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NEW SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY
WILLIAM GIBSON, GARRY KILWORTH,
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AND OTHERS



BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS
BRUCE STERLING INTERVIEW

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EDITORIAL

You, the reader, are not the only one who wonders just what we mean when we say we look for "radical" sf. As we read the stories we're sent, we wonder too. My own view is that a "radical" story is one that can't be pigeonholed into any familiar type - it has something new to say, something that goes beyond the minor originality of pulling a fresh twist out of a familiar tale-type. We can't define what we mean by "radical" because a "radical" story is one that defies all our previous definitions. Which allows an infinite variety of ways that a fictional package of 2000-8000 words can surprise, entertain, shock, provoke or stimulate us into wanting to publish it in *Interzone*.

Accepting dogma is death to imagination, but there are certain currents of thought which provide fertile ground for radical speculations. One of the basic insights of feminism, that branch of sociology which is women studying women, might be phrased as the hypothesis that women are an alien race who have been colonized (or perhaps domesticated as pets) so long that we've never known what it might be to live in other than a Man's World. Possibilities for exploring this hypothesis by experiment are limited - speculative fiction offers one fruitful avenue by which women writers and philosophers might explore alternatives to the current and past ways of thinking that provide our definitions of "men" and "women." There can be no doubt that sf's aggressively masculinist staple formulae have repelled women from making use of the potential it can offer us for exploring our situation in this alien, male-defined world we inhabit. Equally, sf's image of "boys' stories" has deprived the genre of women's views of the nature of man and of the world.

Like sf about aliens, feminism tackles the problem of possible ways to be human which are left unrealized by the way things are. Given this common ground, sf is a field that feminism should explore and exploit more than it does. Sf has almost prided itself on its neglect of characterization: ideas are paramount! Yet, when it comes to writing of the non-human alien, the character embodies the idea. The experience of being an alien, almost unavoidable for women in a man's world, is invaluable background for writing about ways of being alien and how it feels to be alien. Reading feminist tracts can convey that flavour to men who are deprived of the experience first-hand.

Yet the gap between men's and women's experiences, and the lack of understanding or desire to understand shown in the bulk of sf (and other popular literature) poses a problem sf might well tackle. Men and women live their lives side by side, in the same houses, speaking what seems to be the same language to each other every day. If men and women are not able to understand each other's situations, experiences, and ways of thinking - what hope could we ever have of understanding a *real alien*?

Judith Hanna

(These ideas are developed in greater detail in "The Greenskins are Here: Women, Men & Aliens," in *Contrary Modes, the Proceedings of the 1985 Worldcon*, published by Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne 3001, Australia).

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Cover by Pete Lyon

Editors: Simon Ounsley and David Pringle

Associate Editor: Judith Hanna

Advisory Editors: John Clute, Alan Dorey, Malcolm Edwards and Roz Kaveney

Assistant Editors: Paul Annis, Lin Morris and Andy Robertson

Typesetting and Paste-up: Brian Williamson

Circulation Adviser: Gamma

American Agent: Scott Bradfield

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Judith Hanna, 22 Denbigh Street, London SW1 2ER
Simon Ounsley, 21 The Village Street, Leeds LS4 2PR
David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU

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William Gibson

The Winter Market

It rains a lot, up here; there are winter days when it doesn't really get light at all, only a bright, indeterminate grey. But then there are days when it's like they whip aside a curtain to flash you three minutes of sunlit, suspended mountain, the trademark at the start of God's own movie. It was like that the day her agents phoned, from deep in the heart of their mirrored pyramid on Beverly Boulevard, to tell me she'd merged with the net, crossed over for good, that *Kings of Sleep* was going triple-platinum. I'd edited most of *Kings*, done the brain-map work and gone over it all with the fast-wipe module, so I was in line for a share of royalties.

No, I said, no. Then yes, yes, and hung up on them. Got my jacket and took the stairs three at a time, straight out to the nearest bar and an eight-hour black-out that ended on a concrete ledge two metres above midnight False Creek water. City lights, that same grey bowl of sky smaller now, illuminated by neon and mercury-vapour arcs. And it was snowing, big flakes but not many, and when they touched black water, they were gone, no trace at all. I looked down at my feet and saw my toes clear of the edge of concrete, the water between them. I was wearing Japanese shoes, new and expensive, glove-leather *GINZA* monkey boots with rubber-capped toes. I stood there for a long time, before I took that first step back.

Because she was dead, and I'd let her go. Because, now, she was immortal, and I'd helped her get that way. And because I knew she'd phone me, in the morning.

My father was an audio engineer, a mastering engineer. He went way back, in the business, even before digital. The processes he was concerned with were partly mechanical, with that clunky quasi-Victorian quality you see in twentieth-century technology. He was a lathe operator, basically. People brought him audio recordings and he burned their sounds into grooves on a disc of

lacquer. Then the disc was electroplated and used in the construction of a press that would stamp out records, the black things you see in antique stores. And I remember him telling me, once, a few months before he died, that certain frequencies – transients, I think he called them – could easily burn out the head, the cutting head, on a master lathe. These heads were incredibly expensive so you prevented burnouts with something called an accelerometer. And that was what I was thinking of, as I stood there, my toes out over the water: that head, burning out.

Because that was what they did to her.

And that was what she wanted.

No accelerometer for Lise.

I disconnected my phone on my way to bed. I did it with the business end of a West German studio tripod that was going to cost a week's wages to repair.

Woke some strange time later and took a cab back to Granville Island and Rubin's place.

Rubin, in some way that no one quite understands, is a master, a teacher, what the Japanese call a *sensei*. What he's the master of, really, is garbage, kipple, refuse, the sea of cast-off goods our century floats on. *Gomi no sensei*. Master of junk.

I found him, this time, squatting between two vicious-looking drum machines I hadn't seen before, rusty spider-arms folded at the hearts of dented constellations of steel cans fished out of Richmond dumpsters. He never calls the place a studio, never refers to himself as an artist. "Messing around," he calls what he does there, and seems to view it as some extension of boyhood's perfectly bored backyard afternoons. He wanders through his jammed, littered space, a kind of mini-hangar cobbled to the water side of the Market, followed by the smarter and more agile of his creations, like some vaguely benign Satan bent on the elaboration of still stranger processes in his on-going *Inferno of gomi*. I've seen Rubin program

his constructions to identify and verbally abuse pedestrians wearing garments by a given season's hot designer; others attend to more obscure missions, and a few seem constructed solely to de-construct themselves with as much attendant noise as possible. He's like a child, Rubin; he's also worth a lot of money in galleries in Tokyo and Paris.

So I told him about Lise. He let me do it, get it out, then nodded. "I know," he said. "Some CBC creep phoned eight times." He sipped something out of a dented cup. "You wanna Wild Turkey sour?"

"Why'd they call you?"

"Cause my name's on the back of *Kings of Sleep*. Dedication."

"I didn't see it yet."

"She try to call you yet?"

"No."

"She will."

"Rubin, she's dead. They cremated her already."

"I know," he said. "And she's going to call you."

Gomi. Where does the *gomi* stop and the world begin? The Japanese, a century ago, had already run out of *gomi*-space, around Tokyo, so they came up with a plan for creating space out of *gomi*. By the year 1969, they had built themselves a little island in Tokyo Bay, out of *gomi*, and christened it Dream Island. But the city was still pouring out its nine thousand tons per day, so they went on to build New Dream Island, and today they coordinate the whole process, and new Nippons rise out of the Pacific. Rubin watches this on the news and says nothing at all.

He has nothing to say about *gomi*. It's his medium, the air he breathes, something he's swum in all his life. He cruises Greater Van in a spavined truck-thing chopped down from an ancient Mercedes airporter, its roof lost under a wallowing rubber bag half filled with natural gas. He looks for things that fit some strange design scrawled on the inside of his forehead by whatever serves him as Muse. He brings home more *gomi*. Some of it still operative. Some of it, like Lise, human.

I met Lise at one of Rubin's parties. Rubin had a lot of parties. He never seemed particularly to enjoy them, himself, but they were excellent parties. I lost track, that fall, of the number of times I woke on a slab of foam to the hissing roar of Rubin's antique espresso machine, a tarnished behemoth topped with a big chrome eagle, the sound outrageous off the corrugated steel walls of the place, but massively comforting, too: there was coffee. Life would go on.

First time I saw her: in the Kitchen Zone. You wouldn't call it a kitchen, exactly, just three fridges and a hotplate and a broken convection oven that had come in with the *gomi*. First time I saw her: she had the all-beer fridge open, light spilling out, and I caught the cheekbones and the determined set of that mouth, but I also caught the black glint of polycarbon at her wrist, and the bright slick sore the exoskeleton had rubbed there. Too drunk to process, to know what it was, but I did know it wasn't partytime. So I did what people usually did, to Lise, and clicked myself into a different movie. Went for the wine instead, on the counter beside the convection oven. Never looked

back.

But she found me again. Came after me two hours later, weaving through the bodies and junk with that terrible grace programmed into the exoskeleton. I knew what it was, then, as I watched her homing in, too embarrassed now to duck it, to run, to mumble some excuse and get out. Pinned there, my arm around the waist of a girl I didn't know, while Lise advanced – was advanced, with that mocking grace – straight at me now, her eyes burning with wizz, and the girl had wriggled out and away in a quiet social panic, was gone, and Lise stood there in front of me, propped up in her pencil-thin polycarbon prosthetic. Looked into those eyes and it was like you could hear her synapses whining, some impossibly high-pitched scream as the wizz opened every circuit in her brain.

"Take me home," she said, and the words hit me like a whip. I think I shook my head. "Take me home." There were levels of pain there, and subtlety, and an amazing cruelty. And I knew then that I'd never been hated, ever, as deeply or thoroughly, as this wasted little girl hated me now, hated me for the way I'd looked, then looked away, beside Rubin's all-beer refrigerator.

So – if that's the word – I did one of those things you do and never find out why, even though something in you knows you could never have done anything else.

I took her home.

I have two rooms in an old condo-rack at the corner of Fourth and MacDonald, tenth floor. The elevators usually work, and if you sit on the balcony railing and lean out backward, holding on to the corner of the building next door, you can see a little upright slit of sea and mountain.

She hadn't said a word, all the way back from Rubin's, and I was getting sober enough to feel very, very uneasy as I unlocked the door and let her in.

The first thing she saw was the portable fast-wipe I'd brought home from the Pilot the night before. The exoskeleton carried her across the dusty broadloom with that same walk, like a model down a runway. Away from the crash of the party, I could hear it click softly as it moved her. She stood there, looking down at the fast-wipe. I could see the thing's ribs, when she stood like that, make them out across her back through the scuffed black leather of her jacket. One of those diseases. Either one of the old ones they've never quite figured out or one of the new ones – the all too obviously environmental kind – that they've barely even named yet. She couldn't move, not without that extra skeleton, and it was jacked straight into her brain, myoelectric interface. The fragile-looking polycarbon braces moved her arms and legs, but a more subtle system handled her thin hands, galvanic inlays. I thought of froglegs twitching in a highschool lab tape, then hated myself for it.

"This is a fast-wipe module," she said, in a voice I hadn't heard before, distant, and I thought then that the wizz might be wearing off. "What's it doing here?"

"I edit," I said, closing the door behind me.

"Well, now," and she laughed. "You do. Where?"

"On the Island. Place called the Autonomic Pilot."

She turned, then, hand on thrust hip, she swung – it swung her – and the wizz and the hate and some

terrible parody of lust stabbed out at me from those washed-out grey eyes. "You wanna make it, editor?"

And I felt the whip come down again, but I wasn't going to take it, not again. So I cold-eyed her from somewhere down in the beer-numb core of my walking, talking, live-limbed and entirely ordinary body and the words came out of me like spit: "Could you feel it, if I did?"

Beat. Maybe she blinked, but her face never registered. "No," she said, "but sometimes I like to watch."

Rubin stands at the window, two days after her death in Los Angeles, watching snow fall into False Creek. "So you never went to bed with her?"

One of his push-me-pull-you's, little roller-bearing Escher lizards, scoots across the table in front of me, in curl-up mode.

"No," I say, and it's true. Then I laugh. "But we jacked straight across. That first night."

"You were crazy," he says, a certain approval in his voice. "It might have killed you. Your heart might have stopped, you might have stopped breathing..." He turns back to the window. "Has she called you yet?"

We jacked, straight across. I'd never done it before. If you asked me why, I would have told you that I was an editor and that it wasn't professional.

The truth would be something more like this.

In the trade, the legitimate trade – I've never done porno – we call the raw product dry dreams. Dry dreams are neural output from levels of consciousness that most people can only access in sleep. But artists, the kind I work with at the Autonomic Pilot, are able to break the surface tension, dive down deep, down and out, out into Jung's sea, and bring back – well, dreams. Keep it simple. I guess some artists have always done that, in whatever medium, but neuro-electronics lets us access the experience, and the net gets it all out on the wire, so we can package it, sell it, watch how it moves in the market. Well, the more things change... That's something my father liked to say.

Ordinarily I get the raw material in a studio situation, filtered through several million dollars worth of baffles, and I don't even have to see the artist. The stuff we get out to the consumer, you see, has been structured, balanced, turned into art. There are still people naive enough to assume that they'll actually enjoy jacking straight across with someone they love. I think most teenagers try it, once. Certainly it's easy enough to do; Radio Shack will sell you the box and the trodes and the cables. But me, I'd never done it. And now that I think about it, I'm not sure I can explain why. Or that I even want to try.

I do know why I did it with Lise, sat down beside her on my Mexican futon and snapped the optic lead into the socket on the spine, the smooth dorsal ridge, of the exoskeleton. It was high up, at the base of her neck, hidden by her dark hair.

Because she claimed she was an artist, and because I knew that we were engaged, somehow, in total combat, and I was not going to lose. That may not make sense to you, but then you never knew her, or



know her through *Kings of Sleep*, which isn't the same at all. You never felt that hunger she had, which was pared down to a dry need, hideous in its singleness of purpose. People who know exactly what they want have always frightened me, and Lise had known what she wanted for a long time, and wanted nothing else at all. And I was scared, then, of admitting to myself that I was scared, and I'd seen enough strangers' dreams, in the mixing room at the Autonomic Pilot, to know that most people's inner monsters are foolish things, ludicrous in the calm light of one's own consciousness. And I was still drunk.

I put the trodes on and reached for the stud on the fast-wipe. I'd shut down its studio functions, temporarily converting eighty thousand dollars worth of Japanese electronics to the equivalent of one of those little Radio Shack boxes. "Hit it," I said, and touched the switch.

Words. Words cannot. Or, maybe, just barely, if I even knew how to begin to describe it, what came up out of her, what she did...

There's a segment on *Kings of Sleep*; it's like you're on a motorcycle at midnight, no lights but somehow you don't need them, blasting out along a cliff-high stretch of coast highway, so fast that you hang there in a cone of silence, the bike's thunder lost behind you. Everything, lost behind you... It's just a blink, on *Kings*, but it's one of the thousand things you remember, go back to, incorporate in your own vocabulary of feelings. Amazing. Freedom and death, right there, right there, razor's edge, forever.

What I got was the big daddy version of that, raw rush, the king hell killer uncut real thing, exploding eight ways from Sunday into a void that stank of poverty and lovelessness and obscurity.

And that was Lise's ambition, that rush, seen from the inside.

It probably took all of four seconds.

And, course, she'd won.

I took the trodes off and stared at the wall, eyes wet, the framed posters swimming.

I couldn't look at her. I heard her disconnect the optic lead. I heard the exoskeleton creak as it hoisted her up from the futon. Heard it tick demurely as it hauled her into the kitchen for a glass of water.

Then I started to cry.

Rubin inserts a skinny probe in the roller-bearing belly of a sluggish push-me-pull-you and peers at the circuitry through magnifying glasses with miniature headlights mounted at the temples.

"So? You got hooked." He shrugs, looks up. It's dark now and the twin tensor beams stab at my face, chill damp in his steel barn and the lonesome hoot of a foghorn from somewhere across the water. "So?"

My turn to shrug. "I just did... There didn't seem to be anything else to do."

The beams duck back to the silicon heart of his defective toy. "Then you're okay. It was a true choice. What I mean is, she was set to be what she is. You had about as much to do with where she's at today as that fast-wipe module did. She'd have found somebody else, if she hadn't found you..."

I made a deal with Barry, the senior editor, got twenty minutes at five on a cold September morning. Lise came in and hit me with that same shot, but this time I was ready, with my baffles and brain-maps, and I didn't have to feel it. It took me two weeks, piecing out the minutes in the editing room, to cut what she'd done down into something I could play for Max Bell, who owns the Pilot.

Bell hadn't been happy, not happy at all, as I explained what I'd done. Maverick editors can be a problem, and eventually most editors decide that they've found someone who'll be it, the next monster, and then they start wasting time and money. He'd nodded, when I'd finished my pitch, then scratched his nose with the cap of his red feltpen. "Uh-huh. Got it. Hottest thing since fish grew legs, right?"

But he'd jacked it, the demo soft I'd put together, and when it clicked out of its slot in his Braun desk unit, he was staring at the wall, his face blank.

"Max?"

"Huh?"

"What do you think?"

"Think? I... What did you say her name was?"

He blinked. "Lisa? Who you say she's signed with?"

"Lise. Nobody, Max. She hasn't signed with anybody yet."

"Jesus Christ." He still looked blank.

"You know how I found her?" Rubin asks, wading through ragged cardboard boxes to find the light switch. The boxes are filled with carefully sorted *gomi*: lithium batteries, tantalum capacitors, RF connectors, breadboards, barrier strips, ferroresonant transformers, spools of bus-bar wire... One box is filled with the severed heads of hundreds of Barbie dolls, another with armoured industrial safety gauntlets that look like spacesuit gloves. Light floods the room and a sort of Kandinsky mantis is snipped and painted tin swings its golfball-size head towards the bright bulb. "I was down Granville on a *gomi* run, back in an alley, and I found her just sitting there. Caught the skeleton and she didn't look so good, so I asked her if she was okay. Nothin'. Just closed her eyes. Not my lookout, I think. But I happen back by there, about four hours later, and she hasn't moved. 'Look, honey,' I tell her, 'maybe your hardware's bugged up, I can help you, okay?' Nothin'. 'How long you been back here?' Nothin'. So I take off." He crosses to his workbench and strokes the thin metal limbs of the mantis-thing with a pale forefinger. Behind the bench, hung on damp-swollen sheets of ancient pegboard, are pliers, screwdrivers, tie-wrap guns, a rusted Daisy BB rifle, coax strippers, crimpers, logic probes, heat guns, a pocket oscilloscope, seemingly every tool in human history, with no attempt ever made to order them at all, though I've yet to see Rubin's hand hesitate.

"So I went back," he says. "Gave it an hour. She was out, by then, unconscious, so I brought her back here and ran a check on the exoskeleton. Batteries were dead. She'd crawled back there when the juice ran out and settled down to starve to death, I guess."

"When was that?"

"About a week after you took her home."

"But what if she'd died? If you hadn't found her?"

"Somebody was going to find her. She couldn't ask

for anything, you know? Just take. Couldn't stand a favour."

Max found the agents for her, and a trio of awesomely slick junior partners Leared into YVR a day later. Lise wouldn't come down to the Pilot to meet them, insisted we bring them up to Rubin's, where she still slept.

"Welcome to Couvreville," Rubin said, as they edged in the door. His long face was smeared with grease, the fly of his ragged fatigue pants held more or less shut with a twisted paperclip. The boys grinned automatically, but there was something marginally more authentic about the girl's smile. "Mr Stark," she said, "I was in London last week. I saw your installation at the Tate."

"Marcello's Battery Factory," Rubin said. "They say it's scatological, the Brits..." He shrugged. "Brits. I mean, who knows?"

"They're right. It's also very funny."

The boys were beaming like tabled-tanned light-houses, standing there in their suits. The demo had reached Los Angeles. They knew.

"And you're Lise," she said, negotiating the path between Rubin's heaped gomi. "You're going to be a very famous person soon, Lise. We have a lot to discuss..."

And Lise just stood there, propped in polycarbon, and the look on her face was the one I'd seen that first night, in my condo, when she'd asked me if I wanted to go to bed. But if the junior agent lady saw it, she didn't show it. She was a pro.

I told myself that I was a pro too.

I told myself to relax.

Rashfires gutter in steel cannisters around the Market. The snow still falls and kids huddle over the flames like arthritic crows, hopping foot to foot, wind whipping their dark coats. Up in Fairview's arty slum-tumble, someone's laundry has frozen solid on the line, pink squares of bedsheet standing out against the background dinge and the confusion of satellite dishes and solar panels. Some ecologist's eggbeater windmill goes round and round, round and round, giving a whirling finger to the Hydro rates.

Rubin clumps along in paint-spattered L.L. Bean gumshoes, his big head pulled down into an oversized fatigue jacket. Sometimes one of the hunched teens will point him out as we pass, the guy who builds all the crazy stuff, the robots and shit.

"You know what your trouble is?" he says, when we're under the bridge, headed up to Fourth. "You're the kind who *always* reads the handbook. Anything people build, any kind of technology, it's going to have some specific purpose. It's for doing something that somebody already understands. But if it's new technology, it'll open areas nobody's ever thought of before. You read the manual, man, and you won't play around with it, not the same way. And you get all funny when somebody else uses it to do something you never thought of. Like Lise."

"She wasn't the first." Traffic drums past, overhead.

"No, but she's sure as hell the first person you ever met who went and translated herself into a hard-

wired program. You lose any sleep when whatsisname did it, three-four years ago, the French kid, the writer?"

"I didn't really think about it, much. A gimmick. PR..."

"He's still writing. The weird thing is, he's going to be writing, unless somebody blows up his mainframe..."

I wince, shake my head. "But it's not him, is it? It's just a program."

"Interesting point. Hard to say. With Lise, though, we find out. She's not a writer."

She had it all in there, Kings, locked up in her head the way her body was locked in that exoskeleton.

The agents signed her with a label and brought in a production team from Tokyo. She told them she wanted me to edit. I said no; Max dragged me into his office and threatened to fire me on the spot. If I wasn't involved, there was no reason to do the studio work at the Pilot. Vancouver was hardly the centre of the world, and the agents wanted her in Los Angeles. It meant a lot of money to him, and it might put the Autonomic Pilot on the map. I couldn't explain to him why I'd refused. It was too crazy, too personal; she was getting a final dig in. Or that's what I thought then. But Max was serious. He really didn't give me any choice. We both knew another job wasn't going to crawl into my hand. I went back out with him and we told the agents that we'd worked it out: I was on.

The agents showed us lots of teeth.

Lise pulled out an inhaler full of wizz and took a huge hit. I thought I saw the agent-lady raise one perfect eyebrow, but that was the extent of censure. After the papers were signed, Lise more or less did what she wanted.

And Lise always knew what she wanted.

