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# interzone<sub>16</sub>

NEW SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FROM  
RACHEL POLLACK, JOSEPHINE SAXTON  
AND BRIAN STABLEFORD  
PLUS JIM BURNS  
SPECIAL FEATURE

A surreal landscape with a red sky, a flying blue bird, and a person walking on a road. The scene is a wide, straight road stretching into the distance under a sky with horizontal light streaks. A large blue bird is flying in the upper right. In the foreground, a person with long hair, wearing a dark vest and blue jeans, is walking away from the viewer on the right side of the road. The road is flanked by buildings and parked cars, including a white car on the left and a dark car on the right. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and otherworldly.

IAIN BANKS  
INTERVIEW  
GWYNETH JONES,  
NEWS & REVIEWS

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to *Interzone's* sixteenth issue, which marks the end of our fourth year of publication. This is the "Sex Wars" number (following on from Judith Hanna's editorial in issue 15). Not all of the stories deal with the subject of gender conflict, but several of them do, each taking a different approach and each casting a suitably bizarre light on the sexual anxieties of our day. It also happens we have here a higher proportion of female writers than in any previous issue - and that pleases us.

At this time of year a large number of our subscribers come to the end of their four-issue run and hence are due to renew their subscriptions. We have been in the habit of sending all these people a little questionnaire along with our request for more money. Since the last three questionnaires have brought useful and illuminating responses, we are repeating the exercise again this year. If your subscription expires with this issue you will find the questionnaire on an enclosed renewal slip. We should be most grateful if you could fill it in and return it to us when you send in your cheque or postal order for the next four issues. If your subscription has not expired, or if you are a bookshop buyer rather than a subscriber, you may also wish to have an opportunity to let us know your thoughts - so we reproduce the questions here:

- 1) Which stories in issues 13-16 have you particularly liked?
- 2) Which stories in issues 13-16 have you disliked (if any)?
- 3) Which illustrations in issues 13-16 have you particularly liked?
- 4) Which illustrations in issues 13-16 have you disliked (if any)?
- 5) Have you any comments on the non-fiction contents of issues 13-16?
- 6) What do you think we should do to improve the magazine in the coming year?

Anyone who cares to do so is most welcome to send us their answers to the above questions in the form of a letter. As usual we shall publish the "poll results" in the issue after next. If you want your comments to be counted in, please try to get them to us by 1st September 1986.

We are very pleased to have in this issue a feature on Britain's leading commercial sf illustrator, Jim Burns. It is occasioned by the recent publication of his book *Lightship*, and we are grateful to Jim Burns and his publishers, Dragon's World Ltd., for their cooperation in making the item possible. All the Burns illustrations reproduced here, including our cover picture, are taken from *Lightship*.

Mary Gentle, deep in the writing of a new novel which will be the follow-up to her very successful *Golden Witch-breed*, has wearied of book reviewing for *Interzone*. Her regular column is replaced in the present issue by two short guest columns which we have commissioned from John Clute and Alex Stewart - neither of whom should need any introduction to long-time readers of *IZ*. Mary Gentle may resume her reviewing stint at some future date, but in the meantime our review columns will be written by various hands. We thank Mary for all her contributions to the magazine since issue 8.

David Pringle

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### Cover by Jim Burns (from 'Lightship')

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**Submissions:** Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but each one must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Story submissions should be sent to any one of the following addresses:

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# Brian Stableford

## And He Not Busy Being Born...

**I**t was in September 1973, shortly after returning from his honeymoon, that Adam Zimmerman began to read *Sein und Zeit* by Martin Heidegger. Although a native New Yorker, he read German fluently. He was the son of Austrian Jews who had fled Vienna in 1933, and a perverse estrangement from his parents had made him more enthusiastic to retain his national roots than his religious ones. For this reason he had always remained aloof from schmaltz while being self-indulgent in the matter of angst, and he was ready-made for that sanctification of self-pity which is the existentialist's red badge of courage.

While he read Heidegger, a couple of chapters at a time on those nights when he elected not to claim his conjugal rights, he felt that he was not so much being instructed as helped to bring to consciousness knowledge which had always lain within him, covert and unapprehended. He hardly needed to be told that angst is the basic mood of existence, because it had always nested in his soul. When Heidegger explained how our awareness of possible death, though unfathomably awful, is so carefully repressed to a subliminal level, so that the threat of nothingness can be held at bay, what Adam felt was a surge of tremendous relief, as the truth which had been captive in his mind was set free.

When he finally laid the book down on his bedside table for the last time, the silken caress of his expensive sheets seemed infused with a new meaning. For twenty-five years he had been a stranger to himself, but now he had been properly introduced.

He woke Sylvia, his bride of eight weeks, and said: "We're going to die."

Although distressed at being hauled back from gentle sleep in this rude manner, Sylvia naturally adopted a tone of loving sympathy. "No we're not, Adam. We're in perfect health."

"It is the one constant of our existence, Syl," Adam told her, calmly. "That awareness which haunts us,

that we may at any moment be snuffed out of existence, forsaking our being, is the fundamental insecurity which weakens the foundations of the psyche. We try in our myriad ways to suppress it and defeat it: we invent myths of the immortality of the soul; we try to hide in the routines of the everyday; we try to dissolve our terror in the acid-baths of love and adoration. None of it works, Syl. At the end of the day, it can't work. Heidegger thinks we can break through – liberate ourselves from our servitude to the ordinary and achieve authentic existence – but even that won't work. It's nothing but another cheap trick to try to dodge the issue. The angst will always win. What can we do, Syl?"

In a year of courtship and eight weeks of marriage Sylvia had already had abundant opportunity to study her loved one's penchant for being abominably pompous, but she still thought he was wonderful, and didn't mind it too much.

"Go to sleep," she advised.

Adam loved Sylvia too well to react to this shallow riposte with the contempt it clearly deserved. Instead, he let her follow her own advice while he continued to brood. The sheer enormity of his realization denied him escape into the arms of Morpheus. He turned out the bedside lamp and sat in the dark, appalled by the vision of nothingness that was conjured up before him, languishing in the sensation of having no hope.

**I**t is useless to speculate now whether sleep might have saved him; if he could have slept in such circumstances, he would not have needed saving. As it was, Adam Zimmerman became in the course of that insomniac night a man obsessed. Those few rough-hewn sentences which had poured out of him as he tried to explain himself to the sleepy Sylvia became the axioms of his philosophy of life. Heidegger's analysis of the human predicament – that life is underlaid, limited, subverted and devalued by its own precariousness in the face of possible death –

he accepted in full; but he denied what seemed to him feeble attempts by the philosopher to find a cure in some shifty sleight-of-mind. He went on to read the work of other existentialist writers, and became especially fond of Sartre after Nausea made him throw up, but try as he might he could attain no age of reason, obtain no reprieve and discover no iron in the soul.

Adam was tempted for a while to abandon his job as a high-powered company accountant, on the grounds that there was something absurdly meaningless about the ceaseless juggling of figures. It seemed to exemplify that desperate absorption in the trivial which was one of the hollowest of false solutions to the problem of being. He played the guitar well (it was his one mode of relaxation) and he contemplated beginning a new career as a spaced-out folk singer, growing his hair and beard and changing his name to Adam X (to symbolize the falseness of the family as a conduit of intergenerational continuity). He decided against it, in the end, because hippiedom was already passé, and because he thought of a better plan. Sylvia applauded this decision heartily, but was later to divorce him anyhow, on the grounds that he was too gloomy and could not provide her with essential emotional support.

"The trouble with you," she said as she left him, "is that you're deadly dull, over-devoted to stupid speeches, and incapable of enjoying yourself."

Angst, as far as Sylvia was concerned, was a marital misdemeanour. She lived comfortably on the alimony which he paid her for the remainder of her days, but failed to escape the ravages of her own angst and eventually died an alcohol-sodden wreck in 1999.

Adam's own plan for escape from the human predicament was a daring one, but devastating in its simplicity. If the quality of life, he reasoned, is permanently and fatally impaired by the momentary possibility and ultimate inevitability of death, then the only real solution is to become immortal. When, before their divorce, he put this proposition to Sylvia, she laughed contemptuously, having long left behind the days when love forbade such indelicacies, but this reflected the fact that she really and truly did not understand him. For all his faults, Adam was not given to idle flights of fantasy. When he said he thought that there was an answer, he meant it. Nor was he talking in terms of any metaphorical or metaphysical immortality: he did not believe that satisfaction could be found in the thought of "living on" in the pages of a few books or a few children, and the prospect of being a born-again optimist did not tempt him even when the Fundamentalist revival was at its height in the 1980s. Adam needed something more solid than Christ to put his faith in, so he invested it instead in ice.

**B**y the time Adam became interested in cryonics the Cryonics Society of California and half a dozen similar outfits had been freezing newly-dead bodies for more than a decade. He was not impressed by their activities even in the days before a power failure allowed one cache of corpses to thaw out in 1981. He could not convince himself that future medical science would readily stretch to actual resurrection, and he was worried that contemporary

techniques in freezing were inadequate to guard against tissue-damage. He knew though, that given time and money cryogenic scientists would soon devise methods which would allow living human beings to be placed in suspended animation more-or-less indefinitely.

There was, of course, a problem of timing to be worked out. Before being frozen down, Adam wanted to wait until the most sophisticated techniques could be put at his service, but on the other hand he wanted to be hale and hearty at the time. He knew, too, that he was going to need considerable wealth if he were to get the best of care during several centuries of inactivity. It was not easy to weigh all these things in the balance, but years of devotion to the juggling of figures had given him an unparalleled skill in calculation. He eventually decided that he must be frozen down in the year 2001, when he would be fifty-three years old. For safety's sake, it would be advisable to have at least a billion dollars at his disposal. This decision was taken in 1986, two years after his divorce, and he decided that provided he did not marry again, the billion dollars was achievable. He contemplated remaining celibate, but having studied Bertillon's data regarding sexual activity and death-risk decided that keeping a string of mistresses was a justifiable expenditure.

There were several ways in which an aspiring company accountant could plan, in 1986, to make a billion dollars by the turn of the century. They all involved stealing, but at that time the body and spirit of American Capitalism were relatively unfettered by legalistic inconveniences, and it was not necessary to take undue risks. Adam did not, of course, steal from the corporations which employed him, but only for them, taking an entirely reasonable commission on every deal.

Adam was fortunate in his dealing during the 1990s, which were for so many the Golden Age of Capitalism: the days of the multinational frontiersmen, the buccaneers of international finance and the software stormtroopers, when hardly a month went by without a whole nation going bankrupt. Adam took a lion's share during the heady years of the asset-stripping of the Third World, and was one of the quiet men who masterminded the great Tokyo Crash of 1996, which smashed the brittle commercial hegemony of the New Samurai and brought the entire world electronics industry into a corner whose anchorage was in the belly of the corporation which numbered Adam among its brain-cells.

**A**lthough his part in these transactions made him one of the wealthiest men in the world Adam remained rather modest and unassuming in dress and manner. His legion of aides and assistants thought him shy and kind, though he did have an annoying habit of giving them pompous little lectures on the power of positive thinking, the virtues of thrift and the dangers of hedonism. One of his favourite topics, ironically enough, was fame. "Fame," he would tell them, sternly, "is essentially a matter of attracting attention, and attention is always fatal to men who make their living by dipping into other people's pockets. One should avoid at all costs being interesting; it not only renders one vulnerable

to the iniquities of inquisitiveness, but makes one susceptible to flattery. Flattery is a powerful force, and its seductions can be difficult to resist. One must constantly remind oneself that fame is one of the most awful reminders of one's own mortality. The masses are always hungry for misfortune and disaster, and they love to revel in the sympathy, tragedy and grief which attend the sufferings of their idols. The public invents celebrities mainly in order to revel in their decay and extinction, and fame always breeds sickness and self-abuse."

Such speeches as this were taken by his associates as evidence of cynicism, and it was widely assumed that Adam Zimmerman was an unhappy man. The story got around among those who knew him that his life had been blighted when his one great love, Sylvia, had deserted and divorced him, and that his relentless money-making was a pathetic compensation for his failure in the one aspect of his existence which really meant something to him. Even his mistresses believed this, and perhaps with better cause, because sometimes, in the grip of post-coital *triste*, he would weep a few tears for all the people in the world who were wretched and starving because he and others like him were appropriating all the wealth which, in a saner world, might have made them comfortable. In such moods as this, he would utter statements of a different kind.

"The thing we have to remember," he would say, earnestly, "is that we are *all* dying, with every moment that passes. We begin to die even before we are born; the moment an ovum is fertilized it begins to age. The embryo is aging even while it grows, and the period when the forces of growth can successfully outweigh the forces of decay is brief indeed. We think that we are still possessed by the bloom of youth at twenty, but this is an illusion. Death begins to win the battle against life when we are barely nine years old. After that, though we continue to increase the size and number of our cells, the rot of mortality is set in. The equilibrium is passed, and the new cells we produce already show the signs of senescence in the copying-errors that have accumulated in the nucleic acids, and in the cross-linkages that disable functional proteins. What we call maturation is the seal set upon us by the Grim Reaper, and until science finds a way to reverse these processes, correcting the nucleic acid errors and obliterating the cross-linkages, there is no hope at all for any of us, whether we sleep in silken sheets or starve in arid wastelands. We are all equal before the horror of it, whether we have the best of care or none at all. In such circumstances, there is no honour in conscience, no shame in selfishness. In an evil world, we are free to be evil."

His mistresses always understood these arguments, because he always picked intelligent companions, but they rarely found it possible to agree with him. Without exception they concluded that he was lonely, bitter and neurotic, and pitied him as much as they adored him. He had the knack of finding women who loved him passionately for himself, caring little about his money, and he broke their hearts with careless regularity.

Adam never used any of his own funds to support the intensive research in cryogenics carried out by the Ahasuerus Foundation of Cincinnati during the

1990s, but he did prompt the various senators and congressmen who were in the pocket of his corporations to divert massive government funding in that direction. He always considered this to be the humanitarian side of his activity, allowing the people of the whole world (who were, in the final analysis, the source of the wealth paid as taxes by the great corporations) to become shareholders in the greatest of all human endeavours: the war against death. Many of them, indeed, were privileged by his intervention to become casualties in that war. Adam Zimmerman was very proud, therefore, to become in April 2001 one of the first few volunteers to be frozen down while still in the full bloom of health, using the most sophisticated of new techniques. He left his vast fortune in trust, to pay rent for his body, if necessary, for thousands of years, while he waited for the war against death to be won and for immortality to become the common heritage of all mankind.

**B**y virtue of its links with the corporations for which Adam had worked, aided by the trustees of his fortune, the Ahasuerus Foundation rode out the Great Depression of the 2020s, the resource crisis of the 2040s and the plague wars of the 2060s. It remained rich and strong through the Greenhouse Crisis of the 22nd and 23rd centuries, surviving the sporadic hostility of individual saboteurs, Luddite governments and the predations of the new breed of tax-gatherers which were spawned by the strengthened United Nations once it came to dominate the old nation states and vie for power with the cosmicorporations which controlled the world's wealth. The Foundation was untroubled by the Ice Age of the 26th and 27th centuries, though it moved most of its holdings (including its richest corpses) with the rest of the world's elite to one of the fabulous eocarcologies which sprang up on the moon once the elaborate technologies of artificial photosynthesis made it fertile. Adam Zimmerman's body was moved from the moon to an orbital habitat in 2724, and back to earth again in 2887 when the UN's ecological engineers finally brought eternal summer to what had, in pre-glacial days, been the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere. By 3015 Adam was back where he had started, in the new supercity erected on the site of Cincinnati, still at rest in his personal freezer.

The trustees of Adam Zimmerman's estate grew very rich, and as generation followed generation they loyally fought off a series of attempts to have him revived. The first technology of longevity developed in the 24th century, involving drastic tissue-renewal surgery, extended the human lifespan to 150 years, but this was far from the immortality which Adam coveted. The technology which replaced it was based on the genetic engineering of human ova, and was not the slightest use to anyone but the unborn, so that by the year 3000 research into the technology of longevity was entirely concentrated in that area of embryonic engineering. The Ahasuerus Foundation had diversified its interests to the point where almost none of its effort was devoted to research which Adam Zimmerman would have considered relevant. Cynical observers suggested that Adam's trustees were showing a marked lack of enthusiasm for the attempt to create the circumstances in which they would have

to hand their fortune back to its real owner, but the trustees simply stated (correctly) that under the terms of their trust they could not bring Adam back into a world such as theirs without betraying his dearest wish.

When the UN finally broke the economic back of the cosmicorporations in the 33rd century, Adam's situation changed. Instead of growing richer and richer, his trust began to grow poorer. By 3450, by which time none of the old corporations existed as separate entities or reservoirs of power, the Ahasuerus Foundation had been absorbed into a minor UN department. The job of deciding what was to be done with its legion of corpsicles became a matter of petty bureaucratic decision. Many of the legion were recruited by degrees into the land of the living, but Adam's case was a difficult one, and it was in the nature of bureaucracy even in this era that decisions were always easier to postpone than to take. The tempo of life had slowed dramatically with the extension of the human lifespan, and these postponements stretched over centuries.

Eventually, Adam suffered the ultimate fate of all matters of bureaucratic record: he was forgotten by every living person, his very existence known only to the uncaring intelligence of computer files. Along with eleven other corpsicles he was consigned to an informational limbo, there to await rediscovery for as long as it might take. By 3750 all the other people frozen down in the second and third millennia had been revived, and cryonic preservation was no longer employed for any purpose at all, but Adam and his companions, exempted by some whim of chance, slumbered on, the electricity supplies to their cryonic chambers carefully maintained by conscientious automata. The world continued to change around them – rather slowly – but they remained quite unaffected.

**I**t was, in the event, not until the 47th century that the technology of longevity used by mankind reached its ultimate stage, granting its users what they believed to be a limitless lifespan if they remained untouched by violent accident. It was not until the 52nd century, though, that the rebuilding and renovation of Cincinnati IV brought back to the surface of the earth the secret chamber where Adam's body had been concealed for more than a thousand years. The rediscovery was a momentous event in a world where hardly anything new ever happened, and it stirred the imagination of the people of the new Golden Age of youth and tranquillity. In this Utopian era there was no such thing as an unfulfilled need except the need for surprise, and no greater joy was possible than the uncovering of something wonderfully ancient.

Unfortunately, the cryonic technology of the year 2001, despite all the effort poured into it by the lavishly-funded Ahasuerus Foundation, proved to have been far from perfect. Of the twelve corpsicles stored in the vault, eleven had succumbed to the ravages of putrefaction in spite of everything. Only one could be revived, and the singularity of this seemed a virtual miracle. There was undoubtedly a certain justice in the fact that the sole survivor was Adam Zimmerman, because he had done far more than the other eleven to make sure that the possibility of sur-

vival remained open.

When Adam awoke, he found himself in a comfortable bed, with sheets that felt like the softest and most delicate silk. Beside his bed sat a phenomenally handsome blonde girl, who seemed to be about nine years old. He favoured her with a bright smile, and asked: "What year is it?"

"In your calendar," she told him, pronouncing the words tentatively and a little clumsily, "it is 5186."

Adam smiled again, but dared not yet rejoice in the feeling of security which he had promised himself when this moment came.

"Are you immortal, little girl?" he asked.

"One cannot be sure of that," she said, "but I am three hundred and seventeen years old, and I know no reason why I should not live forever."

Adam could not help but laugh at the delightful contradiction involved in a person of three hundred years plus looking as if she were only nine: a blonde-haired, snub-nosed poppet with eyes that radiated innocence! Of course, he believed what she said.

"And I am to be immortal too," he said, not even phrasing it as a question.

It says a great deal for Adam Zimmerman's strength of character and essential resilience that he did not break into tears when she told him, as diplomatically as she could manage in a language which was for her utterly archaic, that he was not.

The enormity of it all did not become clear immediately. He learned only by degrees what sort of a world it was to which he had come. His task was made more difficult by confusion, and dogged by a deep depression that was alleviated only occasionally by intervals in which he was simply too overwhelmed by the wonders of the new era to be despairing.

The facts of the matter were straightforward. He was in a world where no one died unless he or she chose to do so. Disease and aging were completely conquered, and the probability of fatal accidents had been reduced by technological ingenuity to zero. Minor wounds could be healed by tissue-regeneration, even to the replacement of lost limbs or smashed organs. Violence and aggression no longer figured in the repertoire of human behaviour. The world was at peace, and it was paradise.

No one was born into the world any longer, although the technology existed to clone individuals from single cells, developing the embryos in artificial wombs. All who were alive in this world had been shaped to an ideal of physical perfection by genetic engineers. The development of their bodies had been arrested at that point when the forces of growth held the forces of decay exactly in check, and everyone in the world appeared to Adam's eyes to be nine years old. The world was without puberty and without sexual intercourse. Such pleasures of bodily contact as there were required neither arousal nor orgasm.

All that was known in this era about the technology of longevity concerned methods of engineering human egg-cells and early embryos. Immortality was simply programmed into human nature. Even the primitive methods of tissue-renewal, which had first given longevity to men of the third millennium, had not been practised for thousands of years, and to attempt them would be a hazardous business. Despite the awesome sophistication of the science these people

had at their disposal, there was little they could think of doing to help preserve Adam's life beyond its own programmed span. They could protect him from disease, and from cancer, and could help regenerate his tissues as they wore out, but about the copying-errors that accumulated in his DNA and the cross-linkages that were disabling his proteins they could do nothing. He might live to be a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty, but then he would die.

Adam realized, slowly, that he was the only person in the world doomed to senescence and death. He was the only person in the world who was the victim of Heidegger's angst. He was also the only person in the world possessed of sexual desire, and though the people of the new era were perfectly willing to help him serve these urges if he wished, he was not psychologically equipped for life in a paedophile's Utopia; his sensibility revolted at the thought of intercourse with persons who appeared to be nine years old, whatever their real age might be.

The fact that he was still completely cut off from his heart's desire (though everyone else in the world was not) was only one of the ironies in Adam's new situation. He awoke to find himself famous. By virtue of his nature he was the object of a fascination greater and more widespread than had been attained by any other man in history. There was not a man or woman in the world who did not know about Adam Zimmerman, who did not want to see and touch Adam Zimmerman, who did not want to be kept informed of every detail of his progress through life. The world was hungry for his thoughts, besotted with his actions.

They tried, of course, to be scrupulously polite. They readily acknowledged his right to privacy, and tried not to invade it. They did nothing that involved him without seeking his informed consent. They apologized for every intrusion, and begged his leave for every question they asked. If he asked to be let alone, they left him, but hovered always near to be responsive to his every whim. When he chose not to be alone – and he could hardly bear solitude – there was no way for them to set aside their curiosity, their utter absorption in the mysteries of his fate and fortune.

Adam soon found out that if he were to ask his hosts to have him frozen down again, they would do it. He no longer had a vast fortune to pay for his upkeep and guard his interests, but in this world there was no currency needed save need itself. Whatever he asked of these people, they would give him, and though they would be disappointed in the extreme if he chose to leave them, they could not bear to deny him anything. He could ask them, too, to dedicate great efforts to the development of the kind of technology of immortality that he (and he alone in all the world!) required, and they would do it. They would work for him, proudly and gladly, for centuries or millennia, and would delight as much as he in the possibility that he could one day get what he had come so far in search of. Their delight, though, would mask a disappointment, because if he became one of themselves, he would cease to be fascinating. What he had cynically said about fame in that distant, forgotten past was all too obviously true in this startling present. The basis of his celebrity was his mortality; what these

people were fascinated by, above all else, was his awful misfortune in being a man who one day must die.

Adam Zimmerman considered his options, and he hesitated.

For the first time in his life, he had doubts about the prospect of immortality. Was such a reward, after all, a mixed blessing? Could he really bear to have the clock of his being turned back, to revert to being nine years old forever? Would it really work, as a cure for his existential predicament?

As the days passed, and Adam lived in the supremely comfortable world of the 52nd century, he began to wonder whether angst was still the sole and central fact of his existence. Another horror was beginning to compete with his horror of death. It was not the horror of eternal life *per se* – that would have been absurd – but it was the horror of the idea that in winning eternal life he, the essential Adam Zimmerman, would be exterminated just as thoroughly as he would by death. The people of this new era were healthy, and happy, and wise; theirs was an entirely enviable condition – but it was a condition to which they had been born, and he, if he was ever to inherit it, would have it thrust upon him. It would not be, could not be, the same. The pre-pubescent avatar that would result from the scientific miracle would be an immortal, but it would not be an immortal Adam Zimmerman. The goal he had sought in casting himself adrift on the sea of eternity in the first year of the third millennium – the preservation of *his own being* – was still out of reach.

Adam realized, like so many others before him, that his cure for the human predicament would not work. Like all old philosophers and lovers, all the artists and hobbyists, all the mystics and martyrs, he found in the end that you couldn't beat the angst. You could repress it, ignore it, sublimate it, stare it full in the face or freeze it for thousands of years, but you couldn't get away from it.

Adam didn't particularly enjoy this discovery, but he was not utterly defeated by it. Alongside the realization that he didn't really want the kind of immortality these people might procure for him came the realization that there was an alternative open to him. Instead of asking to be frozen down again, he could allow himself to fall for the flattery and seduction of his fame. He could give these Golden Age innocents what they longed for: a taste of human dereliction and death. He alone, in all the world, could make them appreciate the privileges they enjoyed, by showing them what it was to be without them.

Adam had spent the greater part of his life trying to find an escape from angst; now he changed direction. He decided to revel in angst, in order to show a world that was without angst the true meaning of his existence, the true significance of his state of being.

"I am not just a man," Adam told his greedy audience. "I am a symbol. You must learn to understand me, for I am not merely famous, I am fame itself."

They loved it. They drooled over his every aphorism. Adam decided to make the twilight of his life the ultimate dramatic performance. He would show them death with dignity. He would make them see, not only the physical processes of decay which would claim

him, but the psychological warfare that went on in parallel. That which had been trivial and utterly commonplace in his own world, where millions had died because of a few juggled figures on balance sheets, would now be not merely unique, but tremendous.

