HONOURABLE ESTATE' that I first glimpsed the Procrustian blade. The central sub-Guin idea was sturdy enough and the final image too, but I'd hoped for a more subtle investigation of the theme rather than a life and death outcome; a deus-ex-machina only gratuitously prepared.

'THOUGHTS OF RACHEL...' ran out of puff not so much through misjudged length, but I think the author took a wrong turning somewhere. 'MISS BLOOD' had its moments; the ending wasn't one of them and didn't redeem the story. A twist ending was needed, but here it was unprepared, dictated by form, not content.

Tim Love  
(Cambridge)

Dear George,

As the 'new-style' 'DREAM' (whatever that may be) looms on the horizon, the 'old style' continues to intrigue and entertain, with No. 27 providing examples of all the values 'DREAM' stands for.

'MAJOR'S CHILDREN' is a pretty horrendous title in the current political climate (remember when yuppies were 'Thatcher's children?') P.F. Hamilton's story, however, is about as far removed from what the title suggests as you can get, thankfully. This is the type of story we expect from 'DREAM', the genuine 'sense of wonder' article. It has all the right ingredients, from entrepreneurial space pilots to mad scientists, from incomprehensible aliens to galactic special effects. P.F. Hamilton's literary style is appropriately wide-eyed, slightly flavoured with human cynicism. His characterisation might seem a little simple but the plot holds together and, all things considered the net result is more entertaining than not so.

Nothing typical about 'MISS BLOOD'. It's not Science Fiction and the fantasy element is ambiguous, to say the least. The characters are convincing with human foibles the reader can identify with. The plot is beautifully paced with a totally unexpected denouement. Not Science Fiction, Fantasy or even horror, but a simple story about human weakness and immensely satisfying. Jack Wainer comes with impressive credentials and if he's typical of the writers we'll see in 'DREAM's future then I welcome the opportunity to read them. 'MISS BLOOD' is not typical 'DREAM' material, but congratulations to you for taking the risk.

John Light is usually a competent writer but this issue's 'GODDESS WITHOUT LOVE' was not among his best work. The story got off to an unfortunate start. A list of colours is not the way to grab the reader's attention; we can get that from a paint chart, thank

you! Having set this mood of tedium, John seemed unable to break out of it. His characters seemed like stereotypes, going through the motions leading to a totally predictable climax. The story might have worked had it been about two thirds the length, pared of unnecessary exposition and high blown prose. This was simply boring.

With 'MR. PEMBERTON'S BUTLER' Rik Gammack succeeded perfectly in capturing the tone of Asimov's early robot stories without the stilted prose, adding dashes of P.G. Wodehouse and Agatha Christie to flavour the brew. The end product is light hearted and highly readable, a story as ingenious as it is entertaining. I look forward to seeing Rik Gammack in your pages again.

More good stuff with 'AN HONOURABLE ESTATE' by Stephen Wood. The quasi-barbaric civilisation seemed far too familiar for my liking, but it worked okay as a backdrop to events in the foreground. A nice idea, some sympathetic characterisation and a nasty sting in the tail combined to make an enjoyable story that provided food for thought as well.

'THOUGHTS OF RACHEL AND AN OVERWHELMING' by Andy Smith was simply underwhelming (sorry, couldn't resist that!) A half-hearted attempt at stream of consciousness packaged with trite commentary on human nature that would have been perfect material for 'INTERZONE' if it had been better written, but looked sorely out of place in 'DREAM'. The prose didn't grip and nothing about it appealed other than the title. Sorry!

What else? Hopefully, Duncan Lunan's column is gone for good. Your other features are, in the main, excellent, with special mention for the irrepressible Sam Jeffers. 'THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON' is usually the bit of 'DREAM' that I read first, a valuable

guide to the small press with plenty of bite.

Peter Tenant,  
(Shipdham, Norfolk)

Dear George,

My ratings for the contents of 'DREAM' 27: Not much doubt about first place for 'MAJOR'S CHILDREN'. A magnificent piece of modern SF which ably captures the 'sense of wonder' so often missing from contemporary writing. The ability to convey scientific concepts with clarity and poetic artistry is worthy of Arthur C. Clarke and the alien life forms as convincingly as Stanley G. Weinbaum. What more can I say? (*We have five more stories by Hamilton in our inventory at the moment and each is just as good! — GPT*)

In second place I rate 'MISS BLOOD' and 'MR. PEMBERTON'S BUTLER' as a tie. Despite their basic differences the two stories had several points in common. Miss Blood had the greater surprise ending but the Butler had more humour. Clever ideas in both, well thought out if you overlook the minor loose ends.

'GODDESS WITHOUT LOVE' next. A valiant attempt to combine modern cosmology with classical allegory. It succeeds quite well but is a little too fanciful for my tastes.