We did Kings in three weeks, the basic recording. I found any number of reasons to avoid Rubin's place, even believed some of them myself. She was still staying there, although the agents weren't too happy with what they saw as a total lack of security. Rubin told me later that he'd had to have his agent call them up and raise hell, but after that they seemed to quit worrying. I hadn't known that Rubin had an agent. It was always easy to forget that Rubin Stark was more famous, then, than anyone else I knew, certainly more famous than I thought Lise was ever likely to become. I knew we were working on something strong, but you never know how big anything's liable to be.

But the time I spent in the Pilot, I was on. Lise was amazing.

It was like she was born to the form, even though the technology that made that form possible hadn't even existed, when she was born. You see something like that and you wonder how many thousands, maybe millions of phenomenal artists have died mute, down the centuries, people who could never have been poets or painters or saxophone players, but who had this stuff inside, these psychic waveforms waiting for the circuitry required to tap in...

I learned a few things about her, incidentally, from our time in the studio. That she was born in Windsor. That her father was American and served in Peru and came home crazy and half blind. That whatever was

wrong with her body was congenital. That she had those sores because she refused to remove the exoskeleton, ever, because she'd start to choke and die at the thought of that utter helplessness. That she was addicted to wizz and doing enough of it daily to wire a football team.

Her agents brought in medics, who padded the polycarbon with foam and sealed the sores over with micropore dressings. They pumped her up with vitamins and tried to work on her diet, but nobody ever tried to take that inhaler away.

They brought in hairdressers and make-up artists, too, and wardrobe people and image-builders and articulate little PR hamsters, and she endured it with something that might almost have been a smile.

And, right through those three weeks, we didn't talk. Just studio-talk, artist-editor stuff, very much a restricted code. Her imagery was so strong, so extreme, that she never really needed to explain a given effect to me. I took what she put out and worked with it, and jacked it back to her. She'd either say yes or no, and usually it was yes. The agents noted this and approved, and clapped Max Bell on the back and took him out to dinner, and my salary went up.

And I was pro, all the way. Helpful and thorough and polite. I was determined not to crack again, and never thought about the night I cried, and I was also doing the best work I'd ever done, and knew it, and that's a high in itself.

And then, one morning, about six, after a long, long session – when she'd first gotten that eerie cotillion sequence out, the one the kids call the Ghost Dance – she spoke to me. One of the two agent-bos had been there, showing teeth, but he was gone now, and the Pilot was dead quiet, just the hum of a blower somewhere down by Max's office.

"Casey," she said, her voice hoarse with the wizz, "sorry I hit on you so hard."

I thought for a minute she was telling me something about the recording we'd just made. I looked up and saw her there, and it struck me that we were alone, and hadn't been alone since we'd made the demo.

I had no idea at all what to say. Didn't even know what I felt.

Propped up in the exoskeleton, she was looking worse than she had that first night, at Rubin's. The wizz was eating her, under the stuff the make-up team kept smoothing on, and sometimes it was like seeing a deathhead surface beneath the face of a not very handsome teenager. I had no idea of her real age. Not old, not young.

"The ramp effect," I said, coiling a length of cable.

"What's that?"

"Nature's way of telling you to clean up your act. Sort of mathematical law, says you can only get off real good on a stimulant x number of times, even if you increase the doses. But you can't ever get off as nice as you did the first few times. Or you shouldn't be able to, anyway. That's the trouble with designer drugs; they're too clever. That stuff you're doing has some tricky tail on one of its molecules, keeps you from turning the decomposed adrenalin into adrenochrome. If it didn't, you'd be schizophrenic by now. You got any little problems, Lise? Like apnia? Sometimes maybe you stop breathing, if you go to sleep?"

But I wasn't even sure I felt the anger that I heard

in my own voice.

She stared at me with those pale grey eyes. The wardrobe people had replaced her thriftshop jacket with a butter-tanned matte black blouson that did a better job of hiding the polycarbon ribs. She kept it zipped to the neck, always, even though it was too warm in the studio. The hairdressers had tried something new, the day before, and it hadn't worked out, her rough dark hair a lopsided explosion above that drawn, triangular face. She stared at me and I felt it again, her singleness, her purpose.

"I don't sleep, Casey."

It wasn't until later, much later, that I remembered that she'd told me she was sorry. She never did, again, and it was the only time I ever heard her say anything that seemed to be out of character.

Rubin's diet consists of vending-machine sandwiches, Pakistani take-out food, and espresso. I've never seen him eat anything else. We eat samosas in a narrow shop on Fourth that has a single plastic table wedged between the counter and the door to the can. Rubin eats his dozen samosas, six meat and six veggie, with total concentration, one after another, and doesn't bother to wipe his chin. He's devoted to the place. He loathes the Greek counterman; it's mutual, a real relationship. If the counterman left, Rubin might not come back. The Greek glares at the crumbs on Rubin's chin and jacket. Between samosas, he shoots daggers right back, his eyes narrowed behind the smudged lenses of his steel-rimmed glasses.

The samosas are dinner. Breakfast will be egg salad on dead white bread, packed in one of those triangle of milky plastic, on top of six little cups of poisonously strong espresso.

"You didn't see it coming, Casey." He peers at me out of the thumb-printed depths of his glasses. "Cause you're not good at lateral thinking. You read the handbook. What else did you think she was after? Sex? More wizz? A world tour? She was past all that. That's what made her so strong. She was past it. That's why *Kings of Sleep's* as big as it is, and why the kids buy it, why they believe it. They know. Those kids back down the Market, warming their butts around the fires and wondering if they'll find some place to sleep tonight, they believe it. It's the hottest soft in eight years. Guy at a shop on Granville told me he gets more of the damned things lifted than he sells of anything else. Says it's a hassle to even stock it... She's big she was what they are, only more so. She knew, man. No dreams, no hope. You can't see the cages on those kids, Casey, but more and more they're twigging to it, that they aren't going anywhere." He brushes a greasy crumb of meat from his chin, missing three more. "So she sang it for them, said it the way they can't, painted them a picture. And she used the money to buy herself a way out, that's all."

I watch the steam bead and roll down the window in big drops, streaks in the condensation. Beyond the window I can make out a partially stripped Lada, wheels scavenged, axles down on the pavement.

"How many people have done it, Rubin? Have any idea?"

"Not too many. Hard to say, anyway, because a lot of them are probably politicians we think of as being

comfortably and reliably dead." He gives me a funny look. "Not a nice thought. Anyway, they had first shot at the technology. It still costs too much for any ordinary dozen millionaires, but I've heard of at least seven. They say Mitsubishi did it to Weinberg before his immune system finally went tits up. He was head of their hybridoma lab in Okayama. Well, their stock's still pretty high, in monoclonals, so maybe it's true. And Langlais, the French kid, the novelist..." He shrugs. "Lise didn't have the money for it. Wouldn't now, even. But she put herself in the right place at the right time. She was about to croak, she was in Hollywood, and they could already see what Kings was going to do."

The day we finished up, the band stepped of a JAL shuttle out of London, four skinny kids who operated like a well-oiled machine and displayed a hypertrophied fashion-sense and a total lack of affect. I set them up in a row, at the Pilot, in identical white Ikea office chairs, smeared saline paste on their temples, taped the trodes on, and ran the rough version of what was going to become *Kings of Sleep*. When they came out of it, they all started talking at once, ignoring me totally, in the British version of that secret language all studio musicians speak, four sets of pale hands zooming and chopping the air.

I could catch enough of it to decide that they were excited. That they thought it was good. So I got my jacket and left. They could wipe their own saline paste off, thanks.

And that night I saw Lise for the last time, though I didn't plan to.

Walking back down to the Market, Rubin noisily digesting his meal, red taillights reflected on wet cobbles, the city beyond the Market a clean sculpture of light, a lie, where the broken and the lost burrow into the gomi that grows like humus at the bases of the towers of glass...

"I gotta go to Frankfurt tomorrow, to do an installation. You wanna come? I could write you off as a technician." He shrugs his way deeper into the fatigue jacket. "Can't pay you but you can have airfare, you want..."

Funny offer, from Rubin, and I know it's because he's worried about me, thinks I'm too strange about Lise, and it's the only thing he can think of, getting me out of town.

"It's colder in Frankfurt now than it is here."

"You maybe need a change, Casey, I dunno..."

"Thanks, but Max has a lot of work lined up. Pilot's a big deal now, people flying in from all over..."

"Sure."

When I left the band at the Pilot, I went home. Walked up to Fourth and took the trolley home, past the windows of the shops I see every day, each one lit up jazzy and slick, clothes and shoes and softwear, Japanese motorcycles crouched like clean enamel scorpions, Italian furniture. The windows change with the seasons, the shops come and go. We were into the pre-holiday node now, and there were more people on the street, a lot of couples, walking quick and purposefully past the bright win-



dows, on their way to score that perfect little whatever for whoever, half the girls in those padded thigh-high nylon boot-things that came out of New York the winter before, the ones that Rubin said made them look like they had elephantiasis. I grinned, thinking about that, and suddenly it hit me that it really was over, that I was done with Lise, and that now she'd be sucked off to Hollywood as inexorably as if she'd poked her toe into a black hole, drawn down by the unthinkable gravitic tug of Big Money. Believing that, that she was gone – probably was gone, by then – I let down some kind of guard in myself and felt the edges of my pity. But just the edges, because I didn't want my evening screwed up by anything. I wanted partytime. It had been a while.

Got off at my corner and the elevator worked on the first try. Good sign. I told myself. Upstairs, I undressed and showered, found a clean shirt, microwave burritos. Feel normal. I advised my reflection, while I shaved. You have been working too hard. Your credit cards have gotten fat. Time to remedy that.

The burritos tasted like cardboard, but I decided I liked them because they were so aggressively normal. My car was in Burnaby, having its leaky hydrogen cell repacked, so I wasn't going to have to worry about driving. I could go out, find partytime, and phone in sick in the morning. Max wasn't going to kick; I was his star boy. He owed me.

You owe me, Max, I said to the sub-zero bottle of Moskovskaya I fished out of the freezer. Do you ever owe me. I have just spent three weeks editing the dreams and nightmares of one very screwed up person, Max. On your behalf. So that you can grow and prosper, Max. I poured three fingers of vodka into a plastic glass left over from a party I'd thrown the year before and went back into the living room.

Sometimes it looks to me like nobody in particular lives there. Not that it's that messy, I'm a good if somewhat robotic housekeeper, and even remember to dust the tops of framed posters and things, but I have these times when the place abruptly gives me a kind of low-grade chill, with its basic accumulation of basic consumer goods. I mean, it's not like I want to fill it up with cats or houseplants or anything, but there are moments when I see that anyone could be living there, could own those things, and it all seems sort of interchangeable, my life and yours, my life and anybody's... I think Rubin sees things that way, too, all the time, but for him it's a source of strength. He lives in other people's garbage, and everything he drags home must have been new and shiny, once, must have meant something, for however briefly, to someone. So he sweeps it all up into his crazy-looking truck and hauls it back to his place and lets it compost there until he thinks of something new to do with it. Once he was showing me a book of 20th-century art he liked, and there was a picture of an automated sculpture called *Dead Birds Fly Again*, a thing that whirled real dead birds around and around on a string, and he smiled and nodded, and I could see he felt the artist was a spiritual ancestor of some kind. But what could Rubin do with my framed posters and my Mexican futon from the Bay and my temperfoam bed from Ikea? Well, I thought, taking a first chilly sip, he'd be able to think of something, which was why he was a famous artist and I wasn't.

I went and pressed my forehead against the plate-glass window, as cold as the glass in my hand. Time to go, I said to myself. You are exhibiting symptoms of urban singles angst. There are cures for this. Drink up. Go.

I didn't attain a state of partytime, that night. Neither did I exhibit adult common sense and give up, go home, watch some ancient movie, and fall asleep on my futon. The tension those three weeks had built up in me drove me like the mainspring of a mechanical watch, and I went ticking off through nighttime, lubricating my more or less random progress with more drinks. It was one of those nights, I quickly decided, when you slip into an alternate continuum, a city that looks exactly like the one where you live, except for the peculiar difference that it contains not one person you love or know or have even spoken to before. Nights like that, you can go into a familiar bar and find that the staff has just been replaced; then you understand that your real motive in going there was simply to see a familiar face, on a waitress or a bartender, whoever... This sort of thing has been known to mediate against partytime.

I kept it rolling, though, through six or seven places, and eventually it rolled me into a West End club that looked as if it hadn't been redecorated since the Nineties. A lot of peeling chrome over plastic, blurry holograms that gave you a headache if you tried to make them out. I think Barry had told me about the place, but I can't imagine why. I looked around and grinned. If I was looking to be depressed, I'd come to the right place. Yes, I told myself, as I took a corner stool at the bar, this was genuinely sad, really the pits. Dreadful enough to halt the momentum of my shitty evening, which was undoubtedly a good thing. I'd have one more for the road, admire the grot, and then cab it on home.

And then I saw Lise.

She hadn't seen me, not yet, and I still had my coat on, tweed collar up against the weather. She was down the bar and around the corner with a couple of empty drinks in front of her, big ones, the kind that come with little Hongkong parasols or plastic mermaids in them, and as she looked up at the boy beside her, I saw the wizz flash in her eyes and knew that those drinks had never contained alcohol, because the level of drug she was running couldn't tolerate the mix. The kid, though, was gone, numb grinning drunk and about ready to slide off his stool, and running on about something as he made repeated attempts to focus his eyes and get a better look at Lise, who sat there with her wardrobe team's black leather blouson zipped to her chin and her skull about to burn through her white face like a thousand-watt bulb. And seeing that, seeing her there, I knew a whole lot of things at once.

That she really was dying, either from the wizz or her disease or the combination of the two. That she damned well knew it. That the boy beside her was too drunk to have picked up on the exoskeleton, but not too drunk to register the expensive jacket and the money she had for drinks. And that what I was seeing was exactly what it looked like.

But I couldn't add it up, right away, couldn't compute. Something in me cringed.

And she was smiling, or anyway doing a thing she

must have thought was like a smile, the expression she knew was appropriate to the situation, and nodding in time to the kid's slurred inanities, and that awful line of hers came back to me, the one about liking to watch.

And I know something now. I know that if I hadn't happened in there, hadn't seen them, I'd have been able to accept all that came later. Might, even, have found a way to rejoice on her behalf, or found a way to trust in whatever it is that she's since become, or had built in her image, a program that pretends to be Lise to the extent that it believes it's her. I could have believed what Rubin believes, that she was so truly past it, our hi-tech Saint Joan burning for union with that hardwired godhead in Hollywood, that nothing mattered to her except the hour of her departure. That she threw away that poor sad body with a cry of release, free of the bonds of polycarbon and hated flesh. Well, maybe, after all, she did. Maybe it was that way. I'm sure that's the way she expected it to be.

But seeing her there, that drunken kid's hand in hers, that hand she couldn't even feel, I knew, once and for all, that no human motive is ever entirely pure. Even Lise, with that corrosive, crazy drive to stardom and cybernetic immortality, had weaknesses. Was human in a way I hated myself for admitting.

She'd gone out that night, I knew, to kiss herself goodbye. To find someone drunk enough to do it for her. Because, I knew then, it was true: she did like to watch.

I think she saw me, as I left. I was practically running. If she did, I suppose she hated me worse than ever, for the horror and the pity in my face.

I never saw her again.

Someday I'll ask Rubin why Wild Turkey sours are the only drink he knows how to make. Industrial strength, Rubin's sours. He passes me the dented aluminium cup, while his place ticks and stirs around us with the furtive activity of his smaller creations.

"You ought to come to Frankfurt," he says again.

"Why, Rubin?"

"Because, pretty soon, she's going to call you up. And I think maybe you aren't ready for it. You're still screwed up about this, and it'll sound like her and think like her, and you'll get too weird behind it. Come over to Frankfurt with me and you can get a little breathing space. She won't know you're there..."

"I told you," I say, remembering her at the bar in that club, "lots of work. Max..."

"Stuff Max. Max you just made rich. Max can sit on his hands. You're rich yourself, from your royalty cut on Kings, if you weren't too stubborn to dial up your bank account. You can afford a vacation."

I look at him and wonder when I'll tell him the story of that final glimpse. "Rubin, I appreciate it, man, but I just..."

He sighs, drinks. "But what?"

"Rubin, if she calls me, is it her?"

He looks at me a long time. "God only knows." His cup clicks on the table. "I mean, Casey, the technology is there, so who, man, really who, is to say?"

"And you think I should come with you to Frankfurt?"

He takes off his steel-rimmed glasses and polishes

them inefficiently on the front of his plaid flannel shirt. "Yeah, I do. You need the rest. Maybe you don't need it now, but you're going to, later."

"How's that?"

"When you have to edit her next release. Which will almost certainly be soon, because she needs money bad. She's taking up a lot of ROM on some corporate mainframe, and her share of Kings won't come close to paying for what they had to do to put her there. And you're her editor, Casey. I mean, who else?"

And I just stare at him, as he puts the glasses back on, like I can't move at all.

"Who else, man?"

And one of his constructs clicks right then, just a clear and tiny sound, and it comes to me, he's right.

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William Gibson's first book, *Neuromancer*, won most of the American awards for best science-fiction novel last year (Hugo, Nebula, etc). He is regarded as unofficial leader of the "cyberpunk" movement - a term which was coined by sf editor and anthologist Gardner Dozois. His second novel, *Count Zero*, is due to be published by Gollancz around the same time as this issue of *Interzone*. Also due for publication this year is his first collection of short stories, *Burning Chrome*. The above piece will appear in that volume.

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BRUCE STERLING

Interviewed by Andy Robertson and David Pringle

What were your feelings about the Live Aid concerts?

I watched it all day on MTV cable. This was a definitive 80's event – you could feel it as it happened, that sense of blissed-out surprise as an unexpected gestalt emerged. And it had the stamp of modernity all over it – it lacked the hairy-eyed wildness of the counter-culture events of the 60's, but the level of tech was incredible, a head-trip in itself. One regretted the mundane blabbing of the commentators, and the unctuousness of the commercial sponsors. But this was a small price to pay for the conspicuous lack of stabbings and freakouts.

As the greatest media event of all time, it was a testament to the raw power of contemporary pop culture – which was better harnessed than ever before, and harnessed, Thank God, by artists, not politicians. And it all occurred during Ronald Reagan's unconsciousness under surgery – a fascinating example of cultural synchronicity. I am still not quite sure what this coincidence signifies, but it makes me hopeful.

These are very interesting times to be alive (in the normal sense and the Chinese sense). Do you feel that the next few centuries will be as interesting?

Actually, I suspect that the next few centuries may be Chinese.

Sf is thought to be a literature of the future, yet today we have "survivalist" sf, "feminist" sf, "ecological" sf. Don't you think that sf, far from being a vision of the future, is a reflection of the present?

This is a sophisticated question. Obviously sf must in some sense reflect the present, because to describe the future accurately would be an occult act. But to agree that sf "reflects the present" is to belittle its differences from the rest of literature. This premise is usually the first step to an orgy of metaphorization, because if one agrees that sf is "really" about the present, then such sf touchstones as robots and starships must be interpreted as symbols of the modern condition.

Much sf lends itself to such an interpretation, because much of it actually is folkloric talespinning in which

spacecraft serve the role of ruby slippers or a flying horse.

But the best of it, that part which truly fills the role of a literature of ideas, is about ideas. I resent it when my ideas, which I have gone to some pains to develop and explore, are dismissed as unconscious yearnings or a funhouse-mirror reflection of the contemporary milieu. My writings about the future are not "about the future" in a strict sense, but they are about my ideas of the future. They are not allegories.

This question is part of an ongoing critical attempt to reduce sf to a sub-branch of mainstream literature: a sub-branch whose writers do not quite know what they are talking about.

Your "Mechanist/Shaper" stories are about the colonization of the solar system achieved partly by human evolutionary adaptation and partly by technological means. Do you think that strong evolutionary pressures are affecting people alive today?

"Evolution" is a tricky concept. Evolution as it is classically defined does not operate on the same timescale as technological advance. The Shaper series postulates a future in which technical advances shatter the human race into subgroups that are no longer classifiable as human. In one sense these "posthuman" groups are new species, but in another and truer sense they are technological artifacts, industrial products. It's a question of definition.

Obviously the gene-pool of the modern population is changing drastically, thanks mostly to birth control in the industrialized nations and health advances in the Third World. This is our best example of classical "evolutionary pressure." It has little to do with Gernsbackian sci-fi notions of "evolved" human beings with six fingers and swollen foreheads; the kinds of geeks who mooch around in white robes and lucite sandals.

But I anticipate other and considerably more bizarre effects on the population, however: prosthetics, life extension, neurotechnology, and outright genetic manipulation. We are breaking the laws of evolution, and we may soon be amending its Constitution.

Why was there such a long gap between the publication of your second novel, THE ARTIFICIAL KID, in 1980, and your third, SCHISMATRIX, in 1985?

After I finished my second novel I began writing short stories for the first time. And *Schismatrix* was a particularly ambitious work.

Your first novel, INVOLUTION OCEAN, came out in 1977 when you were still in your early twenties. How do you feel now about having achieved publishing success at an early age?

I often have spasms in which I wish that my early work would be ceremonially entombed in the wreckage of the Titanic. However, I feel much the same about stuff I wrote six months ago. No doubt I will eventually feel grave embarrassment about this interview.

This is a personal quirk, though. Young writers should not sit on their hands. Sf writers as a group are greying rapidly and no pop genre can survive this for long.

Are you a full-time writer? Are you married? If so, what does your wife think of your stories?

My wife and I have been a couple for ten years and I've been a full-time writer for two. Nancy is my first and foremost critic.

We are a typical 80's urban couple. She works and I cook. We live in the ruins of traditional sex-roles and we like it that way.

Who were your parents? What did they, or do they, think of science fiction as a career?

My mother died in 1973; my father's an engineer. Science fiction is not a "career"; it is an affliction. No sane parent who fully understood the consequences would want a son involved in such a thing. Luckily my parents were not science fiction readers and never fully grasped the essential lunacy of the enterprise.

Do you have rebellious instincts? Were you ever in serious conflict with any kind of authority?

I have never been caught. Authority does not yet grasp the hideous truth. Which, if any, of these writers has influenced you: Robert A. Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Ursula Le Guin? Do you have any general thoughts on their differing examples



and legacies?

I much admire Heinlein's early sf technique. His detailed use of carefully extrapolated background in the Future History series was a major advance. Heinlein gets a lot of bad press for his politics, but it hardly seems fair. There are plenty of other political eccentrics in sf whose ideas are equally repugnant but not so well expressed.

Dick was a very gifted writer, but his work has never had much personal appeal for me.

J.G. Ballard should be canonized. I stand in awe of the man and have read everything of his I could get my hands on. The disaster novels. The condensed novels. *Billionium*, *The Terminal Beach*, *Chronopolis*, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, all unbelievably brilliant. Ballard has an unrivalled grasp of what Big Science can do the psyche.