In the years that followed, Adam's hair turned gradually grey. He let it grow long, and grew his beard as well. He asked his hosts to make him a guitar, and he began to play again, singing songs in German and English that he had learned in childhood and adolescence, and learning new ones that his faithful admirers found in ancient data-banks. He even composed some songs of his own: sad songs about sex and death, war and poverty, pain and love. He abandoned privacy, and gave himself entirely to his public. When he was not singing, he talked, frankly and with occasional painful honesty, allowing all his thoughts to be recorded for infinite posterity as well as being eagerly lapped up by the everpresent listeners. He began to style himself Adam X, to signify the fact that he was the great unknown.

He planned his death meticulously, though the possibility of suicide was ruled out. He must die, he decided, of what passed in his own time for natural causes: of cancers that would burst spontaneously within his frail flesh; of the gradual erosion of his tissues; of the failure of the co-ordinating systems that bound his disparate cells into a coherent whole. He decided that he would use no anaesthetics, suffering the pain which would come with these varied afflictions. This was not a decision taken out of courage – he had always been something of a physical coward – but out of a sense of responsibility. This was the only chance which the people of the sixth millennium would ever have to understand suffering, and he must not cheat them. His pain, his tears, his shiverings, his sadnesses, his fears – all his stigmata – belonged to them, because it was these which gave significance to his being.

Planning all this, carefully preparing for it all, and going through it – not without difficulty, by any means – Adam X became by degrees a happy and contented man, at peace with himself and his angst. He became a prouder man than he had ever been in the days when he took his gluttonous part in the rape of the world. He became a more joyful man than he had ever been, even in the heights of ecstasy which his relationship with Sylvia had allowed him temporarily to reach. By making death into fulfilment, he robbed it of almost all the power it had once exercised over his imagination. He moved his angst from the side of moral debit to the side of moral credit in the account-book of his psyche, and with that cunning move, so like in spirit to the legerdemain which had

been his forte in days gone by, he turned a potential loss into a handsome profit.

Adam X died on the day which would have been identified in his calendar as the twenty-fifth of July, 5237, at the age of three thousand two hundred and eighty nine. This was a record, ironically enough, in a world from which death had been banished. He died in a comfortable bed, in sheets which felt to him like the most sensuous silk, and which reminded him pleasantly of riots of sexual excess enjoyed with his most expensive mistresses. He had been working on his last words for many years, re-drafting and polishing them endlessly, and managed to deliver them all before losing his powers of speech.

"It is my earnest hope," he told his adoring fans, "that by the example of my suffering and death I may redeem you all from the innocence which is your fortunate heritage. I have been, during these last thirty years, a stranger and afraid in a world I never made, but I have done my humble best to remake it, by remaking its understanding of its own origins. The immortality which you enjoy was born out of the efforts of men such as I, made desperate by their own mortality. We could not save ourselves, but we sowed the seeds of salvation for future mankind, paving the road to Heaven with our good intentions. I have come out of the mists of time to bear a message, which is that our tragedy and your triumph are indivisibly one, and must be understood as opposite sides of the same coin. I cannot express, in the poor language which every person on earth has learned in order to listen to me, the delight I feel in knowing that mankind has attained an Age of Reason, but I know that you feel it too. *Ave atque vale!*"

This speech was to be eternally remembered and treasured by the people of earth, granting Adam Zimmerman the kind of metaphorical immortality that once he had scorned. No one who read it remained unmoved by it; and no one ever thought such an unworthy thing as to deem it pompous.

The innocents of the Golden Age continued to enjoy Adam long after he was dead, granting him the grandest and finest funeral in the history of the human race – whose like, needless to say, was never seen again. They replayed his speeches on TV again and again, without end, for they remained the only resource mankind had left in savouring the bittersweet sympathies of tragedy.

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**Brian Stableford** tells us that the above is the first piece of fiction he has written in five years. The last of his many sf novels was *The Gates of Eden* (DAW Books, 1983). However, he has continued to write a great deal of non-fiction: two books, *The Third Millennium* (with David Langford) and *Scientific Romance in Britain*, appeared in 1985.

## 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.



# LIGHTSHIP

## JIM BURNS

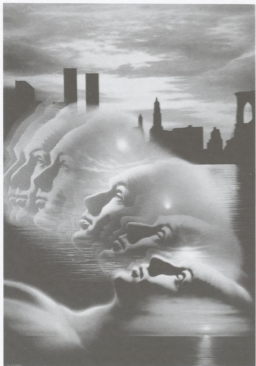
Master of SF Illustration  
Text CHRIS EVANS



*Lightship* is Jim Burns's first book. Since Burns is Britain's most praised science-fiction artist, the appearance of this volume is an event to be celebrated. Published by Dragon's World Limited as a Paper Tiger book at £11.95 hardback, £7.95 paperback, it contains 120 full-colour illustrations, a text by Chris Evans and a preface by Robert Silverberg. The latter says of Burns: "his work satisfies me on every level, from the glistening surfaces down to the mysterious revelatory depths...a Jim Burns cover painting is not only visually delightful, a work of sleek and shining art, but it's generally also keenly revelatory of character and marvellously inventive in a science-fictional way."

After a short spell as a pilot in the RAF, Jim Burns

attended art college for four years – at first in his native South Wales, later in London. He began work as a professional illustrator in the early 1970s, producing paperback covers for sf novels and historical romances. He mastered the difficult technique of the airbrush, and in 1978 he gained recognition for his wonderful set of pictures which accompanied Harry Harrison's novella *Planet Story*. In 1980 he was invited to Hollywood in order to work on Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner*. In the past few years most of Burns's cover paintings have been done for American publishers, and the outstanding series of illustrations for Robert Silverberg's novels (Bantam Books) have been particularly notable. Although he is in constant demand,



Above: 'Dying Inside', 1983

he has also found time to experiment with a few black-and-white pictures for *Interzone* – see M. John Harrison's "The Luck in the Head" (IZ 9), Shirley and Sterling's "The Unfolding" (IZ 11), and William Gibson's "The Winter Market" (IZ 15).

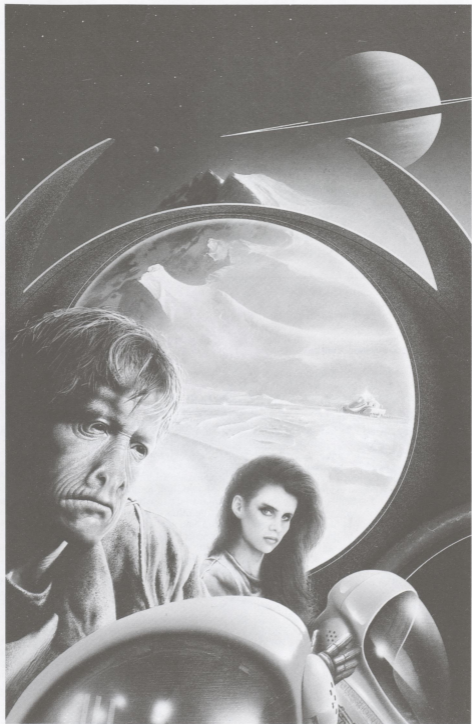
Jim Burns says: "I'm notoriously slow and I would find it very difficult to make much of a living if I depended solely on British commissions which pay perhaps a fifth of their American counterparts. But on the whole I get more of a free hand in deciding what goes on the covers of the British books. . . . I also read *everything* I illustrate. . . . I let the imagination of the author create the characters and overall aspect of a scene. I apply my imagination to the detail and ambience. . . .

"The illustration to Silverberg's superb *Dying Inside* is barely sf at all. That really was quite a challenge, trying to suggest the gradual diminishing and eventual loss within a man of a unique telepathic power and the eventual discovery of tranquillity when it finally blinks out. . . . In Silverberg's *Thorns* a man has been modified by aliens for unfathomable reasons of their own. He lives with pain and the knowledge that he is, back on Earth, an object of horrified curiosity. I wanted to convey in his face the fact that he was a man and not an alien himself, and that there should be as well as horror elements of pathos and sadness there."

Opposite: 'Thorns', 1983

Below: 'Planet Story' – King Kroakr, 1978





# Rachel Pollack

## The Protector

**"I**'m afraid I've got some bad news," Dr Steiner said. He paused, as if waiting for some reaction. Lynne just sat there, her back hardly touching the expensive leather chair. "I've run all the tests I could think of, looking, well, for anything at all, and I'm afraid, Mrs Buscher, that the tests have shown no pathology."

Lynne sighed. Her shoulders slumped and she leaned back. "You're sure? There can't be anything—"

"Blood levels, wave patterns, hormones —"

"But —"

"I'm sorry, Mrs Buscher." He didn't sound sorry. She could imagine his distaste for having her in his office.

She said, "In other words, I'm sane."

"Well, that terminology..." Dr Steiner's voice slowed to a slur and his face shifted. The ears grew longer and pinned back, the cheekbones stood out, the eyes sunk deep in round sockets like gun barrels, and two tongues played with each other across lips covered in a hard black crust. Lynne began to cry, softly, as she averted her gaze to the panelled wall and Dr Steiner's diplomas and honorary degrees.

When she turned back he was normal again. She said, "There's nothing else you can do? No tests?"

"I've done them all. The results —"

"No medicine?"

"I can only prescribe medicine for people with disorders."

"And since I don't — Oh, shit."

Annoyed, Dr Steiner fiddled with a paperweight replica of the Old White House.

*Why did I go to the best?* Lynne thought. If she'd gone to some cheap M.D. she could have pretended he didn't know what he was doing. She stood up, feeling a little dizzy. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks a lot." He didn't deserve her anger but he was there, an easy target.

Dr Steiner said, "There won't be any charge. I've already told my secretary."

Lynne half smiled. "What is this?" Be kind to lost souls week?"

"Call it medical ethics. A case like this passes beyond our proper area."

"That's terrific, Doctor." A light shone around his eyes, and Lynne caught her breath, afraid he would change again. But the light faded, leaving the psychiatrist intact. "Tell me," she said as she slung her red totebag over her shoulder. "What's the money going to do for me when I'm drowning? Or do you think the plague will take a check?"

"I don't think we need to talk about that."

"You don't. All you need to do is get rid of me." She wanted to slam the heavy wooden door but the springs only made a soft hiss as they braked the weight.

A short corridor of closed doors led from the office to the waiting room. Lynne stopped with her hand half raised to push open the door. Suppose the people on the other side had changed? Suppose the whole room had vanished, flinging her onto the ravished surface of Gabriela H-3? Sweating, she thought she couldn't take that, not now. Hell, not ever. "Please," she prayed vaguely, "keep it the way it's supposed to be." She pushed open the door.

Okay. It was okay. The people had stayed comfortably human, the room had kept its neat rectangular shape, the grey couch and the soft chairs with their old-fashioned floral prints hadn't changed to rocks or blasted buildings or trees or anything else.

Peter threw down his magazine and hurried up to her, unconsciously stopping a few feet away. Deliberately she walked past him to the coat rack. She handed him his nylon windbreaker. "Here," she said, and put on her checkered raincoat. She didn't bother to button it.

"What did he say?" Peter whispered.

"We don't have to pay."

"What?" Peter said. "I don't understand."

"Oh come on," she said, and led the way past the

secretary, who pretended not to notice them. They walked down the carpeted stairs to the street door where Lynne looked out through the peephole before she opened the door. Normal. Nothing had changed on 71st Street. The usual limousines and taxis glided up and down, the few pedestrians walked large exotic dogs. When they stepped outside a thin rain was falling. Lynne nodded at the cool wet on her face. No drops of fire, no sharp crystals cutting her skin. Would it stay? That time at her cousin's house upstairs, the snow had started out so innocently. She remembered how she and Jeanette, her cousin's daughter, had run out for a snowball fight on the lawn by the lake. And then it changed. She'd felt something sharp and her face stung. When she'd reached up her glove had come away covered in blood. Poor Jeanette. No idea why Aunt Lynne had started screaming and running for the house. Not that Aunt Lynne had had much idea either.

At the car Peter tried to take her hand but she pulled it back. He did a bad job of keeping the worry from his voice as he asked, "Why don't you tell me what he said?"

She spun around. "He said I'm sane. No pathology. Isn't that great?"

There was a moment when she hoped Peter would just hug her and stroke her, not say anything. Instead he said casually, "Maybe that means it'll all go away." He avoided touching her as he unlocked her door.

"Sure," she said. "Just like that."

As they drove uptown Lynne hardly listened to Peter's attempts at conversation. He was just releasing platitudes, she knew. She felt like he was sponging her with disinfectant.

Lynne just felt so tired. For weeks she'd strained to hold on to the hope she would turn out to be crazy. Chemically imbalanced. Curable with some coloured pills. In a way, now that she had to give that up she could relax. She leaned back against the car seat, her head against the plastic and her eyes staring lazily through the top of the windshield at the cloudy sky.

She was thinking of something that had happened to her when she was a kid. Eleven years old. No, twelve, because it happened the same year they finally banned space flight and they held all those ceremonies. As if that would keep the plague away. So she was twelve, because it happened a couple of months after her sixth grade class had marched in that big parade on Main Street.

The strange thing took place in her grandmother's apartment building, in the hallway where she'd gone to throw something down the compactor chute. An insect bit her. She'd opened the door to the compactor room, made a face at the smell, dumped the bag of garbage and was half out the door when a beetle or something ran out from under a crumpled newspaper. The next thing she knew a sharp pain had shot up her leg. She screamed and fell backward, so that the door scraped her side as it clanged shut. A moment later it seemed everyone was bending over her so close she couldn't breathe, and then she heard sirens and bells and people shouting so loud she couldn't make out anything they said.

The beetle must have carried some kind of poison because Lynne had fallen asleep and couldn't seem

to wake up no matter how hard she'd tried. When she did open her eyes her father told her that she'd slept for two weeks. She'd gotten excited that that would beat her friend Gail who bragged at how much she slept, and then she just fell asleep again. The next time she woke up it was for real, and she found herself in a hospital room surrounded by flowers. While her mother showed her all the presents everyone had brought her Lynne tried to figure out what she could have done during two weeks of sleep.

She was sure, somehow, that she'd kept herself very busy, no matter what her parents said. She could only remember one thing, though. It was a dream of course. She'd understood that. In the dream she'd climbed to the top of the school building. It was a very windy day and she became scared she'd be blown right off the roof, so she bent down to hold on to an old brass telescope bolted to the rooftop floor. Something came and landed, digging bright claws into the edge of the roof. A spaceship, she thought, and became scared someone would see and report her. But then she saw it wasn't a ship, it was a bird, huge and made all of metal. She climbed onto its back and held onto a steel feather as it lifted into the air. Night came and the bird spiralled higher and higher until she could see the whole planet and then the solar system, like nine animals racing round and round a fire. Finally the bird dove, going faster and faster, with Lynne hanging on and her hands getting all cut up until she finally had to let go. The wind carried her around the world in helpless cartwheels and somersaults. Then somehow she became everywhere at once, because she could see everything – her house, her grandmother's apartment building, the school, foreign cities she'd only seen on tv, the ocean and the mountains, day and night.

Lying in her hospital room the twelve year old girl couldn't remember anything else. Now, in her car going home from the psychiatrist, the thirty-one year old woman thought how they should have known then. Her parents should have known. What a waste. Sending her to college, encouraging her to do something with her life. Getting married.

"What now?" Peter said.  
Lynne sat up. They were on First Avenue, heading for the Drive she supposed, but now traffic had backed up, with people honking horns, leaning out of windows. Peter got out of the car and stood on tiptoe, holding on to the door. "Jesus," she heard him say, "I don't believe it." Curious, she got out, looked over the row of cars. There was someone there, sitting in the middle of the street surrounded by packages, a bag lady or something. But what was she wearing on her head? Some kind of funny hat –

No. No, she should have guessed. What else would it be but one of them? She clenched her fists against the huddled figure in its sack made of some metallic cloth. You could hardly see the actual material for all the junk attached to it – small carvings, drawings and pieces of cloth in transparent pockets, bits of circuit board and silicon chips, bones, pieces of animal skin, rocks, torn book covers – And on its head – *Brilliant*, she thought. *A hat. Terrific.* On its head the creature

(she couldn't think of it as a person), the creature wore a black helmet with a white beak nose and curved metal tubes coming out the sides, like the landing struts of a spaceship.

What was it doing? It had spread some things around it so that the cars couldn't get past. Souvenir statues of famous buildings, broken toys, a coil of rope –

"What the hell is he doing there?" Peter said. "Does he think he's protecting us? Christ, the street's clear, we don't need any goddamn protection." Lynne stared at him just as he turned to look at her, his mouth half open as if the words had forced their way out. "Shit," he said. "I'm sorry, Lynne. I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry to me for? Are you crazy? Do you think I have anything – just because I get some bad dreams or something –"

"I'm sorry, honey. I didn't mean anything. Of course it's got nothing to do –"

"You're ready to give me up. All set to sign me off. Are you afraid I'll suck you in after me? Is that what you're afraid of?"

"I didn't mean anything. You know I was just trying – Look, I'm on your side."

"Are you afraid it's catching?"

"Lynne, stop it. You're just upset. Because of that idiot doctor."

"He's not an idiot. Top of his profession. Best money can buy. You said so yourself."

"All right, he's not an idiot."

"Peter, let's forget it, okay?"

"No. I want you to realize –"

"Please. Please, Peter, just stop talking. Okay? I don't want to talk."

"We're going to get over this, Lynne."

"Sure. Sure we are. Now just shup up, okay?"

A couple of cops arrived to shunt the traffic around the crouched figure. Lynne heard someone say "Why don't they just cart him away?" Lynne knew that wouldn't happen. Federal law made it a crime to remove a protector, no matter where they set themselves. You just had to wait for them to get up and go back to their shelters. She remembered the tv story last year about the protector who'd moved into some Wall Street office and the whole firm had had to relocate. Great joke that. She and Peter had really laughed at that one.

As they drove past, Lynne rolled the windows up tight, hoping to banish the scratching noises and the birdlike calls that somehow managed to dance above the engines and the blasts of the policeman's whistle.

In her dreams that night she was Jason Benedict, plodding in his space suit through the ruin of a city on Gabriela H-3. The "black wind" roared all about her, streaking the sky and coating her visor (in the dream she thought of it as a windshield) with nuclear ash. With each step she had to calculate which way to lean into the shifting wind.

They'd have to junk the spacesuit, her dreamself thought. As soon as he was back on the ship, out it would go. It was contaminated. Infected. They'd have to get rid of it. For now, however, she blessed its insulation. (But why were the arms and chest hung with bones and toys and pieces of hardware? And who'd painted that striped face above the crotch?)

She was walking towards a square building with

a dome roof, the only structure left completely intact in the whole city. A strange idea occurred to her and she said it aloud to broadcast it up to the ship. Maybe the Gabis had built the thing after the holocaust, a last gasp of engineering elegance before the collapse. Ridiculous, Captain Santori bleeped back at her. They'd be too busy killing each other for food.

And then she was inside, and her helmet was gone so that she felt the heat on her bare face as she looked at the panels showing animals covered with insects, and clouds with birdlike faces embedded in their dark swirls. From room to room she walked, shouting excitedly about the perfectly preserved artifacts, the statues, the endless sky maps, and the drawings – wall after wall, each telling the same story over and over again: squat four-legged creatures, some kind of black cloud, insects, metallic looking birds –

For a moment she was home, her parents' kitchen late at night, and she was looking for her sister Suzanne who'd stayed out with some wild friends. Knives lay all about her feet as she angrily scanned the lawn which stretched out over hills and domed cities. She thought to herself (believing somehow she was thinking about Suzanne) who put those domes up? Do they really think they can keep something out when they know it's already inside?

There came Suzanne at last. But look at that, she was walking on all fours again, with her head tilted up like a dog, when she'd promised them – How did you protect her if she didn't do as she was told? Her friends danced around her, they were draping her body with ropes. They wore masks, bright red masks with metal wings and beaks carved in bone.

And then she was Jason Benedict again, thinking how something didn't look right, the arrangement of things didn't seem to serve any ritual functions, it was all too logical, too linear, with everything laid out like a lesson. A lesson made as simple as possible, as if they aimed it at children. Or aliens.

They meant it for us, she thought, and knew somehow she mustn't tell anyone. They would lock her up, they would hurt her. She made a mental note to herself. Get rid of the spacesuit. It's infected.

Kneeling down to stare at a display of model animals she wondered why the lesson, the museum or whatever it was, seemed to ignore the nuclear disaster. Maybe they had built it before and somehow made it strong enough to survive the war.

She heard a sound behind her, a thumping noise. One of the rooms was coming to life. She ran, her heart beating against the metal suit.

And then she was in a large house, in a room with rows and rows of empty shelves and at the end large glass doors looking out on the street several floors below. People were marching there and shouting, and burning banners with her name, Jason Benedict, written over and over, in black paint, as if each time the name burned they could kill her all over again. "It's not my fault," she shouted. "I don't want to go. I want to stay here, with my husband." She felt a gust of wind and turned to see a large bird fold its wings as it landed beside her. It turned its face to her

Lynne sat up in bed. She pressed her elbows against her ribs and rubbed her eyes.

"What is it?" Peter said. He touched her, but

gingerly, as if her skin could give off a shock.

"It's nothing," she said. "It's just a nightmare."

"Maybe you should tell me."

"I just did. It's nothing." She lay back on her side, turned away from him. With a sigh he lay back down again and put his arm over his closed eyes. Lynne didn't dare move until she was sure he was asleep, and even then she got up very slowly and half tiptoed out of the bedroom. In the bathroom she washed the night grime off her face, rubbing her eyes until they ached. She was afraid to open them after she'd dried herself. She held the towel up in front of her.

It's just the dream, she told herself. And the dream didn't mean anything. Just her subconscious making the obvious connection. Anyone would have connected that.

She let down the towel and opened her eyes. Quickly she looked around the room, taking inventory. It was okay. Just like the waiting room at the doctor's office. Everything was where it should be. She should give the place a good cleaning, she thought. Maybe it was all going to be okay. The tub looked grimy, the mirror all streaked. Maybe it would all just stop. She poked at a bit of caked toothpaste, then wetted her finger in the sink to rub off the mark. Maybe it had all just – just finished up. The whole place could use a good cleaning. It was so sweet of Peter not to complain.

She thought of him touching her in the bed and she shivered a moment, telling herself it was the nighttime chill, she'd better put on a robe or go back to sleep. She looked at herself in the mirror. Everything sagged, everything looked so old. There was that time he went to kiss her and his face started to come away and there was someone else, something else, waiting inside, waiting its turn.

Better give the whole house a cleaning, she thought. And maybe do an exercise class. Get some of that ache out of her. If you could just peel off the old skin or let someone take it off – And get back to work she told herself. She'd put things off much too long. There were all those letters to answer, ads to send out.

Maybe it was all going to go away. That was why the tests didn't show anything. She'd healed herself. Spontaneous healing. And of course she'd dreamed of Benedict. It was only normal. Anybody would have made the connection. It was just the fears coming up. Maybe that's how she'd cured herself. Or maybe it signalled the end. Last stuff coming up.

Go back to sleep, she thought. A lot to do tomorrow, today. Her breasts and belly itched and she started to scratch, then pulled her hands away. Because of the nylon nightgown she told herself. You could give yourself a nasty rash.

In the bedroom she stood over the bed listening to her husband's wheeze. Better sleep on the couch, she thought. Then she wouldn't have to listen. Or worry about waking him. He looked so – so angry when he slept.

He just needed some rest. Maybe they should both go on a holiday. Might be their last chance. She rolled her eyes, flicked her hand to chase away the wrong ideas. There'd be lots of holidays, all the ones they could possibly want. She snatched up her pillow, got down the extra blanket, and plodded into the living room to curl up on the couch.

Lynne made sure not to get up until after Peter was



gone. Groggy, she swayed into the bathroom. Peter had closed the glass shower doors again. Furious, she felt like throwing him through them. Why couldn't he remember the simplest things? She took a breath, her eyes on the cloudy doors. Anything could hide in there, whole – No. She was all through with that. If she let herself get scared, she could end up talking herself – She touched the door, pulled her fingers away, reached out again. When she opened it she smiled, a comment on how silly she'd been.

Her brilliant husband, she saw, had left the tap in the shower position. "He can't remember anything," she said out loud. Her voice sounded thick, and she remembered that one time when her own voice had attacked her, turning into some growling creature outside her body.

Maybe she should take a shower. Prove she could do it. Prove the water wouldn't turn to steam or knives, prove she could close the doors and not be trapping herself. She reached out. At the last moment she flicked the switch to bath before she opened the faucet. There was plenty of time, she told herself. No need to push.

Lynne spent most of the day cleaning. It felt good to be normal she told herself several times in the day. When she ran out of glasses she got in the car and drove to the mall, just like anyone else. Hungry, she sat down in a restaurant full of people and ordered a chicken salad on toast and a coffee. She didn't even look at the other people while she was waiting, and when the food came she just picked up her sandwich and took a bite, just like anyone else. It was really true, she'd told herself. She'd had a couple of bad moments, she didn't know why, but so what, they didn't mean anything, and then she'd just talked herself into a state. After the meal she deliberately stopped to look at boots, curtain material, whatever caught her eye, just like anyone else. On the way home she almost turned on the car radio before deciding it was better not to push herself, not while driving. She could listen to the radio at home. Or a record. But when she got in the house, she decided she preferred the silence. Plenty of time. The radio could wait.

After dinner she told Peter, "You can watch tv if you like. It won't bother me."

"Are you sure?" he said.

"Go ahead. I'll get going on some letters."

"You sure?"

"Go ahead. There must be a game or something. I'll do the dishes."

He said quickly, "I'll do them."

"You don't have to do the dishes."

"Well, you cooked –"

"Please," she said. "Go. Leave me alone."

Lynne cleared the table, then decided to do some work before washing up. Plenty of time, she told herself, and laughed. In the living room she sat down at the desk Peter had bought for her when she'd started her business. Her red plastic "in-tray" contained a jumble of letters, some unopened, some half read and shoved back in the envelope. Lynne's business consisted of tracking down odd things for collectors. Lynne was a congenial browser. She loved going down to New York and looking through secondhand

bookstores, antique shops, old clothing stores, pushcarts, anything at all that contained piles of assorted treasures. She hardly ever bought anything. She wasn't a collector. She didn't want to own things, she just liked looking. One day at work – she'd been a secretary for the local branch of a national insurance company – someone remarked to Lynne that his wife collected doilies, the kind people once put on furniture to protect from grease stains. Lynne offered to look for some on her next trip to New York, and when she'd brought back two "exquisite pieces" as Jack's wife called them, Jack had insisted on paying her a commission.

