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No 17 Autumn 1986

EDITORIAL

We didn't announce the fact, but *Interzone* went up another four pages in size with our last issue. We are maintaining the new size with the present number, and we hope to expand even more in the future. We now manage to squeeze six stories into each issue, as well as a growing quantity of non-fiction. And the number of good stories which are submitted to us has been increasing of late – it's a pity we can't publish a higher proportion of them. Some correspondents ask why we don't increase our frequency of publication and produce six issues a year instead of four. We'd love to (and perhaps someday we shall), but for the time being we're unable to go to a more frequent schedule. Apart from the financial risk, the main reason for this is that we have no full-time staff. Each of us has a daily job – Simon works in Local Government engineering, Judith is on the paid staff of CND, and I am in a college library – and so all our *Interzone* activities are confined to evenings, weekends and holidays. None of us receives any payment for our work on *IJZ*, and as the magazine becomes more successful it makes greater demands on our time. (In order to devote more of my hours to *Interzone* I have recently given up the editorship of *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction* – that publication is now in the capable hands of Edward James.) Our two Assistant Editors, Andy Robertson and Paul Annis, continue to provide invaluable help by reading and commenting on the bulk of unsolicited manuscripts which come our way.

We have over 1,000 regular subscribers, and bookshop sales have made an upward leap since we introduced full-colour covers. Our production costs have increased at the same time, of course, and we still rely on a modicum of Arts Council support. But the prospects for future growth are good. We are publishers as well as editors, which means that much of our time is spent in juggling accounts, buying stationery and licking envelopes, corresponding with distributors, bookshops and advertisers – all this in addition to reading manuscripts and dealing with authors, artists and printers. Running a magazine, even a quarterly of comparatively low circulation, is a demanding task. Why, then, do we continue to do it with enthusiasm? Partly because it has become an obsession – few things are more addictive than the thrill that one gets from producing another issue – but also because we believe, as strongly as ever, that a magazine of *Interzone's* type is one of the necessities of modern life. As Lee Montgomery points out in this issue's book-review column, 1986 has seen a space disaster, a nuclear disaster and the continued spread of a deadly new plague (among many other things). What other kind of literature, apart from science fiction, is capable of dealing imaginatively with such a world.

David Pringle

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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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Gregory Benford

Freezeframe

Well, Jason, it'll take some explaining. Got a minute? Great.

Here's the invitation. It's for the weekend, and it's not just the kid's birthday party, no. You and me, we've been out of touch the last couple years, so let me run through a little flashback, okay?

Teri and me, we're world-gobblers. You've known that since you and me were roomies, right? Remember the time I took a final, went skiing all afternoon, had a heavy date, was back next day for another final – and aced them both? Yeah, you got it fella, aced the date, too. Those were the days, huh?

Anyway, my Teri's the same – girl's got real fire in her. No Type A or anything, just *alive*. And like sheet lightning in bed.

We grab life with both hands. Always have. If you work in city government, like me, you got to keep ahead of the oppo. Otherwise you see yourself hung out to dry on the six o'clock news and next day nobody can remember your name.

Guess double for Teri. She's in liability and claims, a real shark reef. Pressureville. So many lawyers around these days, half of them bred in those baracuda farms, those upgraded speed-curricula things. So we've got to watch our ass.

Right, watching Teri's is no trouble, I'll take all I can get. That woman really sends me. We're both in challenging careers, but she finds the time to make my day, every day, get it? Our relationship is stage centre with us, even though we're putting in ten-hour days.

That's what started us thinking. We need the time to work on our marriage, really firm it up when the old schedule starts to fray us around the edges. We've been through those stress management retreats, the whole thing, and we use it.

So we're happy. But still, about a year ago we started to feel something was *missing*.

Yeah, you got it. The old cliché – a kid. Teri's been hearing the old bio clock tick off the years. We got the condo, two sharp cars, timeshare in Maui, portfolio thick as your wrist – but it's not enough.

Teri brought it up carefully, not sure I'd like the idea of sharing all this wonderful bounty with a cranky little brat. I heard her through, real quality listening, and just between you and me, old buddy, I didn't zoom in on the idea right away.

I mean, we're fast lane folks. Teri's happy pouring over legal programs, looking for a precedent-busting angle, zipping off to an amped workout at the gym, and then catching one of those black and white foreign films with the hard to read subtitles. Not much room in her schedule to pencil in a feeding or the mumps. I had real trouble conceptualizing how she – much less I – could cope.

But she *wanted* this, I could tell from the soft watery look her eyes get. She's a real woman, y'know?

But the flip side was, no way she'd go for months of waddling around looking and feeling like a cow. Getting behind in her briefs because of morning sickness? Taking time off for the whole number? Not Teri's kind of thing.

What? Oh, sure, adoption.

Well, we did the research on that.

Let me put it this way. We both think the other's pretty damn special. Unique. And our feeling was, why raise a kid that's running on some body else's genetic program? We're talented people, great bodies, not too hard on the eyes – why not give our kid those advantages?

You got to look at it from his point of view. He should have parents who provide the very best in everything – including genes. So he had to be ours – all ours.

So you can see our problem. Balancing the tradeoffs and nothing looks like a winner. We'd hit a roadblock.

That's where my contacts came in handy. Guy at work told me about this company, GeneInc.

The corporation was looking for a franchisee backer and the city was getting involved because of all the legal hassles. Red tape had to be cut with the AMA, the local hospitals, the usual stuff. No big deal, just takes time.

I did a little angling on the variances they needed and in return they were real nice. We got invited to a few great parties up in the hills. Glitzy affairs, some big media people flown in to spice things up. And that's when we got the word.

Their secret is, they speed up the whole thing. It's entirely natural, no funny chemicals or anything. Purely electrical and a little hormone tinkering, straight goods.

What they do is, they take a little genetic material from Teri and me, they put it in a blender or something, they mix it and match it and batch it. There's this thing called inculcated growth pattern. Just jargon to me, but what it means is, they can tune the process, see. Nature does it slow and easy, but GeneInc can put the pedal to the metal. Go through the prelim stages, all in the lab.

Yeah, you got it fella, you can't see Teri pushing around a basketball belly, can you? That's why it's like GeneInc was tightwrapped for lives like ours — lives on the go.

So she goes in one Friday, right after a big staff meeting, and with me holding her hand she has the implantation. She overnights in the clinic, watching a first-run movie. Next day she's home. We have dinner at that great new restaurant, T.S. Eliot's, you really got to try the blackened redfish there, and all she's got to do is take these pills every four hours.

Three weeks like that, she's growing by the minute. Eats like a horse. I tell you, we had a running tab at every pasta joint within five blocks of the apartment.

She's into the clinic every forty-eight hours for the treatments, smooth as a press release. Teri's clicking right along, the kid's growing ten times the normal rate.

Before I can get around to buying cigars, zip, here's a seven-pound wonder. Great little guy. Perfect — my eyes, her smile, wants to eat everything in sight. Grabs for the milk supply like a real ladies' man.

And no effects from the GeneInc speedup, not a square inch less than A-max quality. You hear all kinds of scare talk about gene-diddling, how you might end up with a kid from Zit City. Well, the Chic-n Little's were wrong-o, in spades.

We figure we'd handle things from there. Maybe send out the diapers, hire a live-in if we could find a nice quiet illegal — Teri could handle the Spanish.

We had the right vector, but we were a tad short on follow-through. Teri started getting cluster headaches. Big ones, in technicolor.

So I filled in for her. Read some books on fathering, really got into it. And I'm telling you, it jigsawed my days beyond belief.

Face it, we had high-impact lives. I gave up my daily racquetball match — and you know how much of a sacrifice that was, for a diehard jock like me, highschool football and all. But I did it for the kid.

Next, Teri had to drop out of her extra course in fastlane brokering, too, which was a real trauma. I

mean, we'd practically spent the projected income from that training. Factored it into our estimated taxes, even. I'd already sunk extra cash into a honey of a limited partnership. It had some sweetheart underwriting features and we just couldn't resist it.

Man, crisis time. If she didn't get her broker's licence on schedule, we'd be stretched so thin you could see through us.

She couldn't link into the course on home computer, either. Software mismatch or something, and by the time she got it downwired she was too far behind in the course.

See what I mean? Bleaksville.

But we were committed parents. We believe in total frankness, upfront living.