No one can write like Ballard, but I think at least I've profited by his research technique. He has spoken several times about reading the contents of science-lab wastebaskets. "A gold mine," he called them. I've learned the value of studying this kind of raw data. This is one of the things that makes Ballard's work so effective: its objectivity, its air of the lab report. Science fiction is a hybrid literature and the documentation of technical culture, what Ballard calls "invisible literature," is one of its parents.

I admire Ballard's ambition and outspoken confidence. "Earth is the only alien planet." "Science fiction is the most important fiction that has been written for the last 100 years." Very gutsy statements, manifestos almost, and worth studying and living up to.

I appreciate Ursula Le Guin's work

gutsy statements, manifestos almost, and worthy studying and living up to.

I appreciate Ursula Le Guin's work – *Left Hand of Darkness* is a masterpiece – but her literary theory leaves me cold. I find her political stance bizarre, and the more it informs her work the less I like it. I'm glad she has found her audience, but I am not part of it.

Most of my favourite writers are British. Aldiss, Bayley, Moorcock, Stapledon, Wells. They changed my life.

Did you have a scientific education? Are you a home-computer buff, or anything of the sort?

I'm a journalist by training, and might have become a pop-science writer if fiction hadn't snared me early on. I took a great many science courses in the university, especially astronomy

and biology. I finally foundered on calculus.

I love gadgetry. I have two home computers and a modem. Tech toys fascinate me, especially if they're in chrome or matte black. Anything with an LED is irresistible. I'd fool with computers more, but programming can devour your life. Silicon should be a controlled substance.

Timothy Leary said "Home computers are the LSD of the 1980's." He should know.

If you were the editor of a viable science-fiction magazine what policies would you pursue immediately?

That's a tough one. I don't think there are any quick fixes for the state sf is in at the moment. In general I think I would favour inventive ideation over fine writing, except of course in those rare and splendid instances when the two are combined.

Hard-sf in the sense of nuts-and-bolts technolatr is at a dead end, but intellectual rigour and honest plausibility are still signal virtues. Sf should be about real ideas.

Sf should not be more like mainstream writing. Editors might find it fruitful if they gave up assuming that sf is a form of literature at all. Perhaps they should think of sf as a kind of pop-culture phenomenon, a mass reaction to social change that only happens to be expressed in prose.

Sf readers are not like other readers. Readers who seek out mainstream literary values prefer their literature untroubled by visionary lunacy. Sf readers are a kind of mutated subculture, like Cheyenne Ghost Dancers or Chinese Boxers; a fringe who are reacting wildly to the impact of change. If we are to expand our readership, as I

think we must, it will not be by recruiting literateurs but by capturing those other fringe-types who are most like sf fans. Techies, cyberheads, dopers, rockers, and physicists, most likely.

Have you brought the Mechanist/Shaper series to an end with SCHISMATRIX?

Yes.

What are you working on now? Any new directions?

I'm working on a novel of the early 21st century. I hope to present a plausible version of a liveable human future. Will the USA be the first country to move from First World to Third World status? If so why?

No, not unless we are bombed back into the Stone Age. Even in that case Britain is likely to precede us by at least fifteen minutes.

Do you believe that the majority of people will be living off-Earth, 1,000 years from now?

That depends on what you mean by "people."

In Britain, we have recently been regaled with a major TV history series called "The Triumph of the West." What do you think of that title, and do you think there is any future for the non-Western civilizations?

I don't think that even the West is likely to remain "The West" much longer. The classic attitudes that led the West to world dominance have now been absorbed by other cultures. Recently I read an article in which a Japanese journalist politely explained that Western liberal-democratic society is not the proper milieu for advanced industry. We are too lacking in discipline.

The last twenty years in America have seen some profound changes.

Some justice has been done: white Americans are finally being integrated into black culture. The evidence is all around us: in dress, music, language, work and leisure... Nancy Reagan recently cut a rap-music single. Michael Jackson is the best-known American in the world.

In twenty years, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea may well be more like America than America could ever be. America will be something profoundly different – "post-Western," if you like.

The Western intellectual tradition is in upheaval. Communism is moribund and laissez-faire capitalism is a joke. In a few decades these nineteenth-century legacies will be junked and replaced with something vastly more sophisticated. The future as I see it will be multilateral, multicultural, and full of ferment.

Most of the planet's young people live in the Third World. They will be the greatest source of radicalism, idealism and energy in the years to come. They have the most to gain and face the greatest risk of disaster. There will be no more sweeping youth rebellions in the West – the Baby Boomers will be running things soon and they have a cast-iron monopoly on hipness.

Bruce Sterling's novel *Schismatrix* is published in Britain by Penguin Books.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

The Sex Wars: several stories which deal in surprising and imaginative ways with the battle between men and women – including pieces by Josephine Saxton and Michael Blumlein. Also, an interview, film reviews, book reviews, and more stories...

John Brosnan

The One and Only Tale from The White Horse

The White Horse, the pub where I met him, is gone now. It used to lie at the foot of the Centrepoint building, which looms like a misplaced New York skyscraper over the junction of Charing Cross Road, Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, but a few months ago it was bought by a Danish brewery and converted into a trendy, up-market bar; the kind of place I'm not comfortable in...

Not that I was ever very comfortable in The White Horse. It was always too crowded with the usual mix of music business types from nearby Denmark Street, Arabs from the language school across the street and a smattering of petty crooks. There were usually a number of female groupies about too, hanging around the music business types with adoring looks on their faces. The type of girl for whom the twang of a guitar string sets up a sympathetic resonance in her knicker elastic.

It was particularly crowded on the fateful night last summer. I was standing hunched over the bar, trying to make it plain by my posture that I didn't want conversation. I was in a bad mood. The reason? None of your business.

My ploy worked for about half an hour then I heard the tell-tale jingle of keys that signalled the approach of Mick. Mick is a fat slob of a record producer who makes money by buying up the rights of minor pop classics from the sixties and then re-releases them with overlaid disco tracks. He also runs a catering service on the side and I hear that the food he sells is just as adulterated as his music.

He squeezed his bulk in beside me at the bar, taking care, of course, to avoid actual physical contact, and said, "Hi, Jim. Hot, innit?"

I gave him one of my most condescending grunts but it was like water off the back of a Patton tank. He kept trotting out more conversational gambits that were just as inspiring as his first. I responded with more grunts until I reached the point where I had almost exhausted my entire repertoire. Finally, even

he had to get the message and he retreated with his pint of bitter to find more congenial company. I listened to his keys jingle as he went and wondered, not for the first time, if there were enough locks in all of London to accommodate them.

I ordered another double whiskey from Daros, the Lithuanian barman with the looks of a Lithuanian film star, if there is such a thing, and settled back into my gloom.

"Hot, isn't it?" The voice came from my left. I turned, adjusting my glare to full intensity.

I found myself glaring at a wimpy-looking man aged somewhere between 30 and 35. He was balding slightly, wore thick glasses and was dressed in a grey suit that needed pressing. I didn't recognize him and yet at the same time he was vaguely familiar.

I turned back to my drink and hunched my shoulders up another notch. Much further and I'd be able to play the Hunchback of Notre Dame without padding.

"And it's going to be just as hot again tomorrow," he chirped.

I couldn't resist it. I turned and growled at him, "Don't tell me - you're a fucking meteorologist."

He gave a little laugh and shook his head. "Good heavens no."

I sighed and continued to contemplate my glass. After a pause he said, "I bet you could never guess in a million years what I do for a living."

"That's easy. You're a freelance cretin," I said. He gave that little laugh again then finally managed to catch Daros's attention - never an easy task. "Half of shandy, please," he said to Daros.

Somehow I just knew he'd be a shandy drinker. "Actually," he told me, "I catalogue parallel worlds."

I looked at him again. I thought I had him pinpointed then. He was obviously a customer from that weird shop in Denmark Street. The sci-fi one. You'd often get them coming in to the pub. They'd sit around

with their half pints of lager talking about Dr Who and Star Trek and arguing about how fast "Warp Factor Three" was in terms of miles-per-hour. I'd often told Daron that he should bar them but he never did.

"Parallel worlds, huh?" I said. I knew I was making a mistake letting myself be sucked in this way but I couldn't help it.

He nodded and said, "Yep. I list the anomalies between one world and the next."

"You must meet a lot of interesting people then," I said with sarcasm so heavy it would have given anyone else a hernia.

"No, not really," he sighed. "Mostly I meet the same people all the time."

"Yeah? How come?" I looked over his shoulder, expecting to see the men with the big net come in through the door.

"Because I'm only assigned to deal with the range of worlds that are close to the Prime Reality," he told me.

"Prime Reality?" I glanced at my watch. Maybe it was time I headed for the Frog and Mullet in Old Compton Street.

"Yeah. That's where I hail from." He gave an embarrassed chuckle. "Of course, that classification is a purely subjective one. Naturally, as far as you're concerned, this is the Prime Reality."

"Naturally," I agreed and hurriedly finished my drink. "Well, I got to be going..."

"Oh, don't go yet," he said. "Let me buy you one. What is it?"

I hesitated. He had found my weak spot. "Er, a double Scotch..." I said grudgingly. "Just the one for the road."

He ordered the drink. I felt obliged to humour him now so I said, "You're from another world, eh? What's it like?"

He sighed. "Exactly like this one. That's the trouble."

"Yeah, it can be a real bitch," I agreed sympathetically as if I knew what he was on about.

"It sure can," he said. "My colleagues in the Department of Pan-Temporal Continuum Cross Referencing and Cataloguing have a much easier time of it, if you'll excuse the pun."

I told him I excused the pun. He continued, "they get to check out the more extreme bands in the multi-universal spectrum. You know the sort of things I mean - universes where the strong nuclear forces aren't quite strong enough and so instead of atoms and molecules all you've got is a quark mulch, or a universe where the Big Bang was more like a Weak Fart and the whole place only measures three inches in diameter. Assignments like that are easy."

I nodded. "I'll bet they are."

"Just as easy are the parallel worlds where the anomaly is so plain you can't miss it. For example, one of my colleagues recently encountered a world where the Roman Empire still flourished. London is still called Londinium and Wembley Stadium is the Albion Colosseum. Every Saturday Christians are thrown to the lions there."

"Sounds a less barbaric use for the place than football matches," I commented.

"Another of my colleagues visited a world where Jesus Christ had been born a woman. That had caused

a lot of changes."

"I'll bet it had. What was this female Christ called?"

"Jennifer."

"Jennifer? Jennifer Christ?" I shook my head. "No, it doesn't have the same ring to it. Lacks a certain authority."

"That same colleague found himself in a world where a plague had wiped out every country in the middle ages except Sweden. As a result the entire population of the planet in 1985 was Swedish."

"What was it like there?"

"Quiet. Very, very quiet."

"Yeah, I guess it would be," I agreed.

He took a sip of his shandy and sighed. "My assignments, on the other hand, are more difficult. On my beat the parallel worlds are practically indistinguishable from each other. I really have to dig around to find a single anomaly. Sometimes it can take ages."

"Look on the bright side," I told him as I wondered if I could hit him for another drink. "At least it's safer than what your colleagues are doing."

"Not necessarily," he said. "Appearances can sometimes be deceptive. A world that can appear, on the surface, to be identical to the Prime Reality might harbour a nasty surprise. I mean, if you arrive in a world where the SS are marching down Oxford Street you naturally take precautions but in a world that looks exactly like your own you can be caught off guard..."

"By what, for example?"

"Well, you could be in a world where jay-walking was a capital offence or blowing your nose was a serious social taboo punishable by castration."

"I see what you mean," I said, laughing. "You ever find yourself in a situation like that?"

"No. So far I've been fortunate." He sighed again. "But right now I'd even welcome a nasty surprise of that kind. I've been here almost a week now and haven't been able to spot the tiniest difference between this world and my own."

By now I was caught up by all this wacko stuff and was enjoying myself. I said, "maybe you ended up back in your own world by mistake."

He shook his head. "No. Impossible. I'm definitely several thousand shifts from the Prime Reality. And at that distance some anomalies should have become apparent to me by now."

"How do you go about discovering these anomalies? Do you travel from country to country?"

"Oh no," he said, "I always stay in the same area each time. Usually a walk down Oxford Street will tell me all I need to know. Failing that a visit to the British Museum or the Library around the corner will reveal the anomalies. There's no need for any extensive travelling."

"What are some of the anomalies you've discovered in other worlds?" I asked.

He thought for a moment then said, "well, last month I was in a world where Ronald Reagan wasn't President."

"Jesus! Or, as some would say, Jennifer!"

We both laughed at my little joke.

"So tell me more," I said. "Where was Ronnie?"

"Oh, he was still acting in movies. A big star too."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Well, what happened was that back in 1962 he got

cast as James Bond in the first Bond movie, *Dr No*. He was so popular in the role he never went into politics. And so he's still playing Bond in 1985."

I was about to say, at his age? but it occurred to me that he wasn't much older than the actor who plays James Bond in this world. "So who is President there instead of Reagan?" I asked.

"Another actor. Sylvester Stallone. He's pretty popular even though no one can understand a word of his speeches. The day I left there was a big argument going on as to whether he'd just declared war on Mexico or announced a cut in taxes."

I shook my head in wonderment and gestured to Daros that we wanted another round. "You ever have this much trouble finding an anomaly before?"

"Yes. Once it took me a whole week. It was very frustrating. The world I was cataloguing seemed completely identical to the Prime and I didn't know what to do. And then, finally, it hit me. I was standing outside an airline office in Regent Street wondering what to do next when I happened to glance at a large globe of the world sitting in the office window. There was something odd about it but at first I couldn't put my finger on it. I must have stared at that damn globe for at least ten minutes before I spotted what was missing."

"And what was?"

"Australia."

"Australia?"

He nodded. "I could have kicked myself."

"Hey, it's a mistake anyone could have made," I assured him as I tried to imagine a world without Rupert Murdoch.

Daros finally produced the drinks. I tried to pay but the wimp waved my money away and insisted on treating me again. I thanked him and said, "Well, I'm afraid we definitely have an Australia here. I know because they won the last Test series."

"Yeah, I checked," he sighed. "You've got a New Zealand too, and even a Tasmania." He sipped his shandy and looked gloomy.

I thought for a while and then had one of my rare inspirations. "Hey! I've just solved your problem!" I told him. "I can guarantee you an anomaly – something we don't have in this world that you have in yours."

His rather small eyes shone excitedly behind his thick lenses. "What is it?"

Smugly I said, "we don't have an organization like the one you work for. We don't have a Department of Pan-Temporal whatchamacallits..."

His face fell. "Yes you do."

"What? But I would have heard about it if we did! I subscribe to *New Scientist* for Chrissakes!"

"It's a secret. You must know that your government does a lot of things you don't know anything about. Your version of the Department of Pan-Temporal Continuum Cross Referencing and Cataloguing is based out of Colindale in North London, just like mine. It's one of the first things I automatically confirm whenever I shift."

"Oh," I said. This was getting confusing. I did some more thinking then said, "that means there's a whole bunch of identical you's in all the different realities..."

"Yep. And there's a whole multitude of you too. I've met you before, you know. In here, on previous assignments, though – of course – it wasn't really here and it wasn't really you..."

"I don't remember talking to you before – or rather the other you's," I told him as I struggled to comprehend what he was saying. "But you are sort of familiar so I must have seen you in here before..."

"No, not me. One of my other selves."

"Yeah, that's what I meant." I was starting to feel dizzy. Then a thought occurred to me. "Why don't all the different you's get together and exchange notes? As it stands you lot must be going from world to world duplicating each other's work."

He shook his head. "How could we possibly get together? When one of me is arriving in one world another is just leaving. Like a I told you, the parallel realities close to the Prime are practically identical – millions and millions of 'em – therefore I, and you, are behaving almost exactly the same, and leading the same lives, in each of them."

"You mean in lots of different universes you and I are having this same conversation?"

"Well, yes," he said, "depending on the various anomalies, of course."

"And you've never run into yourself in any of these worlds?"

"No, because my other selves have the same job as me and so they're always off on an assignment when I arrive."

"Of course," I muttered. "That's obvious." I waved frantically to Daros for another round.

"But it does have its advantages. I save on hotel bills for one thing."

"How?"

"I just go home to my own place every night even though, strictly speaking, it isn't really my home."

I digested this and said, "you live alone then?"

"Oh no, I'm married."

The drinks arrived and so distracted was I that I actually paid for them, much to Daros's astonishment. "Let me get this straight. During the six days you've been here in this world looking for anomalies you've been going home each night to your wife except that she isn't really your wife because she's the wife of one of your duplicate selves?"

He nodded. "Right."

"But isn't that, well, adultery?"

"Why should it be? We're all the same man, more or less."

"But that 'more or less' may sometimes count for a lot," I protested. "Hasn't your 'wife' ever noticed you weren't the same man who left for work that morning?"

He considered this and said, "well, on one occasion I went home while I was on assignment and my wife screamed and fainted as I came through the front door. I learned later that in this particular world I had been hit by a truck the week before and died on the way to hospital."

"My God!" I cried. "So what did you do then?"

"No choice but to book into a hotel," he said and sipped his shandy.

I stared at him. Maybe he did come from another world after all. I said, "what about your wife, your real one. Surely she knows, when you go off on an

assignment, that the you who turns up in the evening isn't actually you?"

He shook his head. "She knows nothing about the DPTCGRC. It's top secret in all the worlds. As far as she's concerned I work for the Department of Employment."

"But doesn't that worry you?" I persisted. "Knowing that each night you're away your wife is sleeping with other men? I mean, I know they're you in a sense but not metaphysically speaking..."

He shrugged. "Fair's fair. If I'm sleeping with the wives of the other me's I can't complain if they sleep with mine, can I?"

"I'm not sure," I said, frowning. "I'll have to give it some more thought."

He looked at his watch. "Speaking of wives I'd better get home. She's cooking beef casserole tonight. Apparently it's my favourite dish in this world." He quickly finished the rest of his shandy. "It's been nice chatting to you, as usual."

"Just a sec," I said, having found a flaw in his whole story. "If your work is top secret how come you've been telling me all about it?"

He gave a sly grin. "What does it matter? Have you believed a word I've said?"

He had me there and I laughed. "No, but it's been very entertaining."

He laughed too and, before I knew what was happening, he grabbed my hand and shook it. "Bye," he said, as if nothing was wrong. "See you a..." He dried up as he became aware of the hush that had fallen over the entire bar.

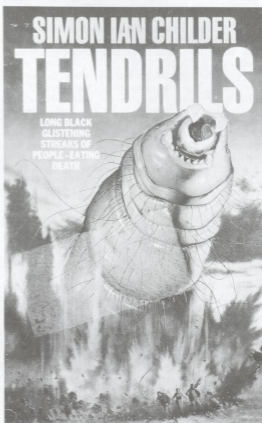
Sick to my stomach I pulled my hand from his grasp. Behind me I could hear someone throwing up. I didn't blame them.

The wimp looked surprised. "What's wrong?" he asked, as if he didn't realize what he'd done. It was then that it occurred to me that maybe he had been telling the truth about being from a parallel world...

Not that it made any difference. I had no choice but to pull out my .38 Smith and Wesson and shoot him twice in the heart. If I'd have let him get away with an act of public physical contact we'd both have been lynched.

I felt sorry for him as he slumped back against the bar, a startled expression on his face, and then slid to the floor. But then I cheered up at the thought that he must have died happy. After all, he had found his anomaly.

John Brosnan. Australian-born but long resident in London, is the author of such film books as *Movie Magic*, *The Horror People* and *Future Tense* (the latter an excellent study of science fiction in the cinema). He has also written a good deal of fiction, much of it under pseudonyms. A recent novel, done in collaboration with Leroy Kettle under the name "Harry Adam Knight," is *The Fungus* (Star Books). This receives high praise from American sf fan Richard E. Geis in the most recent issue of his *SF Review*: "It grabs, it's real and it keeps you reading... Hey, I didn't know you could publish stuff like this in England!... Good job!"



Cover by Les Edwards for the most recent over-the-top horror novel co-written by John Brosnan (Grafton, £1.95). Harry Adam Knight is dead and Simon Ian Childer has taken his place.

NOTE TO ARTISTS

Interzone is open to submissions from artists, but we would prefer all unsolicited artwork to come in the form of non-returnable photocopies which we may keep on file. If an acknowledgement is required please enclose a stamped and self-addressed envelope.

If we like the look of a particular artist's work, we may in due course send him or her a story manuscript to illustrate. We pay on publication for all artwork used. If you wish to submit samples, please send them to either Simon Ounsley or David Pringle at the addresses indicated on page 2 of this magazine.

Garry Kilworth

The Vivarium

At first my mother ordered me to stay at home, then cajoled, and, finally, pleaded. It was no use. Once I have made up my mind, it remains fixed: I was determined to go to Cyprus. She can be quite unreasonable when it comes to a battle of wills between us, and is forever accusing me of anti-social behaviour. I had to point out that this was not *entirely* my fault, for though I am by nature a solitary person – the human race as individuals tend to give rise to a certain revolt of feeling within me and I prefer not to keep company with my fellow creatures if at all possible – it was not always my choice to be confined to my room. It is the lack of understanding between us that creates these situations and if they had really taken time to comprehend... well, suffice to say, there was no understanding. When I realized the immense gulf between their intellect and my own, I decided that I was wasting my time trying to convince them of the possibilities of immortality and began to agree with their puerile statements. The dogged repetition which passed as argument eventually bored me and I let them believe they had won.

One promise she *did* elicit from me – that I would not disturb the vivarium; on no account would I even enter the structure – and this seemed to calm her to a certain degree. There were still threats of course – my mother never gives up easily – and I had to lock her in the cellar before I left to prevent her from carrying them out. She is a convincing woman, especially when dealing with the authorities. I had no choice. She is also a very resourceful person and my conscience was salved by the thought that she would surely find a way to escape, eventually.

I must admit I felt a little guilty at leaving her, but she had to contain her own secrets. I have managed to wipe from my mind the sound of cries since they were really not my concern, their cause not primarily of my doing. The fault was hers and hers alone. I was merely the instrument of her own conscience: the stout door, the heavy lock, the means by which the

punishment was carried out.

Spring in Cyprus brought with it a settling of wild herbs over the mountainsides. The scent of marjoram mingled with the dust from the road as I drove up the incline which led to my late father's estate, situated on a lonely shelf of the Troodos range. Below me, the sea was as still as blue slate and above, the apple orchards clung like permanent white clouds to the sides of the hills. The orchards now belonged to me, though if my father proved still to be alive, he would of course reclaim his own.

We had never been close. In fact I had not seen him for several years. A strong-willed Greek, he had tried to domineer my mother, an Englishwoman of proud spirit, and the marriage had foundered quite early on. Mother had continued to live in Greece for a short while afterwards, but eventually returned to England before I was two years old. They were never divorced, and corresponded regularly, even filling their letters with endearments. Mother maintained that they had the perfect marriage, provided they remained well apart. "You'd have made a good Penelope and Ulysses," I once told her. "Not quite, darling," she replied sweetly, "after all, Ulysses eventually arrived home. I'd prefer that your father remained pottering around the Mediterranean, though I love him dearly."