It was Peter who suggested she make a business out of it. "There must be loads of people out in Dallas or somewhere who collect old beer mats or lunchboxes or something. Only they can't find what they want in Dallas. Everything is new there. New York is the place to look for junk. And if anyone can find that stuff it's you." He was wonderful. He offered to back her for a year, enough to see if the idea had a future. He even helped her compose and send out ads to the different collectors' magazines and computer networks. Slowly, over three or four months, letters had come in, requests, recommendations. Usually Lynne could find something to satisfy the person, and if not she would send them a list of possible alternatives. The dealers were beginning to hold things for her, remembering pieces she'd bought for collectors the month before. Lynne loved the work, loved the thought of acquiring a reputation, becoming an expert. And then the attacks had begun.

She shook her head at the pile of letters, requests, offers from dealers, bills for ads she'd run. She should sort them all, do the urgent ones first. Instead, she just grabbed a letter, read through it, and rolled a sheet into the typewriter, composing in her mind an apology for the delay. Sickness. Personal difficulties. Sickness sounded better. "Now that I'm better," she thought to herself, "I'll start looking for your piece right away. I hope you'll forgive the delay. Sincerely, etc."

In the bedroom she heard the television. Someone must have scored a goal because the announcer was shouting and the engineers had turned up the fake crowd noises. Lynne thought vaguely of the days when people used to pack into sports stadiums by the thousands. It was such a different world back then. As she listened to the tv she found herself testing for voices slithering under the commentary and the noises. "Stop it," she ordered herself and slapped her hand against the desk. A moment later she was banging the typewriter as loud and as fast as possible.

She went to sleep without doing the dishes. In the middle of the night she woke up feeling guilty, but when she went into the kitchen Peter had washed everything. Back in bed, she lay on her side with her eyes open, staring at the half-open bedroom door, feeling like she'd dreamt something but couldn't remember what. Finally exhaustion pulled her back to sleep.

Over the next few days Lynne divided her time between the house and her business, going from washing the kitchen floor to sending out a stack of ads. When she'd answered all her correspondence she told Peter she'd be commuting to the city for the next few days to do some searching, and did



he mind getting his own dinner if she came back late?

"Mind?" he said. "I think it's great."

"I just feel bad," she said. "You've been so sweet and I've been neglecting you."

He reached across the table to stroke her arm. Automatically she pulled it back. He pretended not to notice. "You haven't been neglecting me," he said. "You've been sick. I'm thrilled to see you working again."

She nodded. Sick. That's what she'd written all those people. She was sick and now she was better. "I'm sorry," she remembered the doctor saying. "I'm afraid I've got bad news for you." Quack, she thought. He doesn't deserve protection.

The next day Lynne took the train into the city. She began by making the round of the bookstores, renewing contacts and buying a copy of the abridged Whitman edition of *Tarzan And The City Of Gold* for a retired schoolteacher in Cleveland. As she signed for the book she remembered a letter she'd gotten, one of the first answers to her ads. A man in Denver. After apologies and evasions he got to the point. Could Mrs Buscher locate any copies of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Mars* or *Venus* books? He knew they'd be hard to find and he'd pay a lot and he'd understand if she refused — Lynne had thrown away the letter without finishing it. Space stories! The very idea that someone could ask her — She'd called Peter and told him maybe she should drop the whole idea. He was angry, of course. He wanted to write the guy back or even call him up, but Lynne said she'd forget it if Peter would. The last thing she wanted was for her husband to get into a shouting match with a pervert.

The memory filled her with sadness. A pang of lost innocence. Outside, she hurried down Fourth Avenue, afraid that if she stood still she'd start crying in the middle of the crowded street.

From the bookstores she walked down to the turn of the century shops along Bleecker Street, searching for one of those talking coffee pots people had used back then. She didn't find any, but she did come across a Double Millennium poster from the English messianic movement. It was in perfect condition, and exactly what a client had described in a letter seven months ago, just before Lynne's illness. Excitedly she asked the shop owner if she'd hold it for a few days, until Lynne could contact her client. The woman agreed and said she was glad to see Lynne back on her feet again.

It was late afternoon by the time Lynne finished her rounds of shops in the village. She'd originally planned to go uptown, show her face on the west side or at least in some of the pre-century memento shops that had sprung up on Third Avenue. But she felt so tired, and she hadn't eaten. Everything would close soon anyway. She could come back tomorrow.

Feeling content, and proud of herself, Lynne headed for a diner on Broadway where they served huge tuna sandwiches and old-fashioned malteds. But when she got to Broadway she turned south instead of north and walked some six or seven blocks until she reached the small flea market that had developed on the sidewalk in front of the grimy offices and factories. Searching frantically she bought an assortment of junk — a rusty can-opener, a miniature football, a charm bracelet with plastic faces of movie stars, a



broken necklace made of silicon chips, a scarf of the New York skyline, and so on until her shopping bag couldn't hold any more. When she stood up her back ached and there was a buzzing in her ears. She looked at her bag and shook her head. She'd never sell any of this stuff to anybody. It was worthless. She should just throw it away. But she held on to it, and when she got home – she didn't stop to eat – she quickly hid the bag in the coat closet before Peter could get home and notice it.

That night they made love, the first time in weeks, with Lynne insisting and stroking and tickling Peter until he ran out of excuses and agreed to come to bed. He took a while to get an erection – she suspected he had to think of someone else to do it – and then he came very quickly; but Lynne didn't mind. She pulled his hand down between her legs and showed him how to stroke her, holding on to his wrist at first to make sure he wouldn't get away. As her excitement built she bit his shoulder, small sharp bites, like bird pecks. She bent her arms and hit him with her elbows, laughing as she imagined herself beating his doll-like body with her huge wings.

**T**he next day Lynne returned to the city for her uptown tour, stopping only briefly at the different shops so she could make sure to show her face everywhere. On the train home she felt satisfied, and even slept for a while. That night she and Peter went to dinner at an Italian restaurant across the river. After they'd ordered drinks Peter announced that he'd made reservations for them for the weekend at Lake Mohonk in the Catskills. They deserved some luxury he said, and this weekend was probably the last chance to see the leaves in the mountains before they all started falling. Lynne leaned over the table to put her arms around his neck. Peter grinned as she kissed his cheek. Be ready Friday afternoon, he told her. He'd leave work early and they'd get up to the hotel in time for dinner.

As the waiter set her spaghetti Bolognese in front of her Lynne discovered she could see the bones in his hands. The skin and muscle had fallen away and only a coating of ash covered the white. She jerked her head up to see his face. It was okay. Flesh and hair and glasses. He glanced at her then looked away. "Are you all right?" Peter said. He tried to sound solicitous but Lynne could hear the anger in his voice. "I'm fine," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

Friday afternoon Lynne was singing as she packed their suitcases and laid out Peter's good suit and blazer along with her green dress and her gold pants outfit. The sun was shining and when she'd called the weather report the taped message had promised a warm and clear weekend. A half hour or so before Peter had said he'd come home she sat down at her makeup mirror in the bedroom. But instead of her own face and the bed and the night table behind her Lynne saw – something. There was only a glimpse – a burnt-out landscape, a flock of birds, a cloud. Then she grabbed a can of hair spray and smashed the mirror.

"Oh God," she said. "Goddamn!" Her heart thumped like a machine about to explode. She looked around the room, making sure everything had stayed

in place. She hated this, she was checking things again, something she thought she'd given up. "Goddamn," she said. She looked at the pieces of glass. Like a vampire movie. Just like those old blood films they used to show on tv when she was a kid. The vampires were always smashing mirrors. Except they didn't show those any more. In bad taste. Just like space stories. She remembered a comic on tv who'd made a joke about monsters. The next week he was off the air. No explanation, no apology, just gone. Victim of bad taste. Lynne remembered how she'd agreed with everyone at the office. Some jokes were "inappropriate." Wasn't that how her boss had put it? Inappropriate.

Peter came home shouting with excitement. He found her sitting in her bathrobe in the living room. "Come on," he said. "Get dressed, Let's go. It's a beautiful evening."

"I'm not going," she said.

"What? What are you talking about? Come on." He tried to pull her out of the chair but she slapped away his hands.

"I don't feel well," she said.

"What's wrong?" When she didn't answer he said, "Did you have an attack?"

"Attack?" she said sarcastically. "What a clever expression."

"Jesus, Lynne, you use that word yourself." She turned her face away from him. "Look," he said, "I'm just trying to help."

"Help yourself you mean. Why don't you just go and leave me alone?"

He sighed loudly. "Great. Romantic weekend for two for one."

"You'll have a better time."

"That's for sure. You know, you might try thinking of someone other than yourself for a change." Lynne said nothing. "It might do you some good." She stared at the floor. "Shit," he said and slammed the door behind him. When she heard the downstairs door close Lynne got up and walked to the front window where she could see him drive away. For a moment the parking lot looked like a blackened plain, the car like some frightened animal. Then everything straightened out again, and he was gone.

Peter came back only a few hours later but Lynne was already in bed. When she woke up she found a note from him in the dinette. As long as they weren't going away he might as well do some catching up at the office. He loved her and was sorry they'd had a fight. She was going to be all right. Everything would be fine. She could call him if she liked.

**L**ater that day Lynne went to the mall to get some food for the weekend. It really was a beautiful day. She couldn't blame Peter for getting annoyed with her. She decided to get him a present and after putting the supermarket bags in the car she noticed insects crawling on some of the cases and wallets. She made a face and decided to look somewhere else. Just as she turned away an alarm sounded.

While Lynne just stood there everyone began to run, some for the exit, others for the shops and restaurants, anywhere to get out of the path. Insects, Lynne thought. How could she not have realized? "Lady," a security guard shouted at her, "What are you standing there

for? Move it." He didn't stay to check her. For a moment she lost her footing when someone banged into her. But still she just stood there, looking down the mall at the entrance to J.C. Penney's, where people were running out of the store slapping at the insects buzzing round their faces and arms. What was she supposed to do? She had no idea what to do.

The people from Penney's were screaming, but somehow the sound didn't affect her, as if it came from far away or from a movie. It didn't include her.

She stepped to the side to avoid the mob, but she kept looking. It was impossible to tell when the insects turned into birds, but there they were. They flapped around the people left in the open, they pecked at their bodies.

Someone snatched at her, pulled her inside a shop and down behind a counter. She struggled for a moment, thinking she should be doing something. But when she got her head above counter level she saw that one of them had arrived. He wore the same kind of clumsy metallic dress strewn with junk as the one she and Peter had seen blocking First Avenue. He was hitting a metal can with what looked like a rock, and he was wailing (or singing) above the screams. On his head he wore a helmet with a visor, like something from a space suit. An instant later Lynne's benefactor pulled her down again, and she crouched under the fluorescent glare. She discovered herself disappointed in some strange way. He hadn't looked at her. He hadn't turned around and noticed her at all. She was just the same as everyone else.

After a couple of minutes it all began to quiet down. The running stopped, the screams became isolated voices, the wild flapping ended, and then the drumming and the singing spiralled down. No one on the floor of the shop moved. Even after the all clear sound, the signal that the ambulances had taken away the wounded and the shocked, and that the scanners detected no more manifestations, they still remained hidden. They were waiting until it seemed a good chance the protector had left the mall. A good chance he no longer squatted there to remind them of the attack. For the protector belonged to the plague. He was as much a part of it as the birds and insects.

Lynne crouched with the other victims, all of them averting their eyes from each other, pretending that not seeing meant they weren't there. It was odd. People resented the protectors almost more than the plague itself. They were like traitors, or collaborators. When people started to get up Lynne stepped back into the open, looking for the place where she'd seen the protector.

It was hard to tell. Everybody was walking back and forth, reclaiming the mall for human territory. They picked up clothes to try on, they examined shoes, they ordered juice or pretzels or chocolate from the stalls in the middle, any activity at all, so long as it was bland and suggested that nothing unusual had happened. The attack would go unreported in the newspapers or television. Probably people wouldn't even tell their families or friends. She knew she wouldn't tell Peter.

She stood there watching the crowd, their refusal to look at each other, their awkward exaggerated movements, their tight smiles. And as she watched, her mood slid from disappointment to elation. It had

nothing to do with her. She was just like anyone else. She hadn't sensed it beforehand, she didn't make it go away or have any idea what to do. And when the protector came he took no notice of her. She was just like anyone else.

She didn't bother with Peter's present. She went out to her car, then ran back to a phone booth and called Peter at the office. She asked if they could still go for one night and he said the hotel probably hadn't rented the room on such short notice. If she went home and started packing he'd call and check. He didn't ask what had changed her mind.

**T**hat night Lynne dreamed again of Jason Benedict. She dreamed she was an old man, coughing in a barren room while he wrote his "History Of The Plague." In the dream Peter wanted her to go to her sister's wedding but she refused to leave her notebooks. The work would vindicate her, vindicate space travel, make the world realize he hadn't brought the plague. No one had ever found anything on his space suit, not even microscopic spores. And since Earth people could drive away the attacks, how could they possibly come from another planet?

Outside her cold room people were shouting, but she kept writing, she had to get it done before they took it away, before they tore it up and burned it. She wrote about the first attacks, the panic, the discovery of small communities in Asia and Africa, northern Canada and South America where the shamans and witch doctors kept their people free of the birds and insects. And she wrote about the hospitals, filling more and more with schizophrenics who didn't respond to drugs but who kept the grounds clear of the plague. His back ached and he could hardly hold the pen from the cold but he kept writing. "Listen to the protectors. They call it the other world. They do not mean a planet in space. Listen to them." Outside she could hear the soldiers marching around the house. No use, he thought, it's no use. They'll just burn it like they burned his picture, like they burned her yellow dress.

The dream shifted. She sat in the room but instead of a book she was working on a costume. A sheet of translucent gold plastic lay on her lap and she was sewing things to it – a can opener, the lid of a coffee pot, some crinkly leaves, a pouch containing bits of rock from Earth – and the other place. There was a toy spaceship, wire, a switch from a lamp, feathers. Beside her lay strips of cloth from a yellow dress. Later she would sew them on as well, streamers from her past life. She sewed so fast she kept cutting her fingers and dripping blood on the plastic. She had to finish soon, before the next attack. She had to sew the whole world on to it. She would feed them the world.

Lynne woke up shivering from the cold mountain night. She pulled the blanket over her shoulders and snuggled against Peter, who grunted and stayed asleep. She had to close the window, they should have known better than to have left it open. She just hated the idea of going up to it in the dark. She considered waking Peter or just turning on the light, but finally she got up and dashed to the window to pull it shut. Outside, darkness soaked the woods. It seemed

like it could roll up over the buildings despite the fence of blue lights surrounding the hotel. Lynne wondered where the protector of this area lived, if the hotel kept a cabin for him or her in some hidden area of the grounds. She hugged herself, wishing she'd brought a warmer nightgown.

When she went to pee she turned on the bathroom light before entering or even looking into the room. It wasn't difficult. The switch was outside the door. There were lots of people afraid to enter a dark room. Just as there were lots of people who dreamt about the plague. And Benedict. It was natural, normal. Just no one wanted to talk about it. She knew that in the morning, when Peter asked how she'd slept, she would tell him she'd had a wonderful night.

They spent the next day sitting by the lake, walking along the edge of the woods, climbing on the rock-paths laid out by the hotel. At a certain point Lynne spotted a couple of round stones, one black, one white. She let Peter get ahead of her so she could scoop them up into her jeans pocket. Excitedly she thought how when she got home she could add them to the collection in the coat closet.

They left at five, plenty of time to get home before dark. As they drove through the gates Lynne turned around for a last look at the green and brown buildings. Someone was standing by the entrance, a woman with long matted hair and a shapeless dress hung with pieces of paper, drawings, photographs. She grinned, showing her sharp teeth, and when she waved her hand, like a hostess saying goodbye to a special guest, the bony fingers looked like claws.

Lynne spent Monday and Tuesday going through catalogs, answering letters, making phone calls. Wednesday morning she decided to do another run to the city. She thought she would not concentrate on anything in particular but take with her a list of current targets and try to cover as much ground as possible. As she moved from shop to shop, she thought how much she loved this work, how she could go on forever if only the world would leave her alone.

Around four o'clock she found herself in the Hudson Flea Market, a large warehouse filled with racks of leather jackets, tables of broken clocks and watches, whole cartons full of scarves or corkscrews or plastic flowers. Lynne had once found a cased collection of Chinese coins which she then sold to a man in Boise for a five hundred per cent profit. Ever since then she'd used the coins as an excuse to spend an hour or two a month in this place she called "Browser's Heaven."

Today, however, she stayed no more than fifteen minutes. Rummaging through a box of toys so high she had to half climb inside it, she came across an object made of faded and dented metal. Without even thinking what it was she pulled it loose from the dolls and rifles around it and took it up to Ben, the owner, who sat on a rocker in the back of the shop reading a newspaper.

He looked up at her and before she could say anything he jumped off his chair. "Where did you get that?" he said. "Did you find that here?" He reached out to take the toy, but Lynne pulled it back out of his reach. "Hey," he said, "I'm sorry, Lynne, I didn't

know we had anything like that here. You know I don't know half of what's in those boxes. If I'd seen it I would've thrown it away. Believe me."

For the first time Lynne looked consciously at the collection of metal tubes and discs. A spaceship. The toy was a model spaceship. In fact, it was a drive ship, "the discovery that changed man's destiny at a single stroke," as someone once called it. That was before one of those ships took Jason Benedict to Gabriela H-3.

"Here," Ben said, "let me get rid of it." Again she held it out of his reach. There must have been thousands of these things, maybe millions. She'd played with one as a kid. Her favourite toy, until one day her father came into her bedroom and took it away from her.

"I want it," she told Ben.

"What? What are you talking about? Don't you know what that is?" She didn't answer. "Don't tell me you've got a buyer for that thing."

"How much?"

"Hey," Ben said. "You think I want money for it? Take it and get out of here. Wait a second." He handed her a plastic bag. "Stick it in here," he said. "So people don't see. And don't tell anyone where you got it, okay?"

At home Lynne set the drive ship down on the bed, the first time in over two hours she'd let it out of her hand. From the coat closet she took out her collection and set everything beside the ship. She felt a sense of completeness, of something established. She'd need lots more, she knew. Material, some bone for the mask, and above all rocks and artifacts from out there. But those she could get from the government, they kept whole storehouses full, all of it rescued from the mobs, along with instruments from the ships, pieces of telescopes from the smashed observatories. She laughed at the thought of browsing through all those wonderful warehouses. She looked down at her dress and laughed again. This was the one, the strips she'd seen in her dream. She'd cut up the dress so she could sew her past life onto her costume. Excitedly she pulled the dress over her head and got down the sewing box.

She had the hem of the dress in one hand and the scissors in the other, when she gave a gasping cry and dropped the scissors on the floor. She looked from the stuff on the bed to the yellow material in her hand. It was like someone else had taken hold of her -

No. No, she had to recognize the truth. It was her. When she'd put that toy ship with the other things she'd felt - more settled, more complete than at any time in her life. She began to cry, to shake her head from side to side. It was all so sad, all the things she'd have to give up, Peter, her work, their apartment. And how would she tell her parents? They had such good taste.

She put the ship, the stones from Mohonk, and the other things back in the box. She held up the dress and with a sigh put that in the box as well, without cutting it. That could come later. Later, when the dress really had become a symbol of her former life. A symbol and all that remained of it.

When Peter came home he found his favourite dinner, steak, garlic bread, baked potatoes. There was even a chocolate cake for dessert. "What's up," he said. "Make a big sale?"

She smiled. "No, I just thought it would be nice." He kissed her and ran off to take a quick shower before dinner. How much time? Lynne thought. How much time to keep making it nice before the end?

The end, it turned out, came over a month later. In those weeks, Lynne had settled into a sleepy kind of happiness, making love with Peter, tracking down items for her customers, sleeping well and cooking elaborate dinners. Peter said several times how great she looked, how he'd said she'd get over the attacks, and now she was fine, and maybe they should sue that Steiner guy for malpractice. He talked about vacations and brought home travel folders. Lynne kissed him and said how she'd always wanted to visit Bermuda.

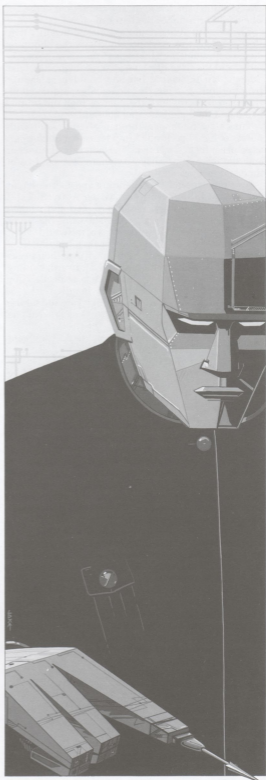
When the end came she didn't even know it at first. She'd taken the Ford down to the mall for a charge and a wash. She drove it in a little before noon, and went to look for boots and a new raincoat. When she came back an hour later she found a group of men dismantling her car. She ran up, wobbling as she clutched her packages. The strap of her bag fell from her shoulder to her elbow, bouncing the bag against her knee. "What are you doing?" she shouted. "Leave that alone. What are you doing?" The men paid no attention. There were five of them, all dressed in short black jackets and black jeans. They went on lifting off a fender, removing a seat, disconnecting pieces of the engines.

Lynne dropped her packages and looked around for help. People were walking by, some in the parking lot, some in the station, waiting for their cars to be charged. No one paid any attention. Lynne ran up to a woman who was getting in her car. "Please," Lynne said, "could you get the police? These men are tearing apart my car." The woman slammed the door and rolled up the window. As soon as she got the engine started she streaked away.

Lynne ran back to her car. "Stop that," she yelled. "Stop it." A couple of the men turned their heads towards her. Their faces gave off a silvery glow and their eyes and noses and ears looked crudely formed, like toys. They opened their mouths and double tongues flicked out at Lynne. She stepped backwards, nearly falling as her foot slid on an oil slick. For the first time she saw their hands, narrow, with curved metal pincers and tools instead of fingers. They were robots. But that was impossible. The government had banned robots, they'd scrapped them all, smashed them in huge piles the same year they'd smashed the space ships.

Lynne moved forward. She realized that the dismantling was revealing something hidden inside the car. As they took off the hood and the roof they exposed something shiny, with a bowed head and folded wings. The robots lifted off the last piece of the car and the bird came awake, nodding its head, rustling the steel feathers of its wings.

Lynne walked towards it. Before she could touch it it reared its head back then brought the tip of its beak slashing down the front of Lynne's body. Her scream died as her skin fell away like wrapping. A grey sludge spilled onto the ground. At first it seemed like everything would empty out, no one would ever find anything left of her. But then she realized she



was standing, she felt light, she could float in the air. She could breathe for the first time in years.

The bird lifted her onto its back and together they flew through the air. She could see the shopping center below and then the houses, the trees, the mountains, and the river like tape across a knobby surface. Somewhere far below her she could hear shouts, people running, a buzzing noise. She paid no attention, and soon the bird took her so high the sounds faded and the land fell away behind her.

They flew for hours, through a dark cloud with points of light that formed into faces that broke apart as soon as she passed them. The cloud swallowed her and she drifted into it, everywhere at once, free of time and memory.

And then the bird was landing and Lynne found herself on a hilltop overlooking a burnt city. She slid off the bird's back and a group of men and women surrounded her. They all wore sheets of plastic or metal covered with bits and pieces of the world. Their heads looked like helmets, with beaks jutting out from opaque visors. Bent tubes hung down over their necks and shoulders. One of them stepped forward, holding something out to her. A mask. A new head. They wanted her to take it, become like them.

"No," she said. "I can't." She looked around for the bird to rescue her, but it was gone. "I can't." No one answered.

"You can protect them," Lynne said. They said nothing. "No. Please. I don't want to."

A woman pointed to the city. Lynne looked at the smashed buildings, the charred remains. In the middle stood a single structure, a domed message left by the last survivors for anyone who might come after them. She was on Gabriela H-3. Below her stood the museum, with all its statues and drawings, all the warnings about the plague. He was right. Benedict was right. They built it after the war, when they knew none of them would live to tell what had happened. It didn't show the war because the war didn't matter. The war only came because of the plague. Because of the panic, the terror. Because no one protected them.

She looked back at the one holding out the mask. "Why does it have to be me?" she said. "I've got my husband and my work." No one answered. Lynne took the mask and lifted it onto her head.

She was back in the parking lot, on all fours on the ground, a few feet from her car. Dizzy, she squinted against the bright sun. Around her people were starting to come out of their hiding places. Someone even stepped out from behind Lynne's car.

"She's still here," Lynne heard someone say. "I thought they're supposed to move on."

"Tell that to her," someone else said. "She's not even wearing the right clothes."

On the other side another voice said, "Isn't there some law that they can't dress like normal people? She could just walk around and no one would know."

"Someone should call the police," the first voice said.

Another one said, "She could have been standing right next to us for all we knew."

Aching, Lynne got to her feet and made it to the car. She had the engine going when she realized she'd left her boots and other packages on the ground. She

shrugged and put the car in gear. A small crowd had gathered but they parted as she drove towards the exit. Someone threw something. It hit the back windshield and bounced off.

Lynne looked at the dash clock. Two or three hours until Peter came home. She wondered how she would tell him. She wondered if he'd resist. "We can beat this," she imagined him saying. "You're talking nonsense. You're just hysterical." It didn't matter.

She wondered where she'd end up living. Did the government give her a shelter or would she have to make her own somehow? Probably at first she'd go to live with a teacher. She knew she needed someone. That was the important thing. She couldn't go through it alone any more. But as for the rest - things like where she lived - it didn't matter any more.

At the end of the mall road she waited for a red light to change before driving onto Route 9. The shadow of a large bird passed across the hood. Lynne smiled.

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Rachel Pollack's first story for us, "Angel Baby" (JZ 2, and reprinted in *Interzone: The 1st Anthology*), was much praised. She has written several books, and one of her most recent works is the text for *Salvador Dalí's Tarot*, published by Michael Joseph Rainbird in 1985.