So we went back to GeneInc and had a talk with one of their counsellors. Wonderful woman. She takes us into a beautiful room — soft lighting, quality leather couch, and some of that classy Baroque trumpet music in the background. Just the right touch. Tasteful. Reassuring.

She listens to us and nods a lot and knows just what we're talking about. We trust her, almost like it was therapy. Which I guess it was.

And we let it all spill. The irritations. Man, I never knew a little package could scream so much. Feeding. No grandparents closer than three thousand miles, and they're keeping their distance. Got their retirement condo, walls all around it, a rule that you can't bring a kid in for longer than twenty-four hours. Not exactly Norman Rockwell, huh? So no quick fix there.

And the kid, he's always awake and wanting to play just when we're stumbling home, zombies. So you cram things in. We had trouble syncing our schedules. Lost touch with friends and business contacts.

See, I spend a lot of time on the horn, keeping up with people I know I'll need sometime. Or just feeling out the gossip shops for what's hot. Can't do that with a squall-bomb on my knee.

Teri had it even worse. She'd bought all the traditional mother package and was trying to pack that into her own flat-out style. Doesn't work.

Now, the usual way to handle this would be for somebody to lose big, right?

Teri drops back and punts, maybe. Stops humping so hard, lets up. So maybe a year downstream, some younger beady-eyed type shoulders her side. She ends up targeted on perpetual middle-management. The desert. Oblivion. Perpetual Poughkeepsie.

Or else I lower my revs. Shy off the background briefings, drop off the party committee, don't sniff around for possible comers to get tight with. You know how it is.

What? No, ol' buddy, you're dead on — not my scene.

But listen, my real concern wasn't my job, it was our relationship. We really work at it. Total communication takes time. We really get into each other. That's just us.

So the lady at GeneInc listens, nods, and introduces us to their top drawer product line. Exclusive. Very high tech. It blew us away.

Freeze-frame, they call it.

Look, the kid's going to be sleeping ten, twelve hours a day anyway, right? GeneInc just packs all that

time into our workweek. Rearranges the kid's schedule, is basically what it is.

Simple electronic stimulus to the lower centres. Basic stuff, they told me, can't damage anything. And totally under our control.

When we want him, the kid's on call. Boost his voltage, allow some warmup -

Sure, Jason. See, he's running at low temperature during the work day. Helps the process. So we come dragging home, have some chardonnay to unwind, catch the news. When we're ready for him we hit a few buttons, warm him up and there he is, bright and agreeable 'cause he's had a ton of extra sack time. Can't get tired and pesky.

I mean, the kid's at his best and we're at peak, too. Relaxed, ready for some A-plus parenting.

Well, we took the Zen pause on the idea, sure. Worked it over. Teri talked it out with her analyst. Thought on the problem, got her doubts under control.

And we went for it. Little shakedown trouble, but nothing big. GeneInc, they've got a fix for everything.

We boost him up for weekends, when we've got space. Quality time, that's what the kid gets. We've set up a regular schedule. Weekdays for us, weeknights and weekends for him.

Now GeneInc's got an add-on you wouldn't believe - Downtime Education, they call it. While he's sleeping through our days, Downtime Ed brings him up to speed on verbals, math, sensory holism, the works. Better than a real teacher, in many ways.

So we feel that - oh yeah, the invitation.

It's for his big blast. Combo first birthday party and graduation from third grade. We put him on the inside track, and he's burning it up. We couldn't be happier. Our kind of kid, for sure.

Pretty soon we'll integrate him into the GeneInc school for accelerated cases, others like him. There's a whole community of these great kids springing up, y'know. They're either in Downtime, learning up a storm, or getting online, first class attention in Freezeframe weekends.

I tell you, Jason, these kids are going to be the best. They'll slice and dice any Normkid competition they run into.

And us - it's like a new beginning. We get to have it all and we know the kid's not suffering. He'll have a highschool diploma by the time he's ten. He'll be a savvy little guy. And we'll load on all the extras, too. Emotional support, travel, the works.

We'll have him on tap when we want him. That'll stretch out his physical childhood, of course, but speed up his mental growth. Better all round, really, 'cause Teri and I totally like him.

See, we want to spread him over more of our lives, keep him for maybe thirty years. Why not have one really top of the line kid, enjoy him most of your life? Efficient.

So look, I got to trot. Map's on the back of the invitation, come and enjoy. No need for a present unless you want to. Teri'll love seeing you again.

And while you're there, I can show you the GeneInc equipment. Beautiful gear, sharp lines. Brochures, too. I've got a kind of little franchise agreement with them, getting in on the ground floor of this thing.

What? Well, that's not the way I'd put it, Jason. This is a class product line.

Calling it a Tupperware party - hey, that's way out of line. We're talking quality here.

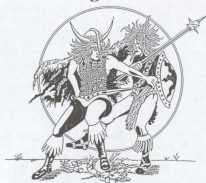
You'll see. Just drop on by. No obligation. Oh yeah, and I got some great cabernet you should try, something I picked up on the wine futures market.

My God, look at the time. See you, ol' buddy.

Have a nice day.

Gregory Benford is a Professor of Physics at the University of California. Since his highly-praised novels *In the Ocean of Night* (1977) and *Timescape* (1980), he has become a very successful spare-time author, with several new books published recently or due imminently. *Locus*, the newspaper of the sf field, has described a forthcoming "Benford publishing program which will have five paperbacks from Tor and Bantam between November '86 and Fall '87." His latest novella, "As Big as the Ritz," will appear in the next issue of *Interzone*.

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Ian Watson

Jingling Geordie's Hole

On the cinema screen: a grey atoll in grey south seas. A bulb of light expanded suddenly; boiling cloud rushed skywards. Within moments the screen rocked at the impact of an implacable, blasting hurricane.

"This is the first moment of the thermonuclear age!" said the newsreel announcer, proud and cheerful as ever.

Ted Appleby felt such a thrill rush through his whole body at the power unleashed. The eleven-year-old paid scant attention to the rest of the newsreel: the Queen touring her Commonwealth, the French Foreign Legion losing a battle in some country called Indo-China, British troops successfully rounding up Mau Mau suspects in Kenya, a woman athlete running round a cinder track. The therm-o-nuclear explosion continued to boil through Ted, seeking outlet, expression.

Curtains slid across the front of the proscenium, luxuriously hung in tiers of pleats, spotlight in pink and orange and green. The main Art Deco lights came on, illuminating Egyptian-style papyrus columns and friezes. A recording of Mantovani's string orchestra playing *Charmaine* began. Ted tagged on to the crowd of children stampeding from their seats, squeezing through the foyer to erupt down mock-marble steps into the bright breezy salty June daylight.

He'd come to the cartoon matinée on his own. As half-expected, Gavin was waiting some way down the street pretending to look in a newsagent's window. Gavin wouldn't wish other boys, who might be from the same school, to see them meet; so Ted loitered, to let the mob clear away.

It was thus with all the older boy's interceptions of Ted; Gavin wanted the two of them to talk alone, to walk alone. Gavin Percy was sixteen. A fortnight earlier a couple of other sixteen-year-olds had surprised Gavin chatting to Ted at a time when Gavin thought they were safe. The older boys had started kidding on. "Got a big sister, then, titch?" Ted had, as it hap-

pened: Helen. He nodded. So far as he knew, Gavin had never even set eyes on her. "Percy's after her – watch out!" Gavin had flushed with embarrassment. "He must be, mustn't he?" Ted had agreed with the tormentors. Gavin had looked relieved at Ted's comprehension, at this evidence of his young friend's complicity.

A lot of smut was talked about girls at that school, a day school for boys only. Lately Ted had been growing ignorantly interested in girls; obviously his own sister didn't count as an example, though the mysteries of her life would be regarded as fair game by any other boys. Bill Gibbon related that his older brother Brian and chums would go to a chum's house when the parents were out at the cinema and would undress a sister and pour ink over her then bath her clean thoroughly. They would stick a carrot up her then make white stuff into the dirty bathwater where she lay. Later, after they'd dried her down thoroughly, Gibbon said that they tied a lump of carrot to a string, put this up her to stop her having a baby then stuck their cocks inside her. When Ted told Gavin about this game, Gavin had looked offended – resentful at his friend having such things in his mind.