I glanced down again into the bay where his yacht had been found drifting and crewless, wondering whether the old man had indeed taken his own life. Certainly the suicide note appeared to be in his handwriting but father had always been a quirky, eccentric man. Two months was a long time though. There had been a clause in the will regarding a greenhouse of some kind that stood behind the house. If I was to inherit the estate – his retirement home since he had amassed a small fortune in his working years – I was obliged to maintain the greenhouse in the manner stipulated in the will.

The Greek lawyer who had explained the conditions of the testament to me was one of those wan, pithy characters that seemed fashioned of material closer to decaying wood than flesh, and whose age would see a slow disintegration similar to that of a rotten log, rather than wrinkled skin and liver spots. His expression gave no clue as to his thoughts when he told me, "there is a glass structure, you understand, in which your father kept plants and some small creatures – I am not familiar with the details but, I believe, birds and perhaps some rodents. The will... your father's will, calls it a vivarium. I have consulted my dictionary on this matter and it appears that a vivarium is an enclosed, sealed garden which also contains creatures. Like a garden in a bottle, you understand. That is, the unit is completely self-contained and must not be opened. On no account must you try to enter or the atmosphere will dissipate into the outside world and the life inside will die. The flora, it states here, is of a delicate nature and to disturb it would be fatal. There are some valves in the walls which control the temperature and humidity. They are of an auto-mechanical nature and are not likely to go wrong. Should they do so, they can be repaired or replaced without entering the vivarium. Your father had them engineered to that purpose..." The lawyer continued in much the same vein, in the precise diction of one who pronounces a foreign tongue too perfectly to pass as a native.

I wondered what kind of exotic plant life the greenhouse (or vivarium) contained. It was surely not valuable, for what would be the point of nurturing rarities that could be neither seen, nor smelt nor handled? I had been shown a colour photograph of the vivarium. It was a dark-green glass with leaded panels, and covered about an acre. A self-contained world that produced its own moisture from condensation, had its own cyclic, gentle climate completely apart from that of the outside. There was something a little chilling in the thought that the old man had created a separate universe in which living things could be born and could die, as apart from the rest of God's creatures as if they had been on a distant planet. I know he had been disillusioned by mankind and once wrote to me, "if God is an artist, he is one of those that creates a work of art then disassociates himself from that work. One of those that believes that art has nothing to do with the artist and is an entity unto itself, bearing the responsibility for itself alone and has no connection with the artist...thus he avoids the responsibility of creating a monster that runs amuck, in its disparate parts, destroying, destroying, destroying..." Was he now playing God himself, with this strange toy I had inherited? If so, what kind of artist was my father?

I know he was, had been, a very intractable man. My mother had been visiting him for the first time in many years when he disappeared. I know she was concerned for my future and believed that father might, should, provide for that, since her income would only support herself. Perhaps he had asked her to go back to him, and on being refused, had committed suicide? My mother was still a very beautiful woman. A little strong-willed perhaps, but she came from aristocratic stock and her determination was one of her attractive qualities. There had been many men in her life since my father, but only he had ever man-

aged to make any impression whatsoever on her stubbornness. It must have been a stormy time for both of them, since they were equally determined to each have their own way. The first thing she did on being informed that he was missing was to dismiss all his servants and hire her own.

As I reached the estate and drove under the apple trees, I could see that the blossoms were beginning to brown at the edges and the ethereal presence that had graced a distant mountain was in reality in the first stages of decay. There was no sense of permanence in them now. They were subject to the same process of change and age that affects all earthly things.

There was a small staff of house servants and gardeners at the estate to meet me. My luggage was conveyed quickly and with the minimum of fuss into the villa where I found a meal waiting for me on the dining-room table. I ate it alone, showered and then went immediately to bed.

The following morning I arose refreshed and forsook breakfast in order to explore the surrounds of the villa. The frontage was completely dressed by tiered orchards through which I wandered, smelling the odours of the blossoms and listening to the persistent hum of millions of insects, the loud clicking of cicadas. Would I ever get used to that sound? It seemed to fill the whole sky and was as unvarying as the note of a dozen dynamos. Such wasted energy. If it could be harnessed, I mused, we could use it to run the irrigation pump engines for the whole summer. I determined to put my mind to the concept. I soon tired of walking through the sameness of the apple trees and returned to the villa. There I took a drink of fruit juice and went to the back of the estate.

The green vivarium stood on a shelf overlooking the bay where my father had drowned himself. On the outside, it sparkled under the morning sun. Inside, close to the thick glass, waxy fronds stuck to the panels revealing yellow-veined leaves. They were like the hands of a trapped man who stares dumbly out at freedom he cannot have. I tried, in several places, to look into the heart of the thing but the steamy interior was impenetrable. I could make out the vague shapes of the tall shrubs and trees adjacent to the glass, and once a bird bumped against a pane, its frantic wing movements shocking me for a second or two. Resting on the panes were also some large, stately butterflies that presented their undersides to me for inspection as they pulsed slowly beneath my gaze. This was indeed an alien world, a forbidding place that I had no desire to enter, even had there not been a huge rusted lock on the door. My mother had told me that there were snakes inside and I had a horror of such creatures, verging on hysteria. One of the gardeners caught me with my hands cupped round my eyes and my nose close to the glass and disturbed me with a tap on the shoulder.

"Yes?" I snapped. I felt a little foolish at being observed in such a position and his touch had startled me into irritation.

"Breakfast," he said, ignoring my brusqueness.

I nodded and strode to the house where a grapefruit cut neatly into two halves awaited me, alongside a pot of the most delicious coffee I had smelt for a long

time. The rest of the day was spent in administration and management of my father's property – or my property, as it now was. Once, though, I glanced out of a window to see the same gardener tending some vegetable patch near the vivarium. He looked up and caught my eye, then dropped his gaze to his task again.

Later that evening, the gardener who had accosted me by the vivarium came to me and explained politely that the valves which controlled the temperature of the greenhouse were of a very sensitive nature and one should not go too near the area in order that the flow of air might remain unrestricted. I did not entirely understand his reasoning, but promised to stay well clear of the structure.

The months went by and subsequently the seasons. The crops were gathered and sold and the estate prospered in a modest way. I was reasonably content, though a little lonely at times. Before I had left England I had almost married a librarian, but we had, at the last moment, parted company. I had been inclined to moodiness, not the result of depression but more an inability to deal with the idiocy of others, and my ideas found no more root with her than with them. I was sorry because I was very much in love with her but found it impossible to alter a characteristic in her over which I had little control.

"I can't get through to you," I told her on parting. She was crying at the time. "You have a closed mind. Can't you see that?" She was a dull person, as I had had the misfortune to discover, and would never have suited me.

The Cyprus winter is cold in comparison to the summer. One needs a fire, especially in the hills where heavy frosts arrive with frequency. Higher up there are snows as thick as those on any northern mountain. I wandered out one night in January, after breathing the fumes of pine logs for several hours, to catch some sharp breaths of evening air. The moon was full and gleamed dully on the glass of the vivarium as I strolled by the now familiar monument to my father's passing. Its presence no longer aroused my curiosity. I was as accustomed to its form as I was the rest of the house and grounds. For the first time since my run-in with the gardener, I went right up to the glass. An owl landed in a pine close to the edge of the cliff and I paused to study it, never having quite got used to the idea of being surrounded by wildlife in my new home. Suddenly, the owl rose silently from its perch and flew straight at a glass panel of the vivarium, veering off at the very last moment with a startling screech. At that instant I caught sight of a shadow behind the glass, stark in the moonlight. I held my breath involuntarily.

It was the shadow of a man.

For a few seconds I thought I must be mistaken and tried to convince myself that what I saw was the shape of a tree or large shrub but then the shadow moved slowly towards me. It was indeed a human form.

I stood there, shaking, in the cold air for a few minutes, and then suddenly I was angry. The gardeners! It had to be one of the staff. All this time I had been under the impression that the vivarium was sacred, inviolate, that no-one could enter. There had to be a secret opening somewhere, a loose panel through



which the gardeners entered to tend the plants. I felt foolish, the victim of a conspiracy. I was not a man to be tricked in such a fashion and was determined to confront the staff as soon as it was morning. Just as I was about to stride away in high temper, the figure behind the glass stood in the full glare of the moonlight. He was naked – a lean, pale, old man with sharp, bright eyes. On the misty glass a shaking finger scratched some letters. They were in Greek and I indicated my comprehension. He was obviously anxious that I should understand, for he tried again, an urgency to his movements in case I should leave before he finished. This time the letters were in English. From his agitated state, I surmised I was interfering in his world and he wanted me to go away and leave him in peace. He waved his hands frantically, and I left immediately.

The second set of letters had read PVEH. Of course the P and E were facing the wrong way because he had written them from his point of view, and for some reason the V was upside-down: probably because of unfamiliarity with the English alphabet. Knowing my father and his constant preoccupation with life-after-death I realized at once what these initials represented. P was Paradise, E was Eden and H was Heaven. The V had me puzzled for a time, I must admit, but I eventually decided upon *Valhalla*, the Norse equivalent of Heaven. The implications of his repetition, no doubt for emphasis, were obvious. My father, for it was him behind the glass, wanted to make sure I understood exactly what it was he had planned for himself. No wonder he had been eager for me to be out of his sight: I had been unwittingly influencing the whole scheme by my mere presence. It was important to him that no-one from my world, that is the outside world, should contact him, even by sight.

As I lay in bed that night, I realized what the vivarium represented. My father had chosen to spend the remaining years of his life isolated from the rest of humanity. It was a desire with which I could sympathize.

What did the letters mean? Simply that the old man was trying for some recreation of the First Garden... an attempt to thwart the inevitability of death? Was he seriously thinking in terms of immortality? The idea that, if Adam and Eve had not transgressed, there would have been no death?

The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced that my father was indeed making an attempt, a bid, at living forever. I knew he was terrified at the thought of dying and I also knew, from his many letters, that he believed in Belief. That is to say, he believed in the power of belief: that it could create its own existence. I searched the trunk I had brought with me in the secrecy of the villa's storeroom, and by the dim light of an oil lamp re-read the yellowed pages of his letters.

"When the Ancient Greeks worshipped Zeus and his retinue of gods, those gods actually existed. It is only when belief in them faded – that faith failed – then the gods disappeared, to become myth. It was belief that changed. When men believed that those gods were false, that they did not exist, then they indeed ceased to exist, and new gods, or a God, took their place just as real..."

Thus, if the old man could convince himself that

he had created a universe separate from ours, a new world, then our natural laws would have no relevance. He could make his own – a world where death had no place and life was forever. Time – our time – would be a concept applicable only to us. He would have his own.

"To believe is to make happen. That is the secret of the mystic, the true magician, the telepath, the spiritual medium – they believe, completely and unflinchingly, in their special powers. To doubt, for an instant, for a shade less than total, means failure."

To achieve and maintain that kind of belief, I could see, one needed to be either isolated from mankind mentally – an insanity of sorts – or physically. Then there are possibilities for a strong mind to recreate concepts in personal terms.

"The Christian God is a creation of mankind's belief, but once created, not only becomes, but has always been, for the paradox is not contained by the limits of time and space – it is the paradox of the chicken and the egg in abstract."

Of course, although my father's ideas intrigued me, I only gave them casual deference. A man would need to be insane to give such ideas credence. Immortality, as I once tried to explain to the uncomprehending dullards who questioned my ideas in Britain, was not a matter of belief, but of reforming the concept of life, so that it rejected the idea of death. That is, the reforming could only come about by employing a vast amount of mental energy in order to come to an acceptance of immortality as true and existing. If he had indeed created a new world, there would be new creatures, new plant life. I determined to watch for changes in the fauna and flora I could see through the glass. I have as open a mind as anyone, and I owed him that much.

And how was he managing to survive? I knew there was a spring somewhere inside: one of three which came to the surface on the estate. He would have water to drink and, presumably, to supply a pool in which he could stock fish. No doubt he could grow fruit and vegetables, and there would be livestock: goats, chickens and the like. Was an acre enough to sustain a man? Would I have him hammering on the glass one night, desperate for food?

There were many questions which only time would answer. He surely would not starve himself to death rather than admit he was wrong, so I had no real concern on that front. He was too afraid of pain and death to commit suicide in that fashion.

So, my father was alive, in his microjungle, amongst his exotic birds and waxy-leaved plants. What was I to do about it? I considered the matter very carefully and came to the conclusion that if I revealed his whereabouts to the Cypriot authorities, there would be two losers. I would lose the estate, at least in name which was just as important to me as in fact, and my father would lose his garden. He would probably be carted away to an asylum, no doubt for the rest of his life, and I would remain with a guilty conscience and a handful of disgruntled, accusing servants who had obviously been primed by my mother to protect his secret. On the other hand, if I were to leave him where he was, he would at least be as safe as in any mental home and



apparently ecstatically happy. Why destroy all that for him? Even if he was wrong, the worst that could happen would be for him to die a natural death. I eventually decided that since his creation could not possibly harm him physically, I was prepared to let him continue in his paradise. I would manage the estate as if it were my own and let him alone, unless some circumstance should arise that gave cause for concern.

Over the next two years the estate continued to prosper. The gardeners that tended the orchards knew their jobs well and the trees and fruit remained healthy. Orders continued to come in and the goods were despatched to satisfied customers.

I took a sight-seeing tour once, around the island, visiting Paphos, the supposed birthplace of Aphrodite, and Curium temple – various antiquities. I saw the orange groves of the valleys, the tiered vineyards of the lower slopes and the olive trees, twisted, as though the earth and sky moved in opposite cycles and were wringing out the trunks. There were minerals as well as agricultural goods: copper and chrome mines on the hillside out of Episkopi. It was all very interesting, but once I had seen it, I had no wish to repeat the experience.

From my position on the side of the mountain I could witness the falling and melting of snows on the peaks; could study the sandy beaches and white-topped waves below. I had no need of travel, however short the distance.

Then the civil war started. Suddenly the skies were full of the noise of battle, and the dust of skirmishes could be seen on the valley floors below. In the moun-

tains we were relatively safe but I was concerned that a stray bullet might pierce the vivarium. I was conscious of the delicate balance of temperature that needed to be maintained within. We were paid a visit by the Turkish forces, who confiscated two shotguns I owned and took liberties with my larder, but apart from that we were unharmed. My staff was a mixture of the two races and happily they protected one another's interest. Father was right, the real world was the mad place to live in. I think I envied him his fantasy then. Eventually the situation stabilized once more, though on a different footing. At that time, I began visiting the vivarium again, occasionally to listen outside for possible appeals for assistance, but heard nothing. I also studied those plants and creatures I could see through the thick, dark glass but though I could not identify the former – I was no botanist and such exotic plants could have come from South America, or Borneo, or anywhere outside my sphere of knowledge – the latter were always too quick for detailed study and mere glimpses through the glass were not to be trusted as accurate guides to shape and form.

One day in January, it occurred to me that he might die and I would be none the wiser. I had dismissed his theory completely by this time, with the thought that a dog, ignorant of death, is not immortal: it dies a dog's death. The months went by until I became convinced that he was ill. I began to get anxious. I could not leave him too long. The authorities were going to be angry as it was. I am not the sort of person who can make outright denials when faced by officialdom. The belief of his illness lent a sinister, conspira-

torial air to the vivarium, as if it were hiding some terrible secret, afraid to reveal it to the world.

I felt I was failing in my duty towards my father: that I should have recognized the insanity of his ideas from the start and done something about it. To let him die in there, alone and without the comforting presence of his family was, now, quite horrifying – unthinkable. I did not know what to do. My mind was oscillating backwards and forwards from one horn of the dilemma to the other. If I opened the vivarium and he was all right, he would hate me, even if his scheme was based on fantasy, he would not have had time to prove it and he would hate me.

Yet, to leave him there, ill, without aid, was also terrifying to my mind. I would be guilty of manslaughter – at the very least – through negligence. The thought made me physically unwell. My mother, I knew, would never forgive me. How long, I reasoned, can a man survive in such an enclosed environment? Logic told me that the condition of a man of his age would deteriorate over the course of two years and my belief in his illness hardened.

Yet I was still reluctant to enter his created world and continued to procrastinate. I merely spent nights, full of anxiety, pacing around the vivarium in the positive knowledge that life inside the glass was sickening in its own contained, cloying atmosphere. Surely those dim plants I could see, looked diseased, a canker creeping through their interior veins causing them to droop and wilt against the panes? And the butterflies? Their colours appeared to have faded, were washed with an insipid dullness that caused lethargy in their movements; were stained at the edges with a faint brown reminiscent of the dying apple blossoms. Nothing escapes mutability – everything is subject to death.

One night in April, just after the last rains had ceased, I went out to the vivarium. I had awoken with a start in the middle hours with my head unusually clear. There was a sharp definition to the furniture, illuminated by the moonlight through the window, and the air was still and light, almost to the point of being profound. It was as if I had been roused at the very moment there was a pause in the workings of the universe. I could see the reflection of the vivarium in the mirror of my wardrobe door, accidentally left open when I retired for the night, and a particular warp to the glass must have given the image of the structure a look of instability, as if it were folding in on itself. Thinking there might be a danger of collapse, due perhaps to weakened struts over the course of time, I dressed hurriedly and went out to inspect it. The whole glass palace was glistening with raindrops in the moonlight, giving it the appearance of a giant crystal, alive with tiny stars. Underneath this superficial brightness however, my father's enclosed universe presented a brooding, inner face for my inspection. It was almost as if it resented my visit and wished to be left alone to resolve its own problems. I put my ear to one of the panes. I could hear no sounds, except I seemed to sense a pulsing from within, as from a beast with a heart of heat. I could feel my own heart faltering in my chest as a wave of intense uneasiness passed through me. What was going on in there?

I walked further round the vivarium and shone the torch on the panes. Suddenly I came upon a section where a message was scratched on the misted glass in disordered letters, like graffiti over a toilet wall. I could feel my cheek twitching in the cool breeze from the valley as I read the note. It was barely decipherable. The condensation inside was running in rivulets, destroying the clarity of the letters. The word was reversed, a mirror image, but it read:

HEAP

Help? How long had that message been there? Wildly, I looked around me, as if the answer could be found somewhere in the night, amongst the shadows. Perhaps it had been there for weeks, ignored by the gardeners, either because they did not understand its implications or because they had been told to ignore anything connected with the vivarium. I could not remember having passed that precise pane recently, and if I had, whether I had inspected it closely enough. In that moment I knew he was dying. I felt it deep within me – a sure knowledge, not a supposition. He was dying, and I was responsible.

"Oh God," I groaned. I knew I had to do something. I picked up a large rock and hurled it at the glass. The panes were thick and it merely chipped out a tiny hole, sending a huge crack snaking up the side of the vivarium. Humid, fetid air hissed from the hole and at the same time I fancied I heard a scream from within. I snatched a second rock and threw it with all my force. This time the pane shattered. Trembling with fright, I crawled through the hole and shone my torch into the dense undergrowth. My shirt was immediately soaked as the humidity hit me full in the chest, like a soft blow from a giant, gloved fist.

After a few moments, I recovered and began to call out my father's name. There was an odour about the place, the smell of putrefaction, and I gagged. Not receiving any answer, I began to force my way through the damp foliage, watching anxiously for signs of snakes. The leaves were slimy to the touch and left juices on my skin. The heat was unbearable. The closer I came to the centre of the vivarium, the hotter became the atmosphere, and even in the dim light of the torch, I could see that the plants were decomposing. Fungus and mould had begun to grow over the trunks of palms, and ferns had sunk to the floor in lethargic heaps. I slid on the slippery fronds of dying plants. Sweat drenched my body and each breath I took was laden with moisture. I found a pool and nearby lay the body of my father, almost buried by humus with which he had presumably tried to cover his nakedness.

He was in a terrible condition. He appeared to have contracted some awful skin disease – perhaps a leprosy of sorts. His flesh was rotting before my eyes, hanging from his carcass in ugly, grey lumps. I could see the toenails peeling from his feet, the pallor of the skin beneath that of some fungoid grown hidden deep in the darkness of a cave, away from all natural light. Around him grew a pool of vile-looking fluid, draining from the orifices of his body. The smell was foul and I gagged again, eventually vomiting on the ground.

As I bent to touch him, to my utter horror, he moved. He moved. His hand fluttered once, like a dying moth and his filmy eyes were fixed on my face. His mouth barely moved, but a voice came from somewhere deep within him.

"Days," he croaked. "Just a few days..." I cradled his head in my arm and his eyes started, wildly: a flood of bodily fluid gushed from his mouth and there was a violent spasm – a final jerk as death entered him. Then he was gone.

I left the corpse where it was and went into the house. There I took out some medical books and studied them with a growing horror. From the condition of the remains it would appear that my father had been dead for two years or more! In fact, since shortly after he was sealed inside the vivarium.

Yet I had heard him speak!

I had heard his words, clearly in my head. He had been alive when I found him, admittedly in a deteriorated condition. There had to be an explanation and the only conclusion I could come to was that I was dealing with something outside the normal scope of human knowledge: something that fell beyond the natural laws of the universe. My comprehension had previously been influenced by the narrow range of human understanding – I had to allow it to widen, to come to an acceptance of a set of circumstances with possible preternatural associations.

Immediately, I returned to the body and buried it in the heart of the vivarium. For the next few days I must have wandered around the estate in a kind of trance – a nightmare state. I know I had difficulty with my physical condition, for I frequently found myself in my bed without any knowledge of having gone there. I trembled much of the time, as if my nerves were suffering from some kind of palsy, and my whole muscular system was in a weak condition: my legs would hardly support my weight and my arms functioned only with difficulty. At times it seemed that my blood had been replaced by liquid lead, for my body felt heavy, lethargic and difficult to manipulate. Headaches constantly plagued me and there were frequent lapses of memory.

It seemed that my father's experiment had been proved to be a failure. Yet, I did not destroy the vivarium. In fact I had it restored to its original state.

What bothered me, you see, as I sat on my veranda and studied its jade exterior, on nights when the cicadas would not let me sleep, were my father's last words.

Days. Just a few days...

Just a few days more? What? What could a few extra days prove? No, not that. I believe – I am firmly convinced, since I have worried this problem into a corner – that what my father was telling me was – yes, that he thought he had only been in the vivarium for a few days. Of course, it had been years, to us, on the outside. But time had become a new, a different encapsulated dimension within the enclosed universe of the vivarium. That meant of course, that he had been right.

The manner of his death, too, gave substance to this belief. He in fact, in our time, had died of natural causes – perhaps heart failure – some months, perhaps years, previously. It was only when I smashed the glass, and he effectively re-entered our time zone, that the events which should have taken place caught up with him.

So, I have repaired the vivarium, strengthened its glass and struts. I have no doubt that it worked, despite that message on the misty pane: **HEAP!**

I know now why it was going wrong. It was not that my father's *belief* failed him – but that my disbelief was stronger. He believed in his world, but I did not, and the prurient waves of my disbelief were strong enough to disturb his universe, to penetrate its relatively thin exoskeleton and cause a disruption in its stability, in its laws. I had destroyed his world with my concern for his well-being – my overpowering anxiousness for his safety, which I believed was at risk and therefore was...