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# SEX CHANGE OPERATION SHOCK – Can Reading SF Make Your Thing Drop Off? Gwyneth Jones

Ideology is a funny thing. It is invisible unless you don't like it. There is a splendid film (I can't remember the name but the remake was *Alien*) which displays this effect perfectly. The crew of the pre-Nostromo includes two women, a neurosurgeon and a micro-biologist (or similar). They analyze the tissues of the Scarey Thing all right: but they also do the cooking and wait on the men at table. The invisible has become visible. The same text today would have to be considered (with or without approval) as down-right inflammatory. Feminism – or "post-feminism," as the New Right prefers to call it – has invaded the future. There are lesbian utopias, Haldeman style bunkmates; there are Emma Peel clones, there's Sigourney Weaver in her underwear, there's Captain Cirrocco Jones. But still, in many subtle or not so subtle ways, the sf majority remains hostile to women's liberation. It should be remembered that Emma Peel began life as a male-designed marketing concept.

Science fiction is a genre that clings to its traditions, and one of the most treasured has always been that Real Men, in whatever far-flung future, will be happy to sit like dumplings and have their chins wiped. And Real Women will be eager to do the wiping. When sex became printable in the sixties, the response of sf writers was predictable; and neatly identified by Colin Greenland in his study of the New Wave (*The Entropy Exhibition*). The (inner) space-jock finds a piece of excess blonde baggage in his locker. He throws her out of the airlock as before. But this time he screws the ass off her first. Later, sf briefly flirted with the idea of coming out as human. But it didn't last. Whoever They are, They got to Frederik Pohl. The moment of the anti-liberal backlash remains frozen forever between *Gateway* and *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*. *Gateway* describes a society of honest and varied sexual relationships, and two people drawn together by common cowardice. Isn't that the truth? For we must find some way to hang together, if only for fear of hanging separately, otherwise... But by the *Blue Event*, we're back to giggling coyness. He got scared. Some visions are just too dangerous. And ever since, the big bestsellers – women

as well as men – have spared a little plot space somewhere (as if it was in their contracts) to prove this sex-change deal Would Not Work. Cf. *Helliconia*. Cf. Job. Cf. (God give me strength) *The Towers of Isis*.

Revenge is sweet. When feminists take to writing sf, especially if after years of reading the junk, it is hardly surprising if the male ego comes in for a little battering. It is pleasant to think (I don't deny it) of almost any well-known sf writer, with his prick caught in the metaphorical zip of my cold equations. This is of course quite apart from the serious task of disassembling the foul cancer of patriarchy, code by code and gate by gate. But then I meet *The Wasp Factory*, and Iain Banks' climactic self-flagellating image: of Man as a vegetable baby, his brainpan full of squirming maggots. And that rather spoils my fun.

I don't want to fall victim to oppressed minorities syndrome: where nothing They can do is right, where even an honest admission of guilt is another contemptuous handout. Perhaps abject male penitence is just what feminist sf deserves – the only possible reply to those lesbian utopias of unrelievedly caring and compassionate wimmin. Does anybody seriously believe that male hormones have been exclusively responsible for all the foul-ups of the last two million years? Real Woman, the chinwiper goddess, is just as dubious a character as Real Man. She even claims to have been in control (secretly) all along. *He likes to think he's the boss. Isn't he cute!* Which gives grounds for a charge of criminal negligence, to say the least. Let's get this straight. We are not arguing about whose turn it is to be in the shit, or whose turn it is to be to blame for everything. I do believe the world would be a better and a safer place if run by women, but that's a matter of taste: choose the flavour of your oppression. It would be much better still if we could stop the seesaw, and become human together.

We can do it. We can rebuild per\*. We have the technology... Men can breast feed. Male pregnancy is a real option – just pay £10,000. Physical strength was never the issue (as Kate

Millet said long ago: why isn't the world run by Irish navvies?) Male superiority in intelligence is just a nigger joke. Female superiority in emotional openness and moral sense is a consolation prize, attached to the underdog, not to gender. If child bearing and child rearing became Man's business, there's not much left for biological determinacy. Taste in hats, maybe? What happens now depends on consumer choice, on economic pressures, on the rise or fall of the New Right. And of course there's always the chance that the debate will be ended by a sudden return to natural realism: infant castration and a few prized, beloved males – in the biologically determined matriarchy of the Post-Nuclear Stone Age.

Whatever the outcome, sf cannot affect or effect anything. Previously it has reflected society's willingness to accommodate all kinds of aberrant sexual mores, so long as the dissenters agree to be classified as "subversives" – parasitic on the unchallenged normal world. And equally – notoriously in Heinlein's famous text of "sexual emancipation" *Stranger in a Strange Land* – humanity's perennial desire for sweeping reforms, so long as everything stays exactly the same. Now it mirrors, as accurately, the panic, the elation, the subterfuge and evasion engendered in human society by the bare possibility of real change.

\* This is not a misprint, it is a literary allusion to one of the few bisexual utopias, in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

(With acknowledgements to Iain Banks, Geoff Ryman, Josephine Saxton and the participating audience at the Mexican 2 Sex panel.)

Gwyneth Jones has written a number of children's books before the publication of *Divine Endurance* (1984), which received rave reviews and marked her as a new British writer to watch. Her second adult novel, *Escape Plans*, was published in April 1986 (Unwin Paperbacks, £3.50). Gwyneth has lived in Manchester and Singapore (which formed part of the background of *Divine Endurance*) and now lives in Brighton.

# Michael Blumlein

## The Brains of Rats

**T**here is evidence that Joan of Arc was a man. Accounts of her trial state that she did not suffer the infirmity of women. When examined by the prelates prior to her incarceration it was found that she lacked the characteristic escutcheon of women. Her pubic area, in fact, was as smooth and hairless as a child's.<sup>1</sup>

There is a condition of men, of males, called testicular feminization. The infants are born without a penis, and the testicles are hidden. The external genitalia are those of a female. Raised as women, these men at puberty develop breasts. Their voices do not deepen. They do not menstruate because they lack a uterus. They have no pubic hair.

These people carry a normal complement of chromosomes. The twenty-third pair, the so-called sex chromosome pair, is unmistakably male, XY. Declared a witch in 1431 and burned at the stake at the age of nineteen, Joan of Arc was quite likely one of these.

Herculine Barbin was born in 1838 in France; she was reared as a female. She spent her childhood in a convent and in boarding schools for girls and later became a school-mistress. Despite her rearing, she had the sexual inclination of a male. She had already taken a female lover, when, on account of severe pain in her left groin, she sought the advice of a physician. Partly as a result of his examination her sex was redesignated, and in 1860 she was given the civil status of a male. The transformation brought shame and disgrace upon her. Her existence as a male was wretched, and in 1868 she took her own life.<sup>2</sup>

**I** have a daughter. I am married to a blonde-haired, muscular woman. We live in enlightened times. But daily I wonder who is who and what is what. I am baffled by our choices; my mind is unclear. Especially now that I have the means to ensure that every child born on this earth is male.

A patient once came to me, a man with a painful

drip from the end of his penis. He had had it for several days; neither excessive bathing nor drugstore remedies had proven helpful. About a week and a half before, on a business trip, he had spent time with a prostitute. I asked if he had enjoyed himself. In a roundabout way he said it was natural for a man.

Several days later, at home, his daughter tucked safely in bed, he had made love to his wife. He said that she got very excited. The way he said it made me think she was the only one in the room.

The two of them are both rather young. While he was in the examining room, she sat quietly in the waiting room. She stared ahead, fatigue and ignorance making her face impassive. In her lap her daughter was curled asleep.

In the room the man milked his penis, squeezing out a large amount of creamy material, which I smeared on a glass slide. In an hour the laboratory told me had gonorrhoea. When I conveyed the news to him, he was surprised and worried.

"What is that?" he asked.

"An infection," I said. "A venereal disease. It's spread through sexual contact."

He nodded slowly. "My wife, she got too excited."

"Most likely you got it from the prostitute."

He looked at me blankly and said it again. "She got too excited."

I was fascinated that he could hold such a notion and calmly repeated what I had said. I recommended treatment for both him and his wife. How he would explain the situation to her was up to him. A man with his beliefs would probably not have too hard a time.

**I** admit that I have conflicting thoughts. I am intrigued by hypnotism and the relations of power. For years I have wanted to be a woman, with small, firm breasts held even firmer by a brassiere. My hair would be shoulder-length and soft. It would pick up highlights and sweep down over one ear. The



other side of my head would be bare, save for some wisps of hair at the nape and around my ear. I would have a smooth cheek.

I used to brush it this way, posing before my closet mirror in dark tights and high-heeled boots. The velveteen dress I wore was designed for a small person, and I split the seams the first time I pulled it over my head. My arms and shoulders are large; they were choked by the narrow sleeves. I could hardly move, the dress was so tight. But I was pretty. A very pretty thing.

I never dream of having men. I dream of women. I am a woman and I want women. I think of being simultaneously on the top and on the bottom. I want the power and I want it taken from me.

I should mention that I also have the means to make every conceptus a female. The thought is as disturbing as making them all male. But I think it shall have to be one or the other.

**T**he genes that determine sex lie on the twenty-third pair of chromosomes. They are composed of a finite and relatively short sequence of nucleic acids on the X chromosome and one on the Y. For the most part these sequences have been mapped. Comparisons have been made between species. The sex-determining gene is remarkably similar in animals as diverse as the wasp, the turtle and the cow. Recently it has been found that the (male) banded krait, a poisonous snake of India separated evolutionarily from man by many millions of years, has a genetic sequence nearly identical to that of the human male.

The Y gene turns on other genes. A molecule is produced, a complex protein, which is present on the surface of virtually all cells in the male. It is absent in the female. Its presence makes cells and environments of cells develop in particular ways. These ways have not changed much in millions of years.

Certain regions of the brain in rats show marked sexual specificity. Cell density, dendritic formation, synaptic configuration of the male are different from the female. When presented with two solutions of water, one pure, the other heavily sweetened with saccharin, the female rat consistently chooses the latter. The male does just the opposite. Female chimpanzee infants exposed to high level of male hormones in utero exhibit patterns of play different from their sisters. They initiate more, are rougher and more threatening. They tend to snarl a lot.

Sexual differences of the human brain exist, but they have been obscured by the profound evolution of this organ in the past half-million years. We have speech and foresight, consciousness and self-consciousness. We have art, physics and religion. In a language whose meaning men and women seem to share, we say we are different, but equal.

The struggles between sexes, the battles for power are a reflection of the schism between thought and function, between the power of our minds and powerlessness in the face of our design. Sexual equality, an idea present for hundreds of years, is subverted by instincts present for millions. The genes determining mental capacity have evolved rapidly; those determining sex have been stable for eons. Humankind suffers the consequences of this disparity, the ambiguities of identity, the violence between the sexes. This can be changed. It can be ended. I have the means

to do it.

**A**ll my life I have watched men fight with women. Women with men. Women come to the clinic with bruised and swollen cheeks, where they have been slapped and beaten by their lovers. Not long ago an attractive middle-aged lady came in with a bloody nose, bruises on her arms and a cut beneath her eye, where the cheek bone rises up in a ridge. She was shaking uncontrollably, sobbing in spasms so that it was impossible to understand what she was saying. Her sister had to speak for her.

Her boss had beat her up. He had thrown her against the filing cabinets and kicked her on the floor. She had cried for him to stop, but he kept on kicking. She had worked for him for ten years. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Another time a young man came in. He wore a tank top and had big muscles in his shoulders and arms. On one bicep was a tattoo of the upper torso and head of a woman, her huge breasts bursting out of a ragged garment. On his forearm beneath this picture were three long and deep tracks in the skin, oozing blood. I imagined the swipe of a large cat, a lynx or a mountain lion. He told me he had hurt himself working on his car.

I cleaned the scratches, cut off the dead pieces of skin bunched up at the end of the tracks. I asked again. It was his girlfriend, he said, smiling now a little, gazing proudly at the marks on his arm. They had had a fight, she had scratched him with her nails. He looked at me, turning more serious, trying to act like a man but sounding like a boy, and asked, you think I should have a shot for rabies?

**S**exual differentiation in humans occurs at about the fifth week of gestation. Prior to this time the foetus is sexless, or more precisely, it has the potential to become either (or both) sex. Around the fifth week a single gene turns on, initiating a cascade of events that ultimately gives rise to testicle or ovary. In the male this gene is associated with the Y chromosome; in the female, with the X. An XY pair normally gives rise to a male; and XX pair, to a female.

The two genes have been identified and produced by artificial means. Despite a general reluctance in the scientific community as a whole, our laboratory has taken this research further. Recently, we have devised a method to attach either gene to a common rhinovirus. The virus is ubiquitous; among humans it is highly contagious. It spreads primarily through water droplets (sneezing, coughing), but also through other bodily fluids (sweat, urine, saliva, semen). We have attenuated the virus so that it is harmless to mammalian tissue. It incites little, if any, immune response, resting dormant inside cells. It causes no apparent disruption of function.

When an infected female becomes pregnant, the virus rapidly crosses the placenta, infecting the cells of the developing foetus. If the virus carries the X gene, the foetus will become a female; if it carries the Y, a male. In mice and rabbits we have been able to produce entire litters of male or female. Experiments in simians have been similarly successful. It is not premature to conclude that we have the capability to do the same for humans.

Imagine whole families of male or female. Districts, towns, even countries. So simple, it is as though it was always meant to be.

**M**y daughter is a beautiful girl. She knows enough about sex, I think, to satisfy her for the present. She plays with herself often at night, sometimes during the day. She is very happy not to have to wear diapers anymore. She used to look at my penis a lot, and once in a while she would touch it. Now she doesn't seem to care.

Once maybe every three or four months she'll put on a pair of pants. The rest of the time she wears skirts or dresses. My wife, a labourer, wears only pants. She drives a truck.

One of our daughter's school teachers, a Church woman, told her that Christian girls don't wear pants. I had a dream last night that our next child is a boy.

I admit I am confused. In the ninth century there was a German woman with a name no one remembers. Call her Katrin. She met and fell in love with a man, a scholar. Presumably, the love was mutual. The man travelled to Athens to study and Katrin went with him. She disguised herself as a man so that they could live together.

In Athens the man died. Katrin stayed on. She had learned much from him, had become something of a scholar herself. She continued her studies and over time gained renown for her learning. She kept her disguise as a man.

Sometime later she was called to Rome to study and teach at the offices of Pope Leo IV. Her reputation grew, and when Leo died in 855, Katrin was elected Pope.

Her reign ended abruptly two and a half years later. In the midst of a papal procession through the streets of Rome, her cloak hanging loose, obscuring the contours of her body, Katrin squatted on the ground, uttered a series of cries and delivered a baby. Soon after, she was thrown in a dungeon, and later banished to an impoverished land to the north. From that time on, all popes, prior to confirmation, have been examined by two reliable clerics. Before an assembled audience they feel under his robes.

"Testiculos habet," they declare, at which point the congregation heaves a sigh of relief.

"Deo gratias," it chants back. "Deo gratias."

**I** was at a benefit luncheon the other day, a celebration of regional women writers. Of five hundred people I was one of a handful of men. I went at the invitation of a friend because I like the friend and I like the writers who were being honoured. I wore a sports coat and slacks and had a neatly trimmed four day growth of beard. I waited in a long line at the door, surrounded by women. Some were taller than me, but I was taller than most. All were dressed fashionably; most wore jewellery and make-up. I was uncomfortable in the crowd, not profoundly, but enough that my manner turned meek. I was ready for a fight.

A loud woman butted in front of me and I said nothing. At the registration desk I spoke softly, demurely. The woman at the desk smiled and said something nice. I felt a little better, took my card and went in.

It was a large and fancy room, packed with tables draped with white cloths. The luncheon was being catered by a culinary school located in the same building. There was a kitchen on the ground floor, to the left of the large room. Another was at the mezzanine level above the stage at the front of the room. This one was enclosed in glass, and during the luncheon there was a class going on. Students in white coats and a chef with a tall white hat passed back and forth in front of the glass. Their lips moved, but from below we didn't hear any sounds.

Mid-way through the luncheon the program started. The main organizer spoke about the foundation for which the luncheon was a benefit. It is an organization dedicated to the empowerment of women, to the rights of women and girls. My mind drifted.

I have been a feminist for years. I was in the room next door when my first wife formed a coven. I told her it was good. I celebrated with her the publication of Valerie Solanas' *The S.C.U.M. Manifesto*. The sisters made a slide show, using some of Valerie's words. It was shown around the East Coast. I helped them out by providing a man's voice. I am a turd, the man said. A lowly, abject turd.

My daughter is four. She is a beautiful child. I want her to be able to choose. I want her to feel her power. I will tear down the door that is slammed in her face because she is a woman.

The first honoree came to the podium, reading a story about the bond between a wealthy woman traveller and a poor Mexican room maid. After two paragraphs a noise interrupted her. It was a dull, beating sound, went on for half a minute, stopped, started up again. It came from the glassed-in teaching kitchen above the stage. The white-capped chef was pounding a piece of meat, oblivious to the scene below. Obviously he could not hear.

The woman tried to keep reading but could not. She made one or two frivolous comments to the audience. We were all a little nervous, and there were scattered titters while we waited for something to be done. The chef kept pounding the meat. Behind me a woman whispered loudly, male chauvinist.

I was not surprised, had, in fact, been waiting from the beginning for someone to say something like that. It made me mad. The man was innocent. The woman was a fool. A robot. I wanted to shake her, shake her up and make her pay.

**I** have a friend, a man with a narrow face and cheeks that always look unshaven. His eyes are quick; when he is with me, they always seem to be looking someplace else. He is facile with speech and quite particular about the words he chooses. He is not unattractive.

I like this man for the same reasons I dislike him. He is opportunistic and assertive. He is clever, in the way that being detached allows one to be. And fiercely competitive. He values those who rise to his challenges.

I think of him as a predator, as a man looking for an advantage. This would surprise, even bewilder him, for he carries the innocence of self-absorption. When he laughs at himself, he is so proud to be able to do so.

He has a peculiar attitude toward women. He does not like those who are his intellectual equal. He does

not respect those who are not. And yet he loves women. He loves to make them. Especially he loves the ones who need to be convinced.

I sometimes play tennis with him. I apologize if I hit a bad shot. I apologize if I am not adequate competition. I want to please him, and I lose every time we play. I am afraid to win, afraid that he might get angry, violent. He could explode.

I want to win. I want to win bad. I want to drive him into the net, into the concrete itself and beneath it with the force of my victory.

I admit I am perplexed. A man is aggressive, tender, strong, compassionate, hostile, moody, loyal, competent, funny, generous, searching, selfish, powerful, self-destructive, shy, shameful, hard, soft, duplicit, faithful, honest, bold, foolhardy, vain, vulnerable and proud. Struggling to keep his instincts in check, he is both abused and blessed by his maleness.

Dr P, a biologist, husband and father never knew how much of his behaviour to attribute to the involuntary release of chemicals, to the flow of electricity through synapses stamped male as early as sixty days after conception, and how much to reckon under his control. He did not want to dilute his potency as a scientist, as a man, by struggling too hard against his impulses, and yet the glimpses he had of another way of life were often too compelling to disregard. The bond between his wife and daughter sometimes brought tears to his eyes. The thought of his wife carrying the child in her belly for nine months and pushing her out through the tight gap between her legs sometimes settled in his mind like a hypnotic suggestion, like something so sweet and pure that he would wither without it.<sup>4</sup>

I asked another friend what it was to him to be a man. He laughed nervously and said the question was too hard. Okay, I said, what is it you like best? He shied away but I pressed him. Having a penis, he said. I nodded. Having it sucked, putting it in a warm place. Coming. He smiled and looked beatific. Oh god, he said, it's so good to come.

Later on he said, I like the authority I have, the subtle edge. I like the respect. A man, just by being a man, gets respect. When I get an erection, when I get very hard, I feel strong. I take on power that at other times is hidden. Impossibilities seem to melt away.

(A world like that, I think. A world of men. How wondrous! The Y virus then. I think it must be the Y.)

**I**n the summer of our marriage I was sitting with my first wife in the mountains. She was on one side of a dirt road that wound up to a pass and I was on the other. Scattered on the mountain slope were big chunks of granite and around them stands of aspen and a few solitary pines. The sky was a deep blue, the kind that makes you suck in your breath. The air was crisp.

She was throwing rocks at me, and arguing. Some of the rocks were quite big, as big as you could hold in a palm. They landed close, throwing up clouds of dust in the roadbed. She was telling me why we should get married.

"I'll get more respect," she said. "Once we get married then we can get divorced. A divorced woman gets respect."

I asked her to stop throwing rocks. She was mad

because she wasn't getting her way. Because I was being truculent. Because she was working a man's job cleaning out the insides of ships, scaling off the plaque and grime, and she was being treated like a woman. She wanted to be treated like a man, be tough like a man, dirty and tough. She wanted to smoke in bars, get drunk, shoot pool. In the bars she wanted to act like a man, be loud, not take shit. She wanted to do this and also she wanted to look sharp, she wanted to dress sexy, in tight blouses and pants. She wanted men to come to her, she wanted them to fawn a little. She wanted the power.

"A woman who's been married once, they know she knows something. She's not innocent. She's gotten rid of one, she can get rid of another. They show a little respect."

She stopped throwing rocks and came over to me. I was a little cowed. She said that if I loved her I would marry her so she could divorce me. She was tender and insistent. I did love her, and I understood the importance of respect. But also I was mixed up. I couldn't make up my mind.

"You see," she said, angry again, "you're the one who gets to decide. It's always you who's in control."

"I am a turd," I replied. "A lowly, abject turd."

**A**woman came to me the other day. She knew my name, was aware of the thrust of my research but not the particulars. She did not know that in the blink of an eye her kind, or mine, could be gone from the face of the earth. She did not know, but it did not seem to matter.

She was dressed simply; her face was plain. She seemed at ease when she spoke, though she could not conceal (nor did she try) a certain intensity of feeling. She said that as a woman she could not trust a man to make decisions regarding her future. To my surprise I told her that I am not a man at all.

"I am a mother," I said. "When my daughter was an infant, I let her suckle my breast."

"You have no breasts," she said scornfully.

"Only no milk." I unbuttoned my shirt and pulled it to the side. I squeezed a nipple. "She wouldn't stay on because it was dry."

"You are a man," she said, unaffected. "You look like one. I've seen you walk, you walk like one."

"How does a man walk?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"I am courteous. I step aside in crowds, wait for others to pass."

"Courtesy is the manner the strong adopt toward the weak. It is the recognition of their dominance."

"Sometimes I am meek," I said. "Sometimes I'm quite shy."

She gave me an exasperated look, as though I were a child who had strained the limits of her patience. "You are a man, and men are outcasts. You are outcasts from the very world you made. The world you built on the bodies of other species. Of women."

I did not want to argue with her. In a way she was right. Men have tamed the world.

"You think you rise above," she went on, less stridently. "It is the folly of comparison. There's no one below. No one but yourselves."

"I don't look down," I said.

"Men don't look at all. If you did, you'd see that

certain parts of your bodies are missing."

"What does that mean?"

She looked at me quietly. "Don't you think it's time women had a chance?"

"Let me tell you something," I said. "I have always wanted to be a woman. I used to dress like one whenever I had the chance. I was too frightened to keep women's clothes in my own apartment, and I used to borrow my neighbour's. She was a tall woman, bigger than me, and she worked evenings. I had the key to her apartment, and at night after work, before she came home, I would sneak into her place and go through her drawers. Because of her size, most of her clothes fit. She had a pair of boots, knee-high soft leather boots which I especially liked."

"Why are you telling me this?" she asked suspiciously.

"I want to. It's important that you understand."

"Listen, no man wants to be a woman. Not really. Not deep down."

"Men are beautiful." I made a fist. "Our bodies are powerful, like the ocean, and strong. Our muscles swell and tuck into each other like waves."

"There is nothing so pure as a man. Nothing like the face of a boy. The smooth and innocent cheek. The promise in the eyes."

"I love men. I love to trace our hard parts, our soft ones with my eyes, my imagination. I love to see us naked, but I am not aroused. I never have thoughts of having men."

"One night, though, I did. I was coming from my neighbour's apartment, where I had dressed up pretty in dark tights, those high boots of hers, and a short, belted dress. I had stuffed socks in the cups of her bra and was a very stacked lady. When I was done, I took everything off, folded it and put it neatly back in the drawers. I got dressed in my own pants and shirt, a leather jacket on top, and left. I was going to spend the night with my wife."

"On the street I still felt aroused. I had not relieved the tension and needed some release. As I walked, I alternated between feeling like a man on the prowl and a woman wanting to grab something between her legs. I think I felt more the latter, because I wanted something to be done to me. I wanted someone else to be boss."

"I started down the other side of the hill that separated my house from my wife's. It was late and the street was dark. A single car, a Cadillac, crept down the hill. When it came to me, it slowed. The driver motioned me over and I moved away. My heart skittered. He did it again and I swallowed and went to him."

"He was a burly black man, smelled of alcohol. I sat far away from him, against the door, and stared out the windshield. He asked where was my place. I said I had none. He grunted and drove up a steep hill and several more. He pulled the big car into the basement lot of an apartment complex. 'A ladyfriend's,' he said, and I followed him up some flights of stairs and down a corridor to the door of the apartment. I was aroused, frightened, determined. I don't think he touched me that whole time."

"He opened the door and we went in. The living room was bare, except for a record player on the floor and a scattered bunch of records. There was a record

on, about two-thirds done, and I expected to see someone else in the apartment. But it was empty."

"The man went into another room, maybe the kitchen, and fixed himself a drink. He wasn't friendly to me, wasn't cruel. I think he was a little nervous to have me there, but otherwise acted as if I were a piece of something to deal with in his own way at his own time. I did not feel that I needed to be treated any differently than that."

"He took me into the bedroom, put me on the bed. That was in the beginning; later I remember only the floor. He took off his shirt and his pants and pulled my pants down. He settled on me, his front to my front. He was barrel-chested, big and heavy. I wrapped my legs around him and he began to rub up and down on me. His lips were fat, and he kissed me hard and tongued me. He smelled very strong, full of drugs and liquor. His beard was rough on my cheek. I liked the way it felt but not the way it scratched. He began to talk to himself."

"'The swimmin' gates,' he muttered. 'Let me in the swimmin' gates. The swimmin' gates.'"

"He said these words over and over, drunkenly, getting more and more turned on. He rolled me over, made me squat on my knees with my butt in the air. He grabbed me with his arms, tried to enter me. I was very dry and it hurt. I let him do it despite the pain because I wanted to feel it, I wanted to know what it was like. I didn't want to let him down."