In Ted's classroom ball-fights were the rage among half a dozen of the boys, chiefly Gibbon who once exposed his cock in class under cover of his desk. Ted steered well clear of ball-fights which seemed excruciating. Two fighters would square off, each with one hand cupping trouser-clad balls, then would dart at each other to claw the other's defences aside and squeeze his knackers. Howls of pain went up from the loser.

"Hullo," Ted said to Gavin.

The newsagent's window display consisted of a row of sun-faded paperback westerns and war stories, a line of pens and pencils, and a box covered with red crêpe paper. On that box stood a glass of water and a yellow plastic ostrich a few inches high. The ostrich slowly dipped its beak into the water, raised

its head, dipped it, raised it.

"I wonder how that works?" mused Gavin. "Perpetual motion is scientifically impossible. Something to do with water and sunshine, I suppose."

Ted stared in trembling fascination. The novelty ostrich reminded him . . . of the crane on the pier!

From where they stood he couldn't quite see the pier. The clock tower at the bottom of the street was in the way, as was part of the miniature Gibraltar behind which housed the castle, a small army base, and the ruins of the priory. Turn right at the clock tower and descend the steep road alongside the grass slopes of the castle moat, and into view would come: the great north pier of granite blocks, high whitewashed lighthouse at its seaward end.

The massive wheeled crane rested on several sets of rust-bobbled rails running along the mid-section of the pier, high and low. Anyone walking out to the lighthouse had to pass underneath its looming, girdered bridge then along beneath its hundred foot jib. These days the crane never rolled to and fro nor swung its jib out over the sea. Why had it ever done so in the past? To unload boats tying up formerly at the lower stone quayside, safely clear of the Black Midden rocks?

Many steel hawsers as thick as a boy's arm tethered the crane to iron rings in the pier walls; at these points the granite was streaked orange with salt-water rust. The crane had to be chained like some mechanical Samson or winter storms could smash it into the bay. Wild waves sometimes broke clear over the top of the crane, even over the top of the lighthouse. But perhaps the machine couldn't move, ever again; perhaps it was rusted in place. Ted sincerely hoped that this was so, but scarcely dared believe it. Whenever his parents had taken him and Helen for a walk along to the lighthouse of a sunny Sunday afternoon, the passage under crane and jib was fraught with terror. He was sure that the crane's many wheels might creak into life, and start rolling, that the jib would duck down, dangling chains like octopus arms, to snatch him, crush him. He'd endured several nightmares about that iron giant which brooded over the pathway out to sea.

He imagined a therm-o-nuclear explosion hurling that metal monster into the bay where river met sea, drowning it safely, though bits might still protrude.

Ted's Dad had told him that a tunnel ran all the way along inside the pier; that's why there were those opaque green glass slabs set periodically in the concrete path. But how, even in a dream, did you get inside the tunnel which would protect you from the crane?

The ostrich ducked its head into the glass of water, rose erect, ducked, arose, hypnotically.

"I just saw the H-bomb test," Ted told Gavin and imitated the rush of a hurricane, as he imagined it.

"Oh," said Gavin. "Are you walking home or catching the bus?"

Buses departed from beside the clock tower. A crowd from the matinee horsed around the bus stop; a melée. Ted knew that Gavin wouldn't want to mingle with that.

"May as well walk and save the fare," said Ted.

So they strolled away together from the hidden sea, past a closed fish and chip shop with amber Tizer bottles lining the window, past a barber's dustily advertising Durex sheaths, a gaunt Congregational church, a small shrubby park with floral clock. Then came a dingy pub, The Dolphin, smelling of stale beer with a blue star mounted outside on a bracket; next to a grocer's and a greengrocer's. The plate glass reflected Ted and Gavin both dressed in dark blue blazers with crimson badges framing three black anchors, both wearing grey flannel trousers, in Ted's case short ones — but he'd been promised long ones when his next birthday came around. Both with close-cropped haircuts: Ted's hair chestnut, Gavin's gingery. Gavin was slightly plump; Ted was slim. Gavin's face was freckled; Ted had the complexion of an angel, so his mother said embarrassingly. She used to say: cherub, which was worse.

They entered the wrought-iron and dirty glass cavern of the small railway station and climbed the wooden bridge over the rails, pausing at the summit to watch an electric train pull in below. Gavin produced a red-bound school book from his blazer pocket and showed it: *Edward the Second* by Marlowe.

"We've started reading this for the exams."

"A play." Ted regarded the volume with mild disgust.

"It's exciting. It's the best play I've ever read. Part of it happens right here — down by the castle. Edward's best friend sailed from France and landed here to meet the king."

France seemed a great distance from this northern port. Such a voyage — in an ancient sailing tub — made very little sense. If the king's friend had been coming from Norway, that would have been a different kettle of fish. But then, old plays often didn't make sense either.

"All sorts of things happen. Do you want to know how the king gets killed? He's in a dungeon up to his ankles in filthy water. They bring in a table, hold him down with a mattress — then they jab a red-hot cooking rod up his bottom."

"That must hurt." Ted felt sick. Another image had arrived to join the crane in nightmare land, one which he knew his mind would dwell on.

"Maybe we could read a bit of it together, another week? Act it out? It's terribly good."

"Yes," said Ted.

They descended the far flight of steps and headed through streets of houses, each with a tiny walled front flower garden, most with stained-glass panes above the doors. From a number of chimneys identical aerials rose in the form of a large capital "H". Those homes, unlike Ted's or Gavin's, boasted television sets. The "H" reminded Ted of H-bomb.

"Pow!" he exclaimed, and made a noise like rolling thunder.

Beyond those streets was a large, tree-dark park with bowling green and pet cemetery as prelude, and a soot-blackened institution set within iron railings as finale. The old workhouse, from Victorian times, was still tenanted by aged paupers, mostly ailing. Some of the residents were sitting on park benches, passively. A few stood watching the bowling, over a



low hedge. The players – more prosperous pensioners in white Panama hats and club blazers – ignored their derelict audience of shabby overcoats.

Ted wondered whether any work was performed in the grim building known as the workhouse. He imagined old women knitting sweaters for sale to Norwegian sailors, old men whittling wooden boats, or maybe sewing mailbags. He'd heard that husbands and wives were kept separate inside, spent the nights in separate phlegm-racked dormitories. Only when they were let out could a married couple meet.

Presently Ted and Gavin came abreast of a hunched figure in greatcoat and cloth cap shuffling slowly along. This Methuselah with rheumy red eyes held a huge vile handkerchief at chest level to catch a constant string of grey gluey drool proceeding from lips or nostrils; Ted couldn't bear to look more closely. He had passed this fellow on other occasions and presumed that he and his like were the reason why this park, which dropped away steeply to the south down a leafy ravine with cascading stream in the direction of the fish quay, was known as Spittal Dene. On account of the sputum.

Soon they were in sight, over treetops, of the roofs along the river bank: those of ships' chandlers which supplied the trawlers, of wholesale fish merchants, the smelly guano works which manufactured fertilizer from tons of imported bird droppings, the Jungle Arms public house ill-famed for Saturday night fights, and Hood Maggie's rope factory, staffed mostly by notorious women.

Gavin also was staring at the roof of the rope factory. He licked his lips.

"Do you know what Brian Gibbon in my class heard happened at Hood Maggie's last month? There was a new supervisor on the job – a young chap. The women pulled his trousers down and fitted an empty milk bottle over his cock. Then they pulled their skirts up over their waists to excite him." Gavin was sweating, nauseated and excited. "His cock swelled up stiff inside the milk bottle, and wouldn't go down again. He had to go to hospital in a van to get the bottle off. You know about cocks swelling up, do you?"

Ted nodded.

"Does yours, sometimes?" Gavin asked.

At this very moment it was trying to, and Ted walked on awkwardly. Just the other evening, in his room, he had drawn a naked woman on a sheet of paper torn from an exercise book. A woman with breasts and a smooth sweep of flesh between her legs, like a flap glued down. Soon he had ripped the drawing into tiny pieces and flushed them down the lavatory in case his mother discovered. Some scraps had floated; he had to flush the pan again and again.

"I haven't told my Mam, but I've got hairs growing on me down here," he said to Gavin.

"Have you? That's natural." Somehow Gavin looked as though he deplored this development. "So have I," the older boy added after a while. "They're called the short and curlies."

The sky had been clouding over. A hooter sounded from the river, just as an air-raid siren might sound.