Fourth 'AN HONOURABLE ESTATE'. Based entirely on one highly improbable idea makes the story highly improbable also.

Why does there always have to be one incomprehensible story? 'THOUGHTS OF RACHEL...' was it. There are other mags that feature this kind of story and, although well enough written it is not the

kind of fiction that I associate with 'DREAM'. I am compelled to place this last.

The reviews are always useful and interesting. You just cannot afford to buy everything around these days, so it is useful to know what you are missing.

Alan Hunter  
(Bournemouth, Dorset)

Malcolm McLaren. The reasons are pretty obvious. Swindle!

Eric Topp  
(Barton-on-Humber)

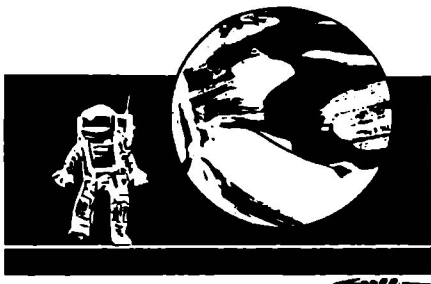
● *We've a bit of bad news for you, Eric. Guess who's got a story in 'NEW MOON' No. 1? No, no, not Isaac Asimov... GPT)*

Dear George,

I'm a newcomer to the small press scene — discovered it in 'INTERZONE' ads. Want to know who is this Matthew Dickens bloke? Reading his letter (THE MELTING POT, 'DREAM' 25) on predictions, I would like to make a few of my own.

Matthew Dickenson will write a best-seller. This is not because he is a best-selling author, it is because he is famous. How can this be so, you cry? I'll tell you. Matthew Dicks has placed a letter in just about every issue of 'WORKS'. He is a prolific letter writer. You name it, Matthew Dick has placed a letter in it. Even graffiti in the Thames Poly toilets is signed by Matthew Dickend. And his stories: Charles Dick has placed one in just about every magazine ever published, though I've heard his literary exploits have not received the acclaim they deserve. 'THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON' reads like the Charles Dickenson appreciation society at times. And now, horror, I see his name in 'INTERZONE'. Assistant editor, no less. Jesus, save us from Charles Molecule Quark Dicks. I have heard that Matt Dick is against literary experimentation: bad news for those of us who want to submit such work to 'INTERZONE'. I predict that anything not up to the standard of Charles Dickens will be rejected out of hand.

I would like to guess that his hero is



Dear George,

Just a brief request. The fiction is (usually) great, with only the odd exceptions like 'LAST SHREDS OF X-SPACE' and (gawdelpus) 'THOUGHTS OF RACHEL..'. If we want 'mood' crap like this we can get it in 'WORKS' and the like. However, what I'd like is more about the authors. At least a few lines of bio. on each author each issue, plus, if possible, photos, so we can be overwhelmed by their beautiful phizzogs (!) Any chances? I know you do run bios sometimes, but I want it on a regular basis.

Steve Worth,  
(Worcester)

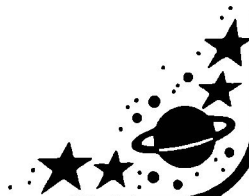
● *With the advent of NEW MOON we will be running regular bios of the authors and artists, plus, we hope, photographs. 'NEW MOON' will be printed on glossy art paper, so we will be able to get good results. Of course, we can't make the authors any more beautiful! — GPT)*



Coming in **NEW MOON** 1

A whole host of really good fiction coming up in the first issue of **NEW MOON**. Long-time favourite Stephen Baxter leads us off with 'BEFORE SEBASTOPOL', an 'alternate-history' story which takes us away from his usual 'Xeelee' Universe. New favourite P.F. Hamilton gives us 'SONNIE'S EDGE', set in that famous seaside town Peterborough. Well, it is in this story! Hamilton has had some good stories in 'DREAM', but we vote this his best so far. Also present: Matthew Dickens, with his first story for us, John Duffield, with a tense story of a future eco-war and Philip Sidney Jennings, with 'A BREAKING HEART' (and he means it literally, folks!)

Also coming up shortly: A new story from Eric Brown, Andy Darlington's best short story yet (and you know that means it's good!), more from P.F. Hamilton, Keith Brooke, Gerry Connelly, Chris Beckett, plus, in an issue or two, the absolute hardest SF story I've seen for years. Stay with us and see for yourself.





# NEW MOON

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SEPTEMBER 1991

## In This Issue

**STEPHEN BAXTER  
REWRITES HISTORY**

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**MATTHEW DICKENS  
REWRITES SHAKESPEARE**

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**P.F. HAMILTON  
AFTER THE  
GREENHOUSE EFFECT**

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**JOHN DUFFIELD  
ECO—WARS**

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**P.S. JENNINGS  
ON ALIEN LOVE**

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**Britain's Alternative S.F. Magazine**

# DREAM SCIENCE FICTION

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