"Even before then, before the pain, I had withdrawn. I was no longer aroused, or not much. I liked his being strong because I wanted to be dominated, but as he got more and more excited, I lost a sense that I was anything at all. I was a man, but I might just as easily have been a woman, or a dog, or even a tube lined with fur. I felt like nothing; I was out of my body and growing cold. I did not even feel the power of having brought him to his climax. If it wasn't me, it would have been something else..."

I stopped. The woman was quiet for a while.

"So what's your point?" she asked.

"I'm wrong to think he didn't need me. Or someone, to do what he wanted. To take it without question."

"He hurt you."

"In a way I pity him. But also, I admire his determination."

She was upset. "So you think you know what it's like to be a woman? Because of that you think you know?"

"I don't know anything," I said. "Except that when I think about it I always seem to know more about what it is to be a woman than what it is to be a man."

**H**aving a penis, my friend said. That's what I like best. It reminds me of a patient I once had, a middle-aged man with diabetes. He took insulin injections twice a day, was careful with his diet, and still he suffered the consequences of that disease. Most debilitating to him was the loss of his sex life.

"I can't get it up," he told me. "Not for more than a minute or two."

I asked if he came. Diabetes can be quite selective in which nerves it destroys.

"Sometimes. But it's not the same. It feels all right, it feels good, but it's not the same. A man should get

hard."

I nodded, thinking that he should be grateful, it could be worse. "At least you can come. Some people can't even do that."

"Don't you have some shot, Doc? Something so I can get it up."

I said no, I didn't, it wasn't a question of some shot, it was a question of his diabetes. We agreed to work harder at keeping it under control, and we did, but his inability to get an erection remained. He didn't become depressed, as many do, nor did he get angry. He was matter-of-fact, candid, even funny at times. He told me that his wife liked him better the way he was.

"I don't run around," he explained. "It's not that I can't...the ladies, they don't seem to mind the way I am. In fact, they seem to like it. I just don't want to, I don't feel like a man."

"So the marriage is better?"

He shrugged. "She's a prude. She'd rather not have sex anyway. So how about a hormone shot, Doc? What do we go to lose?"

His optimism was infectious, and I gave him a shot of testosterone. And another a few weeks later. It didn't change anything. The next time I saw him he was carrying a newspaper clipping.

"I heard about this operation," he said, handing me the article. "They got something they put in your penis to make it hard. A metal rod, something like that. They also got this tube they can put in. With a pump, so you can pump it up when you're ready and let it down when you're finished. What do you think, Doc?"

I knew a little about the implants. The rods were okay, except the penis stayed stiff all the time. It was a nuisance, and sometimes it hurt if it got bent the wrong way. The inflatable tubes were unreliable, sometimes breaking open, other times not deflating when they were supposed to. I told him this.

"It's worth a try," he said. "What do I got to lose?"

It was four or five months before I saw him again. He couldn't wait to get me in the examining room, pulling down his pants almost as soon as I shut the door. Through the slit in his underwear his penis pointed at me like a finger. His face beamed.

"I can go for hours now, Doc," he said proudly. "Six, eight, all night if I want. And look at this..." He bent it to the right, where it stayed, nearly touching his leg. Then to the left. Then straight up, then down. "Any position, for as long as I want. The women, they love it."

I sat there, marvelling. "That's great."

"You should see them," he said, bending it down in the shape of a question mark and stuffing it back in his pants. "They go crazy. I'm like a kid, Doc. They can't keep up with me."

I thought of him, sixty-two years old, happy, stiff, rolling back and forth on an old mattress, stopping every so often to ask his companion that night which way she wanted it. Did she like it better left or right, curved or straight, up or down? He was a man now, and he loved women. I asked about his wife.

"She wants to divorce me," he said. "I got too many women now."

The question, I think, is not so much what I have in common with the banded krait of India, him slithering through the mud of that ancient country's monsoon-swollen rivers, me sitting pensively in a cardigan at my desk. We share that certain sequence of nucleic acids, that gene on the Y chromosome that makes us male. The snake is aggressive; I am loyal and dependable. He is territorial; I am a faithful family man. He dominates the female of his species; I am strong, reliable, a good lover.

The question really is how I differ from my wife. We lay in bed, our long bodies pressed together as though each of us were trying to become the other. We talk, sometimes of love, mostly of problems. She says, my job, it is so hard, I am so tired my body aches. And I think, that is too bad, I am so sorry, where is the money to come from, be tough, buck up. I say, I am insecure at work, worried about being a good father, a husband. And she says, you are good, I love you, which washes off me as though she had said the sky is blue. She strokes my head and I feel trapped; I stroke her and she purrs like a cat. What is this? I ask, nervous, frightened. Love, she says. Kiss me.

I am still so baffled. It is not as simple as the brains of rats. As a claw, a fang, a battlefield scarred with bodies. I want to possess, and be possessed.

One night she said to me, "I think men and women are two different species."

It was late. We were close, not quite touching. "Maybe soon," I said. "Not yet."

"It might be better." She yawned. "It would certainly be easier."

I took her hand and squeezed it. "That's why we cling so hard to one another."

She snuggled up to me. "We like it."

I sighed. "It's because we know someday we may not want to cling at all."

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**Michael Blumlein** wrote one of the most memorable stories *Interzone* has ever published - "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" (no. 7). He lives in San Francisco, where he is now starting work on a new novel.

# MUTANT POPCORN

FILM REVIEWS BY NICK LOWE

I will be frank and admit that Barry Longyear is not a name I would have expected to see written in lights. Only by a supreme act of self-denial could any sensitive reader forget the opening of the award-winning 1979 novella "Enemy Mine", which did so much for its emerging author's reputation:

The Dracon's three-fingered hands flexed. In the thing's yellow eyes I could read the desire to either have those fingers around a weapon or my throat. As I flexed my own fingers, I knew it read the same in my eyes.

"Irknaan!" the thing spat.

"You piece of Drac slime."

But here, seven years on, is **Enemy Mine**, a hugely expensive international production that arrives here at last an ominous year after its unhappy demise at the US box office. The significance of this event, which far outweighs the film's own merits, is simply this: *Enemy Mine* is the latest, and perhaps the last, in a vanishing line, the first picture in a decade to be based on a story from a science-fiction magazine. (Teaser for buffs: what was the last? Why doesn't *Re-Animator* count?)

Looking back at Longyear's novella, it's hard to see why this particular item should have been singled out from decades of low-circulation ephemera for hundreds of talented people to spend months of their lives and tens of millions of dollars turning it into an indifferent motion picture. Perhaps the answer lies in its very familiarity: an unconcealedly derivative hybrid of desert island yarn, *Roots* ripoff, and that old WW1 chestnut about the jingoistic Tommy and the lone Hun thrown together in no-man's-land to bury their enmities in the common need to survive. It's a difficult story to dislike, despite or even because of its artless pulp prose and bland liberal message; but though quite touching in a goofy sort of way, it's hardly the sort of material you can just point a camera at and make instant box-office history. And in fact the end product reworks the story with an insouciant freedom that clearly betrays a basic contempt for its source. It's not like *Dune*; it's not as if it's been read by more than a handful of spotty eccentrics, so nobody's going to clamour if you change the setting and substitute a nonsens-

ically different second half. Goodness knows I don't object to a little creative rehandling, but the screenplay of *Enemy Mine* shows so little awareness of the qualities that made the property worth acquiring in the first place that its failure seems almost guaranteed.

Well, out of the skies above desert planet Fyrine IV hurtle interstellar dogfighters Jeriba Shigan (Lou Gossett, Jr.) and Willis Davidge (Dennis Quaid, ugh), locked in the life-and-death combat of man against evil slimy lizard bent on universal domination. They crash together on the planet's bleak surface, inhabited only by radio-controlled tortoises and tentacles on strings, and necessity thrusts them into an uneasy mutual dependence that grows by degrees to conquer their xenophobic conditioning in a devoted, if soldierly, friendship. In due time Jerry (sic) has a happy event (no no, what are you *thinking*, he's hermaphroditic) and croaks, leaving Will uncle to a little bundle of reptilian joy called Zummy. Fans of V will already know that infant geckoids mature from gelatine-covered puppet to adolescent actor with gratifying speed, and soon Zummy is being kidnapped by space slavers and Will, rescued by the Terran navy, has to go back and find him. Can he succeed, with time, Brion James,

and the entire US spacefleet against him? Do chickens peck corn?

The basic problem is the gargling. True, the pace of the first half is draggy, the production designs uninspired, and Wolfgang Petersen's lumbering direction is if anything worse than in *The Neverending Story*. Longyear's tidewracked desert island (rejected as "too earthlike") has become a barren volcanic stormworld of singular visual uninterest whose locations are all too obviously filter shots of Lanzarote. But the point where the film's central ambitions fall down is the aliens. No matter how inventive and elastic the makeup, no matter how carefully Gossett tries to move and emote like a non-human, there's never any doubt that what we're watching is a black actor in a rubber suit, and that his eerie inhuman voice is simply that actor gargling. What can have been the emotions of Fox executives who sat through the first screening of the uplifting final scene, where Zummy is ceremonially received on his homeworld to a soundtrack of massed male-voice gargling? Did they grin a rictus smile and congratulate the producer with a handshake like fresh-caught mackerel? Did they retire each in awful silence to his office, to sit past midnight in a pool of desklight with locked spine, ashen face, and a bottle of Cutty Sark clutched in a death grip? I feel sorry for *Enemy Mine*, bravely trying to build a space adventure movie around a cast of two and a closely-observed emotional bond between members of alien species. But the final attempt is so flawed by compromise and sheer misjudgment that it might have been better not to try. The only way I can see the costs recouping would be by releasing a soundtrack single of Mr Gossett's gargling version of "The Midnight Special". Will we really still be



Louis Gossett & Dennis Quaid in 'Enemy Mine'



Daryl Hannah in 'Clan of the Cave Bear'

singing Creedence Clearwater in 2092? Only if 20th Century Fox take action now...

By contrast, the summer's other major fantasy screen adaptation has to contend with the biggest-selling sf novel of all time, though one little read or even acknowledged by genre readers. **The Clan of the Cave Bear** comes, of course, from Jean M. Auel's shaggy loincloth-ripper about a Cro-Magnon girl reared by a tribe of telepathic Neanderthals. Like "Enemy Mine", it's unashamedly recycled material: a shrewd confection of *The Inheritors* thrown together into the pot and boiled to a pulp with the timeless adolescent fantasy of the ugly duckling who grows up to be a swan. But unlike "Enemy Mine", it's a property whose integrity is jealously valued not only by its rich and protective author (and her lawyers) but by millions of devoted readers the world over. Not surprisingly, the screen treatment is slavishly respectful, with only modest telescoping of the sprawling plot and a discreetly improved ending. Even so, the proprietary Ms Auel (and her lawyers) are reportedly none too happy with the result. I can't imagine why, unless it's the occasional touches of quiet wit in John Sayles' script that hint perhaps too boldly at the fundamental silliness of the material.

Daryl Hannah (a rather obvious bit of casting) is the tall, blond, nordic Ayla growing up among the squat, swarthy, and clearly degenerate Clan people. It soon becomes evident she's a forerunner of the master race by reason of her superior arithmetic ability and dawning feminist consciousness, and we follow her progress through the usual cursus of Pleistocene life-crises as she masters hunting, medicine, and motherhood with equal and unsettling aptitude, to the indignation of the lowbrow chaps. At last the tension between her adoptive people and her own higher evolutionary destiny breaks out in open confrontation, and she strides off to seek her own kind in five projected sequels of escalating direness. (Out in the written world, she's only just found them in volume three, but mercifully nobody with a *sapiens sapiens* brain could conceive of filming the sequels.)

Simply as entertainment, this magnificent claptrap is hard to beat: a searing tale of strong, primitive emotions threaded cheerfully together by strong, primitive plotting. Sonorous bass rhythms boom out over dankly epic hillscares, and behind their walls of beeting makeup the support players ham up something rotten. Ms Hannah, with her incongruous preppy cheekbones and archly animalian performance, survives her role rather well,

and at a brisk 99 minutes the screenplay laudably resists the temptation to ponderous grandeurs of scale. Sublimely ridiculous, it's an immeasurable upgrade on the novel, and shameless enough to disarm suspicion of its dodgy anthropology and distasteful racial subtexts.

All the same, it's just as well the film interpretation opts for high risibility, because as a speculative drama on human origins it's just an embarrassment. To a point, tradition is to blame: scarcely anything of the complexities of postwar anthropology, palaeo- and social, has yet penetrated the Euro-American novel, and in English more-over there isn't an established subgenre of hominid fiction to compare with that in Eastern Europe. As a result, popular film and fiction is still wickedly inept at the epic presentation of tribal societies, past or present, and one of the major achievements of sf is to have offered a natural shelter for the very few creditable essays at hard anthropological fiction. Even so, the majority have dealt with cultural clash, frequently using a convenient outsider for viewpoint, rather than with the day-to-day unfamiliarities of life in a complex alien culture.

Now, on the face of it, *Clan of the Cave Bear* is groundbreaking stuff. Auel's Neanderthals are ugly, shit thick, and doomed to extinction, yet

as their story unfolds they invite our empathy and even our affection. But to achieve this the scenario burdens them with a modern-human protagonist, stupendous psionic abilities, and a linguistic articulacy capable of complex, abstract speechifying over whole pages at a time. Sayles and director Michael Chapman do what they can to minimise these absurdities, playing down the racial-memory gimmick and of necessity pruning the rhetoric. Following the novel's cue, dialogue (subtitled) is a combination of grunted substantives and gestural verbs; but the elaborate sign language has all too obviously been devised by an Amnesianist rather than a primatologist, and

you don't need to have sat through *Quest for Fire* to spot the difference. Communication, social and individual behaviour, even physical appearance have been quietly but ludicrously anachronised to make our tribal forebears more appealing. In short, these are tourist Neanderthals, colourful, photogenic, and sweetly primitive, and as anthropological of *Cave of the Cave Bear* is just another tourist movie, as insulting to the imagination as *Out of Africa* is insulting to history.

**T**wo pictures, then, that purport to take us under the skin of an alien culture, and only manage to reinforce in practice the racial partitions they

seek in principle to demolish. Why is the Terran spacefleet a century hence piloted by white American males? Why are the aliens played by negroids? Why should the enigmas of recent human ancestry be presented in the terms of a crude myth of Aryan supremacy? Science fiction may be no more than a form of semiological tourism, but at least the written genre has struggled hard of late to achieve a more sophisticated sense of the alien as alien. Cinema sf has a lot of catching up; far from advancing the dawn of universal fellowship, it's just another shot in the foot for Hollywood liberalism.

## NEWS

Winner of this year's British Science Fiction Award (presented by the British SF Association) for best short story was **David Langford**. His winning story, "Cube Root," appeared in *Interzone* 11. The winner in the novel category was **Brian Aldiss**, for his *Helliconia Winter* (Cape), and the year's best sf artist according to the membership of the BSFA is **Jim Burns**.

**Ian Watson's** "The People on the Precipice" (*IZ* 13) has been taken by Terry Carr for his next edition of *The Year's Best Science Fiction*. **Christopher Burns's** "John's Return to Liverpool" (*IZ* 10) may have come bottom in our last year's popularity poll (though we liked it!) but it has been selected by Karl Edward Wagner for his forthcoming *Year's Best Horror Stories*.

**Garry Kilworth** has sold his first "general fiction" novel to Bodley Head. It's called *Witchwater Country*,

and it should be out in the autumn of '86. He describes it as being about fantasy, rather than a work of fantasy in itself.

**Richard Kadrey**, who has written for *Interzone* in the past ("The Fire Catcher," *IZ* 12) and who has illustrated Pat Murphy's story in this issue, recently contacted us to say that Terry Carr has bought his novel *Metrophage* for publication as an Ace Science-Fiction Special.

**Neil Ferguson**, author of "The Monroe Doctrine" (*IZ* 6) and "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" (*IZ* 13), has a collection of short stories, *Bars of America*, due imminently from Hamish Hamilton. It's non-sf and priced at £9.95.

*Interzone: The 1st Anthology* is now out in its hardcover American edition (**St Martin's Press**, \$14.95). In its advance review of the book, *Publishers Weekly* said: "These tales reveal a political sophistication beyond that of most American science fiction and at their best — the Ballard, for instance —

a quality of writing rarely encountered."

Fresh from the Antipodes is a new fanzine called **Australian Science Fiction Review** (Second Series) Vol. 1 No. 1 March 1986. The Australians have always tended to produce fanzines of an admirable high seriousness (mixed with a little low humour), and this latest example looks as though it will maintain the tradition. *ASFRR* (Second Series) is edited by Jenny Blackford and others, and is available from GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Subscriptions cost 10 Australian dollars for six issues (\$12 US, or £5 UK).

Phil Stephenson-Payne of Leeds and Gordon Benson of Albuquerque, New Mexico, have got together over a distance of thousands of miles to produce an impressive series of amateur bibliographies of leading sf writers. They are calling themselves **Galactic Central Publications**, and they have already published bibliographies of Poul Anderson, Harry Harrison, Bob Shaw and several others. Prices range from 75 pence to £2.50. The sample to hand, a bibliography of John Wyndham, consists of 20 clearly laid out text pages plus a dozen pages of illustrations (reproductions of book jackets). The address to write to in the UK is 25A Coptgrove Road, Leeds, LS8 2SP.

Peter Lamborn Wilson (watch out for his story "The Fountain of Time" in a forthcoming *IZ*) is seeking unpublished stories more outrageous than even *Interzone* will print for an anthology which is to be published by **Semiotext(e)**. His collaborators in this venture are Rudy Rucker and Robert Anton Wilson. They are looking for "Hebephrenia SF All Meat SF Bad Brains SF Godgrope SF... a new jolt with a post-everything topspin." They envision "paying anything from \$50 to \$200 per acceptance." If you think your manuscript has got what it takes send it to Peter Lamborn Wilson, "SF Anthology," Semiotext(e), 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA.

# CONCEPT

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# Pat Murphy

## His Vegetable Wife

Fynn planted her with the tomatoes in the greenhouse on the first day of spring. The instructions on the package were similar to the instructions on any seed envelope. Vegetable Wife: prefers sandy soil, sunny conditions. Plant two inches deep after all danger of frost has passed. When seedling is two feet tall, transplant. Water frequently.

A week later, a fragile seedling sprouted in the plastic basin beside the tomatoes: two strong shoots that grew straight with little branching. The seedling grew quickly and when the shoots were two feet tall, Fynn transplanted the seedling to a sunny spot near the entrance to his living dome, where he would pass it on his way to the fields each day.

After transplanting the seedling, he stood beneath the green sky and surveyed his empire: a hastily assembled pre-fabricated living dome that marked the centre of his homestead; a greenhouse built of plexiglass slabs, tilted to catch the sun; and the fields, four fertile acres which he had tilled and planted himself. Most of the farm's tilled area was given over to cash crop: he was growing cimmeg, a plant that bore seeds valued for their flavour and medicinal properties. Row after row of dark green seedlings raised their pointed leaves to the pale sky.

Beyond the fields grew the tall grasses native to the planet, a vast expanse of swaying stalks. When the wind blew, the stalks shifted and moved and the grasses hissed. The soft sound of the wind in the grasses irritated Fynn; he thought it sounded like people whispering secrets. He had enjoyed hacking down the grass that had surrounded the living dome, churning its roots beneath the mechanical tiller, planting the straight rows of cimmeg.

Fynn was a square-jawed man with coarse brown hair and stubby, unimaginative fingers. He was a methodical man. He liked living alone, but he thought that a man should have a wife. He had chosen the seed carefully, selecting a hardy stock, bypassing the more delicate Vegetable Maiden and Vegetable Bride,

selecting a variety noted for its ability to thrive under any conditions.

The seedling grew quickly. The two shoots met and joined forming a thicker trunk. By the time the cimmeg was knee-high, the wife had reached the height of his shoulders, a pale green plant with broad soft leaves and a trunk covered with downy hairs. The sun rose earlier each morning, the cimmeg grew to waist high, filling the air with an exotic spicy scent, and the Vegetable Wife's stem thickened and darkened to olive green. The curves of her body began to emerge: swelling hips pinching in to form a thin waist; rounded breasts covered with fine pale down; a willowy neck supporting the rounded knob that would become her head. Each morning, Fynn checked the dampness of the soil around the seedling and peered through the leaves at the ripening trunk.

In late spring, he first saw her pubic hair, a dark triangle just above where the twin trunks joined to form her body. Hesitantly, he parted the leaves and reached into the dimness to stroke the new growth. The smell of her excited him: rich and earthy and warm, like the smell of the greenhouse. The wood was warm beneath the hair and it yielded slightly to his touch. He moved closer, moving his hands up to cup the breasts, running his thumbs over the unevenness that promised to become nipples. The rustle of the wind in her leaves made him look up.

She was watching him: dark eyes, a suggestion of a nose, a mouth that was little more than a slit, lips barely parted.

He backed away hastily, noticing only then that he had broken the stalks of several leaves when he stepped in to fondle the trunk. He touched the broken leaves guiltily, then reminded himself that she was only a plant, she felt no pain. Still he watered the wife generously that day, and when he went to work in the cimmeg fields, he hummed to himself so that he would not hear the grasses whispering.



The instructions had said that she would ripen at two months. Each morning, he checked on her progress, parting the leaves to admire the curves of her body, the willowy stalk of her neck, the fine bright gleam of her eyes. She had a full body and a softly rounded face. Though her eyes were open, her expression was that of a sleep-walker, an innocent young girl who wanders in the darkness unawares.

The expression excited him as much as her body, and sometimes he could not resist pushing close to her, running his hands along the gentle curve of her buttocks and back, stroking the fine dark hair that topped her head, still short like a little boy's hair, but growing, maturing like the rest of her.

It was late spring when he first felt her move under his touch. His hand was on her breast, and he felt her body shift as if she were trying to pull away. "Ah," he said with anticipation, "it won't be long." Her hand, which had formed recently from a thickened stalk, fluttered in the wind as if to push him away. He smiled, as she swayed in a puff of wind and her leaves rustled.

That afternoon, he brought a thick rope, looped it around her ankle, and knotted it carefully in place. Smiling at her angelic face, framed in dark hair, he spoke softly. "Can't have you running off. Not now that you're almost ripe." He tied the other end of the rope firmly to the frame of the dome, and after that he checked on her three times each day, rather than just once.

He cleaned the inside of the dome for the first time in months, washing the blankets of his bachelor bed, opening the windows to banish the mustiness. He could look out the open window and see her swaying in the breeze. Sometimes, she seemed to be struggling against the rope, and when she did that he checked the knots to make sure they were secure.

The cimmeg grew tall, its sharp glossy leaves catching the sunlight and glittering like obsidian blades. Her leaves withered and fell away, leaving her naked olive-green body exposed to the sun and to his gaze. He watched her carefully, returning from the fields several times each afternoon to check the knots.

**H**e woke one morning to find her crouched at the end of her tether, pulling at the knot with soft fingers that bled pale sap where the coarse rope had cut her. "Now, now," he said, "leave that alone." He squatted beside her in the dust and put his hand on her sun-warmed shoulder, thinking to reassure her. She turned her head toward him slowly, majestically, with the stately grace of a flower turning to face the sun. Her face was blank; her eyes, expressionless. When he tried to embrace her, she did not respond except to push at his shoulders weakly with her hands.

Excitement washed over him, and he pushed her back on the hard ground, his mouth seeking her breast where the rough nipple tasted like vanilla, his hand parting her legs to open the mysteries of that dark downy triangle of hair.

When he was done, she was crying softly, a high faint sound like the singing of the small birds that nested in the tall grass. The sound woke compassion in him. He rolled off her and buttoned his pants, wishing that he could have been less hasty.

She lay in the dust, her dark hair falling to hide her face. She was silent, and he could hear the wind in her hair, like the wind in the tall grass.

"Come now," he said, torn between sympathy and annoyance. "You are my wife. It can't be that bad."

She did not look at him.

He cupped her chin in one hand and tilted her head so that he could see her expression. Her face was serene, expressionless, blank. He patted her shoulder, reassured by her expression. He knew she felt no pain; the instructions had said so.

He untied the rope from the frame of the dome and brought her inside. By the window, he set a basin of water for her. He secured the rope to the leg of the bed, leaving the tether long enough so that she could stand in the window or the doorway and watch him work in the fields.

She was not quite what he expected in a wife. She did not understand language. She did not speak language. She paid little attention to him unless he forced her to look at him, to see him. He tried being pleasant to her — bringing her flowers from the fields and refilling her basin with cool clean water. She took no notice. Day and night, she stood in the window, her feet in the basin of water. According to the instructions, she took her nourishment from the sun and the air and the water that she absorbed through pores in her skin.

She seemed to react only to violence, to immediate threats. When he made love to her, she struggled to escape, and sometimes she cried, a wordless sound like the babble of the irrigation water flowing in a ditch. After a time, her crying came to excite him — any response was better than no response.

She would not sleep with him. If he dragged her to bed, she would struggle free in the night, and when he woke she was always at the window, gazing out at the world.

He beat her one afternoon, when he returned from the fields and caught her sawing at the rope with a kitchen knife. He struck her on the back and shoulders with his belt. Her cries and the sight of the pale sap excited him and he made love to her afterwards. The rough blankets of his bed were sticky with her sap and his sperm.

He kept her as a man keeps a Vegetable Wife, as a man keeps a wild thing that he has taken into his home. Sometimes, he sat in the dome and watched darkness creep over his homestead as he listened to the wind in the grasses. He watched his Vegetable Wife and brooded about all the women who had ever left him. It was a long list, starting with his mother, who had given him up for adoption.

One day, a government agent came in a copter to inspect the cimmeg fields. Fynn did not like the man. Though Fynn directed his attention to the cimmeg, the government agent kept glancing toward the dome. The wife stood in the window, her naked skin glistening in the sun, smooth and clear and inviting. "You have good taste," said the agent, a young man dressed in khaki and leather. "Your wife is beautiful."

Fynn kept his temper with an effort.

"They're quite sensitive, I hear," said the young man.

Fynn shrugged.

The apple tree that he had planted near the dome entrance bore fruit: a basketful of small hard green apples. Fynn had crushed them into a mash and fermented a kind of applejack, a potent liquor smelling of rotten apples. Late in the afternoon after the agent had left, he sat beneath the apple tree and drank until he could barely stand. Then he went to his wife and dragged her away from the window.