A thought occurred to Ted. "Do women have short and curlies too?"

"Yes!" snapped Gavin, a peevisish note in his voice. "Gibbon brought a picture magazine to school last

term. I glanced at it."

Ted brooded about his drawing. It had been copied, to the best of his memory, from a photo of the statue of a goddess in an encyclopedia. And it had been wrong. No wonder he had felt so odd about it, and baffled as to what a husband and wife were supposed to do, as regards that seamless flap of skin down there.

"I'd like to see a magazine like that."

"What for?" asked Gavin.

"You'll not laugh?"

"I promise I won't."

Ted explained about the drawing. Gavin smiled.

Rain started to spit in their faces. A Vespa putted along the nearby road, the rider perched upon the scooter's ample casing as though upon two creamy metal buttocks.

Dreams could trap and trick you. Ted was hastening through the giant crane's shadow. He could hear noises up there: rattling, clanking.

He had to look up! Scrambling out along the jib above him was . . . Bill Gibbon, bare body bristling all over with hairs. A "Gibbon" was the name for some kind of ape, Ted knew. Therefore Gibbon was a hairy beast. The person overhead looked massive as a gorilla. Could that be Gibbon's elder brother? Or both of them fused together?

Now that Ted had spotted him, Gibbon began gibbering and capering. One huge paw grabbed his groin in preparation for a ball-fight. Catching hold of a loose hawser, Tarzan-style, Gibbon swung down.

Ted fled towards the tall white lighthouse which seemed far away. Gibbon easily overhauled him.

A paw clutched at Ted's cock and balls, to squeeze. Pressure mounted, painfully – but also thrillingly. Squirming to turn, Ted found himself pressed against not Gibbon, but the naked goddess of his drawing. Her breasts squashed against his face; the hair at the base of her stomach pricked him. A bright light, bright as the sun, crescendoed somewhere. He felt wet, and woke. Down inside the bed his fingers touched his groin which was soaked with hot sticky liquid. He smelt a salty-sweet tang.

Gavin didn't coincide with him, the next school day; but the day after he was hanging about near the park gate. Ted hadn't wanted to tell his mother what happened in bed, but now he told Gavin.

Gavin nodded. "That's natural. It's called a wet dream. Was I in the dream?"

"You?" asked Ted, puzzled.

"If Gibbon was, I thought I might have been."

"The woman I drew was in it. I told you."

Gavin shook his head dismissively.

Above the school playing field was a small wild grassy plateau with precipitous sides. The boys called it "the Lost World" and occasionally agile disobedient pupils such as Bill Gibbon would climb up there to lie hidden on top. The headmaster had put the plateau out of bounds, as a boy once fell off and broke his leg. Cricketers who weren't yet in to bat were supposed to stay near the green-painted pavilion, with its scoreboard and changing room. Those who had already batted could watch play from anywhere around the fringes of the field, on the flat.

As Ted, in white shorts, shirt, and sandshoes, was sprawling on the grass eyeing bowlers and batsmen in total boredom and watching a ladybird climb a green blade, Gibbon and his chum Malcolm Davies loomed over him.

"You're sucking up to that Gavin Percy," Gibbon said. Even Gibbon Junior was much burlier than Ted. "You're his pet, hoping he'll help you with your homework."

"No," Ted said feebly. "That isn't true."

"I'll tell my big brother about you and him if you don't come up the Lost World with us after the game. We're going to tie you up with strong grass and leave you. You'll miss your tea, and get five hundred lines and the slipper for being up there."

The two boys ambled off, leaving Ted hollow and scared.

Strong grass braided together would cut wounds in his wrists and ankles if he tried to free himself. Gibbon might debag him too, steal his shorts. If he didn't do as they said, Brian Gibbon would be told. Ted worried desperately.

After the game, however, he ran off home. In bed that night he fretted for ages because he hadn't gone up the Lost World and wished morning would never arrive, when he must go to school to face Gibbon and Davies.

He turned up as late as possible, nearly missing the school bell. Though he was full of jitters all day long, oddly neither of the bullies paid any attention to him. Could they have entirely forgotten something which preoccupied Ted so desperately? Although he still worried a bit the next day too, nothing at all happened. That evening, walking home, he realized that if the headmaster had discovered about Ted being tied up on the plateau, then he would have demanded to know who else went up there with him and tied him up. Davies and Gibbon would have been punished too; tanned with the slipper, kept in for an hour or two to write lines.

Following the cartoon and news matinee the next Saturday, Ted met Gavin in the usual place, beside the ostrich which Ted tried not to notice. An early bus had cleared everyone away from the clock tower so Ted and Gavin went to perch on the edge of the stone horse trough dated 1841 below the tower. The trough was bone dry, empty apart from a screwed-up fish and chip paper; buses didn't drink from horse troughs.

From that vantage point they could see a stone man standing in mid-air: statue of a commander in Nelson's navy, a victor of Trafalgar now surveying the river protectively from a high column. The column rose from an imitation castle, and Ted could make out one of the cannons from a man-of-war which poked riverwards over mock battlements.

Gavin took out a red book; his play.

"You don't have to go home yet, do you? We could climb up to the monument and act a bit. It's super. Would you like that?"

"All right. I can only stop for half an hour."

As they climbed the wide, crumbling steps to the battlements, the sun shone bright. Up top, a fresh wind blew, to discourage other visitors. Over the river herring gulls and kittiwakes milled

and screamed. The kittiwakes nested on all available upper storey window ledges along the river front, dis-tempering walls with their droppings.

More sheltered spots might be basking in warmth, and the beaches to the north of the real castle, though rather exposed, would no doubt be spotted with fly-specks of plodgers and sun-bathers. Not the haven nestling below by the pier, however. The haven's sand was a mess of washed-up cork, sea coal, black weed, driftwood, nubs of polished glass, on which hulls of beached yachts rested. Several yachts were tacking out in the bay, with tiny crew. Otherwise, the scene seemed deserted of people.

They sat by a cannon, its wheel sunk in concrete and muzzle plugged likewise – as though someone might otherwise vandalistically fire a stone ball at a trawler.

Tilting the open play towards Ted, Gavin read aloud:

"Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay."

Ted felt confused. Was there straw spread to dance on, to stop the satires from spoiling the lawn with stiletto heels?

"Sometimes a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
Crowns of pearl about his naked arms,
And in his sportful hands an olive tree,

To hide those parts which men delight to see –"
Gavin broke off. "Those parts. Do you understand that, Ted?"

"Sort of. He's talking about . . . down here. Is the boy hiding behind the tree?"

"No, tree just means a bit of a tree. A bunch of leaves, to hide his parts. It has to rhyme."

Ted grinned. "Maybe the boy has a lot to hide."

"I shouldn't think so. The men want to see . . . and touch his parts. Shall we explore the tunnel down below?"

The false castle was hollow. An empty space the size of a train tunnel circuted the square core of the column. The entrance side was dingy, the other three sides pitch black. Ted had only once stepped through that entrance and taken a few paces into the thickening gloom. The floor was of dry soil, and just inside the entrance he remembered clumps of dogs' dirt, some of it white because the dog had distemper. He'd heard Bill Gibbon say that youths took girls into the tunnel under the monument for a feel.

"I brought a torch," Gavin said. "To show those parts, down below." From his blazer pocket he produced a small flashlight.

Ted shook his head. "Dogs do their business in there. You could catch distemper from touching it. Look, I'll have to go. I said I could only stay half an hour."

"With the torch, we can keep clean. Let's just explore quickly."

"I can't! Next week, maybe. I have to run for the bus."

Ted dashed down the flaking stone steps away from the looming cannons.

That night Ted dreamed he was tied up, on the Lost World. It was twilight; Venus shone. He could see the stone man looking in the wrong direction, atop his column, unable to turn round just as Ted was unable. The rope of grass bit into his wrists which were fastened behind his back, so that he couldn't touch those parts. Those parts itched and swelled painfully. Touch would change the pain to pleasure, relief.

He woke, to find that he'd been sleeping with his palms squashed under his buttocks. His hands were paralysed, two dead animals fastened to his wrists. Soon they prickled and stabbed with pins and needles.

It rained a lot during the next week, so that he didn't meet Gavin at all, only spying him once or twice in the distance down school corridors. However, the following Saturday was a scorcher. When Ted arrived for the matinee, Gavin was already waiting near the cinema.