Soon I intend beginning the experiment again. This time it will succeed. It will. I know it to be a truth. Perhaps a dog doesn't know death, but, if so, it's also ignorant of immortality. It dies, not because it expects to, but because it doesn't know how not to!

I wondered what my mother would say if she knew the real circumstances of my father's death: how a few days previously I had seen the word **HELP** written on the inside of the panes (with the Greek letter Λ in place of the English L) and had entered the structure to find my father dying. I remembered how distant she had been – the distressed state she was in when she arrived back in England. I recalled that she became nervously ill for a time, suffering with a mania about personal cleanliness, continually washing her hands. Her obsession with fresh soap and water – her belief in its ability to cleanse her guilt. Besides, I had promised her, had I not, that I would never enter the vivarium, and especially that I should not disturb the contents in any way whatsoever? If she knew I had been in there, she would be dreadfully upset. It was my father's sanctuary and I had promised her on oath that no-one, not even myself, should violate its interior.

It was good that mother was in ignorance of the fact of my disobedience. But how glorious the real facts were! My father had discovered the secret to immortality and his son was going to reap the benefit of that knowledge! Already I have dismissed the servants and staff, and am preparing a time-lock for the doors, which will seal me inside. My faith shall not fail me. I will live forever. In order that I do not weaken in my resolve, there shall be nothing inside with which I can fracture the glass. It will become, effectively, my prison as well as my salvation, just as the cellar was both of these things to my mother.

Mother! Father! How proud you would have been of your son. What a shame it is that I shall never join you both in the grave, to complete the filial harmony. It is a pity that such a loving trio as ourselves should be kept apart for eternity, but you have each other and, perhaps, the knowledge of your son's triumph over those bigoted fools who refuse to listen to the logic of his ideas. Reason always triumphs over prejudice.

Garry Kilworth wrote the popular story "Spiral Winds" (*Interzone* 9). He has recently been expanding it into a novel, provisionally entitled – *Spiral Winds*. His last novel was *A Theatre of Timesmiths*, and in 1985 he published the short-story collection *The Songbirds of Pain* (Gollancz). The title story of that volume was reprinted in *Omni*, the world's highest-paying science-fiction magazine.

MUTANT POPCORN

FILM REVIEWS BY NICK LOWE

...but first, a roundup of the season's morals. Old people are entirely acceptable so long as they're kept in an expensive institution and don't actually behave like old people (*Cocoon*). Young chaps should get themselves a nice steady girl who'll appreciate them for "what they are," and should definitely not try to build their own (*Weird Science*, *The Bride*) – unless they're specially into inexplicable accents, excess lip gloss, or Jennifer Beals' ghostly interpretation of a sophomore Janey Morris. Children only seem insufferable when they're not allowed to follow their dream, which in *The Goonies* seems to entail acting out thinly-scripted fantasy gaming scenarios in pursuit of pirate gold. (Do eight-year-olds actually want to be pirates? As a normal, well-adjusted eight-year-old my fantasies ran more to being 1: a turtle, 2: a woman, or 3: stabbed to death, all of which seemed infinitely more exciting than sickly old pirates.) All parents should be thrusting and dynamic (*Back to the Future*), and if you just stand up to someone and punch them in the guts you can change your destiny from a pathetic squithead to a successful science-fiction author, resulting in a tidy house, model children, and a golf handicap women will admire.

In short, the ideology of the family has settled into Hollywood like a soft, inoperable brain tumour. You can map its growth by monitoring the dialogue, as a new contender crawls up the ratings to threaten "Let's get (the hell) out of here" as the most overused line in movies. "I love you" used just to be the sort of thing fellows said to ladies and back again, and that was okay, though you still put your head down and blew obscene bubbles in your Kia-Ora. But now you get kids, parents, siblings noisily emoting this time-honoured erotic signifier in one another with no decent regard for public sensibility. It's worse on television, where the malignancy originated – the soapier matter, the more "I love you's" clocking up per passing minute. Fathers and sons are especially bad. I don't think the perpetrators can appreciate its effect on the British, who have built a national pastime out of expressing intense emotion in the most oblique

possible guise. "I think I'm getting a wart." "Can I finish up the cottage cheese?" "I don't remember the radiator making that noise before." On such ears, a bare, crass "I love you" falls like a brick into trifle.

Of course no real human talks like this, even an American. I suspect it's all down to a thin man in a grey suit who strolls round the sets with a clipboard. "I see we haven't affirmed the family in the past eight minutes, Mr Spielberg." "Uh, ah...right away, sir...if we maybe insert an 'I love you, Dad' just after 'Holy shit, my brain's exploding'..." "Very good. You won't forget again, will you?" "No sir. Thank you sir. Heh, this heat, wow..."

A few with strong overseas connections escape: *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* showed an agreeable absence of any kind of redeeming moral, while the only people likely to get anything out of *Lifeforce* and *Legend* are the archaeologists of late capitalism who will write theses on how such transparently hopeless scripts could ever have made it to the screen. But the outlook isn't pretty. Despite a refreshing trend towards ironic comedy, snappy editing, and superior visual style, films like *The Goonies* and *Back to the Future* leave an unsettled feeling in the belly as expectations of subversions are biliously thwarted in the final reel.

Both of the last-named were on show at November's London Film Festival, alongside some rather more adventurous sf items of international origin. Of particular interest were two British films making screenwriting debuts by two highly-regarded playwrights-turned-novelist on the margins of the genre. In a sense, neither is exactly representative of its author's recent fiction work: Snoo Wilson's *Shadey* was actually written before either of his joke sf novels (which haven't found a lot of favour with the science fiction community), while Clive Barker's *Underworld* was scripted under panic conditions after shooting had already begun. Neither film is a thundering success, but at least they're films that dare. The most daring thing about *Back to the Future* is the attempt to make us enjoy Huey Lewis.

Shadey has Anthony Sher, oddly cast, as a kind of transexual Ted Serios, gifted with the talent to project telepathic images of distant scenes on to film. Apparently unwilling to trust his working parts to the enlightened British NHS, the bumbling *Shadey* tries to raise money for a private op (there being no more felicitous term) by hawking his talent to industry. But hard-headed Sir Patrick Macnee bargains the unwitting and peaceloving *Shadey* off to the military, and soon a bewildering posse of enemy powers is jostling in pursuit. Meanwhile *Shadey* becomes knottily involved with Sir Patrick's intently nubile daughter and increasingly ga-ga wife, until a breathless string of unlikelihoods brings all parties their just deserts and *Shadey* his release from the toils of masculinity.

Amazingly, this piffle took eight years and a million pounds to put on screen, little of which Channel Four, the main backer, seems likely to see again. The one bankable commodity is Sher, much favoured on the boards just now, though this first starring role in film is the kind of performance that might benevolently be tagged unusual: a wide-eyed straining after imbecility that only begins to convince in the character's last-reel transformation. There are good lines, and the storyline is pleausurably tangly – though the present 110 minutes, hewn down from a much longer rough cut, leaves some of the intrigue subplots in a rather mystifying state. But Philip Saville's direction is stodgily televisual, and the script labours jokes and strains whimsy in a rather unpleasant way. There's a nearly perfect moment when Sir Patrick has just had his ear severed by kidnappers, and we see looney wife Katherine Helmond receiving a jiffy bag in the mail, then walking off camera... followed, with breathtaking ineptitude, by a wholly unnecessary scream, reaction shot, and view of the offending organ exposed. And look out for the zany satire on pop videos featuring Leslie Ash chased along a beach by a pack of weirdos with Down's syndrome. Hurk hurk, this must be that black humour I hear so much about.

I find much more to forgive in *Underworld*, a daft gothic romp luridly designed, lit, and directed with one shrewd eye on the lamented golden age of Hammer and Amicus, and the other casting frantically about in search of Ridley Scott style on the cheap. Retired white knight Larry Lamb, looking entirely unlike a hardboiled hitman and every bit like a documentary cameraman from Earl's Court, is engaged to chafe after his lost true love who's been kidnapped by (apparently) a gang of former bass players with Nazareth. It takes him a ridiculous



From 'Underworld', directed by George Pavlou

length of celluloid to discover that sinister pharmacist Denholm Elliott has developed a miracle hallucinogen that causes your skin to break out in great accretions of latex, and that his addicts have abducted our heroine to the chthonic community in the London sewers. Down into this debatable underworld speeds our reluctant Orpheus, and cue shoot-outs, subterranean chases, confused revelations, mid-budget special effects, and a suitably nasty death for old doc Denholm.

But not as nasty as planned, because the shooting schedule ran out before the ambitious special effects climax was finished, and the miracle is that, despite loose ends splayed around like leftover pasta, the finished movie makes what minimal sense it does. Shot in an impossible seven weeks, with no script at the start of shooting and the powerful cast lured in merely by vague descriptions of the envisaged end product, it's an extraordinary achievement for all its slapdash plot-line and loose ends splayed round like leftover pasta. Admirers of Barker's horror fiction (I'm not one, particularly) may find the invention and dialogue fall short of his best, and it's certainly not a representative debut. But more projects are in line from the same team, and next time it's hoped the production constraints will be easier.

Among English-language Festival items with a genre interest, a couple of Antipodean offerings deserve a note. Geoff Murphy's **The Quiet Earth** is a worthy addition to the increasingly assured New Zealand cinema, with Sam Pillsbury of *Scarecrow* producing and co-scripting, and Bruno Lawrence from *Smash Palace* in the lead. Taken from a Noozie sf novel by Craig Harrison, it shifts three Aucklanders into a parallel world empty of all human and animal life. Scenario and dialogue are sometimes laughably portentous, but there's a lot of lovely images and some cherishable scenes. (Slowly unhinging in the deserted city, Lawrence goes hunting for God; breaks into a church and holds our Saviour's image at gunpoint. "Come on out," he calls to the rafters, "or I'll shoot the kid.") On the fringe of the genre there's Ray Lawrence's film of *Bliss*, co-written by Peter Carey from his funny, touching novel of an advertising executive who dies for nine minutes and, on revival, believes himself in a cunningly disguised Hell. The book's languid, unfilmable voice is warmly compensated for by sharp dialogue, marvellously sharp editing and direction, and some winning characterisations from the three leads. And look out in the spring for *Re-Animator*, a gory semi-spoof loosely worked up from one of Lovecraft's

earliest and most idiotic shudder fictions.

But for sheer batty bravura there's been nothing to compare with **A Zed and Two Noughts**, and a jolly good thing too I think I heard at the back. I've no doubt this amazing film will see more of the British public's fillings than most this year, and that all the friends Greenaway inadvertently won with *The Draughtsman's Contract* will file out muttering and rolling their eyes expressively. Nevertheless, any serious whingeing on the subject has to acknowledge the film's basic seriousness, ambition, and coherence behind the free-wheeling doodles of ironic caprice; and as it falls solidly within at least one famous definition of sf it may get a more appreciative viewing from us lot than from the seat-slammng critics of Wardour Street.

The weird plot has a pair of twin zoologists lose their wives in an act of God so bizarre as to seem almost farcical and almost meaningful. Both brothers, in their initially different ways, are shocked into questioning their lives against the background of their science, and launch into obsessive studies of evolution and biological decay to try and detect a purpose in the agonizing crawl from ooze to zoos and back again. Not surprisingly, they don't find one. What they find instead is that the differentiation between

human and not-human is more questionable than their science accepts, and that the institution of the zoo puts unacceptable bars between human-kind and its evolutionary context. And so both brothers set about the systematic subversion of the zoo in pursuit of their private truth, their paths increasingly converging after a lifetime of denying their genetic identity. Along the way they involve with a cluster of typically Greenaway characters: a dubious surgeon who wants to become Vermeer, a seamstress who wants to be ravished by a zebra, and a legless woman who wants to bear 26 children all named after the letters of the

alphabet.

Accessibility isn't helped by the densely artificial Greenaway dialogue, just credible in the mouths of 17th-century aristocrats but hard work in a contemporary setting; or by the ambivalent emotionality that tries, dangerously, to hang suspended between tragedy and farce and leave the feelings to the audience. There's a great deal of deliberate silliness, of virtuosoic flaunting of cinematic technique, and of the old Greenaway habit of flirting michievously with the audience's ennui. (*The Draughtsman's Contract* was nearly like this too, but for a quiet word from the producers over the

three-and-a-half-hour rough cut.) But at heart it's a serious, witty, and beautiful essay on the dignity of animals and the handicapped, that confirms Peter Greenaway (as if it needed confirming) as a cinematic maestro on a par with Resnais, Ruiz, and Kluge. I found it headspinning and heartwarming, easily the best film of 1985, and the one honestly radical slice of science-fictional imagining to hit our eyes this season. There's certainly no denying it's a work of genius. But then, so was Newton's *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of Saint John*.



From 'A Zed and Two Naughts', directed by Peter Greenaway

WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

Diana Reed

A Multiplication of Lives

Top Form

Mat became Captain an hour ago, but I can hold sane another hour yet: the drugs that in every phase determine the range and timbre of my thoughts peak rapidly, but their decay is relatively slow. This is a rare interval. I am at my maximum intellectual ability for this cycle, but free of responsibilities to and for the others aboard our enclosed, travelling world. Should I have looked for Jan, rather than writing this? I am still rational enough to answer: *no, a subjective record will be useful in later times. When the cycle is broken.* But I don't look back to past pages, past phases of the cycle: the "I" of this moment is so unlike the self I remember being at other times, other seasons, as to be almost a stranger.

The cycle was dampened to near-normal mood fluctuation when I first met Jan de-la-Mer. We were each objects of curiosity at a mildly high-life party: he a metaphysician specializing in the theory of the matrix of universes; I a child of that matrix. He had read my poetry – or, rather, Laura Winter's poetry – stemming from the ever-recurring phase of depression, the steep, weary slope following the trough of dark, dead sleep that leads, at last, to the light and the sky until I topple over the ridge again, down the hill, helter-skelter, back to the night between the waves and the next melancholy awakening.

At first we went together to plays and concerts, read the same books, talked to each other as if each was the other's self: with perfect trust, confidence and understanding. I decided to leave the Authority's service, to enjoy the autonomy of emotion, the subtle fluctuations of mood responding freely in any situation basic to ordinary life. On earth the "I" who made that decision, and the Jan she loves, live together: I hope with contentment, if not in constant happiness. Maybe there is a child. On Earth alone there were six of us sharing the name and being of Laura Winter; but the Authority would allow the only

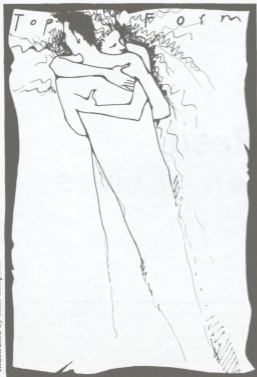
terrestrial Mr and Mrs de-la-Mer that much for the co-operation of this Jan and "I" in this Universe.

They say that every project is special, every project's costs must include the price of the lives it gives. This one is non-standard, to satisfy the unreasonable demands of an old woman, now dead.

We can be demanding too, Jan and I. Jan more than I, for he was unique, only one of him in all the universes. His price was birthright for our child.

A boy we will have named Michael, after Jan's great-grandfather, Michael Cohen: yes, the Michael Cohen who, in failing to invent a matter transmitter, nevertheless created (or patterned, or refracted – use the term you wish, though the latter comes nearest to accuracy) an Ident – where? How can we "place" a Universe that in no way seems to impinge on ours, which is so estranged that however far that first Cohen travelled, at whatever speed, he could never have reached his second self? Now we know so many Universes, accepting the mathematicians' proof of their infinity so casually that the images have crystallized beyond recall: an unending lattice-work, realms of order encysted in an incomprehensible matrix.

If the child is a girl she is named for my grandmother, Ariadne Winter. And most particularly for the Granny Ariadne I knew so well, the Ident far-branched from her original and remembering scores of universes, rather than the Earth-dweller who had pioneered the mood cycle. She is the old woman whose unreasonable demands brought us here: she had her reasons, though she refused to give them. When we land, maybe we will find out what they were. I saw her occasionally in company with herself, her more-than-sister Idents, who sat on the Committees, who held power in the Authority. It seemed to me that they could not deny her, though they did not want to know what she had learned about her self and her lives. Fearing, they blind-folded themselves and let themselves be led. It was easy enough to clothe the real reasons for their submission



in specious justifications: new plants, animals, and crystals to copy home. They did not want the other knowledge that possessed her.

I never knew my parents. Granny Ariadne made sure I was looked after, took me away on holidays, talked to me, seemed to care for me. She saw to it that though I was grown on from childhood by the fastest factor possible, I did not suffer from it. At school they packed my brain with ordinary words and facts: she told me stories, shaped my ambitions and values, entertained me, and sometimes my friends, so that I rarely felt deprived of the mother and father I did not possess. And she too was working in the cyclic pattern, and must have needed all the single-minded, almost ruthless determination that has made more than one Ariadne Winter famous and powerful. No one loved me as much as she did, until Jan.

Maybe he's waiting for me, or talking to Gael. I must find him. It's been a long time since we laughed freely, and there's time now. It's really quite a good thing that we can't Refract immediately onto another planet – there'll be no time for laughing when we arrive. And now I'm beginning to feel lighter, as if truly a load has been lifted from my back. I have kinder clothes packed small in store, and scents and colours waiting for employment. I can't remember dates or co-ordinates. Why should I? Mat is Captain now.

Later: Over the top

No-one seems to be at all cheerful or happy. I laugh, and tell them jokes, and feel so much energy running through my body that I want to dance or run across a wide space so fast I'd leave the hard ground and

swim in the air. Outside there are friends to be made, a live life waiting, but we must wait, as caution makes unhappy machines of all but me.

Isn't it exciting just being here on-planet at last, where the ground will be firm beneath our feet for the rest of our lives? Isn't it a unique experience to have sprung into being in a new world – or, rather, in a new Universe, a totally other void, lit by suns that "I" in my parallel incarnations have never seen and will never see?

With no homing beacon to guide us, only co-ordinates in the matrix, there's no pin-point accuracy and we must use probability as well as skill to bring about our harmless eruption into depths of empty space, nearer rather than further from New Naxos, but nevertheless far. I hope they never change it, never find "better" ways. The age-long cruise through a small part of this Universe was our ship's final, wedding flight. This "I", on this world, can know there will be no more miracle transfers for this "me", this stream of my network of beings. Other "I"s, the Lauras of old divergencies, will most certainly diverge again as the network spreads beyond my full comprehension. But: no reason to re-create this now self on Earth, or anywhere else; no part of their future to hold me from whatever end I will. Emancipation. I am free of the need to think of more than my present self. The exhilaration of such resolution fills me with a powerful contentment – the forward surge of unvisited interest.

They did feel it, last night. There wasn't much sleep for anyone, one way and another. The Captain, of course, doesn't need to sleep, and I'm still awake nineteen hours in twenty-four. That's all part of the cycle, the system. Wonderful: if only he felt like this too.

My fiancé, Jan Armond de-la-Mer. Jan: tall, dark – handsome? Not quite. A little taller than me, but my eyes can still look into his, even as he holds me close to him, and I feel the curves of his body and mine as utterly complementary, close and comforting, and the warm ache begins. He's dark – yes, his hair's shadow-black and so sensuously coarse, adorably crinkly for my fingers to untangle; but his face is over-pale, and his hazel eyes look beyond me, over my shoulder, and will not meet with mine.

I wanted him so much that I went to find him. He wouldn't see me, not clearly, but called me his pretty siren, told me to wait, that everything would be better later.

"Why did you come along," I asked. "If you don't want me?"

"To teach," he teased. "When the colony's set up. Remember? That's my job here," he said.

"That's not what I meant. And it's not why you're here. You didn't come for that."

"I came because I love you," he said.

"Then love me!" I told him.

"Not now, not like this. I love you, when you're being you. Not like this."

He's a pig. No, the proverbial cold, hateful, distant iceberg, truly afraid to come near me in case he melts.

I remember – but as if in a dream or even in someone else's dream – how we planned to live together, forever, happily ever after, one pair, us and an end to the system, in a little mission house on New Naxos. He laughed when I named him a missionary, but he

did not object. I hope they're not cannibals out there.

There were people beginning to gather outside the cooling ship just before sunset, keeping at a distance, watching. The Captain confirmed that they were human: instruments available to him could determine that fact, even though they were not clearly within eye-shot. Gael and I had been kept from the control area, sent down to the passenger saloon, out of the way. Authority always seems harsh, doesn't it? What makes it all the worse is that Jan stayed up there, did not choose to join us. I had some fun, all the same, with the rest of the colony team. With so little to see in the long, dark hours we concentrated on having a party, a sort of home-warming. They got warmed up, and not by fractions. But still not in a way to make Jan jealous. Almost felt there was some kind of gentle law, a social fence to protect his property...

Gael slipped away halfway through the night to sit by Thomas, who lay in the Crystal Coffin. I told her to come away, have some fun, but she smiled that weak, resigned smile and asked me to leave her alone. I was glad to: I don't feel happy with such a heap of wet misery. Tears, drooping sighs, all that soulful melancholy and despair. She and Thomas will make a good pair when this is over and our ministry is under way. We bring with us a gift-wrapped package of human knowledge and culture, built over so many centuries, the rightful heritage even of such an unplanned, unwanted colony: but the giver must stay with the gift, and live or die in its use. Thomas and Gael will give freely, with joy. They were chosen for that. So were we all chosen, to give and give, life after life.

I fell asleep after the first light of dawn silhouetted those figures, dimly seen but coming closer as curiosity balanced fear, reminding me vaguely of something, sometime, long ago; a useless indistinct form, scratching outside that over-worked door of memory.

Granny Ariadne, the "she" who had been there on my sixth-year marker day, romped through my dreams: an old lady splashing in the pool with the other children. I looked forward to her mad spells, disliked the severe Professor Ariadne Winter working in her study-lab through the preceding month, and was afraid of the quiet, sinister "she" that appeared a month after my best Granny disappeared into her grey-time, as she named the time in the total-care machine, the Crystal Coffin. It was my favourite Granny Ariadne who winked at me last night when I dreamed of her.

"It was all true!" she said, "you'll see. Those tales I told you of my world weren't so tall...you'll see!"

I always was her favourite.

Splash and sing. Water splinters the heavens into four rotating vanes, dividing the colour-neutral light into rainbow shades, forever following in sequence. The cycle-system: Ariadne Winter's system.

Later, in full light, I saw this real world through the window. Perhaps two hundred people stood outside the ship, so quietly. They were all women: a range of ages, from the untidy, impatient child-in-arms, to one so old that it seemed amazing she could stand unsupported. We had no way of telling them that we were coming, but they must have been in some measure

prepared, to be hesitant, uncertain, and yet so intensely, confidently watchful and unafraid.