Fynn whipped his wife for flaunting her nakedness. He called her a tramp, a whore, a filthy prostitute. Though the sap flowed from the welts on her back, her eyes were dry. She did not fight back, and her passivity inflamed him. "Goddamn you!" he cried, striking her repeatedly. "Goddamn you."

He grew tired and his blows grew softer, but his fury was not abated. She turned on the bed to face him, and his hands found her throat. He pressed on her soft skin, thinking somehow, in the confusion of drunkenness, that strangling her would somehow stop the whispers that he heard, the secrets that were everywhere.

She watched him, impassive. Since she absorbed air through the skin, the pressure at her throat did not disturb her. Nevertheless, she lifted her hands and put them to his throat, applying slow steady pressure. He struggled drunkenly, but she clung to him until his struggles stopped.

He was quiet at last, quiet like a plant, quiet like a tree, like the grasses outside. She groped in his pocket and found a jack-knife. With it, she cut away the rope that bound her. The skin of her ankle was scarred and hardened where the rope had rubbed her.

She stood in the window, waiting for the sun. When it warmed the earth, she would plant the man, as she had seen him plant seeds. She would stand with her ankles in the mud and the wind in her hair and she would see what grew.

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**Pat Murphy**, who lives in San Francisco, is the author of a novel, *The Shadow Hunter* (1982), and has had many short stories published in *Amazing*, *Asimov's Galaxy*, *Universe* and elsewhere. Her second novel, *The Falling Woman*, is forthcoming from Tor Books in October 1986.

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STOP PRESS: *Interzone* has been nominated for a Hugo Award, the result to be decided by the members of the World Science Fiction Convention in August of this year. We are one of a shortlist of five in the category of "Best Semi-Pro Magazine" (oddly enough, there is no category of best professional magazine), and the other contenders are all American: *Fantasy Review*, *Locus*, *SF Chronicle* and *SF Review*. May the best mag win.

# Josephine Saxton

## The Cup is the Wine

He was nothing, again. All the best bits of him had been squashed, cut off, or discounted as irrelevant.

Brains malfunctioning, using themselves up on involuted reasoning, to justify his own state and condemn hers; heart stopped and then speeded up, the carburettor intermittently blocked by the effluvia of pain recently past; bowels churned and then ripped out ("You are nothing but a load of shit like everyone else" or "You are such a hollow man"); cock about as useful (much he cared) as the tassel on the window blind which he could not resist batting every time he passed by, with the inevitable result that it fell to rest, a victim of some law about diminishing momentum. His balls had tried to retract into a safety zone, but a grasping female claw had got a grip on them, too, being faster than they. The marks were still there, he felt; criss cross.

He was tiny, puny, weak; a nonentity, a failure. Any moment now, someone merely normal would come along and kick sand in his face. He covered his eyes in anticipation. He pressed his eyelids to dam tears. He set all his muscles, as if at an expected blow (talk, curse you, talk!), always threatened, never landing.

He took a look around at the landscape that he had just entered – a shabby shore to the south of a rising cliff turned with its face from him – dotted with plastic flotsam, plants without hope, and one dead fish. Then he looked away again. He seemed to stand aside from himself and take a good look. Disgusted, he turned away. Where could one go?

Today would be his last day for feeling like this. He would never see her again. He need never return to their mutual territory. She could keep his few lousy possessions, he did not need the things of this world. It was females who collected junk, like insane jack-daws. He needed – nothing. Nothing can only need nothing. She was monstrously unfair, always self-regarding, always complaining about illness and depression, never aware that he had troubles, too.

And they quarrelled like demons, sometimes. He could do without all that.

He shambled up from the shore amongst sandhills, towards some scrubby grass track kind of place that was about a mile from the head of the cliff. The air would be clearer up there, and he would be able to look out to sea. Contemplating landscapes was his thing; one could always return to it, and be refreshed.

He was putting far more energy into the walk than was necessary, trying to impress himself. He had a great deal of self-awareness and could catch himself out like that. He slowed, steadying something in his chest, just underneath his heart. It took a lot of effort. He did not feel like himself. He felt very odd.

He ought to come out here more often, not after the holocausts, but instead. But, being so reduced like this made everything seem a great deal harder. That was what women could do to men. Make it impossible for them to live.

He sat, or fell down, into a hollow, and with some fumbling managed to get a cigarette lighted. After a couple of puffs he said aloud: "I think I'll give up smoking. I don't know why I do it." He almost threw the cigarette away, to demonstrate to himself that he could make a resolution and carry it through, but thought it unnecessarily dramatic. People who dramatized situations always made them a great deal worse. She did that, all the time.

He got up and looked around once more. It did not interest him, it hardly registered. He felt numbed and dulled, like the inside of a mouth with a row of bloody holes recently vacated. Soon perhaps he would ache again. Now, he was half dead. He began to make a gesture of hopelessness and despair, but curtailed it, sneering at himself. He felt foolish.

"What the Hell am I doing in this lonely place?" he yelled. No reply. A seagull had not understood. He tramped on and up again, shuddering with the effort.

She had called him a disoriented rabbit. Soon, a great black dog would come lolloping down from the

dune and grab him in its monstrous jaws. Toss him up, catch him; chomp, swallow, gone. He welcomed that experience. He was nothing but a tired, fuddled rabbit, the victim of a universal myxomatosis, spread amongst Mankind to ruin it – the secret weapon of the dark Gods, otherwise known as Woman.

He was not worth keeping, like this. He played no worthy or meaningful part in any cycle. Null and void: finished.

But just stop those dramatics, boy! This is just how she likes to get you – self-denigrating, self-castigating. Oh no!

**N**ear the top of the rise, before the turn towards the cliff, he saw a dead tree. Its bark was stripped, the wood starkly whitened by salt gales and its two remaining arms lifted in supplication, out sideways like an optimistic 'T'. He stood and stared at it for a while, then turned and stepped backwards, sat at its base.

"A great bloody big cleft stick," he said, grinning numbly. It was true. He did have a dilemma.

Sit and meditate for a while. Get calm, if possible. He leaned back against the tree, looking towards the flat ocean out and below. Pressed harder into the wood, and closed his eyes.

"She's a mad bitch, that's all. I don't have to take all that." Comforted by his animosity, he began to relax a bit. When he was quieter, he could hear the ocean reassuring him softly, with every third breath he exhaled.

"There has to be something better than all this," he dreamed, all the familiar thoughts coming easily, as on tape.

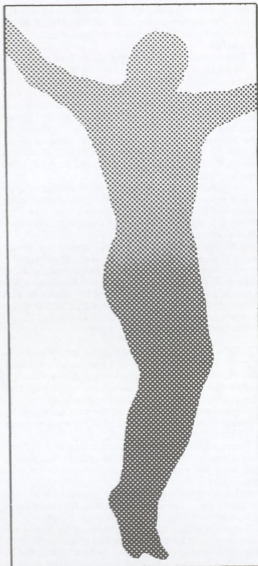
All his life, he had felt a poignant longing for something that was out of this world. He had made certain moves towards reaching this something, but had not found himself satisfied. He wanted something beyond the flesh, beyond mere phenomena.

Drugs, drink, yoga, religion; none of these had supplied what he desired. Something beyond the flesh, beyond – sex, too. His head remembered that sex could reach out to this state of being so impossible of definition, but his heart, acrid with hate and humiliation, knew that it was not what he wanted. Sex, women, all that, led to states like this. Totally the opposite of what he desired. Something other, something beyond, something more.

And love, that was just a word, a catch-phrase. Meaningless. Everything, a lot of the time, was so very much lacking in meaning.

There had to be something else, beyond this thing that he was, this bag of bones and blood. There had to be. And yet, he did not believe in God, in a life beyond death, in other worlds of the spirit, in mystical experiences. He found it impossible to distinguish between psychotic delusion and the descriptions of mystical experiences that he had read. It was all so much chemistry; wrong use of the perceptions, fallacious conclusions based on inexperienced observation by people with too small an experience of certain physical states. All that stuff, he did not believe. He did not believe – anything.

"Here I am, a man, clothed in garments, at the foot of a dead tree, near an ocean on a planet, in the Solar system in the Milky Way in the Universe which has



Illustrated by D. West

no end and no beginning."

Since he was a child he had got caught up in circular thoughts of this kind, approaching some great mystery.

Sometimes, he felt as if something in his head, something just behind his eyes, would snap open and he would see something totally different, or see the whole Universe in a new way; the scales would fall – oh shit! He could also go mad and die in blackness.

One or the other was equally desirable, it did not matter to him, did it? A nothing guy like he was, there could be no doubt of it, she had pronounced.

*Mad bitch!*

Action was what was needed. Like in Sartre, man without action was nothing. Action caused being. But, he was impotent, inert, could do nothing. Action caused being. Anything he could think of to do, or to say, or to think, was without meaning. It had no reference to anything he cared about, anything real. He

thirsted after a genuine change of consciousness, the kind of thing that women did not understand about. He needed meaning. She did not need meaning. She had said so.

"We are meaning. The here and now is all we have."

He had rounded on her like a kicked lion, snarling about platitudinous crap, women who mouthed off without knowing what they were talking about, anybody could read a few pages of Watts on Buddhism and mouth off like that, it sounded good! He had insulted her by saying that men were the dreamers, the thinkers and inventors, the real creators of the system, and women were there to be used, so that the search could continue; they provided support, comfort, and children.

He could see her silent face full of pitying despair of him now, and then see it break out into that cackling chatter of derision, turn into harsh sound like high crows. It broke into his peaceful, thoughtful, regenerative, afternoon.

Someday perhaps, she would come to her senses and see more clearly – as clearly as any female could, bearing in mind their inferior mental equipment, of course, how it really all was. Or did he mean, when he thought of her being healed of her madness, that she might someday begin to agree with him? Whatever he meant, he would not be around to witness it.

Enough was enough.

**H**e was suspended in the tree before he knew where he was. He had gone round the back of it where the ground was higher, and found, as something in him had known he would find, that it was possible with very little effort to lever his body up into the wide fork between the two arms, and by exerting pressure with the backs of his arms, to hang, at awkward rest.

There was confusion in him as to why he had done this. Usually, thought preceded action. This time it had been the other way around, and here he was, wondering – why?

It felt good to be up here. He wondered how long he could stay. The view was better. He could see a long way out to the horizon. He stayed there.

His arms began to ache. Perhaps if he had some kind of support for his feet? He looked around, straining. There were no convenient rocks which might be moved. If he was somehow fastened to the arms of the tree. He considered what things he had which would be suitable to tie around his wrists and the stout branches. His neck-scarf and his leather belt. He thought around how to get them off, and to tie them, but it would be too difficult.

A breeze sprang up, at the beginning of the sunset. His arms hurt more and more, the elbows bent back against themselves, in a dreadful cramp. His shoulders creaked, his neck muscles hardened. His stomach knotted up, pressed into the uneven wood.

But, he was beginning to feel strong again. He was more his normal size. He was his real height, his real breadth. His inner torment felt eased, his mind calmer. And then it came to him, what he was doing, and why. It almost caused him to let go suddenly, this shameful realization. He had found himself enacting one of her theories. Symbolic action as a healing force. He had called it a load of bollocks. And

here he was, next door to a martyrdom freak.

Well, enough really was enough.

Down on the ground again, he experienced worse pain as his bruised flesh came to life.

"Not my scene at all, that kind of thing. Whatever in God's name came over me?" He was ashamed. Amused, of course. Symbollocks crucifixion, eh?" Go down to the town for a meal out, more like, and maybe have a couple of drinks. Make plans for the future. Without her. He was catching her madness. It was contagious, there was no doubt of that.

And yet, there was some other factor that he did not want to think about. Something else, that perhaps she had said. He felt too dissolved, too separated from himself to formulate exactly what.

"What and who is she anyway? Just a bag of bones and blood like me. There's nothing special. If she doesn't want to reach out for the stars, for other worlds, for greater existences beyond the flesh, that's her business. If that's how she wants to be.

"Women drag a man down. She's just raw material for the worn-out hag that she will become. Food for worms and roses.

"Just who does she think she is?"

**T**he woman walked slowly; seven steps to the right, slightly uphill, and seven steps to the left, slightly uphill. She almost crouched, maintaining her balance by rhythmical swaying, putting her legs out to the side as she walked, as if in a slow dance. Everything coming into her line of sight caused a slight difference to her path; a stone too large to step upon without stumbling made her take an extra large stride, or to sway herself slightly off course. Every such minor obstacle she hated, and expressed this hate with a resentful hiss.

The air was clear of everything except invisible shouting birds which occasionally swooped upwards as she approached their territory in the heather. Once, a hare leapt startled and charged away uphill, going first to the left and then to the right, very rapidly.

"What's the hurry?" she breathed after it, tired. Then she found a dry hollow with a flat rock in it, and here she sat, to regain her wind. She took out a box from her pocket, and from another pocket a box of matches, and having to use four matches, lit a small cigar. She fingered her scarf which was a scrap of pure silk which she loved to touch. Her hair blew across her face several times, and she swept it behind her ears repeatedly, cursing. She lay back in the hollow, stirring herself around to get comfortable, closed her eyes and lay there, feeling how it was to lie there just being herself.

More than anything else, she was aware of a desire for orgasm. It nagged and ground away at her, like a pain. At the same time, she was not really sexually aroused, because every time the idea of how to satisfy her desires rose in her mind, it was accompanied by revulsion, and an offended anger. There were other states that the body could be in, the body could be in a million different states. But always at some point she was to return to this, the nadir, the lowest, the worst. Her soul keened for deliverance, but there was no life for the soul in a muck-heap like this. Depression, deprivation, these made the body begin to die, and therefore the spirit, that within the soul within

the body, that which was the body, the essence of life ...but she heard herself going on explaining and knew that it would make no difference. When she was down, way down, there was no strength in her to get up again, and he would not help for he only loved her when she was beautiful, energetic, positive, and healthy. When she was all those things, dammit, anyone could love her. It was now, now that she needed love. Now that he had half killed her with neglect. Something inside her gut was rotting, and seemed to poison her all through, tasting and smelling horrible. She had called this taste metallic, and yet it was like orange zest, or cow-dung, or kidneys left a day too long raw thawing. It was foul. She could do nothing about it, it was inside her and she could not get at it. Diet, exercise, aperients, nothing helped. The smell and taste was like a horrible ghost haunting her flesh. It was the prime smell of depression and rejection. When she had been young, she had a pair of knees which tasted of fresh salt, hair that smelled of *Amami*, and fingers delightful with sharp apple and fruit gums. But her body had changed in all respects as it grew older, as if it was approaching the conditions of death before her last day. She felt like a slug which must leave a mark wherever it crawls.

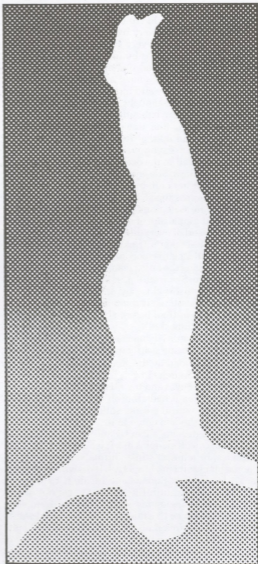
She was driven to meditate upon herself, she could feel nothing but misery at how she was, and compare with how she had been. Not long ago, it seemed, she had been radiantly healthy, clean and young. Now her various humours suggested alchemical evil. Her throat invented strange ejections of foul colours, rarely but horribly streaked with bloody bubbles. Sometimes there were weird yellow dyes that might have been particles from polluted air, carefully saved for some anti-Christmas occasion. Her nose sent interesting gifts of opalescent or aqueous crystal, or lace mats of ecru.

Her ears were slow, weeks would pass and nothing would happen. But then they would itch, and she might dig with a conveniently narrow fingernail and mine a little lump of something a bee might use; but who would be a bee for it smelled vile.

Her eyes were always active and easily produced large puddles of salt water clear and plentiful to wash out dust and tiny flies and sad feelings. A flick of tongue sideways like a *Noh* hero showing anguish and a tear would taste pleasant, but make her thirsty. Sometimes the corners of her eyes would make beads which would have to be unstrung; she worried lest people should see, so often wiped her eyes.

Her mouth was not dependable, sometimes it was too wet and sometimes it dried altogether like a bridesmaid's dress she once left by the fire – hot pink velvet. Her tongue was an ideal environment for strange mosses, white or yellow or even black. Her mouth was a biological Howard Johnson's, and she liked none of the flavours. Sometimes she retaliated with clove-scented sprays, coruscating mouthwashes, but this caused not bactericide but mutation into ever-new monsters.

Her skin played strange tricks on her. Sometimes it was itchy and flaky and dry and gathered itself into roseate islands of anger, as if this might be several safety valves for the rest of her. She wondered if it was Saint's Disease, that product of guilt which will break out even at the thought of broken vows. She



was driven to wallow in water and stand in draughts to cool herself. Conversely she sometimes ran with sweat all prickling and the agent of various odours. She could have detected her various moods by her scents. Ill temper smelled of stale garlic, happiness like rosemary, despair like steel, sex like catspaws and hunger like hot wheat. Every pore on her body had something to offer.

Her bowels were a factory for many strange substances, from little pellets more suitable to a rhinoceros to floods of swamp-bilge which made her think of cancer. But when she was normal she forgot about that, rejoicing. Her bladder reflected her too, with poisons unknown to medical science. She could receive messages from urine, poring over it like a shaman; a certain horrendous odour, a cloud of white particles, and she knew that next day she would feel better and something good would happen.

Her womb possessed her more than anything. On time, usually, it would clutch itself dramatically and let go a flood of her very own blood. Like a Master Painter it had mixed every shade of red from palest rose to carnelian and ruby to blackest dark like the humours of a wounded demon, eruptions from a snail-toothed mouth. Once, a lump as large as an orange had suddenly slid forth onto a newly-washed floor, and she had thought she heard the wail of a soul seeking a new habitation, but it had only been herself, keening. She dragged herself upright and staggered on and up the slope. Not far, now.

At the top of what appeared to be a hill was a five-hundred foot fall to the ocean: straight, glassy down, sheer as stockings. She lay out flat, head over the edge, tickled under her chin by little starry flowers.

Looking across the slatey plain towards the frilled horizon white as napkins, she sought her far reflection in the ringing amalgam of mercury and gold, dark and deep to the end of everything. It shifted and wavered, like a movie-maker's trick: soon, some handsome bastard would clatter coconut-shell clear up to her screen, smoking the only cigarette that can be stubbed out anywhere. She would pass him, as she sped flying head first, whistle close by and grab the offensive weed in her teeth, wait the moment when it would sizzle, a mite of time before she rang the gong with her lotus-opening skull.

Flooding down, as if someone enormous had emptied interior claret, came scarlet light. She tipped back her head to be blinded by the sun as it too flung itself to death, slowly, much slower, because it was so big.

She shut her eyes and travelled back in time to after breakfast, when it had all been desperate, a problem to be solved with the same solution, conclusion, as always, and she had come to it.

"I hate it in here. I can't stand it any longer. My body hates me. It cripples me, it won't work, it twists, it tickles, it itches, it stinks, it rots, it erupts, eruets, floods, blocks, it isn't attractive, it draws contempt to me, it is a traitor. Somewhere inside it I am young and fresh and beautiful if I can only get out of this caul which strangles my soul." So, simply to slide forward unnoticed like Injuns off this cliff, that would free her, to fly free and cool, unhampered by pain, longing, irritation, the fact of not being able to fly or dance for a week, or to sleep at the word "go." Slithering sideways silver into finer and finer modes of existence she would become smoke and atoms and light, peace at last as an imperceptible vibration.

**W**hen she got home, she lay so tired, upon their empty bed, and wrote a poem.  
*The wine is the cup.  
Today, I  
Failed to kill myself for the  
Seventeenth time.  
The cup is the wine.*

She put it where she knew he would look, and fell then into black sleep, grateful for the inescapable fact of day and night.

He came in, stomping about the job of struggling out of his clothes, taking a shower, deliberately not shaving because she hated scratchy chins and then shaving because he hated them, too. He thought: all that symbolic stuff, who needs it? His muscles were

toned up with pride, ready to fight anybody. Bitterness lent strength.

He saw the poem. Somebody snarled silently like a Metro-Goldwyn lion with laryngitis. Crazy poetry! Cryptogram of a disordered mind! He fished around in a dusty cut-glass dish for a pencil stub, and took her sacred offering (she often burned her poems, saying that the message would reach whoever needed it in the smoke), and managed to mark out in reply: "Better luck next time." Then he flung himself down beside her into a dark pit of feathers.

The time he woke was not on the clock. It was dark, late, and frequented only by himself. He had been here often. This was the hour of the insistent hard-on. He cursed it, regretted it, avoided it mentally, but it was stronger than that. A real one. So here he was, a naked man with demanding flesh, on a planet, in the Solar system in the...

No! He was leaving her. He turned away from her.

**S**he woke in a nimbus of white light in the black room and knew that she was going to make it again. It was wonderful to be woken like this where bodies were miracles, every cell replaced at death by a new, innocent cell. He spoke to her.

"You feel like melting honey. You smell good." She knew it was true.

"Your skin is giving off that vibration. I can feel it."

One day, he thought, she would kill herself, maybe. One day perhaps he would really leave. But all that was irrelevant. Because here he was in the scents and sounds of consuming and regeneration: air, fire, water, earth. Earth above, solid, a vortex taking him through to the other side where the light would be. But not just yet.

She thought, before she stopped thinking: this is the change of consciousness that makes sense. Everything about me and the world feels quite different. My body is not a trap for a wounded soul. My body is my soul. Had he understood the poem? Probably not, her poems were not much good. He realized things for himself. How could he not know that a mystical experience is the same thing as a physical experience, if he felt anything like she felt now.

They exchanged all manner of particles where they touched, transformed each other's chemistry. Everything was transformed. Free as air, but not escaped, for there was nothing to escape. At the end there would be death, until then she was a living soul. The cup is the wine.

In the morning, there were words spoken, things meant to soothe and heal but it was all unnecessary. She spared a thought for the next time that everything would go violently horribly wrong. But for the time being, things were normal.

In the morning light, as he was dressing, she wondered what had caused some bad bruises on his arms and back.

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Josephine Saxton wrote "No Coward Soul" (*Interzone* 3). She has been a published writer of sf and fantasy for more than 20 years, and her recent collection, *The Power of Time*, is reviewed in this issue of IZ. She has several more books due for publication in the coming year.



# IAIN BANKS

## Interviewed by Kim Newman

### What made you want to be a writer when you grew up?

It seemed a good idea at the time. I always enjoyed writing stupid wee stories when I was a kid. If you had a choice in essay questions, one where you could write about what you did in your Summer holidays and one where you could write "a story starting with the following sentence" I'd always go for the fiction one. I always found it much easier to write fiction than to dredge up the past and put it down accurately. I just went on from there. After I stopped wanting to be A Scientist – I didn't want to specialize, but to be A Scientist: they seemed to be the most important people around – I decided if I was going to get paid for anything I enjoyed doing, writing might be the thing. There was no sudden cry of "ah, I know what I'm going to be, not an engine driver after all!" It was a very gradual process. I sort of grew into it: rather, it grew into me, like a toenail.

### What's all this nonsense about wanting to write science fiction?

I've got an sf book tentatively scheduled to come out in November. It's called *Consider Phlebus* – a very arty title. It's from "The Waste Land." It's an old-fashioned sf space opera. A little more thoughtful, but with tinges of what Aldis described as "wide-screen baroque." A bit grittier, perhaps, but unashamedly full of fast spaceships and wonderful weapons. It's told from a fairly mundane level, from the point of view of, not a soldier exactly, but someone toting a gun. It's a radical version of *Starship Troopers*. Well, it's better than that, I hope, but it's frankly about hardware. It takes very old fashioned precepts. It does have faster than light travel, it has got ray guns, lasers, whatever. No tentacles, but three-legged aliens.

One of the things I was trying to get in, one of the things you don't have in most science-fiction novels about fighting, is the sheer amount of luck – often very bad luck – involved in real warfare, in real life. One of the things that used to annoy me a lot about stories like *Dune* is that everyone thinks the same way. It's just like a chess game. Everyone knows what they're doing. It's the way people think in terms of, you know, the Soviets are

very cunning, the Pentagon knows what they're doing, Bull-shit. It's only thirty-four years later you find out they not only didn't know what the other side was doing, they didn't know what their own side was doing.

So much of war is an awful lot of chance. Whether it works, I don't know, because all this is second hand. I've never had a shot fired at me. To me, it seems to read more realistically than most sf written in that form. If you do imagine these wonderful weapons, you should think of the things that can go wrong with them. It was envisioned as a novel that went from action sequence to action sequence, but it bloated on the way and became more complex, philosophical. It's a hard-sell approach I'm taking here.

A problem with science fiction is trying to find something important enough to hold the reader without making it too important. You know, life as we know it. It's the problem with science fiction not being able to rely on the characters. It's all in the technology. If you're going to have technology you might as well have the biggest technology, if you're going to have problems and conceptual breakthroughs, they might as well be the biggest, the best. It's a bit adolescent, a bit silly. It's yet another thing I'm going to try and correct in this story. The genre bloody well ought to be out of short trousers by now. Of course a lot of people will use me writing science fiction as a way to catch me out. "Ah-hah, we knew it was rubbish all along..."

**Both your novels so far, THE WASP FACTORY and WALKING ON GLASS, have had a lot of games-playing elements...**

I'm a sucker for games and puzzles. It's something adults tend to carry on from their childhood, but just try to disguise more. From obvious things like the Dad buying his son the train set and then spending all the time playing with it himself. That was the thing I was trying to bring out in *The Wasp Factory* – I don't think entirely successfully – the whole thing was to try and make Frank a type of symbol for the military establishment. One of the best banners I ever saw was from the Greenham Common women: "Take the Toys from the Boys." That's exactly the

level it's on. Just because they're spending megabucks to destroy the world doesn't mean they're not essentially little kids at heart. Little kids can be extremely destructive and vindictive and total bastards a lot of the time. But it's something to worry about when you've got that much power.