"I've got one of those photo magazines to show you," said Gavin. "You know? It's in my pocket. I can't take it out where anyone might see. Why not skip the cartoons? That'll give us longer to look at it."

"How did you get it?"

"From a newsagent's down on the fish quay. I went specially. Sailors must buy these." From the strain in Gavin's voice Ted could guess how hard it must have been for his friend to sneak into that shop, down in rough territory, where at least he wasn't likely to be known. No doubt Gibbon Senior never had such qualms. Had Gavin worn his school blazer?

"Did the newsagent make it hard for you?"

"Not much."

"Are there lots of pictures?"

"Quite a few. Some show everything."

"Where shall we go? The monument?"

Gavin shook his head. "How about the rocks below the priory? It's more natural there. More beautiful. We could climb up into Jangling Geordie's Hole. We'd be private; it would be light and airy and clean."

Jangling Geordie's Hole was a small cave a little way up the cliff face, which high tides lapped into. Legend had it that the cave drove deep into the headland on which castle and priory stood; it had supposedly been used by smugglers, and was haunted by a ghost who jingled chains. According to an old book called *North Country Lore and Legend* in the Percy household, a young knight had once fought his way past demons into the pitchy depths to drink from "the chalice of truth." An engraving showed him wielding a sword which shone as bright as the sun, against beasts resembling pterodactyls and prehistoric crocodiles. In reality, the cave was only shallow.

"All right," agreed Ted.

Ten minutes later they were crunching over shingle littered with torn-up bladder wrack, broad black whips with explosive air-pods. They skirted pools inhabited by button anemones, limpets, whelks, and small crabs, then clambered over tumbled white boulders to the towering cliff. Gentle waves slopped and hissed. The tide was barely on the turn, so they couldn't be cut off for another two or three hours. Further along the shore a couple of blokes were sea-angling from a spit of black rock, but a deep inlet of water carved its way in between. No one else was

exploring their area; most kids would be at the matinee.

Past storms had tossed weed into the cave but no recent wind-whipped waves had reached as high, thus crisp black heaps matted the stones thickly. Hot morning sun had been warming the weed mattress. Gavin shucked off his blazer, encouraged Ted to remove his, and laid both down as rugs. From his inside pocket Gavin slipped a small folded magazine and creased it the opposite way to straighten the pages. On the colour cover: the upper half of a smiling naked suntanned woman with raven hair and big bouncy breasts.

"Health and Efficiency. It's for nudists."

"Oh boy," said Ted.

Inside were black and white photos. A dark-maned young woman splashed naked in the sea, her bottom turned to the camera; Ted thought he saw a hint of hair between her buttocks. He felt those parts tingle and swell. A blonde woman lay supine on a towel, her nearer leg raised to conceal her groin. Gavin turned the page. The same blonde was leaping in the air, but between her legs was only a blurred grey smear. However, on the right hand page a flaxen-haired girl with little pointy breasts showed faint delicate curls on the mound where her legs met.

Gavin propped the magazine open on a hump of weed. "You'll hurt yourself, keeping your parts squashed up like that. So will I. It's dangerous." He opened his belt and unbuttoned his trousers; opened Ted's gently too, his hands brushing Ted's aertex-clad parts. "Better let it right out. In fact, we ought to take our trousers and pants right off. We don't want to stain them."

Remembering the hot wet gush in bed, Ted agreed. Soon their flannel trousers and aertex pants lay discarded. Gavin looked at Ted's now urgent parts; Ted looked at Gavin's hairs and swollen cock, then at the photo. Ted wanted to hold himself but Gavin pushed his hand aside. From his pocket he took a blue and white glass jar, unscrewed the lid, scooped a mass of Nivea skin cream on to his fingers.

"Watch the photo, Ted. Pretend I'm her." Gavin massaged him teasingly with cream-smears fingers. Presently he whispered, "Lie over. Let's pretend you're a woman too." Briefly he took his hand away to smear cream on himself, emptying the jar. Now Gavin gripped Ted's cock wonderfully; and a creamy cock butted up Ted's backside. "This might feel strange. It's worth it."

Ted stared at the photo in front of his face, moving his own parts up and down now in Gavin's fist. His bottom felt as if he was straining on the toilet with a huge turd stuck half way out, but this discomfort was secondary to the pleasure in his front part. He shut his eyes. From deep inside him something was rising, a snake of hot jelly that lived in his belly. Hotter, more urgently it rose. The therm-o-nuclear explosion was coming – the blinding light; that was why he had his eyes shut. For timeless moments boiling milk burst through the squeezing fist; he saw whiteness everywhere. Simultaneously the burning rod which killed the king entered Ted's bowels. Gavin gasped, "Sweet Prince, I come!" Fiery stars exploded throughout the blank smooth whiteness, and Ted cried out.

The world boomed as though the cave was a bass

drum which the sea beat upon. Ted felt that some door had been torn open in him – a door which was also in the backside of Jingling Gordie's cave. A dim tunnel stretched away. Far off, a transparent ghost gibbered and writhed. Ted's limbs were the ghost's, his gibberings and writhings, its. At the heart of the ghost floated an albino tadpole. Somehow that tadpole swam within Ted too.

Then the wild wave which had burst its bounds hissed back to its source. Gavin let go of him, turned him over, kissed him on the lips.

Ted drew away, and saw vivid blood streaks on Gavin's foamy cock like strawberry syrup on an ice cream cornet. As he drew on his underpants hastily Ted felt cream and blood ooze out to stain the cotton.

Feeling sore and awkward, Ted walked home alone, worrying about his underpants. There'd hardly been any need for Gavin to say so strenuously that he shouldn't tell anyone; he had no intention of telling. But his soiled pants! Maybe he'd stained the inside of his trousers too.

He detoured through the huge cemetery near his home. Around the back of the chapel and crematorium was a shabby public lavatory; he could examine himself.

He generally admired the marble chips within the boundaries of graves: little lakes of emerald crystals, ruby crystals, ice, and amethyst. He usually enjoyed seeing the glass bells covering bowls of china flowers faded to pastel. Today he hardly noticed. Rooks cawed from their black stick-nests in the green heights of elms. Decaying wreaths lay heaped along one new grave; nobody had cleared the rotting flowers away yet. He hardly heard, or saw.

The men's lavatory was a short dark concrete tunnel with pee-stained wall and yellowed gutter sloping to a drain-hole. The stone floor was slicked with damp. Cocks had been pencilled on the wall as if to remind users – in vain – which way to aim. At the end: a door battered with bootmarks, carved with initials, a stout brass mechanism bolted to it. Ted fed it a penny.

Behind the door he found a china bowl with no seat, a string dangling from the overhead cistern, a piece of metal where toilet roll would fit, had there been any. He forced the bolt shut with difficulty, fearing that he might lock himself in. He undid his trousers, which to his relief were reasonably unblemished. But a big dark brown patch disfigured his underpants.

He recalled how much soaking and bleaching his hanky had needed, when he had a nose-bleed. He couldn't possibly clean this mess in secrecy. It mustn't be known that he had bled between the legs. His sister presumably bled – Gibbon told dirty jokes about tomato sauce – but that was different, and private. He wasn't meant to.

So he eased his trousers off, keeping them clear of the wet floor, removed his underpants and put his trousers back on. The underpants he stuffed behind the chipped bowl. Maybe his mother mightn't notice for weeks that he only now owned three pairs of underpants instead of four. If she did find out he would say that he messed his pants at school one day, took them off in the school bog and got rid of them. Because there was dirt in them. But he'd been ashamed to tell her.

A week later the summer term ended. In the hall the assembled school sang:

*Lord dismiss us with thy blessings,
Thanks for mercies past received . . .*

Ted had avoided Gavin during that final week, and on the last day once again he caught a crowded bus home in company with a gang of boys rather than walking. For the first two mornings after the events in Jingling Geordie's Hole he had found smears of blood on the toilet paper, but then no more.

During the first ten days of the summer holiday Ted mainly stayed at home, re-reading old copies of *Hotspur* and *Wizard*, sorting out his cigarette card collection, drawing pictures of therm-o-nuclear explosions. Though he was no nuisance his mother chased him out occasionally for a breath of fresh air. He stayed close to home, wandering round the wooded back lanes of the cemetery.

On the eleventh day the Appleby family set off by train to spend a week in Edinburgh. Ted's Dad, an electrician with the Council, was now on holiday; also sister Helen who had left school the year before and now worked as a dental receptionist.