Many people, but only one face, repeated perhaps two hundred times. The identity was not immediately obvious. At every age lines had changed, different experiences had marked the same material in different ways, so that even among those who seemed near-contemporaries some were plumper than others, some looked as if they smiled more easily, while others had been pinched by pain or unhappiness. Eyes, blue eyes flecked with green, were the only unvarying feature. How can I help laughing and laughing again when I think of those hundreds of eyes, all the same as those I remember from half a lifetime ago and other-worlds away, and from a dream of an hour before? She had the technology. There were tools enough in the explorer's module, comprehensive as could be designed. The knowledge was in her head.

I'm suddenly sleepy. Time is slowing down. It's not comic, not at all, and I ought to tell them properly, clearly, as I would have at any other stage. It's cold - I'm cold. The windows are icing over, the colours freezing, the blood in my body is thickening in the weariness. Thomas has woken - he looks very solemn. Now I lay me down to rest... Thomas, like an alchemist, or a learned owl.

Why do we do this, cycle after cycle? Why do we accept such denial of the rhythms of our own being? The cold is so fierce that I am afraid to sleep, even the kindly sleep of our Crystal Coffin.

No words in the Crystal Coffin, only dark rest and re-adjustment, as the womb-machine does its work.





Later: The Trough

I wish I was dead – better yet, had never been born. (Hear the rough edge of intensity distorting the tone even though the words have almost lost their meaning with the abuse of over-use.)

I look at myself in the mirror. My body has been preserved, but my face is wrongly shaped, the nose too long, the forehead too high. My hair falls in dispirited waves and is greasy, thin. And that's not the half of my self-disgust.

I can't talk to anyone. There's a soft wall around me – the sounds come through, but the meanings are indolent, take time to arrive. I start to cry at the slightest excuse, and cannot stop sobbing. Jan spends as much time with me as possible. He's so kind, I don't deserve his love, am unable to return it. He puts his arm around me and we sit together, still. I can't answer him if he offers me words. When he looks at me I don't meet his gaze, but sometimes when he's thinking of something else, I stare and stare, for he's so remotely beautiful even to the curve of his ear, the lean – but not thin, never harsh – face.

The others hardly ever come near me. I cannot endure Gael's company, nor she mine – she is so gay, so happy, so insensitive. She makes me remember how I behaved at that phase of the cycle, two months ago, and I feel such shame that something inside me curls up and howls in appalled horror. (I wish I was dead.)

Mat, who follows me, now lies in the Crystal Coffin; and Thomas, who I follow, moves into Gael's place as Captain. I can understand him not bothering over-much with me, but I wish he would talk to me as if I

was an individual, not just his future replacement, another bar in the four-spoked wheel of power. I often sit in the control-room, watching, listening to him discussing the situation with our two stable assistants. I must know what is happening, so that I shall be able to take command. We're all still here, in the ship, two months after arrival, and all he can do is try to negotiate. We offer only gifts, but they will not accept without conditions – ridiculous conditions, conditions they change and replace with others even more absurd.

Thomas has recognized that the faces – face? – outside are Ariadne Winter's. My Granny Ariadne. We wait.

If they were all of one stream, all refractions of my Granny, even from those years ago when one of her was created in this world's universe, alone, then we could sympathize, understand from our own experience and knowledge. But the differences in age-group show that these are siblings rather than Idents: clones with completely unshared life-experiences. To look back down the time-stream of any one of them would not be to reach root experiences common to all.

Thomas is marking time, hoping that when it comes to my turn as Captain I'll know what to do, since she was my Granny Ariadne, and directed us here before she died. Before she killed herself.

She despised me. I can see that now. Or, rather, had no regard for me, as myself. I was content on Earth; only her promptings to my pride made me wish to multiply my life. That first "I" gained nothing, except the doubtful satisfaction of knowing her Ident could find an adventure, a fulfilment, that she might one day feel a lack of. Sometimes I wonder: does the mirror never distort? How should I compare to my Ident of a distant branching.

We are pleased to believe that each "I" is equal to each other "I": that the root has no priority over the branch. But surely there must be a responsibility not to place oneself in a situation that would be intolerable to that self? A multiplication of lives is, naturally, a multiplication of deaths. And as I grow older I recall that infinity of possibilities for suffering, as much as satisfaction, with something more like despair. I have stood as an explorer on hostile worlds at the moment before return, knowing that I would come home, and also being the I that must stay behind and face the rest of my life there, short as I intended to allow it to be. When I was young, I thought all life was a gain. Now I am grown suddenly old, and those young lives are an unexpected burden. It is too late for responsibility: only guilt remains.

Is this the Christening gift that turned her Idents away from my Granny Ariadne, like the good godmothers at Aurora's baptism, horrified by the demon in one of their kind? Did they try to keep their knowledge of death, the poisoned spindle, from their kingdom? When the cumulative guilt of what she had done and had to do found her, on New Naxos, she rose above despair to plan and put in motion one last, superb, mad act of restitution for some of her betrayed selves on the rare world that could sustain life indefinitely; the demi-semi Eden she named New Naxos. Without Granny Ariadne's encouragement I



should never have begun this life, let alone have come to her later self's universe. For why did she take such an uncharacteristic interest in me, if not to this end?

Even my memories change – true, not in their exact content, but the character of each event seems different. It's so tangled that to simply understand the statement "I am" is an impossibility. What did Ariadne expect me to do? She left only hints of what form compensation should have, the form which a sequel should take: a sequel to her story of being stranded on this potentially rich world, of working through a near-infinity of chances to emerge again on Earth with the knowledge of their relative "positions" in the matrix. So many branchings, ending in nothing, to find by purest chance the one way through to "home." So many lonely deaths: how could she bear the responsibility for them all? This part of the tale was incomplete: she had said nothing of the self-built nature of the society which supported her efforts. But should I wonder that the self who came home had a new madness, a fresh obsession?

Outside, those faces. I thought I comprehended my network of being, controlled it: I believed that over-all I was unique. They said I looked like her, but photographs and likenesses deceive. She died, old, when I was young. But now I look outside and see so many faces, both young and old, that are one face. The oldest are hers, the younger mine.

"Granny" Ariadne?

[I wish I were dead: better yet, had never been – born?]

Later: Top Form

I am again sane, as capable and balanced as I shall ever be. The following statements are, to the best of my knowledge, true:

a) The society outside is entirely composed of individuals genetically identical to myself. Some may be Idents of each other, sharing experiences and memories, but none are my Ident; we share only a basic physical structure.

b) I am responsible for the welfare of a heterogeneous crew, with the over-all aim of furthering the development of human civilization in this place and time.

c) No Ident of Ariadne Winter, my only parent, has come forward to talk to us, or seems to be in authority in the outside society. They are unsure of their origins, of what Earth means. Much knowledge has been lost, or never known, due to deficiencies in an otherwise acute mind. (I never could manipulate advanced equations or cook a complicated meal). They know that each of them individually was created, and see no signs of their own evolution. Some even believe themselves to be machines or androids; at least to have no kinship with animal life. They experience loyalty, affection, and love for each other, but this is essentially a love of themselves; they cannot know how to love another, as I do Jan, for there have been no other than themselves for each to know. They need us, though not me, to experience a full range of social and emotional interaction, and cling to a promise or prophecy of a saviour, a "man" who will come to them and live among them, with each of them, forever.

d) A partial, gradual introduction of one extra-





ordinarily desirable individual – i.e. Jan – would cause chaos and disintegration of the balance of this society, which in turn could endanger the survival of my own group, here on the ship.

e) We have facilities for local refraction, to create as many Idents as any individual as seems desirable.

The decision and responsibility is mine. Others will carry out my orders, but I must act alone. The pattern Ariadne Winter willed for her descendants is clear to me now, but her will is not mine. There is an alternative, radical solution.

Later: Over the top

My clever Granny Ariadne knew that anyone I fancied, she'd probably start sweating for as well: that's crudely expressed, but it's true. A million Jans (refracted) for a million Ariadnes on this desert wilderness. All her plots and ambitions were so seductively, selfishly obscene, to make up to herself for the many-times-given gift of death. Oh, if you were the only boy in the world – though of course there were others on the mission.

I'm sure they'll come to some kind of arrangement. But I couldn't do that to Jan – my Jan – while there was any way to avoid the necessity. Technical feasibility is one thing, psychological possibility another. I won't share him, not even with myself. Nor would he agree. As sad Laura said, "a multiplication of lives is a multiplication of deaths."

Ariadne never considered the alternative: that Jan and I might take the ship and disappear, leaving no Ident – no knowledge of what those other versions of herself had lost – making them rub along as best they

might with humbler mortals of the team: not my own delicious Jan.

So here we are, almost alone in a little private paradise circuiting this sun for ever, he all mine and I all his, selfishly, unsharing. And I am happy: so awake, so overflowing with energy. Even the certainty that this is almost the very last phase of the cycle for me does not bring alarm, although when I wake from the Crystal Coffin my mood will be uncontrolled, normal – if "normal" can be normal when I have not in all my adult life been entirely removed from the System. Now, at this phase, I am incapable of fear.

We're all right. We're lucky – happy – clear off the ground, free of the mess the team'll have to steer its way through pussyfoot. I like to think of our disappearance as taking the trigger from my Granny Ariadne's sociomorphic super-bomb. Then, when I think of the complex pattern of happenings that brought us here: of the System, Refraction, all the aspects of this tangled (being) web –

When I think of them all resulting in our voluntary exile from the only inhabitable world within a lifetime's travel; in a life-long quarantine –

(Stalemate. Ariadne O: Us O)

– then I have to laugh. Or –

Diana Reed read PPE at Oxford University. She then worked for the BBC for over ten years, starting as a clerk and crossword editor on the *Listener* magazine and eventually becoming a radio producer. She left the BBC in 1983 to get married, to move from London to Manchester, and to pursue a freelance career. Since then most of her time has been taken up by producing a baby daughter. The above is her first sf story to be professionally published.

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GOODBYE – AND THANKS FOR THE SF

by Allen A. Lucas

Last issue we published Vincent Omniaveritas's stimulating essay, "The New Science Fiction." The following piece by a young British writer is *not* a reply to Mr Omniaveritas (it was drafted before the American essay appeared) but it could nevertheless be regarded as a statement from the "opposition." We would be most interested in receiving our readers' comments on both pieces, and if they are forthcoming we shall publish a selection of responses in a future Letters column.

– The Editors

I don't remember the first science-fiction book I ever read; it was probably some awful Hugh Walters juvenile novel (sort of "Biggles in Space," for those who don't recognize the name). By the time I'd galloped through *The Lost World and War of the Worlds* I was hopelessly hooked. For several pre-teen and teenage years I was almost exclusively a science-fiction reader. I am twenty-seven now. Too old for that sort of stuff? Or am I severely disenchanted? These days I don't even look at the sf stock in bookshops. In trying to articulate my own reasons for no longer wanting to write or read science fiction, I feel I can speak for many others; a lost generation, if you like.

The Death of Literacy?

A simple answer for my disillusionment is the literary development of myself and people whose work I have long admired. Christopher Priest, for example, has had his two recent novels *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour* published as "fiction." Is this because, from a publisher's attitude, the books are too good to be associated with *Battlestar Galactica* etcetera; or is it because the books aren't science-fictional enough for the modern generation of sf readers? How many of this "generation" will bother with Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*? Won't most of them think he's "sold out," just as they always expected he would?

One can be a literary science fiction writer – just. People of the calibre of John Sladek and Thomas M. Disch, after having been established in the genre for several years, have made efforts to transcend its limitations. One

can be a "mainstream" literary figure and flirt with the field – Angela Carter and Doris Lessing, for example – without facing absolute artistic death. What one cannot contemplate, here in the Britain of 1985/6, is commencing a literary sf career. The younger novelists – Salman Rushdie, William Boyd, Rose Tremain, Graham Swift, et al – the people making waves today and writing the pertinent, contemporary fiction, are not drawn towards science fiction as it presents itself these dark days.

SF and the New Imperialism

Science fiction today and in the recent past has changed dramatically. The days of "dangerous new world visions," to coin a phrase, the time of experimentation and radical politics, seem long gone.

Once again sf is an American-dominated field, falling largely into three categories: high tech (often scientifically incomprehensible); computer games-related works; and all-out off-Earth or fake-Earth fantasy. More disturbingly, underpinning these developments is an obsession with and antipathy towards Otherness – from "Space Invaders" machines to *Grem-lins* and so on. Indeed, one can chart a circular course – as American politics has reverted to a more right-wing mode, so has science fiction.

The Growth of the SF Film

Perhaps one can pinpoint how these changes have come about.

In 1968, the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* was unleashed onto a largely bewildered public. At the time it was the most expensive sf film ever, and at four years in the making also the most protracted sf production. It was what its title promised – a space film – but it hinted at other "literary" areas. Indeed, co-creator Arthur C. Clarke called it "The first ten million dollar religious movie." Although *Planet of the Apes* and *One Million Years BC* were released at much the same time, *2001* was contemporaneous with *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner*, works which took the televisual/filmic form of science fiction into previously uncharted territories. The gauntlet was thrown down but never successfully picked up.

In late 1977 *Star Wars* hit the screens and science fiction was never the same again. This latter film and its many spin-offs marked the death of the New Wave/New Worlds phenomenon. There is no acid trip/transcendence sequence in *Star Wars* – just special effects, adventure, heroes, and villains – and, some would argue, fascist overtones (see John Brosnan's *Future Tense*). Hal 9000 had been a decidedly ambivalent character; no one could question that Darth Vader was evil. George Lucas, the director, had set the pattern for a seemingly endless series of similar science fiction films where the main concerns are: special effects, space, aliens, and xenophobia. The repercussions have been with us ever since: Hollywood's definition of, and now powerful sway over, science fiction has had a major determining effect of sf literature since 1977-78.

Personal Responses

What do I want from science fiction? I want Kafka; I want *Crush*; I want *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; I want *Greybeard*; I want Tavernier's film *Deathwatch*.

What is our main fodder? *Clan of the Cave Bear*, *The Darwath Trilogy*, *V1*, xxx trilogy; endlessly self-sustaining sf/fantasy series. You want escapist, colonialist, role-playing, wish-fulfillment? Sf has got it.

I still love sf, but I don't write it – I write poetry (mostly social satire), songs with a rock group (!), and experimental fiction. Admittedly most of my published work so far has been sf/horror, but...

I still love sf, but I don't want to read it. *Interzone* retains a last tenuous link for me. When visiting my local bookshop, the "Booker Prize" novels slated in *IZ* 12's editorial hold far more appeal – I'd rather read *Flaubert's Parrot* (Julian Barnes) than the *Thomas Covenant* epics of Stephen Donaldson, for example.

I want a fiction that attempts to cope with the real world, or developments within it and their possible extrapolations – myths of the near future, if you like. After all, *2001* is only fifteen years away.

Anticipated Arguments

You might say I'm confusing "sf"

and "fantasy." No, not me. Rather blame the publishers who market the stuff, the writers who churn out the stuff, and the readers who read the stuff.

From *Interzone's* standpoint, perhaps the field seems livelier, more inventive, and more relevant. But I would counter that I was on the "inside" for many years and therefore am well placed to observe the change that's come over sf.

Labels and bedfellows can stick too easily. If something is lumped together with endless imperialist fantasy epics and flash bang xenophobia space war fiction, will it not be swamped, nay, even determined by the works associated with it? To some extent – and maybe entirely in certain areas of the popular consciousness – you are what you are labelled as being!

Radical Hard SF

The definition and intention "radical hard sf" might once have been possible but is now probably a contradiction in terms. Modern radicalism has equations with a latterday Luddism – wholefoods, co-operatives, anti-nuclear, pro-wildlife, etcetera. There is no connection with the "use it up, invent something else, nuke the Vegans" attitude of traditional "hard sf".

Indeed, one must pose the question: is radicalism in these post-Wellsian days anti-science? This article is not the place to properly discuss such a proposition, but it must be noted that radicalism has a distinct distrust of certain scientific advances. After all, it's one thing playing chess with a home computer; M15 surveillance, genetic experimentation, and star wars technology are quite a different side of the coin.

Summary

I love sf essentially because of the primacy of the idea. Brian Aldiss pays science fiction a marvellous back-handed compliment when describing the modern novel as (I paraphrase) "consisting of two newly-weds; they have work in advertising; they live in Highgate; and they have a 'problem'." In science fiction, ideally, one can get away from the unsympathetic yuppies and sink one's teeth into an inspiring concept, a mouth-watering "What if..."

Interzone deserves credit for its occasional brave attempts to expand sf's constrictions, such as Neil Ferguson's "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw," a story about a semiotic detective. How many modern sf readers have even heard of semiotics? If this is the future

direction of *IZ* (why not?), then what's the point of continuing to flirt with the "SF" label?

In attempting to institute a concept of "radical hard sf" *Interzone* is fighting a losing battle. You don't have to be "just another little literary magazine," but do you really want to be *Isaac Asimov's UK*? There must be a path somewhere else that is worth taking.

In Britain, the field of "mainstream" literature has expanded to encompass the science fiction/fantasy related works of D.M. Thomas, J.G. Ballard, Emma Tennant, Angela Carter, and others; but Science Fiction itself, in Britain and America, has taken a different turn in a seemingly irrelevant direction.

Allen A. Lucas has had a short story published in 'Fantasy Tales'. His verse has appeared here and there. He is vocalist and lyricist with a rock band, The False Dots.

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c/o Vince Docherty
20 Hillington Gdns
Glasgow G52 1PR

S.W. Widdowson

The Ibis Experiment

"For indeed strange things shall happen, and secret things be known, and many centuries shall pass away, ere these memorials be seen of men."

— Poe

Here then, was the famous estate. It was how I had imagined it – open, light – which helped a lot. No more green corridors and restraints, no more instruments, no more drugs. Now it was nearly over. I was to relax, and this man I had been brought to would help me. I had wanted to return to work, but they were insistent, and now I was glad of that.

The house was old, comfortably so, and commanded fine views all around. Through the window, down that gentle slope, the trees progressed towards a slow, winding river. Elsewhere there were terraces and ornamental gardens. It was quiet, but not silent. It was a calm, almost ideal world that welcomed me here. And it was nearly over, nearly over.

"I am more interested in the nature of the mission. I already know the facts. What did you experience? We clocked you at just over two days – the onboard computer has it at a good ten. What's your version? How did you feel when you closed orbit?"

"I thought this wasn't a debrief. They said I could rest."

"So rest. Lie back, take a drink. That's not a psychiatrist's couch. Distance yourself a little and go through it like you would a bedtime book. And take your time – I'm getting good money for looking at this view and drinking good wine. I can take a few days of it."

"I don't want to talk about it, I get a headache. So you're still working on me. I can understand your enthusiasm, but give me a day at least – I will lie back and drink, but I'll be thinking about something else. I have to."

"We'll try tomorrow, if you like."

"Tomorrow! I like the sound of that."

"Just remember, this isn't some kind of game, and we don't have to score points off each other. Think of it as trading time – every contribution you make to this interview brings you closer to that leave. You've earned it, so don't delay it too much longer."

"Who are you?"

"At the moment, questioner. And listener. We need more from you than you've yet given. So far you've only flown the mission – now we want our slow motion replay, from your side of the camera, where it hurts."

"Piss off then!"

"Tomorrow then."

But I didn't go. I spent the afternoon in the old part of the estate. I explored a walled garden and descended steps to the narrow path that ran alongside the moat. The air was old, in decay; the bricks of the ancient walls breathed it out, and the still black water absorbed it – a dynamic petrification that I felt beginning within myself. When the appointed time arrived I felt safe from the house, and from him. I wandered further, trying to lose myself in the antiquity, willing the centuries to backtrack so that he and his cursed organization might return to the unformed future. He found me.

"Coming back? I can remember the instant it began. I was plastered against the back of my seat when the acceleration started. It felt like ten, maybe fifteen gravities. I knew there was nothing to do but wait it out. I can't recall too much of it, so I guess I lost consciousness."

"You did, after fifty minutes. I don't know how you managed for so long, but then you were carefully picked for the job."

"So how long did it go on for after that?"

"More than a hundred hours. The ship had everything in hand, including you. Once you were out you were kept that way, for the mission's sake as much as for your own."

"A hundred hours? At that acceleration?"

"Not entirely. After seventy the ship had enough velocity for the ramjets to operate efficiently. When they cut in you really started to speed up."

"And the course was - ?"

"Parabolic. Designed to bring you inside the orbit of Venus. Deceleration started somewhere this side of Jupiter. Do you remember anything before we picked you up?"

"I remember hearing voices. It was the recovery ship of course, trying to establish contact. At the time I thought I was still back there. I didn't remember beginning the return trip until much later. I can't describe how I felt, just very dry, and aching in every part of my body. I couldn't move. The harness wasn't necessary, my muscles felt like they'd melted. When it was released I thought of removing the tubes from my arm, but of course I was still helpless."

And he enticed me back then, to watch the gathering night from the warmth of the house...
"You left Neptune base with a long, solitary journey ahead. How did you fill the time?"

"I read, when I bothered to wake up. I was well supplied with the drugs - couldn't have me dying of boredom before I even got there."

"So you slept a lot. What did you dream about?"

"Once I dreamed that I was back on Neptune, and I described the events of the mission in great detail during debrief. Once I dreamed I was here, only I was alone and it was raining heavily. The house was different too: squarer, smaller."

"And as you approached the target, when the drugs were changed, how did you feel when the dreams stopped? Were you able to adjust to the coming crisis?"

"That's curious - it didn't feel like the dreams had stopped at all. I was obviously more active, and quite involved in ship's operations, but there seemed to be a continuity, as if none of the things I was doing had any cold reality outside my head. I believe the dreams were induced - they were of a dazzling clarity - as a form of practice for the mission. My training. Are we that clever?"

"Why do you think such a training would be necessary? Was it so terrifying that we should feel you had to be...coaxed into a certain frame of mind?"

"I ask a question and you come back with two. I'd answer yes to your second, which automatically answers the first. Now answer mine: are we capable of choreographing dreams?"

"I don't know, I was genuinely curious. Would you say you experienced the approach as in a dream?"

"I looked out and saw the sun as one star amongst millions. It was only slightly brighter than its nearest competitors. Somehow though it still seemed close. When you look at the stars, whether it's from down here or out past the moon, you see in two dimensions - it's like looking across an empty room at a painted wall. The sun was somewhere in the middle of the room. It gave the illusion of warmth. In the other direction, another empty room. And then again, not quite. If I looked down slightly, or to the side, I caught a movement on the edge of vision - a whirl, not of light, but of...movement, just that. A ghost that grew directly larger, although it revealed itself neither to my direct sight nor to the ship. It remained no more than the

conjunction of our target coordinates.

"As in a dream? It wasn't like any that I have known, but it helps to think of it like that. Weeks passed, and I found that I had less and less time for anything other than this...this flickering shape. It was becoming easier to observe, and the motion now appeared to form a definite vortex. It was still invisible to the ship, which puzzled me then, and does now."

"Not so puzzling, if you consider the mission from our point of view."

"How so?"

"With the base computer handling affairs from our end, there were times when you - participation - would have been both unnecessary and detrimental."