At the same time, I think there's too much pressure on kids today to grow up very, very fast. You don't get the chance to go through childhood and exhaust the possibilities of play before you become an adult. The result of that is that instead of making any sort of reasonable break between the two states you end up with the childish things coming out in adulthood because they've never been exorcised. It would be possible to imagine a society in which this was done almost deliberately, but that would be a mistake as well, to deliberately exclude the child from the adult, to make a clean break. You have some sort of manhood ceremony where you go into the woods and rape the bear and kill the squaw. That's going too far, but we're too far the other way. People with power and money tend to – almost literally, ha-ha – play with themselves.

One time, some friends and I were walking up a hill in Scotland, and we started saying "we're approaching the summit of Hill 417." We started playing soldiers. We were all about 25. We picked up these branches and developed this great game of soldiers shooting at each other. It was better than when you played it as a kid, because you were honest. When you got shot, you really fell down. It was quite a reasonable sort of game. I thought this was crazy. In Scotland, we could have been legally married and parents for about nine years. I was thinking it would be quite unusual if we'd stumbled across some kids of about nine or ten and they were all sort of sitting there fiddling about in each other's underpants or smoking. Adult games. Now, they have all these fat stock-brokers firing paint pellets at each other. They sound like total bastards. The sort of guys I'd love to put a real bullet through, the people who are going to make lots and lots of money out of the big bang. They're not just there for the fun of it, but to prove they're real men as well as bears of the

stockbroker belt...dearie me.

**Are there any themes you feel you're working out in your books?**

Well, in each of my books, I've managed to mention McEwan's export. Maybe I should write to Scottish Newcastle breweries and ask for some sort of consultancy fee, or a bribe or something...but maybe they'd ask me for money, so I'll scrub that. I'm trying to write the books I'd want to read. If I was doing something else, I'd still like to read the kind of stuff I'm writing. Actually, I'd like to read rather better stuff, but it's worth a try. It's a bit of a cliché now, even the cliché has become a cliché, but, you know, the Hampstead novel...zzzz...sound of author going to sleep. There doesn't seem to be a lot of stuff around that makes sense. It comes to something when something as surreal as *The Young Ones* comes to seem more like reality than a conventional sit-com. I've lived in flats not much different. I suppose it's a very sad statement on the moribund state of the BBC's light entertainment department. But that's their problem.

I'd like to write something that had the politics as an immediate subject. I've vague plans for the fourth book perhaps being a political novel. I've got some research to do on supertankers and Japan and the Panama Canal. Apart from that, it'd just be a breeze. But it'll definitely be quite overtly political on the side of the good guys. I was never very radical at university, but after I left I shifted in a fairly sinister direction and I remain set in that course. One of the few good things about the Rightward shift – clutching at straws here – is that it's shown who was Left because it was fashionable, who's a total bastard. It's flushed the rats out a bit. It's very much a backward ripple on a tidal wave though.

**Your characters are fairly quick to resort to violence. Does this connect with your McEwan's Export vision of the Scots character?**

Ya bastard...this tape is now finished...khhh, khh-ghhp-rgrgh...

**How am I supposed to transliterate that?**

Ya cannae. Brackets – sound of interviewer being hit by interviewee. We do not resort to violence, Jimmie, take that – whack! – now it's back to the bourgeois voice. There's a fair amount of violence in the books, not disproportionate I hope. I'm not a violent person. I don't hit people. I can't remember the last time I hit anyone. It was a school fight or something. Very half-hearted. I'm mild-mannered Jain Banks. The violence is in the books, it's not in me. It's looking at the world – I hope this doesn't sound too pretentious – and seeing what's there. There's no point in trying to make light of it. It's what's around me. I'm lucky I've had a very sheltered upbringing in some ways.

I've never had to go into the army, no wars have ever impinged themselves on me or most of my generation. That's why people can believe that the Bomb has held the peace. In fact, there's been thirty million people killed since 1945. That's a pretty big war. Unless you deliberately choose to forget about it – buy the Sun, watch *East-Enders* – you can't pretend it's not there.

You can only write about reality. Violence is a very large part of reality. Not as it directly affects us, but it's there indirectly. It's there inside me in a very deep sense. It's something I could perhaps be capable of, but it's certainly not something I'd resort to or have resorted to. I'm fairly well-bred and under control. I do make violence funny sometimes. That's a tricky operation. You should laugh at it first and then feel the horror, not laugh at it and forget it. I wait in fear and trembling for someone to dig up the case of some kid who tortures rabbits because he read it in a book – heh heh heh heh – called *The Wasp Factory*. Almost always the violence in books is mild compared to the things people really do. If you look at the case that *Psycho* is based on, it was really disgusting. The guy was actually skinning these women and he used to dress in their skins. You couldn't do that in a book. Not back then, at least. People don't need these little prompts, they're quite capable of coming up with it themselves. It's one of the few levels where the apparently cretinous have untold reserves of imagination. Blockhead prison guards in Greece and Chile and Argentina and Iran and the SS used to come up with wonderfully imaginative, ingenious tortures. It's a funny old world isn't it.

The worst bit in *The Wasp Factory* wasn't made up, it was real – the kid with the maggots in his brain – it was told to me as a nursing horror story. It's supposed to have happened to some nurse in Glasgow. Maybe somebody else made it up, but it was told to me as a true story. It might have been embellished. It just happened to fit my purposes. Even that wasn't used completely gratuitously, it was there for a purpose. That's my defence and I'm sticking to it.

**In the paperback of THE WASP FACTORY, you quote a lot of your reviews, including the murderously bad ones.**

Oh yes, I think that's funny. "A piece of writing that soars to the level of mediocrity" from the *Times*. That was the best of the lot. It was the most stupid thing that was said about it. I don't care if you call the book evil, nasty, vicious, anything else. But it's not mediocre. His final word was "rubbish." I read it doubled up with laughter. It was a guy called Andrew Gimson. My editor looked him up and looked into his filing cabinet and came up with a bit of paper. It was a rejection

letter to Andrew Gimson, rejecting this book of his. That was mildly amusing, but I took it that the guy was doing quite an honest review and you can't hold that against him. Then I found out what his day job was...where he worked...heh heh heh...The Conservative Party Central Office. So I went "yeahhh!" I didn't want a good review from those bastards. It was just priceless. Hee hee hee. It really made my day.

---

Jain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and *Walking on Glass* (1985) are published in Britain by Macmillan, and Futura Publishing. The *Irish Times* described *The Wasp Factory* as "a work of unparalleled depravity." On the other hand, the *Financial Times* called it "a Gothic horror story of quite exceptional quality...an outstandingly good read."

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# Shirley Weinland

## The Final Episode

**“E**mma, love, did you get all the cues you need to do your special effects magic?”  
“Yes, Julian.” When Julian directs, he takes the task seriously. And that includes trying to figure out why I’m still here if I have what I need from the actors’ walk-through.

I’m waiting for the producer to come and tell us our show’s cancelled. After eight years, the actors who play the real officers of the Explorer Ship Magellan are about to get the axe, but all they know is that the final scene isn’t as good as usual.

Angie looks up from her script to complain about the wrong thing. “It’s boring to have the plot be another hydroponics system breakdown.” She goes on marking her breathing points, even after eight years.

“An old story line wouldn’t be so bad if the ending weren’t so predictable,” Charlie says. “Engineering wins again.”

Aha! Here is the producer himself, ladies and gentlemen, Ed-of-the-faultless-cuffs. Odd, his hair is mussed. The UN chaps downtown must have given him a hard time. Or maybe he just realized his whole mortgage comes due as soon as his job ends.

“Everyone, may I have your attention, please?”

They can hear the doom in his voice, they just don’t know which of them will get it.

“Thank you. I’ll make this brief. This is the last show for the Magellan. As you know, it’s been more than a year since the Magellan has found a colonizable planet. The UN Space Colonization Directorate feels that the newer ships are in more promising galactic quadrants, so the Magellan is being dropped and one of them will be picked up. You’ll be paid for the full Fall season, right through to the end of your contract – termination cheques on Thursday, after the taping.”

My, how quiet we are. If I had to, I’d guess that they’re wondering about where they’ll go when they lose their UN housing allowances. Not many out-of-work actors can stay in New York. They should be

wondering why that final scene falls so flat.

Ed looks at the clock. “I’d like to hang around and talk it over, but I’m due back downtown in twenty minutes. I only came up because I didn’t want you to find out from the media.” He means the casting call has already gone out.

“Which ship will it be?”

Look at that! Teddy, you have pricked our producer to the core – they didn’t tell him and he hasn’t figured it out.

“The UNSCA director will announce the new ship on Thursday.”

And the door slides across behind him, shutting off our questions. The sigh-click of the door is genuine finality.

“But they can’t do it just like that, can they?”

“Sure they can, Angie – this isn’t Guild.”

Poor Charlie. For eight years, millions have waited for that world-warming grin announcing that the Engineering Officer found enough extra power to get the Magellan out of one more gravity tide or collision path, or restored the hydroponics unit. Nobody would believe him in any other role, even if he was a Guild member instead of an UNSCA contract employee.

Julian stands up. “Well, ducks, I suggest we collect ourselves and move across to Kelley’s Pub. This calls for a drink.”

Yes, Julian, a drink at the very least. And I’m coming with you, even if I’m not a member of the cast.

The foyer of the UN Space Colonization Agency is empty in mid-afternoon. The bronze UNSCA emblem set into the marble floor rings with Charlie’s boot-heels so that the guard looks up from the security desk. The foyer hasn’t exactly been crowded with people applying for a place in one of the colony ships. Convicts went out in the first four, 12,000 at a clip and all in hibernation. But they don’t stroll in to volunteer.

I like Kelley's – the back bar is real wood and Kelley serves honest drinks, even to people he doesn't like. And he doesn't like us.

As we pull tables together and gather chairs, Julian watches me, trying to figure out why I'm still with them. I sit down beside Angie and she shakes a smile. She isn't used to having an older woman so close. I'm not going to move, so I smile back. After all, even pretty Chinese-Italian girls get old – if they're lucky.

"So," Julian says, "here we all are. Everybody punched in a drink order? Good. No talk about cancellation till the anaesthetic comes, okay?"

"No," I say, "not okay. They aren't telling you the truth. That hydroponic system doesn't get fixed."

Angie laughs at me, then looks around because nobody else is laughing.

Julian asks, a word at a time, "How do you know?"

"The hyperbeam tape – I have a copy. They didn't tell the truth about that, either. They get full coverage from the Magellan – they have since it left the Moon. It takes hours to receive it, one digitalized pixel at a time, but it's there. They never had to simulate – it was a policy decision."

"If you've seen the tape," Charlie says, "you know about my arm."

"You lost it."

"Yeah. I didn't see how they could manage microsurgery out there."

Angie looks away; she doesn't ask if Rosa Chang has a scar.

"I'd like you to come to my place tomorrow night and see the real tape. Eight o'clock. Bring wives and husbands, but no children, please. And don't tell anyone."

All the way downtown, I think about the cast and the men and women they play. It shouldn't matter where people die, but it does. They shouldn't have to flicker out so far from home, with only a lie to mark their passing.

As always, coming up the ancient escalator to SoHo Arts is coming home. Eighty years ago, the City bought ten square blocks of old buildings to rent to artists – to be a tourist attraction when tourism came back. I stop at the cafe to tell my upstairs neighbour his sink is still leaking and my kitchen plaster is still falling. I stop at the deli for prosciutto for tomorrow, then at the greengrocer's for melons – yellow ones with pink flesh, green-fleshed white ones. These are local, rooftop grown.

I put the food away and clean up things that don't need cleaning up, then I start work. I've marked all the master shots and stage crossings, so it takes me only about two hours to set up the flow of backgrounds on the computer screen, including the views from outside the ship. All the backgrounds – exterior and interior – were shot before the Magellan left the Moon.

Now comes the tricky part. I have to alter the looks of the hydroponics unit so that three clear shots of it convince the audience the plants are dying and the fourth that they're growing again. Only what is natural isn't what looks natural. I have to fiddle with it on the screen, speeding up the rate of leaf droop here, the rate of colour drain there, exaggerating the shrivelling of the leaves. Then, for the last shot, I have to give the new wheat sprouts a green that would knock

your eye out.

It's midnight when I start sending my work uptown to the synthesis system at UNSCA South Bronx. If the Agency know how much I work at home, they've never said so. Of course, why would they? The electricity is on my bill, not theirs.

In the morning, even Angie is subdued as we time each scene while I enter the changes. Julian is being particularly careful, so the timing has to be adjusted over and over. After lunch, we fit in the dialogue and the close-ups.

Husbands and wives are drifting in when I leave. Julian is still working on the last scene, but I'll get that tomorrow.

Angie and her husband arrive first. She's all wide-eyed; she never realized I was Emma Dansker the computer artist, she thought it was just a funny coincidence of names. Tony reaches for the bottled beer with the relieved look of a man who thought older women just serve herbal tea.

Julian brings his wife and Teddy brings her architect husband. Charlie comes alone – his new girl has left him. Ray and his wife are late, but finally everyone is here and everyone has a drink.

"Well, Emma," Julian says, "put up or shut up."

His wife frowns – she doesn't like him to be crude.

I've set up the projector so that, when I turn it on, there's the Magellan's bridge, almost life size, on the side wall. Angie moans when she sees the real Life Support Officer; it's as though she wants to turn away from the scarred face but can't. Julian's wife gasps when the real Captain stands up.

"How could he wear such a filthy uniform on camera?" she asks. Julian hushes her – it is the first time they have heard other voices saying their lines. They hear every change.

The script has Angie say "boron leaked into the hydroponic system, damaging the plants," but we see Rosa saying "flooded the hydroponic system and killed the plants," and we hear her voice as she says it. Charlie begins to shiver. Everyone is waiting for the last scene, the one that doesn't work. When it comes, they don't even breathe.

The projector clicks off, leaving only a soft muttering in the room. Angie is saying *Hail Marys* as fast as she can while Tony tries to comfort her.

"It plays," Julian says. "Listen, ducks, that ending plays! We'd have half the world weeping into its after-dinner decaf if we did that ending."

His wife bites her lip. She likes Julian to look his best.

Teddy puts ice in her drink. "If we played that ending, UNSCA would tell everyone we invented the whole thing to get back at them for cancelling the show and they'd make sure none of us ever works again."

"I found a way to copy the hyperbeam tape two years ago," I tell them. "I'd been looking ever since I saw the stills of the first colonizable planet. UNSCA claimed they were photographs, digitized and sent over and over, but they weren't."

Angie asks why they wouldn't use the real picture if they had it all along?

"They aren't going to convince the world that colony planets are the answer for an overcrowded Earth if

people see what really happens out there," Ray says.

"Do they know you stole their tape?" Angie asks. She looks around for confirmation that she is right to sense danger, but sees even her husband thinks she's silly. She looks to Julian as if to ask "silly how?" but he is looking at me, putting things together in his mind.

"That was about the time Ed replaced the synthesizer because it did weird things," he says.

"I was still learning what I could do with the signal."

The difference between their portrayals and the real officers fascinates them. Teddy's husband is repelled that they see the last scene as theatre – as though even his own wife didn't understand. But it isn't insensitivity. They're actors with a show to do, one final episode.

"I don't see why you care how they do it," says Julian's wife. "They look awful."

In the silence, Angie seems to realize that her own silliness is tiny compared with this. Helpfully – she'd want someone to tell her – she moves toward Julian's wife. It's like watching the gasoline walk over to the fire.

"You don't understand," Angie says. "They're not playing it, they're doing it – and now they're maybe dying. That's what's important, isn't it, Julian?"

"Dead," says Teddy's husband from the kitchen doorway. "Not 'maybe dying,' damn it, dead!" He puts his glass down too hard on the buffet table and Teddy looks at him in surprise.

"I guess they are dead, aren't they?" Julian says, as though he had to count it out, and they leave before the food is even half gone.

Everybody comes to Thursday's taping, even Ed, and he never comes in the morning. Some scenes get done four times, but they go through the last scene like automatons. Ed has other things on his mind and doesn't notice.

They finish about three and it's my turn. They wait around in costume in case anything went wrong and a scene has to be done over. Ed watches me so closely, I wonder if he knows what I'm thinking.

"I still don't understand how you get the synthesizer to take these pixels from the actors' tape and use them to replace those pixels in the background," he says, shaking his head.

"Just women's work, mister producer, sir," I say. "Not much more complicated than an automatic mealmaker."

He nods. He always has to have some self-denigration from me; it annoys him that he doesn't understand what I do, and has no way of knowing if I'm doing it right. When he sees the flash of clear green at the end – new wheat coming up like a miracle – he gives a nod of relief and straightens up.

"Right," he says. "That's it, then, until it goes on the air tomorrow night at seven." He makes his voice bigger as he turns, sweeping everybody in. "Leave your things here, please – you can clear out your lockers later. Press conference in the foyer in five minutes. You too, Emma. We're up first, then they announce the new ship and introduce the crew."

"Cast," Charlie says. "Not crew, cast."

Ed ignores him. "You'll receive your cheques afterward."



Illustrated by Nick Theatre

The foyer looks different with people in it. Ed herds us up on a platform so the deputy director can thank us. He has a list of our names, but he doesn't look at it until he gets to me. Even then, Ed has to tell him who I am.

"Now," he tells the reporters, "the crew of the Magellan will be available to you in the far corner in ten minutes."

"Cast," says Charlie loudly. "We're the cast – the crew is up there."

He points toward the sky, but all the deputy director sees is ceiling. He frowns like he's just been suckered and Ed hurries us over to our corner. Now the UNSCA director takes over; it's his great pleasure to announce that they're switching to the Explorer Ship Beagle. Ed-of-the-faultless-cuffs swears in my ear. I guess he was hustling for the wrong ship.

The director is now introducing the actors who play the Beagle crew. When he finishes, some of the reporters head for us, others for the champagne-and-goodies table (catered by Kelley's).

Ed sees the new cast being steered off by the UN's programming chiefs and bolts after them. As soon as the last reporter has left, the deputy director hands out our cheques, excuses himself, and goes off to the elevator (to join the new cast?) while we move toward the goodies table.

"We're going home to my folks' place in Kentucky," Julian's wife says. She picks over the canapés, wrapping the best in napkins and sticking them in her purse. "The house is too big just for my parents, and Julian's going to teach drama at the community college."

Angie isn't so mean as to tell her we know how Julian hates Kentucky and how her parents feel about New York actors.

The deputy director, the programming chief, and Ed – as cool, alert, and faultless as I've ever seen him – come out of the elevator and herd the new cast across the lobby. The deputy director tells the guard to switch any calls to Kelley's private dining room. Ed couldn't see us if he was looking – we have ceased to exist.

Julian's wife, napkin in hand, asks Teddy what she and Jeff plan to do.

"You missed this one," Teddy says, spearing the last meatball and dropping it in the napkin. "Actually, we haven't decided yet."

Charlie opens two more bottles of champagne. The guard glares, but then sees Kelley riding his big motorized service cart through the front doors and waves him in. When Kelley takes the feast away, we won't have any reason to hang around where we're not wanted.

"So, you got fired," Kelley says, tallying the champagne bottles. "Serves you right. I don't hold with deceiving folks. Tell convicts they'll get free land then stack those hibernation units up on Mars." He edges his cart toward us so we have to move.

"Come on," Julian says, "let's clean out our lockers."

As we start down the hall, Charlie says "We should have played the real last scene."

"Well, we didn't, did we?" Teddy's voice is harsh.

Maybe it's Teddy and Charlie, maybe it's Kelley, or maybe it's just the champagne.

"All right," I say, "but I'll need twenty-five minutes to do it right. If they try to shoo us out sooner, stall

them"

"What good will that do?" Angie asks. "I mean, I'm willing, but I don't see –" Tony whispers to her and she looks at me in surprise.

Reluctantly, Julian says "The real last scene is too long."

I don't answer. Last night I found 47 seconds I could take out of one early scene and 22 seconds I could take out of a middle one. It's enough.

Families mill around between the taping studio and the dressing rooms, sorting out sweaters, coffee cups, home remedies. Shutting down the synthesizer takes seven minutes and cutting out the same bits in each tape takes about 12 minutes. Because I set up my home system before I left, just in case, it takes only five minutes to get the other data stream over the phone and patch it in at the end. Angie is watching me, ready to yank me to safety in case it all blows up.

"Hey," says the intercom, "hurry it up, will you? You're supposed to be out of here."

Julian calls back. "Sorry sport. I mislaid my ID card and nobody's leaving till we find it."

Finally I turn the synthesizer back on to finish fitting the actors into the background, a pixel at a time. Sometime tomorrow, it will ship the finished show directly to the broadcast system. Nobody at UNSCA will find out what I've done before it goes on the air.

Teddy's packed my things as well as hers, and Charlie carries them out for me. Everybody shakes hands with me at the curb except Julian's wife. I can't tell if she's snubbing me or if it takes both hands to keep her purse closed with all those meatballs in it.

When I've deposited my cheque next morning – making the largest balance I'll ever see – there is nothing to do. My neighbours are soaking up the last sun of Indian summer, but I'm too fidgety – I can't work either.

Just before seven I turn on the television. The news shows about a minute and a half of us, and there I am, this odd old woman with spiky gray hair and invisible lips. Then the show starts.

The cuts aren't obvious. The blending for the last scene works as if it were planned. The faces change, the uniforms age and grow ragged, the ship ages. You know that's the real captain stepping forward, not Julian.

"We're still looking for a place to set down," he says. "Meanwhile, we're shutting down the hyper-beam transmitter so we can use the power to drive the chemical air regenerator. We should have three days left."

Shadowy figures have been crowding toward the bridge, and now we see the rest of the crew. Some are holding up their children so that we can see them; only their pictures will ever reach Earth. We hear their voices blending halfway across the galaxy. "Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind..." You wouldn't dare write an ending like that, but it does play.

Nobody talks about it until the late news comes on, and they tell us "sources in the U.S. intelligence community have confirmed that the scene shown was real." Our UN delegate refuses to comment.

I get to sleep late, and wake up to the morning news. What I see is a live remote from in front of the UNSCA

building. Hundreds of people are setting up camp with sleeping bags and stoves. The reporter says they're waiting to sign up for the next colony ship as soon as the office opens on Monday.

A young couple edges past, on their way to the end of the line. The reporter asks them why they've come. The girl looks at him like he was stupid.

"Well," she says, "well, it's really true, isn't it? I mean space, and colony planets, and all that – it really is out there."

Then they show the last few minutes of the program all the way through for anyone who missed it last night.

**Shirley Weinland** lives in Palo Alto, California. She informs us that for the past 30 years she has been lucky enough to work as a technical writer-editor in a large contract-research institute – "a sort of Harrod's of technology and problem-solving."

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# BOOK REVIEWS, 1

## John Clute

As always, the latest Robert A. Heinlein novel starts off with an enticing narrative hook, like a Venus fly trap. Maybe this time the gimmick seems more Rube Goldbergian than those he used to construct thirty years ago, in his sleek poisonous prime, but it works. **The Cat Who Walks Through Walls** (Putnam's, 1985 \$17.95; New English Library, 1986, £9.95) drags the reader down into the dark acid bath and abyss of its dreadful innards just as in the days of yore. But there is a difference from the earlier books, and it is particularly fortunate in this case that mind-fucking never killed anyone not already blown away by reading *The Number of the Beast*, because in *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* too we are asked not only to follow the author into a hell of solipsism, but also to pretend that it is not Hell but Heaven we've arrived at deep within the palimpsestic runnels of the ancient author's mind.

After the Late Heinlein Manner, the first half of the book is pellucid, ram-bunctious, and blowzy. Right off someone asks our narrator – a Competent Man with a missing leg – to murder someone and is immediately murdered himself by a person unknown who may well be the woman who immediately beds and weds our very narrator, and off we go through space habitat and defective shuttle to the Moon of *The Moon* is a Harsh Mistress chased by a legion of bureaucrats and villains, I think.

And then it happens. Narrator and spouse are translated abruptly from an incomprehensible lunar imbroglio into the dippy multiverse of *Time Enough for Love* as added by the *Beast* (see above), and we are in Hell, or the omnipotent latency of the ancient author's mind. Call it Hell. Lazarus Long is in charge, seemingly, and proves to have begotten everyone else; every once in a while, however, he points coyly through the runnels of Time and Space in the direction of a familiar ancient author's savage solipsistic countenance as though to say: Surprise! Behold the true and onlie begetter! Ozymandias! The narrator's wound is magically healed in a magical hospital on a fleecy cloud somewhere in Time and Space; but, Time being revoked and Space trodden on,

we don't know where or when and don't much care. For we are inside the sad verberating runnels of the head of Ozymandias. We do learn that the characters of any book Oz approves of are just as real as the characters of any world, and just as vulnerable. Certain "events" do transpire. There is screwing and spanking and sass and a lot of political "discussion" so daft and illiberal that the book should probably be restricted to American readers, just as Spider Robinson suggested for *Expanded Universe*. But all of this is merely toying with the velleities of an infantile latency that can no longer find an objective world out there to bite into. The "plot" ends in mid-gesture, in a sort of slithery brilliantine raspberry to any reader who might still harbour expectations, for we are in Hell, we are in the solitude that eats itself without ate.

There is solitude also in Kim Stanley Robinson's intriguing second novel, **Icchenge** (Ace Books, 1984, \$3.50; Orbit, 1985, £2.50), but it is the solitude endured by men and women who cannot understand the dark orrery of the universe as it turns. The book is divided into three autobiographical documents. In 2248, Emma Weil tells of a mutiny on a spaceship near the asteroid belt effected by rebels determined to travel to the stars – the authoritarian corporate government of Mars, to which she is shakily loyal, opposes any symbolic challenge to its hegemony. Emma, radicalized by what she has perceived, writes her inflammatory and liberating document back on Mars, at the verge of escaping into the desert from the collapse of a revolution against the corporation. Or so it seems.

In 2547, Hjalmar Nederland, a compromised but surreptitiously independent archaeologist, gains corporation approval to do a dig on the site of the failed revolution 300 years earlier. He finds Emma's journal, which undermines the government version of those events, and is allowed to publish it. In the desert, epiphatically obsessed with Emma and her possible survival, for it is now possible to live for centuries with the aid of drugs, Hjalmar shapes her document, and the evidence she provides that the mysterious

Icchenge on Pluto was constructed by star-bent rebels, into an explosive message of renaissance.