The family stayed in a boarding house off Hanover Street, ate porridge and kippers for breakfast, explored the city. The Botanic Gardens of Corstorphine seemed to Ted a paradisaical version of the cemetery back home. The tiny room Ted stayed in was directly behind the red neon sign, *Princes Guest House*, which stayed lit all night long, tubes humming and buzzing, bathing the room even through the curtains in a blood-stained light. Though it wasn't obvious from the street below the sign was thick with spiders' webs and hundreds of insect corpses.

On the fifth morning of the holiday Ted was sick before breakfast. He vomited clear bitter liquid into the tiny wash-handbasin and couldn't face kippers or porridge. Likewise the next morning.

"You must be off colour," his Mam observed. Ted wondered if this could be some reference to the neon sign outside his window.

On the train home he felt nauseated, then better once they had returned. He carried on reading, drawing, walking in the cemetery, daydreaming about the botanic gardens of which he'd bought picture postcards. He wished he could live there forever, camping in the orchid or fern house, after a therm-o-nuclear war which had killed everyone else. Since that would include his Mam and Dad, he cried a little. Soon it was September, and the new school term began.

"Have a good holiday?" Gavin asked, meeting him in the corridor near the physics lab.

"We went to Edinburgh. I was sick a few times." This stuck in Ted's mind since he had hardly ever been sick before, and never on just getting out of bed.

Gavin looked hurt, as though Ted said this to reproach him.

"We went to the Lake District," said Gavin. "I thought about sending you a card but I decided not. Your parents might have asked. I bought you a present."

A tin of butterscotch with a picture of a hill called Helvellyn.

"I climbed that mountain. Early on, I found a sheep

lying on its back in the bracken. I rolled it over but it couldn't stand up. I thought about you at the cairn on the top and added a stone for you. Are you going to the matinée this Saturday?"

"I don't know."

Noisy boys were clattering in their direction. Gavin slipped away into the lab.

On Saturday Ted set off for the cinema, since his Mam expected this; but he went to the cemetery instead. Parking himself on a bench, he read most of the stories in a new copy of *Hotspur* and ate all of the butterscotch. Careful that no one saw, he chucked the empty tin under a laurel bush before returning home. For several hours afterwards he had indigestion.

Playing rugby that winter, Ted soon got puffed out and could only trot around after the ball.

The crush of the scrum bruised and scared him. Bill Gibbon often shouldered into him, tried to trip him.

Ted was very hungry these days, sometimes gobbling four slices of bread and marg with his Mam's meals. He sneaked biscuits from the pantry. He always bought chocolate bars with the money he saved by missing the cartoon matinée; these gave him the energy to endure the cold of the cemetery.

Towards Christmas his Mam said, "You're putting on weight," and it was true. His trousers – long ones, since his October birthday – pressed cruelly into his waist. He hadn't seen much of Gavin at school; Gavin seemed offended by Ted's long trousers instead of admiring them. Ted found that the trousers tried to cling together at the turn-ups when he walked; he waddled, legs apart. The turn-ups filled with fluff which wadded into felt, but he couldn't bend to clean them out with his finger. If only his elastic belt, with the silver snake-clasp, would open out still further.

In January as the new term started his Mam said, "You're becoming a fatty. You shouldn't eat so much. But maybe that isn't it, maybe it's glandular. It can be, with boys of your age. Maybe we should take you to see the doctor."

"No," said Ted, "I feel fine."

He didn't. Rugby games were a nightmare, made slightly less so only by the general indifference of the sports master. On sports days Ted longed for rain, then the class would stay in the school doing prep. As often as not, it did rain; or sleet. Worse, now there were marks on his belly like thin red worms as though his skin was slowly tearing. His Dad had a feeble, brief word with him about the facts of life, embarrassing them both.

The radio news announced how British troops were leaving the Suez Canal Zone, and how France was sending thousands of troops to Algeria. Ted felt proud for the French. Their Prime Minister, who was also called France, was making everyone drink milk because it was healthy. Ted used this as an excuse to persuade his Mam to order an extra pint bottle a day all for him. But the British hadn't done so badly after all; tommies had crushed the Mau Mau who butchered settlers with long knives. In Algeria the natives threw bombs into cinemas. In America President Eisenhower was guarding Formosa against the Red Chinese. By the autumn of that year there would be television with adverts, just as at the cinema. Ted

wished there was a TV set in their house, and a big "H" on the roof, so that he could see all the newsreels he was missing; but his Mam said they wouldn't get one while he was still at school with homework to do. Helen didn't seem to care whether they had a set or not; she was a dull, boring sister who read *Woman and Ideal Home*.

Ted always locked the door when he had his weekly bath; he never let anyone glimpse the red worms on his tummy. He didn't dare go to the surgery because he already knew what Dr Robson would discover. Nocturnal visions of a tunnel and of a white tadpole – coupled with furtive reference to a big maroon volume titled *The Home Family Doctor* which was kept on a high shelf – had made it plain; and if Dr Robson found out he would find out what Ted and Gavin had done.

Ted was having a baby.

One day he met Gavin after school. The older boy no longer seemed to like Ted much, not only on account of those long trousers but because Ted looked swollen and blotchy as well as being a bit taller. They walked the streets together as of old; unlike as of old.

"Gav, I have to tell you something."

"Yes?"

"I'm having a baby. I think it'll come in March."

Gavin grabbed Ted by the shoulder. "You can't! You aren't a woman. What do you mean?"

Ted began to blubber.

"What's wrong with you?" Gavin had gone white.

"Scared."

"Why?"

"I told you. It's because of what we did in Jangling Geordie's Hole."

Now Gavin seemed furious – though scared, too. "You're making this up. That's scientifically impossible. You don't have a womb inside you. You're saying this to make trouble!"

"I must have something that's imitating a womb. I've got so fat. I told you how I was sick in the mornings during the summer hols – that's morning sickness. I looked in a medical book. There are all these red marks on my tummy, because it's stretching. Can I show you them?"

"I don't want to see."

"Won't you help me, Gav? My Mam wants me to go to the doctor."

A cunning look crossed Gavin's face. "You haven't told your Mam?"

"No."

"Women drink stuff to get rid of a baby. I'll find out. But you mustn't tell anybody else."

Ted winced. "Ouch, I felt it move."

"What?"

"In my tummy. Feel it, Gav!"

"Here in the street?"

"Feel while it's moving, or you aren't helping me!"

Gavin glanced up and down the deserted street, scanned the nearby net-curtained windows. Hastily he stepped close to Ted, let his hand be guided clammyly.

"Do you feel it?"

"Something's shoving, kicking," the older boy mumbled, bewildered and terrified now.

Two days later, by the deserted chilly bowling green, Gavin said, "I've asked Brian Gibbon."

"He'll tell his brother." Ted felt betrayed.

"No, he won't. I gave him my new fountain pen. I'll do homework for him, and I promised him some of the money I got for Christmas if he helps. Gibbon knows about girls and babies. It has to be him, Ted. Anyway, I didn't mention you!"

"So what did you say?"

Gavin sniggered bitterly. "That I got a girl into trouble. She's threatening to tell her Dad. Gibbon respects me now, because of that. He wanted to know all the details. He would!"

"And?"

"I pretended she's a friend of my cousin's. I said I took her to one of those concrete pill-boxes from the war, along the dunes among the spiky grass, and we did it there. Last term. I thought she might only let me have a feel but she took her knickers off and let me do it all. That's what I said." Gavin looked disgusted by his story. "Gibbon'll find a way."

Ted thought about carrots tied to string, and milk bottles. His tummy curdled. Gavin too looked haunted with anxiety. Let him be haunted!

He whispered to Gavin, "If I have a baby and people find out you're the father, the police'll take you off to a reformatory."

Gavin bit his lip.

"Gibbon says it's done with a bottle of gin and a bent wire coathanger," Gavin told Ted. They were on the railway bridge. "The woman drinks the gin to upset her stomach then someone pushes the coathanger up inside her and scrapes the pregnancy loose. The thing comes out."

This news filled Ted with alarm. "You'd shove a coathanger up my bottom?"

"Gibbon says that only works properly in the early months, and the woman sometimes bleeds a lot. He said if the baby's bigger it's best to stick to the gin, to try to cause a miscarriage –"

"Hey! I thought you told him that girl and you did it last term."