"You mean the ship was keeping information from me?"

"I mean you were being protected. We thought you'd have enough to handle."

At some point it suddenly occurred to me that I was free of the system - no longer out beyond Neptune or in the Plutonic Belt, but out, for the first time, of the entire circus. It was a cold feeling, a panic as real as the lightyears around me, or the few cubic yards of cabin space.

I knew it was the first time that anyone had been that far, but it didn't feel new, not at all. It was old, dank and hopeless; its darkness hid many secrets. Then sleep offered the only solution - in its garish halls the unthinkable could assume a familiar reality. It may be that this is the only ground we have in the outer regions.

"You said you did some reading. You didn't say what."

"I wasn't sure how you'd take it. I read your IBIS report. Twice. It was superb, as far as I understood it. But then it had to be, didn't it? You were willing to put me on the line on account of it."

"Ah. Well I shouldn't be surprised that you know me. After all, I helped pick you."

"You should be flattered. Only you would be asking these questions. Don't you want to know how I came by my copy?"

"No, I'd be wasting my time - or rather you would. And I probably already have that information filed somewhere. What I want to know is what it was like."

"You're eager to see how well your equations describe the reality in the vortex. I may disappoint you, Doctor."

"I don't think you will. My calculus throws a wide net."

"Believe me, it will be stretched."

The flickering grew closer, and its true size became apparent. It was tremendous. Half the stars of the galaxy now shimmered and danced, as if viewed through a sheet of unquiet water, or more accurately, in reflection from the surface of a great black whirlpool. And now it impressed itself fully onto my direct vision, so that I could at last study its form.

Separate threads of movement were apparent, as in the rapid transmission of streams of flickering pulses, inwards along what seemed to be stable, well-defined paths. Most of these were spiral in shape, disappearing into the central dark spot. It was clear later that

these spirals were themselves in motion, rotating slowly in a clockwise sense.

Other threads were hyperbolic, and rotated at faster rates. I guessed that it was one of these latter that the ship was about to follow – that much was clear from the report. I couldn't take my eyes off the forward port – this was size beyond anything in my experience. It had to be close, very close, to be that big. Next to my skin. I could feel it pressing against my forehead. I was stupefied, reduced to unthinkable insignificance. I would have curled onto the floor and cried, or held my breath until dissolution came. But the ship wouldn't let me – it fed my brain and kept me in its subtle chemical grip. I reeled, wild and dreaming, before the great glass port and managed meanwhile the endless domestic rotas of the mission.

“You entered a hyperbolic orbit – along a thread, a locality in the disturbance.”

“Not a thread really. More like a wide channel, or a tunnel. It was in motion, the stars were everywhere, stretching and jumping through the distortions. Size, shape, it all got very confused as I went further in. It felt like buffeting – mental as well as physical.”

“I suppose you could call it a gravity storm. The local geometry of space gets fairly shaken up. Some of the wave patterns would be stupendous!”

“Good Doctor, I think you would run out of variables. Then you might start to get as confused as I was.”

“You have described the mission nine times so far. No two versions have been quite the same. In every case the order of events is different. I already knew

enough of the vortex to predict that this would be so. I can chart your experiences – as far as I know them.”

“So you say. And you want more information now for that purpose. I know that you must want very much for this thing to work – I want it to be true myself, now at last that it's over. I'm not being deliberately reticent. The memory is all here, right now, but it changes, shifts all the time as if it were alive. I get mesmerized by a recollection, and forget all the rest when I see, in my memory, bits and details that I hadn't noticed before. The moment starts to change, I see more of it than I did originally. But it was all there, all the time, to be discovered merely by looking for it.”

“How about a summer afternoon in July. A peaceful scene by a river. Men in white. A shout?”

“It could have been earlier. The sun was quite high, and it was getting late.”

“How do you know what time it was? Was there a clock? A church spire?”

“No. But it was late. The smell, perhaps. It was definitely evening.”

“What sounds were there? The woods – there must have been birdsong.”

“No, not at that moment – the trees could have been empty. Just the voice, one sharp syllable, ringing on. Maybe the surrounding silence was a reaction.”

“Was the voice near to you? Was it yours, perhaps?”

“It wasn't mine, I'm certain of that. It was strange, it didn't come from anywhere around. It sounded like someone a long way off. The trees were unbowed, so the air must have been still. The voice carried over a fair distance.”



"And what did it say? What was the syllable?"

"I can't say. I mean I can't make any sound that even comes near it. I said it was more of a ringing, maybe no more than the last few ripples of the eardrum. It's not the sort of sound we normally pay attention to. But it came from the trees, of course! I should have made that clear. It came from the direction of the woods."

"But didn't you say there were no noises coming from the woods? Is it changing now?"

"No, it's not changing, it's the same memory. The woods were quiet. The sound didn't originate there."

"Then what? It must have been one way or the other."

"It must have been an echo. The sound was coming back. But not back to me. The man in front of me, his arms were raised, his feet off the ground. His head was turned away from me, I could see only the back line of his jaw. It was open. He could have shouted."

"Right. And there was someone else in front of you, wasn't there? Facing you?"

"His mouth was closed. I remember him best of all. He was at the centre of something. He reminds me of the vortex – I seem to see lines spiralling and converging in on him, from all corners of my vision. Lines in tension, about to snap in the next moment. I was looking at him, wondering which way they would fly when they did. They're how I know that this happened on the mission, the spiral lines. The trademark of the vortex."

"When else could it have happened?"

"On any dark night when I was fast asleep and dreaming. Or back in my childhood, or in a book I read. It's a memory."

"But it's limited to one frame. It has no seriality, it's just a scene."

"That's exactly what I mean. We don't all have an eidetic memory. Most of us are used to that."

"But this static memory has a habit of changing, or developing. It is of a unique character."

"It certainly is."

"And to my knowledge you have never played cricket."

"No, you're right. I don't even know much about it. But I knew what was happening immediately. And the sound, the echo, corresponded to a sensation in my leg – the warm tingling that follows the pain of a blow. And I was leaning forwards, the bat in my hands. I watched his hand. It was halfway out of – or into – his pocket. The whole world waited along with me, intent on its future motion."

"How long was it so?"

"What do you think? It was an instant, it had no duration."

"Yet you had the time to observe its every aspect in minute detail. How long did it feel like?"

"That's impossible to answer. I knew the ship was crossing one of the spiral threads as our own orbit swung round the centre. The moment stretched back in one direction to that same field in the English countryside – in the other it disappeared into the hub of the vortex. I experienced it where our two paths crossed. But by then I was flying along a similar extension of my own. At the same time I was standing in front of the ship's forward port, a moment that seemed to run from the launch pad at Neptune into the same

dark hub."

I left his questions and again retreated from our rooms. Most of the estate had been neglected, probably uninhabited for generations. I gave up trying to follow the moat – the path was blocked in several places by rubble from the tottering inner wall. I began to notice the cameras – I didn't mind, I was too agitated by other matters. Through our last session, the mood of the mission had come upon me again, and my mind raced around and around its final scene. I didn't want to share it, not with him. So his cameras could keep him aware of my movements – he could watch, but he couldn't learn. He needed my consent for that.

I followed an avenue of beech into a low, shadowed glade behind the main house. I felt a perverse pleasure in thwarting his surveillance. By degrees I was becoming calmer. I was at ease in this cool, quiet spot. No one had seen fit to decorate the view, and so this was one of the few parts of the estate lacking a statue or a fountain, or some more complex folly. Apart from the avenue, which must have been planted centuries earlier, the natural processes had been given their rein here. I wondered if that had been the original intention, or whether time or circumstances had forced the abandonment of some grand project. I liked to think that the former was true, that this glade in itself had been considered worthy of such a monumental approach.

Even the house was invisible from here, its highest turret falling well below the line of the trees. I sat against the root of a giant oak and pretended that he wouldn't find me. After a long while my breathing came very slow and soft. I was perfectly still. I was feeling free at last from the tyranny of the experiment – and although I didn't realize it, I was approaching the only state in which I could re-live the terror.

"**Y**ou passed through a number of these threads?"

"We intersected, yes. They weren't transient events, all were part of my own single experience. They were all at the same time."

"But each separate?"

"Absolutely. The intersections were in different places, thousands of miles apart."

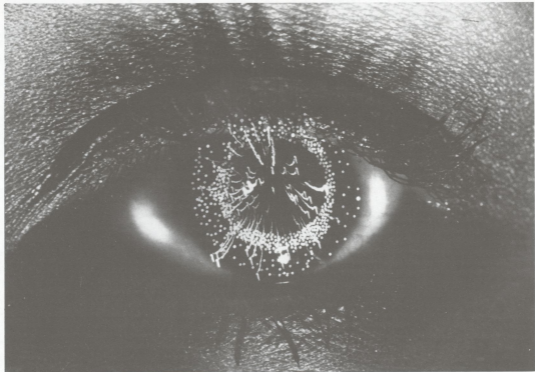
"What about the transfer point? Your last intersection."

"Not the last. I was witnessing the strangest tableau yet, set in a place closely bounded by earth and damp straw, almost as confined as the ship. I knew somehow that this particular thread was hyperbolic, like my own. Without any sudden wrench, without any measure of discontinuity, my course changed. I was now heading out from the vortex along this new line. The remainder of my original orbit was left untravelling. It felt like I was being absorbed into this new scene. The ship – the mission – became no more than a vivid dream, fading rapidly as I experienced a new set of intersections. No, the transfer wasn't the end."

"Only insofar as we stopped tracking you at that point. Our instruments couldn't follow the manoeuvre."

"No. They'd have had to be there."

"Will you describe this new thread?"



"I'd rather not. But of course it's the most important one, isn't it?"

"Yes. When you cleared the vortex the ship was busy starwatching. That's the only hard data we have."

"Is it classified?"

"Of course. Even to you."

"I could make some safe guesses, having read your report. And I was there, after all. Doesn't that give me some sort of clearance?"

"Not automatically. All you have to go on are dreams, remember?"

"Are they? Are you really so interested in my dreams?"

"I would not wish to jeopardize the experiment by colouring, or even prompting any of your recollections. It may be possible later to arrange some access for you. Before that we have to talk about this new, 'earthy' space."

"A trade? My nightmare for your numbers? It seems a bit one-sided."

"What you have may be of significance in confirming or denying what I have. It may be irrelevant, trivial. I can't make any promises. All I can guarantee is that you'll benefit in any case from telling me. Such fearful events are best not buried."

"I can't, not now. I need a drink. Maybe several."

The IBIS experiment was a blueprint for time travel. It didn't contain any new science – the theory it drew on had been generally accepted since the nineteen thirties. What IBIS did was to bring together the new technology and certain new astro-

nomical findings. When applied to the old theory, these produced an astounding synthesis.

The technology involved was the immensely powerful fusion drive, already used extensively for interplanetary travel, and well understood.

The astronomy was the discovery of a black hole in partnership with the sun. It lay in the plane of the solar system, each orbiting about a point roughly midway between them. The black hole was found to rotate.

The theory described the topology of spacetime in the region around such a massive, rotating body. It predicted that it should be possible for a ship to sidestep the normal restraints on motion and, by orbiting the body, to emerge sometime before its approach.

The second phase of such a journey was to involve the most meticulous mapping of the constellations. If backtravel had been achieved, these should have altered slightly in appearance, as their component stars had in the past occupied different positions.

Finally, the experimental data had to be brought within the reach of the experimenter – the ship had now to travel forwards in time with its recordings intact. With these as input, the onboard computer would plot a high-velocity elliptical path, employing the untried ramjets when the fusion drive was at its limit. Shiptime would then be dilated with respect to that of the solar system, and a few days at most would elapse, with the passage of several centuries on earth.

The round trip, according to the report, would have a subjective duration of two to three weeks.

By "subjective," it meant the computer's clock. They were only concerned with my history as a means

of charting the ship's journey. I shouldn't have resented that – a part of me wanted to help, and I knew it was the only way they'd ever let me look at the data.

But I didn't experience it as an experiment, and the only bits I remembered were from quite early on. I wasn't involved in the data acquisition. To me the whole of the second phase was no more than an instant of time that stretched across the void, back towards the sun and the planets. Once the ship was a sufficient distance from the vortex the main drive came on, and of course I don't remember much of that.

So apart from its very beginning and its very end, the whole of the mission could have happened to someone else. Nothing in the report came near to describing my journey – all that lay within the uncertain realm of dream to which I had been guided.

“Tell me about the market again, the boy. I think it must have been Africa.”

“You think? You must be fairly certain, or you'd keep quiet. What was that about prompting memories?”

“Oh, it was Africa all right – the north, I am certain. What I don't know is when.”

“And since that particular intersection occurred in the region of the transfer point, the time would be vital, wouldn't it?”

“You crossed that spiral at a point well inside the vortex. It may have been subsequent to the transfer, in which case you may be in possession of data vital to my analysis. Think about the market. Remember the smell, the heat, all those people and animals. The dancing, where was the dancing?”

“It was a group of five old men. They were in front of a marquee, with jugs in their hands. The crowd had withdrawn to allow their foolishness. A few people watched them with me. One close by had his mouth open wide and there was unmistakable laughter in his eyes. The five were very drunk, their hair and beards awry and their robes heavily stained from tumbling. Holding their wine aloft, they were frozen in impossible balance, legs raised to stomp up more dust.”

“And the boy! He watched them too?”

“He did. He stood next to a table laden with fruit, and his head barely came level with it. He was opposite me, and he was laughing too. And the lines...”

“Lines? What were those? Where could you see them?”

“Like in all the others, they were the lines of tension, of frozen movement. The followed the flow of the dance, winding up to catch the shape the banners made in the breeze. The lines were in the curl of the moustache on the lip of the man near me. I could feel them along my own fingers, and in my scalp.”

“And where was the focus this time? One of the drunks?”

“No. It was with the boy. It still is, it always will be.”

“Who was he?”

“No, I don't know. He was perfectly unremarkable, just a boy.”

“Before or after the transfer?”

“Before. But last time I probably said after. You should stop asking me.”

“No, I think I should go on asking you. Even your ignorance tells me something.”

“The same questions? For how long? How much time do I have to trade?”

“Not much longer now. The same questions, yes. Until all the answers come back the same, at least twice in a row.”

I have said it smelt of earth, though the phrase hardly conveys the impression I had of age and decay. This earth had lain unregarded, unturned, since the time it had formed. Then taken and smeared upon these walls, it conspired with the damp air to give the wretched room the semblance of a grave.

The floor was mud, with a sprinkling of straw. The hag was up to her ankles, and her loathsome appearance suggested that she had recently been rolling in it. Her right arm was raised towards me, the fingertips inches from my face. With her left she was pointing to something beyond my vision. The wick on the wall gave a dim yellow light to one side of her face. Across the low ceiling and the opposite wall her shadow sprawled, even more grotesque than she.

She wore a garland of rotting weeds, which together with the mud formed her sparse apparel. I saw, on that side of her nearest the light, an elaborate pattern, apparently daubed in red clay, which I assumed continued across the rest of her body. Her mouth was wide. She leered at me.

The room was in familiar tension – this time it centred on the hag's one eye. The flame bent towards it, her arms following two of the main lines of force. The red pattern had captured the moment and delivered it bound and trussed before the power of her eye. I watched her and felt constant fear. I was about to be consumed – of that I have little doubt.

As to bodily sensations, I can remember none. My viewpoint was on a level with her swollen belly, so that there was little more than a yard between our faces. Every time I revisit that scene I cast about for some feeling of contact with the floor – I must be kneeling in the ooze – yet without success. It is as if I was there without my body. It could be that such mundane senses were overridden by the violence that began, at that moment, to crystallize.

Her eye has grown. It is a black pit before me; a thin veil of mucus covers its reddened setting. And now I see it – the smallest, remotest point of light in the depths. A speck of yellow, no more, reflected from the rheumy pupil. She grows closer still, and all else increases in proportion. There is detail in this trapped reflection. I see a form that must be mine. I see an open mouth, and my own eyes wide with terror. And how that terror beats now upon my brain, like the leathered wings of some giant, odorous bat!

For my head rests not upon my own two shoulders – the body I see is green, and greatly deformed, carved apparently from a single smooth stone: shiny, veined, and no more than six inches high!

There on a low table before her, there in that damnable place I found at the perigee of my orbit, I squat in mute, eternal captivity.

The Doctor will be looking for me by now. He thinks it is time for our final little chat. What he really hopes to find out, I no longer know. For while it took the combined resources of the Academy, the armed forces

and two governments to engineer the mission, it is obvious to me that the complete affair required the efforts of another agency. She had been waiting for me.

It is also obvious that the report I read was incomplete. I found out just enough to be able to rationalize my experiences, and hence remember them. I was fed information, as well as drugs.

And no doubt they have led me even to this dark glade, so that with a calm, renewed energy I could face that moment just long enough to appreciate its entirety.

The experiment goes on, when I assumed it was over. I shan't go to him, I'm fine here with the oak. Except for the changing light, this place too could be the intersection of two threads on the edge of the vortex. Nothing else shows any evidence of movement or change. My chest is almost still, so slowly do I breathe. I will stay here. It is safe.

Steven Widdowson was born in Nottingham in 1950, dropped out of York University in 1969 and travelled around the world. He resumed his studies seven years later and graduated in 1979 with a first-class Honours in physics. He has worked at many jobs in his time (bus conductor, logger, taxi driver) and is currently a teacher at a comprehensive school in York. "The Ibis Experiment" is his first published story, and he is now working on a novel.

NEWS

The 1985 World Fantasy Award for best novella has gone to **Geoff Ryman** for his story "The Unconquered Country" (*Interzone* 7). Although it is an award administered in the United States, British authors came close to sweeping the board this year. Joint-winner for best fantasy novel is **Robert Holdstock** (*Mythago Wood*, Gollancz and Grafton Books); and winner for best anthology/collection is **Clive Barker** (*Books of Blood*, Volumes 1-3, Weidenfeld and Sphere Books).

Further details on the 1987 **World Science Fiction Convention**, mentioned in last issue's news column: its name is "Conspiracy '87," and it will be held at the Brighton Metropole Hotel and Brighton Conference Centre from 27th August to 2nd September 1987. Author Guests of Honour are Alfred Bester (USA), Doris Lessing (UK) and Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (USSR). The chairman of the convention is Malcolm Edwards, one of *Interzone's* founding editors. For further details write to Conspiracy '87, PO Box 43, Cambridge CB1 3JJ, England.

Dead at the age of 70 is **Bernard Wolfe**, author of the fabled sf masterpiece *Limbo* (1952; better known as *Limbo '90* in the UK). Although it has long been out of print, *Limbo* has been described by J.G. Ballard, among others, as the greatest American science-fiction novel (in fact, Ballard paid homage to it in his book *Hello America*, 1981). Wolfe, born 1915, was a one-time secretary and bodyguard to Leon Trotsky. Apart from *Limbo*, his best-remembered book is *The Great Prince Died* (1959), a novel based on Trotsky's assassination - which occurred after Wolfe had left his service. Wolfe died in a Los Angeles hospital on 27th October 1985.

Interzone: The 1st Anthology (Dent, 1985, £3.95) will be published in the USA by **St Martin's Press**. This is a sale which delights us all. A projected "2nd Anthology" is

unlikely to appear before 1987.

One of *Interzone's* loyal US subscribers has sent us details of "Readercon," a small convention to be held on 27th-28th June 1987 in Boston, Mass. Writer Guest of Honour will be **Gene Wolfe**, and publisher Guest of Honour will be **Mark Ziesing**. This sounds like an unusual American sf convention, since it is explicitly designed for the "serious reader (or writer, publisher, editor, or critic) of imaginative fiction," who sees it "as primarily a form of literature, rather than a type of movie or game." For further information write to Readercon, PO Box 6138, Boston, MA 02209, USA.

Here at *Interzone* we were surprised by the sudden announcement on 15th December 1985 of a science-fiction short-story competition sponsored by the **Sunday Times** and **Victor Gollancz Ltd**. There is a prize of £500 for the best sf story of up to 3,000 words in length submitted by 31st January 1986 (and a further prize of £100 for the best entrant under 21). That's a tight deadline, and it's a shame that it will be long past by the time this issue of the magazine reaches readers' hands. But we wish the competition well and look forward with great interest to seeing its results. The judges are **J.G. Ballard**, **Angela Carter**, **Sir Clive Sinclair** and **Malcolm Edwards**. In his introduction to the competition, published in the *Sunday Times*, Ballard says:

"The time is right for a new flowering of science fiction. As the tidal wave of blockbuster sf movies dies away, so too, I predict, will the traditional sf of outer space and alien galaxies. Already the signs are here, for example in the pages of the new British sf magazine *Interzone*. In place of fairy tales of the future, which suppress thought rather than provoking it, we find a new kind of sf: a fiction dealing with such ideas as ecological crisis, the nuclear umbrella, hazardous trends in medical research, computers, the communications explosion and dozens more..."

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ON THE EDGE

BOOK REVIEWS BY MARY GENTLE

Fantasy is still the boom these days; sf and historical novels have taken to appearing under its guise; as yet there seems no detectable end to the stream. True, it only takes one good book to start a boom, the Good Book in this instance being *Lord of the Rings*. I knew it before it was a cult, quoth Ye Olde Reviewer, not that anybody gives a sparrow's fart; however, it does give one some kind of perspective on the matter. Begin then with Tolkienian or High Fantasy. And, of course, trilogies. (Pause while Faithful Reader gets out the garlic, crucifix, silver bullets, etc.) There are very few fantasy trilogies that are trilogies for a good reason, namely, because that's how long the story is. Usually either the editor thought there were two more commercial sequels to this one OK novel, or else the author couldn't let the story go; and while there may be a difference in the motivation, the results are similar: reader-dissatisfaction. Be that as it may, I'm looking forward to volumes 2 and 3 of Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Summer Tree* (Allen & Unwin, £8.95). And not just because it ends on a (legitimate, I hasten to add) cliff-hanger. It's subtitled "The Fionavar Tapestry," which fits it well: a wide canvas, many characters, multiple threads of story-lines.

Background to the novel comes in part from *The Mabinogion* and the Elder Edda, not too much is original. Five students on a Toronto campus are "collected" by the disguised mage Loren Silvercloak, he takes them to Fionavar, first of all the created worlds, for a royal occasion; there is more to it than that. The *Summer Tree* reminds me of Alan Garner's early books. Kay's student characters are sketched in deftly, certain of them are allowed to be unsympathetic, and panic at vital moments. Once in Fionavar (one lost in transit) the narrative can split to follow their various fortunes in and around the court of King Allell, aging summer king, whose land is dying under a drought. More background here from *The Golden Bough*, by way of the feminist interpretations of the old matriarchal religions. The greatest compliment, I suppose, is to say that the Tolkienian aspects do strike the same note as *LOTR*, without appearing too much the rip-off.