A little later, Edmond Doya dissolves the Nederland hypothesis about Icchenge, thinks he has found Emma Weil herself; but cannot replace one hypothesis with a better one, nor can he be sure it is really Emma Weil he has confronted. Indeed there may never have been an Emma Weil. Her document may be a forgery, an historical lie that tells the truth about the nature of things. All three documents dovetail as texts, in the book called Icchenge; but in "reality," like Icchenge itself, they lock into an epistemological shadow-dance: for "reality" always sashays out of reach of the distorting imperialism of the eye, though the world is surely there. A clever bleak adult book. As it closes, it thrusts us out to think.

A couple of notes. Sara Banerji's **Cobwebwalking** (Gollancz, 1986, £8.95) begins – and continues – on a note of such appalling tweneess that no sane reader could fail to believe there was something rotten going on. This is the case. Tiny Morgan, a hunch-backed dwarf child with emotional problems as she enters puberty just after a non-nuclear bomb sends her Pa into the womb of a fall-out shelter, tells the tale of her moral mental and physical diseasedness with sickening sweetness that ascends to pious horror and ends with puberty properly entered. Whew! mutter the survivors: A hot one.

Robert Irwin's intensely literate, scabrous, funny, despairing, concinnous and naughty second novel, **The Limits of Vision** (Viking in association with Dedalus, 1986, £8.95), cannot be fairly treated in this context. It is pure fabulation. There is no fantasy in it. Marcia goes crazy; or comes to experience the vertigo and nausea of true sight; both. It is a brilliant dark game that must be read.

# BOOK REVIEWS, 2

## Alex Stewart

One of the keenest pleasures of reviewing is finding the Joker: the occasional book in the middle of the stack you'd normally never notice, let alone pick up off the shelf, but which turns out to be a sheer delight. This issue's Joker is **Ratha's Creature** (Gollancz, £7.95), Clare Bell's first novel, and an astonishing debut by any standard. Set in the prehistoric dawn of a world of intelligent cats, it simply shows us Ratha's discovery of fire and the consequent changes in herself and



her culture. Unlike most authors who tackle intelligent felines, Bell keeps a tight rein on any anthropomorphic sentiment; *Ratha* is a real, believable predator, and her world an ingenious piece of sustained imaginative writing.

The best novel of the batch, though, is Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Memory of Whiteness* (Macdonald, £9.95). Robinson is one of the new generation of writers using the tropes of sf as a springboard to creative and original work, and *The Memory of Whiteness* is as rich and compelling as anything I've seen from this burgeoning movement. He creates a future society founded on music, in which composer Johannes Wright finds himself edging ever closer to the ultimate secret of the cosmos as his latest symphony and his concert tour of the solar system near their simultaneous completion. His friends and entourage develop and change as they pursue their own goals, and mysterious conspirators threaten the safety of the party. Highly recommended.

A musician is also the hero of Tim Powers' *Dinner at Deviant's Palace*, (Chatto, £9.95 hb, £3.95 pb), a violent romp through a bizarrely inventive post-holocaust world. Pitted against the Jaybirds, a religious cult that would make Jim Jones blench, Greg Rivas gradually comes to realize that they're simply the unwitting tools of the next best thing to Evil Incarnate; a force he alone has the power to challenge. And therein lies the problem with this book. Well-written for the most part, characters with genuine psychological depth, and plot devices straight out of a second-string Marvel comic. I'm still not sure whether this is an ambitious and subtle work that narrowly fails to come off, for a much better novel keeps breaking through the surface of *Mad Max* versus the *Moonies*. Get hold of a copy and decide for yourself; I thoroughly enjoyed it, although I've a sneaking suspicion there's another two volumes to come.

No such suspicions about Michael Scott Rohan's *The Anvil of Ice* (Macdonald, £9.95), which openly proclaims itself the first chunk of another identikit fantasy trilogy. Mythic quests, magic swords, and heroes who sing in italics aren't really to my taste, but if you like that sort of thing you'll find this book a well-crafted and enjoyable read. Rohan has obviously done a lot of research – rather too obviously in one or two places – and gone to a great deal of trouble to anchor his imaginary world in reality rather than the vague never-never land of most fantasy novels. For that, at least, he should be commended.

The two short story collections to hand are superficially similar at first sight, in that both are retrospective

attempts to chart an author's career through his work. The big difference between them, however, is that the Philip K. Dick collection, *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon* (Gollancz, £8.95), is a posthumous selection from a completed body of work, while Roger Zelazny's *The Last Defender of Camelot* (Sphere, £2.50) is already six years out of date. Though both contain a satisfying variety of well-written fiction, probably the most interesting aspect of both books is the way the authors speak directly to the reader; Dick through a couple of essays, one reprinted from *Interzone*, Zelazny in the quietly self-deprecating commentary on the stories he's selected. One thing I found mildly irritating about the Dick volume was the prissy censorship of expletives with prim Victorian dashes. We're not children, damn it; if we were we'd be reading intellectual thumbsuck like Asimov, not Dick.

And finally, a clutch of reprints. Unwin have reissued Karel Capek's *War With the Newts* (£2.95) in a brisk and witty translation, while Methuen have exhumed a couple of Eric Frank Russell's (*Wasp* and *Sinister Barrier*, £2.50 each) in handsome editions complete with pastiche "Golden Age" covers. Oh come on. You don't really need me to tell you anything about Capek or Russell, do you?



Cover by Nick Bantock for Lisa Tuttle's fine collection of horror and fantasy stories, *A Nest of Nightmares* (Sphere Books, £2.50)

## REVIEWS IN BRIEF

**Black Venus** by Angela Carter (Chatto & Windus, £8.95)

**The Power of Time** by Josephine Saxton (Chatto Fiction, £3.95)

Two very different collections, both excellent. Carter is all elegance and subtlety, Saxton a kaleidoscope of vivid shifts and changes. Saxton, long one of Britain's most under-appreciated writers, tells stories about life and the future: Chief Flying Spider floats the city of Manhattan to the English Midlands; the snake who has read Chomsky triumphs over humans who've become animals; do-it-yourself brain-surgery leads through strange landscapes; and even if the effort fails, it's better to have a go. Carter, recognized as one of Britain's finest writers, explores death and the past through imagery rather than narrative, counterpointing complex permutations of sensuality with death, through psychological explorations within sharply evoked social frames: Poe as a child in a theatre trunk, his beautiful mother always changing costume, make-up, hair, character, dying on stage to come back alive to the dressing room, until one night she dies for real and never comes back; Lizzie Borden suffocating in the confines and sharp evoked stinks of respectable middle America. Eight stories, two of which first appeared in *Interzone*. The Saxton weighs out at 14 stories, one from *Interzone*.

(JH)

**Schismatrix** by Bruce Sterling (Penguin, £2.50)

This novel, like Sterling's related *Shaper/Mechanic* cycle of short stories, concerns future human biological, cultural and social evolution. The background is a defunct Earth and a solar system full of orbiting space habitats – roughly, what was posited by O'Neill and the L5 buffs, but a lot messier, bloodier, and more interesting. Onto this anarchic stage Sterling ushers a squabbling mob of "post-human" cultures and/or subspecies, each deeply fascinating, each radically different from our own. Some of the episodes are science fiction of a very high order indeed: while reading one feels a subjective certainty that the reality, when it arrives, will be like this – and that's about the highest praise I could give any work of sf. The book has some rough edges, but it really ought to leave you with steam squirting out both of your ears.

(AR)

**Count Zero** by William Gibson (Gollancz, £9.95)

In the 30s it was Stanley G. Weinbaum; in the 40s it was Robert A. Heinlein; in the 50s, Alfred Bester; in the 60s, Samuel R. Delany; in the 70s, John Varley – and in the 80s, beyond a doubt, it's William Gibson. There always seems to be one male American sf writer who stands at the height of fashion, the Acme of Cool. Such writers are invariably praised for their marriage of style to substance, their yoking of trad excitements to a new "hip" awareness; they are simultaneously the keepers of the flame, and the uprooters of the old, shoddy idols. As I say, Gibson is it – loved by the critics, his fellow writers, and the Hugo-voting masses. If you've read *Neuromancer*, you'll find little that's new here. *Count Zero* is better finished, more tightly constructed, but it's set in fundamentally the same sleazy, hyper-tech world. It's an extremely poised performance, and I look forward to Gibson's next novel with, as they say, great interest.

**Green Eyes** by Lucius Shepard (Chatto & Windus, £9.95)

Much praised when it first appeared in America as an Ace Special in 1984, this is a beautifully written novel by an outstanding new writer. The story is based on Voodoo lore, and concerns an experiment in the creation of zombies. Shepard's book is not an exercise in sensational horror, however, but psychological science fiction of a delicate kind.

**The Encyclopedia of Superheroes** by Jeff Rovin (Facts on File, £15.95)

Newly imported from America, this large-format 443-page book covers hundreds of "superheroes," from the most obvious to the most obscure. Each entry describes the hero, tells you of his/her origins and gives a potted biography. The emphasis is overwhelmingly on the US comic books, though scattered throughout are characters who began life outside the comics field – for example, Zorro, the Lone Ranger, and, oddly enough, the Scarlet Pimpernel. Despite the last-named, the book is very weak on British characters (I searched in vain for a mention of Dan Dare). There are also a few holes in the American coverage (for some reason, Wonder Wart-Hog is in but Howard the Duck is not). Nevertheless, within its limits, it's a useful and entertaining compilation, and a much more substantial book than Rovin's earlier *The Fantasy Almanac*.

**The Day of Forever** by J.G. Ballard (Gollancz, £8.95)

Collectors should note that this is the first ever hardcover edition of a Ballard volume which originally appeared as a Panther paperback in 1967. Most of the stories are early and minor, but the book does contain the marvellously apocalyptic "The Waiting Grounds" – Stapledon's *Star Maker* out-imagined in less than 30 pages. Other goodies are the title story, about an Earth which has ceased rotating, and "Tomorrow is a Million Years", about a man who is haunted by time winds on an alien planet: both are examples of the "mood sf" that Ballard alone is capable of writing.

**J.G. Ballard** by Peter Brigg (Starmont House, \$6.95)

Published towards the end of 1985, this is "Starmont Reader's Guide 26", the latest in a line of slim critical volumes which are little known on this side of the Atlantic – and for the most part deservedly so. However, I welcome this particular addition to the series and hope it achieves a wider circulation than the earlier books, if only because it's the first critical work on Ballard which is not written by me. Peter Brigg has done a very conscientious job. He believes that "science is the language of the new myths, myths are at the heart of all important literature, and Ballard is one [of] the vital mythmakers."

**The Sirens of Titan** by Kurt Vonnegut; **More Than Human** by Theodore Sturgeon; **A Time of Changes** by Robert Silverberg; and **Nova** by Samuel R. Delany (Gollancz, £2.95 each)

These are the first four volumes in the "Gollancz Classic SF" series, a line of large-format and reasonably priced paperbacks which will draw upon Gollancz's unrivalled 25-year backlist of science fiction. Actually, the oldest and best of the four titles reissued here – Sturgeon's *More Than Human* – goes back rather more than quarter of a century. Gollancz first published it in 1954, well before they had an sf list as such. I find it incredible that this one has been unavailable (in a British edition, at any rate) for so long. I hope some of the younger sf fans will now discover for themselves just why the late Theodore Sturgeon is so highly rated by those who remember his best work.

**Time Patrolman** by Poul Anderson (Sphere, £2.50)

I loved Anderson's *Guardians of Time* when I first read it 20 years ago.

Here at last is a sequel – two long stories about the adventures of Manse Everard in ancient Phoenicia, Dark-Age Europe and other exotic ports of call on the far shores of the time stream. The historical detail is good, as ever, even if the characterization leaves something to be desired.

**Macroscopic** by Piers Anthony (Grafton, £2.95)

This 480-page paperback is the first British publication of the full text of one of Anthony's earliest and best novels (originally published in the USA by Avon Books in 1969). Its complex and mind-bending plot involves the Macroscopic, a sort of super telescope which allows humans to study distant civilizations. Now that Anthony has become very popular through his later space operas and fantasy trilogies, it's good to see this imaginative work back in print.

**Lord of Light** by Roger Zelazny (Methuen, £2.50)

Another oldie but goodie, this Zelazny opus won a Hugo Award back in 1968. It reads like a fantasy based on Indian mythology, but it's actually sf with an interplanetary setting. The mixture is a little too rich for my taste, but many readers have found it very palatable.

**Seasons in Flight** by Brian Aldiss (Grafton, £1.95)

First paperback edition of a slim volume of fables by the multi-talented and much-travelled Mr Aldiss. One of them (the best of them?) first appeared in *Interzone* – that's "The Gods in Flight", about how World War III is seen from Indonesia. Others, such as "Incident in a Far Country", more nearly resemble fairy tales.

(DP)

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## ALSO RECEIVED

**The Initiate** by Louise Cooper (Unwin, £2.75). "Book 1 of the Time Master Trilogy." Genre fantasy.

**The Book of the Stars** by Ian Watson (Grafton, £2.50). Second in Watson's "Book of the River" trilogy, with the third, *The Book of Being*, due in paperback soon. Recommended.

**The Shattered World** by Michael Reaves (Futura, £2.95). "In the tradition of Piers Anthony and Alan Dean Foster." Wow.

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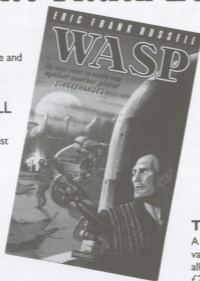
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**Mythago Wood** by Robert Holdstock (Grafton, £2.50). An excellent fantasy, already reviewed here in hardcover.

**Chapter House Dune** by Frank Herbert (NEL, £2.95). The sixth (and last?) book in the late Mr Herbert's *Dune* cycle.

**Orion** by Ben Bova (Methuen, £2.95). Bova switches from hard sf to a kind of aeon-spanning sword and sorcery.

**Doomsday Warrior** by Ryder Stacy (Futura, £1.95). "No. 1 in a stunning all-action new series." Rambo-esque nonsense.

**Killashandra** by Anne McCaffrey (Bantam Press, £8.95). Sequel to *The Crystal Singer*. Girlish sf.

**Downtown** by Viido Polikarpus and Tappan King (Macdonald, £8.95). Illustrated, sepia-printed nostalgic fantasy.

**The Road to Covlay** by Richard Cowper (Futura, £2.25). Elegaic sf.

**Mansed** by Jack Williamson (Sphere, £2.50). Creaky sf—tries hard.

**The King's Justice** by Katherine Kurtz (Arrow, £2.95). "Volume 2 of the Histories of King Kelson".

## LETTERS

Dear Editors:

I'm inclined to agree much more with Allen A. Lucas than with Vincent Omniaveritas. To me science fiction is not some grand, tech-spawned neo-mystical phenomenon but a form of literature, and by literary standards it's been failing for the past dozen years. Yet I think the genre is still more receptive to quality literary sf than is the mainstream. As Brian Aldiss pointed out in the statement that Lucas quoted, the latter field is mostly concerned with bourgeois problems in a mundane world. The sf genre still seems more open to imagination, speculation and alternative viewpoints.

I also think that Lucas' portrayal of the American markets is unjustifiably pessimistic. The most startling thing about the current American SF scene is that it actually seems to be making a little progress. *Omni*, *IASF* and *The Twilight Zone Magazine* all have switched editors since their inception in the dreary '70s, and these changes have been reflected in more unusual selections (e.g., stories with surrealist or magical realist qualities). Moreover, a new breed of writers, the so-called "cyberpunks," have caused a kind of excitement not seen here in

ages. Admittedly, their dependence on gimmicks and action/adventure/mystery plots is annoying, but they've given us some refreshing stylistic experimentation as well as a few new ideas.

Of course we're going to have to take sf much further in order to restore its vitality, and this is where *Interzone* comes in. I have always seen *Interzone* as the pioneer of the field, the magazine that would perpetually push the genre's boundaries, clearing a way for the others to follow. This is why you talk about "drawing back" and publishing "hard science fiction" as well as "hard fantasy" is disturbing. At this time I think your best policy would be to keep pushing forward, publishing the sort of fiction that makes people think twice or three times before they're willing to accept it as sf. By doing so you will almost certainly inspire further growth in our literature.

**Richard Singer**  
New York

Dear Editors:

You invite response to Vincent Omniaveritas's thoughts on the "New Science Fiction" (IZ 14). His retrospect is amusing and astringent. His prospect and manifesto advocate what he calls "a ruthless retooling" to avoid further development of what he sees as "a

schizoid split" characterized by the "rise of fantasy...by nature timeless, insular and traditionalist" (there is an odd-man-out in that trio). Fantasy is a genre which he dismisses as severely alienated from the outside world. His reforming programme is consistent and viable in its promotion of original extrapolative imaginings, technological literacy, two-culture bridging and a global conspectus; but he is vague as to just what is meant by "visionary intensity" and "sf's mind-expanding potential." It would appear that this "visionary" element is directed historically, and only towards a cosmopolitan "21st-century point of view"; and that it requires a literature so aimed as to "produce the best pragmatic results." If this implies a literature from which fantasy is excluded I see unfortunate limitation and a certain insularity in his crusade, however desirably technology and social realism may occupy it. If there is a schism, there is culturally a stronger case for eliminating it than for widening it.

Writers, *Omniaveritas* quotes from P.B. Shelley, are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." What Shelley actually wrote in his *Defence of Poetry* was "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." He was countering Thomas Love Peacock (then established as a satirist of the "Gothic" by his *Nightmare Abbey*) who had written a piece which was, in the context of its time, rather in the *Omniaveritas* vein. This argued that in the 1820s (the technology and prospects of the age of iron and steam was then getting under way) poetry was an archaic and moribund mode and that increasingly issues of "moral, political and physical science" should command attention — issues he considered "withdrawn from poetry". Shelley, addressing Peacock (with whom he was on good terms), wrote: "You will see that I have taken a more general view of what is poetry than you have", and went on in his *Defence* to say that "Poetry in the general sense may be defined as the expression of the imagination" which "awakens and enlarges the mind by rendering it the receptacle of unapprehended combinations of thought...lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." In the prophetic/legislative identity of the poet he sees "the mirror of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present." Thus in subtle, yet powerful if unacknowledged, ways the poet may work to affect man's universal perspective, his self-image and his deeds; for the poet "not only beholds intensely the present as it is but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flowers and fruits of the latest time."

So Shelley is not so much saying that Peacock and (a shadow of futurity)

*Omniaveritas* are wholly wrong as that their vision and advocacies are limiting. It is the poetic insight, not indifferent to science, but of its nature likely to express itself mythopoeically, symbolically or fantastically, that will have the greatest transforming potential.

Whatever interpretations have emerged from debating the phrase "radical hard science fiction" *IZ*'s actual record is one of catholically liberal and synthesizing publishing achievement. I suspect that Mr *Omniaveritas* might consider its practice to have served to perpetuate his "schizoid split already abundantly apparent in the rise of fantasy," in that it has been a vehicle not only for such "hard" extrapolative sf as Bruce Sterling's "Life in the Mechanistic/Shaper Era" or David Langford's "Cube Root," but for fantasies as remote from "reality" as Angela Carter's "Overture for a Midsummer Night's Dream" or Andy Souter's "The Quiet King of the Green South-West". I, for one, do not regret the extremes, but there is also a level, perhaps several levels, at which there appears an imaginative literature veering now towards sf, now towards fantasy, in which disjunctions are bridged, schizoid genre splits are resolved: fictions various as Sue Thomason's "Finn", Lee Montgomerie's "Green Hearts", David Zindell's "Caverns", Barrington Bayley's "The Ur-Plant". Such stories have a base in real or realistically imagined worlds or landscapes where the implied issues of "moral, political and physical science" are alive, but, far from being "withdrawn from poetry", they are interfused with it, or at least those activities of the imagination which characterize poetic insight. They contain elements of that fantasy which is "by nature timeless...and traditionalist" (but not insular). A single image from Ian Watson's "When the Time-gate Failed" embodies one such perennially vital "poetic insight": "You create a jewel when you mate a loving animal?" (the jewel, memory, equates with time, the alien explains). That the context is a fantasizing one of "inner space" and that the jewel has ambivalent identity in the "real world" with a dice cube, that symbol of the contingent, of "chance, death, and mutability", strengthens rather than reduces the imaginative impact of the memory jewel as elusive product of the bond between unlike but complementary creatures or creations.

I see this prominent strand in *IZ* fictions as being in continuity with a tradition, romantic rather than strictly rational. As Mr *Omniaveritas* claimed witnesses in Shelley and Wells, I turn to them again for support in my argument. Wells, at the time he was creating his most influentially enduring fantasies, had intuitions which went beyond the bounds of the verifiable.

Addressing the Royal Institution in 1902 he said: "Worlds may freeze and suns may perish, but I believe there is something in man that can never die." At the end of *The Time Machine*, when "the future is still black and blank", the long dead Weena's two shrivelled white flowers "witness that even when mind and strength are gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man."

In a lecture, "A Future for Poetry" — notes printed in *Agenda* (Winter/Spring 1984) — the American poet Stanley Burnshaw describes a poetic tradition and a future which does not restrict itself to an anthropocentric viewpoint; which, instead of regarding life through the lens of a culture, looks through the lens of earthly existence at cultural phenomena. It is such distancing and perception from what Burnshaw calls a planetary vantage point that writers of imaginative fiction, ranging the science fiction-fantasy spectrum, also may fulfil a liberating role and may often, increasingly sustained by the holistic sciences, carry speculation beyond the horizons of reductionist positivism. But their base must inevitably lie in human loyalties and relationships, such as are symbolized by those faded flowers at the end of *The Time Machine*, by the lit street-lamps and window at the end of *Star-Maker*, by the canal-reflected "Martians" at the close of *The Silver Locusts*. Love, wrote Shelley, "is the bond and sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists." So perhaps it is Virgil's "Omnia vincit Amor" which best complements the manifesto of Vincent *Omniaveritas*.

K.V. Bailey  
Alderney, C.I.

Dear Editors:

There used to be much debate about what sf "is". The trap your three writers seem to have fallen into is one of deciding that they know what sf is, and then complaining when the reality does not match their definition. Reduced to simplistic terms they have decided, respectively, that sf is:

Lucas: A medium for good "literature"

*Omniaveritas*: Folk art of the 21st Century

Hanna: A vehicle for political (feminist) statements

Unsurprisingly each is surprised and disappointed that sf does not live up to these expectations and starts decrying its failure. But the failure is in them and their attempts at strait-jacketing the genre, not in the genre itself.

Like Lucas, I do not remember what the first sf book I read was, but this is only partly due to bad memory. More than that it is because, at that age, I didn't think of it as sf. As I child I read vast numbers of books, and only a

small fraction was sf. But at some point I began to realise that there was a certain group of books which I enjoyed more than average. Initially these were identified with a particular number of authors – later I came across the term sf which, in turn, led me to more books that I enjoyed.

I didn't enjoy them because they were "good literature", although some were; I didn't enjoy them because they aimed to smooth our path into the 21st Century, although some did; I didn't enjoy them because they presented a political viewpoint. I enjoyed them because they did "all of the above," and much, much, more.

Above all, sf made me think, by presenting new ideas and new viewpoints. It made me look at the world in a different (and, I think, more "rounded") way, and it taught me things I never knew before. "How many modern sf readers have even heard of semiotics?", asks Lucas, expecting the answer "Damn Few". Damn Few, indeed, but I suspect that many of those who have, heard of it through sf – which is more than you can say about any other genre.

Which is, perhaps, the whole point. Your writers concern themselves with what sf is or should be – this is the wrong approach, they should be asking what *isn't*.

At the risk of over-simplifying, I would suggest that sf is the only genre which doesn't lend itself to definition, because it is the genre that *fills* in the gaps left by all the other genres. If you look at any two crime novels, you will inevitably find certain similarities of theme and approach. The same goes for other genres. But you cannot say that about sf. Of course there are 1900 identical fantasy novels, and 2500 identical space operas, but that is

missing the point. To identify sf as a genre you need to find the commonality between Ballard's *Hello America* and Doc Smith's *Second Stage Lensman*, between Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* and Donaldson's *Covenanter* books, between *Interzone* and Isaac Asimov's *SF Magazine*.

Sf is the only genre that gives the author complete freedom to write what he wants to, in the way that he wants to write it. I'm not saying he is guaranteed of getting it published – that would be ludicrous – but at least he has a chance within sf. Everybody lauds *Interzone* for publishing stories that other sf magazines wouldn't, but the point is more, surely, that while other sf magazines might publish them (and indeed do reprint them occasionally), outside the sf field they would have no hope of publication at all.

So I can only nod sadly when Lucas talks about Priest's books being published as fiction because they "are too good to be associated with *Battlestar Galactica*, etc". No, that's not the reason – the reason is more that Priest (like Lucas) feels that the "literary" genre is better (whatever that means) than the sf one and has pretensions to being a "literary" author rather than an sf one.

How many sf readers will read *Empire of the Sun* asks Lucas, to which the only answer can be "A lot more than would read any other World War II memoir". But again, why should people read it? It is a good book, no doubt about it, but it is not Ballard's best – although I doubt we could ever agree on what was his best (my vote goes to *Concrete Island*).

You ask what "radical sf" is, and I can only say "Look About You" – it is out there if only you care to look. Radical sf is what Ted Sturgeon wrote for

most of his life when he tried to persuade his readers (often successfully, and long before it was fashionable) that there was more to love than monogamous heterosexuality; it is what Gordon R. Dickson writes when (at times) he puts his readers inside the skin of an alien with a completely alien viewpoint and, in so doing, makes them rethink their basic assumptions about humanity; it is Larry Niven introducing his readers to the frontiers of scientific thought with quantum black holes, naked singularities and smoke rings; it is Chip Delany forever questioning the basic assumptions by which we live.

Of course there is a lot of crap, by the authors listed above as much as by anyone else. There always has been crap and there always will be crap. One reason for that is that, just as my definition of sf differs from yours, so do our definitions of crap differ – to me 50% (at least) of *Interzone* is crap.

But please let us drop this terrible attitude of "sf is moribund; the fans are mindless; nothing gets published but this American pap". Self-pity (and the arrogance that underlies it) gets awful boring after a while. Like them or loathe them, the Star Wars films, Steven Spielberg and the eternal fantasy trilogies are feeding an sf publishing boom which, among the dross, finds room for Delany, Ballard, Priest, Dick, *Interzone* and all the rest – without the former, would we have the latter? I doubt it. If 90% of everything published is crap, then the inevitable conclusion is that we must expect a lot of crap before we can find the 10% that we like.

**Phil Stephenson-Payne**  
Leeds

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