"Yes, but I asked him 'what if?' and he told me. The baby would get born prematurely, and die. It could be buried or chucked in the sea. Gibbon'll get the gin for me from an off-licence if I pay him."

"I'd be drunk. My Mam and Dad would know."

"It takes three or four hours for a miscarriage. You'd probably have got over being drunk. We can do it this Saturday if you can find a good excuse for being out all day."

"I'll say I've been invited to a birthday treat. Matinée in the morning, fish and chip lunch in a café, and the skating rink in the afternoon. Where shall we do it?"

"We'd need to be alone. What about the cave? My Grandad mentioned the tide won't be very high this weekend – I'll find out what time it's rising. The sea would cover the rocks but it wouldn't reach the cave."

"Are you sure?" Ted imagined coastguards, soldiers, police climbing down the cliffs on ropes to rescue them. Even the lifeboat being launched and a breeches-buoy hauling them from drowning.

"Unless there's a storm."

But there was no storm. When they climbed into



Jingling Geordie's Hole that Saturday at ten o'clock the sea was already sluicing across the boulders. White foals – only junior horses – capered along rock-broken, breeze-flicked waves. In deeper water, swells and gulfs of dark green glass undulated frigidly. The sky was a dismal uniform grey.

The cave was damp though not too chilly. Ted had on his thickest jumper as well as blazer and mac; Gavin likewise, with the addition of a woollen scarf. From his deep mac pocket Gavin pulled a bundle wrapped in the *Shipping Gazette*, unwound a bottle of Gordon's Gin almost as darkly green as the sea; then he produced a small First Aid tin with some bandages and gauze in it. Finally, a chocolate bar and mince pie for himself.

Ted disgorged a crumpled envelope with birthday card inside and something in gift wrapping.

"It's a Dinky tank. Fires matchsticks. Cost my Mam four and sixpence." Ted tossed the wrapped present aside.

Health and Efficiency and the empty Nivea jar were still where they had left them, though the magazine was now a damp wad, the pages sticking together.

Ted thought of other places where they might be doing this. In a pill-box along the dunes? With its machine-gun slits facing the beach where concrete blocks still lay slumped, waiting to repel the Nazi tanks brought on landing craft from Norway . . . a pill-box with no door, where courting couples went for a feel. There was nowhere else.

Gavin uncapped the bottle. "Don't swig it like lemonade or you'll cough it up again. Gibbon said so. Get as much down as you can, slowly, and keep on

getting it down."

Ted started swallowing gin.

Though Ted was lying flat he felt desperately ill and dizzy. The cave roof rocked from side to side. The walls rotated. The largest of the slapping waves just below tossed their icy spittle inside, which gave some momentary relief. He sweated, he shivered. His tummy burned and churned. He longed for it to spew out everything, including that living creature that lurked there. But it would have to come out of his bottom, like the biggest turd ever.

Suddenly he did vomit. A stinking flood pumped out over Ted's mac and over weed, as convulsively as though his guts were unreeling through his mouth. Gavin had squirmed aside, swearing, "Bloody fuck!" Even after nothing more would come, Ted was still racked by gasping spasms, deep down in him now, doubling him up on his side.

Gavin began to press Ted's midriff excruciatingly. "You can do it, you filthy little tyke!" he screamed. Ted hardly heard. Waves of pain were squeezing downward rhythmically.

Gavin hadn't entirely believed till now. Even though he had felt those spasms in Ted's tummy. The younger boy was loopy because of what he and Gavin had done together. Gavin knew that people could make themselves ill by imagination. If only he could purge Ted, "catharctise" him – just as Mr Brennan the English teacher said that a tragedy like Marlowe's was supposed to do to the audience. Drive the nonsense out of Ted which had cost Gavin a fountain pen,

money, extra hours of homework, worst of all: obligation to Gibbon. Make Ted utterly sick of it! This had been in Gavin's mind as a safety valve of sanity alongside the mad steam-boiler of Ted's impossible pregnancy. A safety valve, till now.

Now Gavin unbuttoned Ted's spew-smear mac and his blazer and hauled his flannels and underpants off over the shoes. If Ted was to give birth – to believe he was giving birth – he must be naked from the waist down. The sight of Ted's parts gave Gavin no joy now. Swollen, red-streaked tummy. Shrunken knob, wrinkled nuts, hairs. Ted seemed to have passed out, but his midriff convulsed; with each flux the boy's legs slid further apart – and his bottom gaped. Now there could be no doubt in Gavin's mind: the boy was giving birth. Having a baby, in a cave cut off by the sea. Gavin backed away up against the cave wall, chilled with dread and disgust.

He forced himself to look. Ted's anus had split open amidst reeking shit, blood, and yellow juices. Something rather smaller than the boy's head had forced its way out and lay between the spread of his legs, writhing, wriggling.

Was that a miscarriage? A premature baby?

Premature meant feeble, weak, unable to survive. Let the thing stop moving, let it die! But it wouldn't; or not immediately. He should snatch it up and toss it in the sea; he'd have to touch it, though. Or bash it with a stone.

Ted looked dead. *I've seen my Teddy bare and now he's dead; the stuffing has come out of him. I didn't kill him!*

Roll Ted's body into the sea? The corpse might float, pointing at the cave where Gavin sat imprisoned.

The thing between Ted's legs thrashed about as if to right itself; as if growing stronger. Gavin crept closer, then jerked back. The baby looked more like an octopus with bulbous body, suckery arms. Or legs. How many? Where the coat of blood and shit had rubbed off, it was white as cow-tripe, white as cooked cod. Made of strong white rubber. A glossy patch might be an eye; a puckered ridge: a mouth. It was a monster, a terrible deformity. Gavin scrambled to the back of the cave where a hill of stones was piled, rubbed smooth by years and years of sea-grind at highest tide. He cast about for a suitable instrument with which to destroy it. The stones were jammed into a lumpy jigsaw. When he tugged loose an ostrich-egg of speckled, salt-whitened granite another stone shifted of its own accord; then its neighbour, and the next. As if that particular granite egg had been a keystone the whole top of the pile started to slide, scraping and grinding. As Gavin jumped clear, dropping his bludgeon, it almost seemed that the stones were being shoved from behind. High up, an opening appeared – big enough to crawl through.

The creature slithered up over Ted's body. Floppily, fast, it squirmed up the tumbled hill – Gavin shrieked and dodged – and disappeared through the gap.

When his heart stopped thumping Gavin re-armed himself. Cautiously he climbed the slope, having to duck as he came to the gap between stones and roof. The opening appeared to give on to a rough tunnel –

faintly visible, extending away upward into almost-darkness. If only he had brought his torch today.

Maybe he was just seeing a rear section of the cave, one which the stones had blocked off? Surely there couldn't be a tunnel – not an actual Jangling Geordie one! Why, it would have been discovered years ago, explored, and barricaded with a padlocked iron gate not with a heap of stones. Its existence would be common knowledge, not some legend printed in a Nineteenth Century tome. Yet he perceived a tunnel. Yet a faint foetid breath wafted against his face.

The creature's breath? If such creatures breathed. He couldn't see it anywhere, though he could see little enough. As his vision adjusted, however, a blob of grey appeared to flee uphill.

Gavin descended to where the half-naked boy lay sprawled with filth and blood between his legs. Discarding the stone, he shook Ted, slapped his cheeks, tried to find a pulse, tried to find a heartbeat. Ted's flesh felt unnaturally cool; bleeding had apparently stopped.

No one knew they were here. Gavin dragged the boy towards the rear of the cave, humped him up the slope. Using all his strength, he eased the body through the opening until Ted's weight finally pulled him down out of sight.

Quickly Gavin collected Ted's trousers and pants, the wrapped present, the card, and stuffed those through the gap, too. After he had crammed the opening tight with fallen stones, he sat to await the sinking of the tide, trying not to think of what was behind him.

An hour later, having looked to see that no one was visible on the pier, he climbed from the cave and worked his way over high slippery boulders, still sloshed by the waves, back to safety; to the stone steps with their rust-bobbled rail that led up from shingle to where the granite pier rooted into the land.