To the general Elvishness and Celticism is added some original magic – a mage must draw power from another person, his "source" – and grief, and sex, and pain, and responsibility; a little stylized, as figures in a tapestry tend to be, but still allowing people real, messy motivations. Admittedly there is Something Nasty under a mountain in the north, but this Dark Lord isn't as thick as most; his display of power when he's freed (a volcano) actually post-dates that freedom by some considerable time. Presumably he's had time to gather his forces and will give the heroes a run for their money, which will make a change. The heroes, by the way, are not terribly heroic. There is an exiled heir to the throne, who is a phenomenal swordsman and a taciturn berk. There is the younger brother, now heir, who practises irresponsibility, drinking, and wenching on a grand scale (and yes, his best mate and the local tavern are also straight out of *Henry IV Part I*). And a Princess with a mind of her own. While it may be somewhat disconcerting to have a minor character called Tandem, and a major character called Aileron, these are nitpicks. *The Summer Tree* thrives on sequences that are felt: the sacrifice in the wood, life with the Riders. It falls down when it takes the furniture of High Fantasy for granted – elves, dwarves, dark forces. And it thrives on present-day characters, and not on the USA's version of the aristocracy – at one moment I thought a Prince was actually going to behave like an absolute monarch, killing an uppity peasant, but he turned out to be acting merely the power-politician, which is not the same thing at all.

And which leads me, oddly enough to Jack Vance's *Rhialto the Marvellous* (Grafton, £1.95). You don't find too much humour in fantasy, maybe because the subworld-creating variety depends on an illusion that humour can easily puncture; so when it does come along, it's welcome. On the other hand, there's nothing like humour for displaying – in all its unashamed glory – the true prejudices of writer and audience...

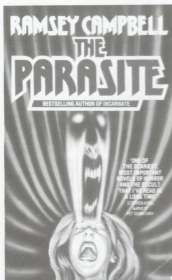
Vance's comic fantasy is underrated, maybe because intellectual. It depends on a kind of deadpan style, narrating

ludicrous events with cool decorum, and a more obscure vocabulary than you'd find anywhere outside the latest Gene Wolfe. But then, it's also cruel. Rhialto the Marvellous, for all the comic presentation, is the aristocrat. And much closer to the mark than most American fantasy writers' approximation – he defeats his enemies mercilessly, and no nonsense about forgiving them after they've been suitably degraded; with his servants he is the absolute autocrat, with maidens in distress he is the gallant (read: sexual predator); with uppity women, instant in working their downfall. His friends are his friends for as long as expediency dictates, and then they are to be taken advantage of.

And that's an odd way to have to look at this series of three linked light-comedy fantasies. In the first, the mages of the 21st Aeon are threatened with enforced effeminacy (the which concept is fully as reactionary as you can imagine it); in the second, Rhialto's arrogance brings about a quite natural conspiracy among the mages to metaphorically pee on him from a great height – which he circumvents, and turns back on the perpetrator; in the third, the mages journey to the end of the universe, and find one of their number bent on justifiable revenge. Again, this is circumvented. There's something fairly disturbing going on under the comedy here. Maybe because the attitude behind it isn't – as one could imagine about "aristocratic" attitudes – safely confined to the 18th century or medieval times. It's alive and well, as you might say, in the freedom-loving West.

That fantasy is intimately connected to the "real" world is no news at all, except to the unperceptive, and those who don't read fantasy (hmm... was that a tautology?) Horror fantasy is yet another fact. I mean the horrors that pertain to what's being called Dark Fantasy, and not, say, old age, illness, loneliness, bereavement. And yet horror has to be more than spooks and dismemberment, has to touch some chord of our fears, or else it produces nothing more than the revulsion attendant on an abattoir. Ramsey Campbell is one of the best real horror writers at work today, though *The Nameless* (Grafton, £1.95) is not his best book. If it ever turns up (old, dog-eared, smelling of yellow paper) in whatever equivalent of second-hand bookshops the future may possess, the lucky finder will prize it not necessarily for the horror-plot (torture-cult abducts child-victims and -practitioners) but for the details of the everyday 1980s. The London literary agent heroine, her life and business; London suburbia, how sunlight looks on certain shops, motorways, hotels, the sound of the quiet

inside empty houses. There is horror of the old sort, the real kind of spooky story that makes the reader (just for a minute, we are adult, aren't we. Aren't we?) afraid of the dark. The heroine's quest for her dead-or-is-it-stolen daughter is gripping. Only the ending does the book no credit. It wants either to be three times as long, and play up the psychic elements as if it isn't afraid of them, or else it wants a non-supernatural ending. As it stands, it's a narrowing-down of what's gone before, too small, to understated, and gone before the reader quite realizes.



Cover by Steven Crisp for another Ramsey Campbell reissue (Grafton Books, £2.50). Observant readers will not that the snarling ghost is identical to the one which appeared on the jacket of Clive Barker's 'The Damnation Game' (Weidenfeld).

And fantasy even closer to the real world brings me to Joanna Russ. Series are common (to go back to form for a moment), fix-up novels are common. *The Adventures of Alyx* (Women's Press, £1.95) – lousy title – is uncommon. Although it is both a series, and a short-novel-and-stories fixed up into a novel. Included are three short fictions, the novel *Picnic on Paradise*, and the novella "The Second Inquisition," which never mentions Alyx by name, and never has to.

The Alyx stories are the only series I know that, as they develop, change their nature. The first three short stories are Leiber-esque fantasy, feminist in that there's a heroine rather than a hero, but with much left unexamined. Alyx, picklock, escorts a

young rich girl out of Ourdh, and assists in her "education"; Alyx leaves her husband for a pirate, and leaves him; Alyx takes the toys from the boys in a science-fantasy mode. There is no apology about the way details of Alyx's past life and origins keep changing. Nor should there be. *Picnic on Paradise* is science fiction, Alyx "a Mediterranean Greek of nearly four millennia ago" trawled into the far future by a time-scoop, and detailed to take a parcel of tourists across a resort-planet during a war. Hardship exposes character, not least Alyx's own. And then there is "The Second Inquisition": psychological fiction. A possible time traveller arrives in small town USA. In 1925. Is she the circus woman, part-black; or does she know too much politics, too much science, for her time? Superwoman or misfit? Or is she there? All is seen through the eyes of the fantasizing girl narrator, who must face the world eventually. "And quite alone," it ends. "No more stories."

And that falls short of the truth, as everything must in some particular. There are always more stories. The question, of course, is why? Commercial, philosophical, metaphysical, and downright loopy answers will all be considered acceptable...

REVIEWS IN BRIEF

The Originals: Who's Really Who in Fiction by William Amos (Cape, £12.95)

An A-Z of fictitious persons, purporting to strip away the masks and tell us who were the real people behind the colourful characters created by various novelists, playwrights and film-makers. It's a big book of 600 well-illustrated pages, and undeniably entertaining in spurts. Nevertheless it leaves me dissatisfied. Although he appends an extensive bibliography, Amos does not mention the two books of a similar nature which preceded his own: Irving Wallace's *The Fabulous Originals: Lives of Extraordinary People Who Inspired Memorable Characters in Fiction* (1955; published in the UK by NEL in 1967); and Alan Bold and Robert Giddings' *True Characters: Real People in Fiction* (Longman, 1984; reviewed almost nowhere at the time of its publication, alas). Amos covers much of the same ground as Wallace, Bold and Giddings; moreover, comparison of the three works shows that there is something very arbitrary in the nature

of such projects – there is little "fact" to be gleaned from these books, just a great deal of opinion. For example, Amos tells us that Rider Haggard's Ayesha was inspired by one Mary Elizabeth Archer, a Yorkshire farmer's daughter; on the other hand, Bold and Giddings inform us that the "original" of Ayesha was a hideous rag doll that terrified Haggard in his nursery. Which is correct? And who cares? Ayesha remains a haunting figment of the creative imagination, and neither of these explanations enhances her significantly. In the end it is the fictionality of fictional characters which fascinates us – not the supposed "real-life" correspondences.

Encyclopaedia of Things That Never Were: Creatures, Places and People, text by Michael Page, illustrations by Robert Ingpen (Dragon's World, £15.95)

Described on the cover as "The Complete Book of Fantasy," this is a beautiful large-format production, gorgeously illustrated. It is in a somewhat similar vein to Jeff Rovin's *The Fantasy Almanac* (Dutton, 1979) but rather better done. The text is copious, and will provide good reading for the young. Like the book reviewed above, it contains entries for a number of fictitious characters – Frankenstein et al – as well as lost lands, fabulous realms and sundry things. This time, however, there has been little effort to relate the characters to real-life models; Michael Page has let his imagination play over the wide-ranging material, and has created a free-floating "world just around the corner of your mind, where reality is an intruder and dreams come true..." Perhaps he has been a little too free: the lack of citations makes it difficult to tell where authentic folklore, legendry and retellings of literary originals leave off and Michael Page's fancy takes over. Never mind. As a coffee-table anatomy of the Fantastic this book will do very well indeed.

Galapagos by Kurt Vonnegut (Cape, £9.50)

The story is narrated by Leon Trotsky Trout, son of a failed science-fiction writer. Suddenly decapitated at the age of forty, he becomes a ghost and lives for a million years on the Galapagos Islands – home of the blue-footed booby, the giant land turtle, the sea iguana, the vampire finch, and other endearing species. There he is privileged to observe the devolution of the human race. The descendants of a few marooned humans develop into a new species: furry, finned, seal-like, and small of brain. It's a sadly funny Darwinian fable, and Vonnegut's most successful sf novel in a long time.

(DP)

Sceptre Mortal by Derek Sawde (Oriflamme Publishing, £2.95)

Tolkien clone that derives from *The Silmarillion* (not the wisest choice for style) by way of the more lurid excesses of H.P. Lovecraft. Cast of thousands, all indistinguishable; one female character, the evil Witch-Queen. Ends in mid-air, further volumes seem likely.

Footfall by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (Collanz, £9.95)

American wish-fulfilment power trip, the "V" invasion re-staged with herd-aliens (who lisp) and are duly outmanoeuvred by the USA's superior firepower. Words like militaristic, libertarian, imperialist, spring to mind. Would make a good tv mini-series, the 1980s equivalent of the McCarthyite *Invasion of the Body-snatchers*: paradigm of invasion from within replaced by invasion from outside. The aliens' major weapon is called "the Foot" – have these people no sense of humour?

Memoirs of a Spacewoman by Naomi Mitchison (The Women's Press, £1.95)

Somewhat dated (1962) but wearing well: episodic tale of a future communicator with alien life forms, her adventures, odd pregnancies, and general bafflement at the truly alien nature of the universe. Adult, emotional, unspectacular, philosophic. Nothing in it is salacious enough to attract the audience the blurb seems to be aiming at.

(MG)

The Future/Le Futur: Canadian Woman Studies/Cahiers de la Femme. Spring 1985 (\$7 Canadian, from 204F Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele St, Downsview, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3)

What's in this special issue – on "The Future" – of a serious academic feminist journal? Half a dozen short stories one of which – Donna E. Smyth's "Future Talk, or the Visions of Chicken Little" – is brilliant, an excellent selection of poetry, and a score of stimulating articles. These range from essays on women and science fiction, to advice on the laws governing how much force women may use in self-defence, to ethics – both in general and in relation to reproductive technology, to "Reflections on Feminizing Time," and articles on reshaping urban environments to fit the way women and families actually, or could, live. These last two topics map ground fertile for science-fictional exploration. Contents are written in either French or English, except for the lively illustrations which transcend language. Good stuff.



In Search of Forever by Rodney Matthews (Dragon's World, £12.95, \$7.95)

Rod Matthews art, on Moorcock covers, posters, calendars, is instantly recognizable. This book – whose release was marked by Matthews' first one man show at the Langton Gallery, World's End, Chelsea – brings together a range of his work including posters and record sleeves as well as more book covers, eg. for Andre Norton's *Witch World* series. Smoothly harmonizing colours, insectoid/reptiloid figures, distorted grotesquerie fading into softly airbrushed romanticism.

(JH)

Time and Again and All Flesh is Grass by Clifford D. Simak (Methuen, £2.50 each)

Two of Simak's most enjoyable and characteristic novels. *Time and Again* dates from 1951 and it's a full-scale space-and-time extravaganza with a support-the-underdog theme. *All Flesh is Grass*, from 1965, is a parallel-worlds mystery about intelligent flowers (and money growing on trees). Delightful stuff – especially for teenagers.

A Quest for Simbilis by Michael Shea (Grafton, £1.95)

After *The Eyes of the Overworld* (1966), Jack Vance seemed to abandon his "Dying Earth" setting – so Shea wrote this sequel (first published in the USA in 1974). Since then Vance himself has returned to the scene with *Cugel's Saga* and others. Shea writes this breezy stuff very efficiently, but of course Vance does it better.

Fire Pattern by Bob Shaw (Grafton, £1.95)

A typical Shaw sf thriller, displaying its author's customary virtues and faults. This one concerns spontaneous combustion in human beings: the "rational" explanation for this phenomenon is wild and woolly and wholly delightful. Alas, the novel's ending is rushed.

(DP)

ALSO RECEIVED

Job: A Comedy of Justice by Robert A. Heinlein (NEL, £2.95). The hardcover edition was praised by Mary Gentle in *IZ* 11.

The Leaky Establishment by David Langford (Sphere, £2.25). Also praised by Mary Gentle, this is a non-sf farce full of in-jokes for sf readers.

The Glamour by Christopher Priest (Abacus, £2.95). A fine novel, revised since its first appearance as a Cape hardcover.

Myths to Live By by Joseph Campbell (Paladin, £2.95). A collection of lively talks on the moral and psychological significance of myth, from the influential author of *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

Going Critical: An Unofficial History of British Nuclear Power (Paladin, £2.95). An anti-nuke book by one of the best-informed critics of contemporary technological orthodoxies.

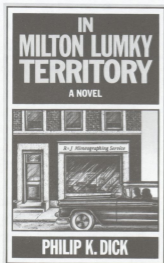
The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy: The Original Radio Scripts by Douglas Adams, edited by Geoffrey Perkins (Pan, £4.99). The "Hitch-Hiker" books have been wildly successful. This one, which goes back to the source in that long-gone year 1978, is the biggest and best to date.

Molly Zero by Keith Roberts (Penguin, £2.50) First paperback edition of a 1980 novel from a very reliable British sf writer.

Hawkmistress! (Arrow, £2.25) and **Night's Daughter** (Sphere, £1.95) by Marion Zimmer Bradley. The first is yet another novel in the interminable "Darkover" series (it has a ghastly cover); the second is a new fantasy based on Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Menace Under Marswood by Sterling E. Lanier (Grafton, £1.95). First British publication of an unremarkable sf adventure novel.

Elephant Song by Barry B. Longyear (Futura, £2.50). Circus hi-jinks on an alien world.



Front cover of an interesting non-sf novel by Philip K. Dick, written in the late 1950s, but published for the first time in 1985 (Gollancz, £8.95).

The First Book of Swords by Fred Saberhagen (Futura, £2.50). Far-future sword and sorcery.

Bio of a Space Tyrant Volume 3: Politician by Piers Anthony (Grafton, £2.50). Seems to be the concluding volume in Anthony's 29th trilogy. Or thereabouts.

The River of Dancing Gods by Jack L. Chalker (Futura, £2.50). Homely fantasy, full of references to the Oz books and other Americana.

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

Just a note, really, to express appreciation of *Interzone* 13 which – film reviews and all – managed to read as more like a magazine than most previous issues and stuck determinedly to the high standard of fiction. I still say that Neil Ferguson's "The Monroe Doctrine" was trite, but I'm happy to praise "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw!" Yes, all the semiotics was a bit, er, knowing, but why not? Worth it all for the denouement.

Peter Garratt's "If the Driver Vanishes" was excellent, too. If *Interzone* started off as, partly, a channel for new writers there's no question about its success. When you start looking forward to the arrival of a new issue of a magazine, that's one sign that the mag is working, and I think *Interzone* is succeeding in terms of what I look to the magazine for: intelligent, well-crafted and entertaining stories backed up by the wider perspective which reviews and interviews can offer.

Andy Sawyer
Birkenhead, Merseyside

Dear Editors:

We are writing to represent a minority group of your readers, being of the gentle (?) sex and under eighteen years of age...in fact two years under eighteen. Impressed? Actually, we were feeling guilty about not answering your questionnaire [results published in *Interzone* 14 – Eds.] and thought we had better inform you of our existence.

Maybe we are isolated from the science-fiction scene, but we feel sf has become less and less popular. There has at the same time been a great jump onto the fantasy bandwagon. The problem is not one of quality but rather one of image. From our experience, our friends feel that liking science fiction/fantasy in itself is somewhat eccentric. Science fiction is regarded as a medium for the ridiculous, an excuse for stories merely out for shocks... Fantasy is dismissed as being universally "Sword and Sorcery" epics. As a consequence of this, the "science fiction"

that hits the public eye is of the Star Wars type, which is pure escapism... The conclusion we have come to is this: spend £80 million on advertising, or alternatively invest the money in a sequel to *Return of the Jedi*. (Incidentally, we are renewing our subscription.)

Kathryn Johnston & Radha Chakraborty
Wakefield, West Yorkshire

Dear Editors:

Nick Lowe's film reviews are excellent – and a real booster shot of 1985 Angli-speak too. (It's important to keep "fresh" in any game.) I also loved Neil Ferguson's "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw," although the Saussurean semiological stance was a bit trying – and the idea of "original semiological significance" getting "worn out" (p.40) is nonsensical even in that frame of reference! But perhaps that was the point? It was like *Divo* in print; all absurdly vacuous and injected with post-modern flash and baroque trimmings.

Jonathan Benison
Bassano del Grappa, Italy

Dear Editors:

Thanks for *Interzone* 14. The cover is horrible, just like a MAPLIN catalogue (on sale now in W.H. Smith). I liked reading Paul McAuley's "The King of the Hill," but its scenario of a USA-occupied Britain is a bit too plausible for comfort. I didn't much like Bruce Sterling's "The Compassionate, the Digital"; the rest were okay. The Impact Theatre Group bit is good too; I'd like to see them. I'm intrigued that your poll puts Ian Miller third and Edwin Dorff 15th among the artists when (to me) they're obviously the same person doing slightly different kinds of work. [You're quite right – Eds.]

Jonathan Coleclough
Reading, Berks.

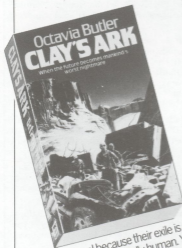
Dear Editors:

On M. John Harrison's letter in *IZ* 14: To go back to your appeal for "radical hard sf" – the adjectives, in political terms, are pure Thatcherism. Harrison's dismissal of your attempts to create a magazine "involving" readers as well as writers, editors etc. – which he appears to see as a soft (or "wet") attempt to subvert the immutable laws of the market place – is per se "hard, radical."

I've been expecting something like it – but it is nevertheless surprising to find a creative writer so wholeheartedly embracing literary Thatcherism. A lovely juxtaposition, though – MJH's letter and Sue Thomason's story. I did like the latter very much.

Bryan Williamson
Swinton, Berwicks.

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BACK ISSUES

Back issues from No. 1 (Spring 1982) are still available from 21 The Village Street, Leeds, LS4 2PR, UK. They are £1.75 each, but readers who buy three or more issues may have them at £1.50 each. (£2.00 each overseas, or £1.75 each for three.) Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of back issues:

1: "The New Rays" by M. John Harrison; "Kitemaster" by Keith Roberts; "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" by Angela Carter; "Guesting" by John Sladek; "The Brothel in Rosenstrasse" by Michael Moorcock.

2: "Memories of the Space Age" by J.G. Ballard; "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart; "The Third Test" by Andrew Weiner; "Angel Baby" by Rachel Pollack; "Cantata '82" by Tom Disch.

3: "The Dissemblers" by Garry Kilworth; "Overture for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'" by Angela Carter; "No Coward Soul" by Josephine Saxton; "Cheek to Cheek" by Nicholas Allan; "Saving the Universe" by David Garnett.

4: "Calling All Gumdrops" by John Sladek; "The Caulder Requiem" by Alex Stewart; "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd; "After-Images" by Malcolm Edwards; "The Quiet King of the Green South-West" by Andy Soutter; "The Ur-Plant" by Barrington J. Bayley.

5: "The Flash! Kid" by Scott Bradfield; "The Tithonian Factor" by Richard Cowper; "Vitamin Memories of B-12" by Edwin Dorff (art feature); "Novelty" by John Crowley; "What Cindy Saw" by John Shirley; "Strange Great Sins" by M. John Harrison.

6: "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder; "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson; "The Views of Mohammed El Hassif" by John Hendry; "Radical Architecture" by Roger Dean (art feature); "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos; "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts.

7: "The Unconquered Country" by Geoff Ryman; "Kept Women" by Margaret Welbank (art feature); "Life in the Mechanist/Shaper Era" by Bruce Sterling; "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" by Michael Blumlein.

8: "Unmistakably the Finest!" by Scott Bradfield; "The Electric Zoo" by Chris Jones (art feature); "Dreamers" by Kim Newman; "Strange Memories of Death" by Philip K. Dick; "Experiment with Time" by M.J. Fitzgerald; "McGonagall's Lear" by Andy Soutter; "What I Believe" by J.G. Ballard.

9: "The Object of the Attack" by J.G. Ballard; "The Gods in Flight" by Brian Aldiss; "Canned Goods" by Thomas M. Disch; "Synaptic Intrigue" by Richard Kadrey (art feature); "The Luck in the Head" by M. John Harrison; "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson; "Spiral Winds" by Garry Kilworth.

10: "John's Return to Liverpool" by Christopher Burns; "Green Hearts" by Lee Montgomerie; "Soulmates" by Alex Stewart; Photographs by Ian Sanderson; "Love, Among the Corridors" by Gene Wolfe; "The Malignant One" by Rachel Pollack; "The Dream of the Wolf" by Scott Bradfield.

11: "War and/or Peace" by Lee Montgomerie; "Cube Root" by David Langford; "Fogged Plates" by Christopher Burns; "Rain, Tunnel and Bombfire" by Pete Lyon (art feature); "The Unfolding" by John Shirley & Bruce Sterling; "Kitemistress" by Keith Roberts.

12: "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software . . ." by Michael Bishop; "Little Ilya and Spider and Box" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Fire Catcher" by Richard Kadrey; "Laser Smith's Space Academy" by George Parkin (comic strip); "A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium" by M. John Harrison; "Instructions for Exiting This Building . . ." by Pamela Zoline.

13: "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" by J.G. Ballard; "The People on the Precipice" by Ian Watson; Interview with William Gibson; "If the Driver Vanishes . . ." by Peter T. Garratt; "Escapist Literature" by Barrington J. Bayley; "Rhinstone Manifesto" by Don Webb; "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" by Neil Ferguson.

14: "When the Timegate Failed" by Ian Watson; Interview with Clive Barker; "The Compassionate, the Digital" by Bruce Sterling; "Finn" by Sue Thomason; "Patricia's Profession" by Kim Newman; "The King of the Hill" by Paul J. McAuley; "The New SF" by Vincent Omniaveritas; "Caverns" by David Zindell.

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