In the early hours Gavin sat up in bed in a sweat of fear. With blankets dragged up to his throat, he pressed his spine against the wallpaper. The bedside lamp, which he'd switched on with a panic hand, illuminated the same familiar bedroom: blue imitation-velvet curtains, untidy work-table, chair with flat orange cushion, full bookcase, calendar of Canadian scenes set by an aunt that Christmas, tick-tocking Swiss chalet clock with chain weighted by a metal fir cone, a long framed school photograph: four ranks of tiny faces all topped by caps, one of them Ted.

Gavin had just dreamt the worst dream of his life, and knew that Ted was linked to him by an invisible cord which could stretch for miles, miles which had no meaning.

Gavin had been within Ted in that dream much more deeply than he'd been within him the previous summer. This time, he'd been wholly inside his skin.

He woke, half-naked on cold rough stone. His tummy, and beneath, was a cavern of dull pain. His head ached.

Light. More in the distance than close by, as though light needed to gain depth before it could show him his surroundings: a tunnel in rock, stretching one way and the other way to the limit of the light, the limit of his eyes.

Ted knelt on bare knees. He noticed clothes nearby.

Staggering to his feet he reclaimed his underpants and trousers and managed to draw them on, over a kind of emptiness as though something was missing from him. His mac stank of stale spew; he dragged the raincoat off and dropped it.

Some way along the tunnel he noticed movement. Something small, complicated, and white was climbing along the floor towards him. Pulling, sucking itself along.

He mustn't let it reach him! He began to limp away – but now ahead of him he saw another white thing, twin to the first, an afterbirth, only the second creature was retreating from him as if filled with loathing. As he moved, the thing behind advanced, the thing in front fled. He was a kind of mirror between the two. The one ahead wanted nothing to do with him. The one behind – they were both like swollen white balls dangling long soft cocks – was doing its best to reach him, touch him, cling to him. He feared it would join itself to him suckingly, and though he sensed a hole in himself he didn't want that inside him ever again.

Therefore he must trudge along the tunnel, to escape from one white thing while tormenting the other white thing by pursuing it. He hadn't the strength to overtake the creature ahead, unless it stopped to welcome him; and he hoped it wouldn't. If he himself stopped, the creature behind would catch up. The tunnel seemed to extend from forever to forever, perhaps because space and time had changed.

Night after night Gavin dreamt the same dream, as if Ted was calling to be let out from behind the wall of stones.

Police visited the school to question Ted's classmates. In assembly the headmaster said a prayer for the missing boy and his family, and warned of the dangers of not confiding in one's own parents. Word went around the school that Ted Appleby had killed himself – probably by jumping in the river – since he was depressed at putting on weight and being useless at games. No finger pointed at Gavin. Bill Gibbon may have felt scared and guilty at having persecuted Ted a bit. So if he knew any other explanation, he wasn't saying – even to his big brother.

Brian Gibbon asked Gavin furtively whether the gin had worked.

"Like a bomb," said Gavin. "But maybe she wasn't really knocked up in the first place! I think she was having me on."

"They do. Slags! Did you use a coathanger?"

"She refused. She just drank."

"She just wanted the gin."

"She got pissed as a newt and sick as a dog. Serves her right, I say."

Gibbon nodded, approving Gavin's new worldly wisdom.

The next Saturday Gavin went back to the dreadful cave, to try to purge his dreams. Scrambling to the top of the stone pile at the rear he began pulling the salty granite eggs loose one by one, tumbling them down behind him. Within five minutes he had cleared the upper reaches. He shone his torch.

On blank rock.

No opening, no tunnel, no body, no octopus-baby, nothing! Just the solid back wall of the cave.

For a moment, in spite of his clear recall that there

was one cave and one cave only in the cliff, he wondered wildly whether there might be another, very similar, a few yards away. Then his gaze lighted on the empty Nivea jar. Frantically he began unloading all the loosened stones, tossing them out of the cave mouth to crash and bounce down the boulders. Then he attacked the bulk of the pile.

He worked hard. Half an hour later the cave was bare. He had even torn up the weed matting from the floor. He stood gasping for breath in an empty hollow, a barren stone womb. The only way out or in was the way he had come already.

Gavin sat on the stone floor and wept.

That night in the dream for the first time Gavin's perspective altered. Now he himself was the terrified, nauseated creature which groped and sucked its way along that dim tunnel – to escape from the zombi figure of Ted which lumbered helplessly after him.

Images began to form in Gavin's mind. He saw that something ancient existed behind that hollow pocket in the headland known as Jangling Geordie's Hole. It could open up its own spaces when it wished. The previous summer the creature had opened a door from its stone depths, to enter Ted; to put part of itself into him, to grow there for a while. Two weeks ago it had opened the door again, to reclaim itself. And to claim Ted, its spent host.

Why? Its thoughts weren't human thoughts. Maybe it wished to escape, but didn't know how. Maybe it wanted to taste the outside world, like an octopus poking an arm from its lair then pulling it back in again, a phantom, ectoplasmic arm emerging out of stone.

Now it was claiming Gavin too, sucking him through the cord which joined him to the dead boy; who wasn't exactly dead. Just as the creature, though cased in stone, wasn't dead.

Gavin glimpsed a fossil: of a primeval, mutated octopus-thing which possessed strange and terrible persistence, a suction upon existence; which had somehow stayed alive in stone. Imprisoned under prehistoric mud, its flesh had changed to rock during a million years but its whole pattern persisted, the pattern not just of body but of will.

Yes, he saw this image clearly now! – as a distant, mute beckoning, from the far end of the tunnel – though really the tunnel had no end. Its earlier stretch and its later stretch were the same, eternal stretch.

It must get lonely inside that rock. But the everlasting creature didn't seem to be imaginative. Or insane, or sane. It merely exerted power over the space around it, and over time, power which caused it to survive.

People in the past had sensed its presence: the "knight" – a naive medieval youth on a quest for some holy grail? – and the old time smuggler, Geordie, with his trinkets clinking about him, whom it swallowed into the rock as he was stowing kegs of rum or whatever. Possessing them both.

As it had possessed Ted, and was now beginning, from a distance, to possess Gavin . . . until one night soon he would find himself out of bed, dragging coat and shoes on, tiptoeing from the house, hurrying helplessly through the darkness down to the sea, to climb into the cave for one final, everlasting time.

The door to the tunnel-which-wasn't-a-tunnel would open and close behind him, and he too would be encased in stone, a fossil continuing to think clinging thoughts, and dream, and sense existence. In the grip of the octopus-wraith, near the ghost-fossils of Ted and the knight and the smuggler who must be insane long since, buried alive in their solid, perpetual, cold hell.

"Only a therm-o-nuclear explosion right above the pier could melt us out of our rock! Turn us to gas and dust, and end us. Could kill the white stone octopus. Bomb the priory, Gav! Get in the crane and rip the cliff open!"

Ted's thoughts were reaching Gavin! Gavin was thinking the boy's thoughts now. Their minds were mingling. Or was the octopus-creature transmitting Ted-like thoughts - which it hardly comprehended? Whichever, Ted and he would have ages together to think such thoughts, ages haunted by a foul noise of monotonous, circulating reverie, degenerating yet never fading. Unless a thermonuclear war broke out.

As if the fear was parent to the deed, the next night Gavin woke to find himself standing in near-darkness. He was out of bed. Something soft clutched at his arms.

Gasping with panic he blundered towards the hidden light switch. Iron fir-cone and Swiss chalet clock flew askew. With his brow he butted the switch. Light blossomed. The thing that was gripping him was his own raincoat, half donned. His sockless feet were stuck into unlaced shoes.

Tearing off the mac and kicking the shoes away, he plunged back under the blankets where he shivered with dread.

That night, or the next night. That week, or the next . . .

Deep within mad jingling Geordie's Hole, there in the young knight's hell-bound corridor, next to the cracking fossil of Ted: forever the stone ghost waited. Ghost out of ancient Carboniferous seas, prehuman, perpetual. Potent - and imbecilic.

Forever its petrified prisoners whispered their crazed memories of the greed or fierce desire or yearning which had led them into that cave, and which had spurred the living fossil to open its stone door.

Ian Watson's latest novel is a fantasy, *Queenmagic, Kingmagic* (Gollancz). Next Spring his fourth short-story collection, *Evil Water and Other Stories*, will appear from the same publisher. He lives with his wife and daughter in a rural retreat near Daventry, Northamptonshire.

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John Shirley

Interview by Richard Kadrey

"I've told stories compulsively all my life. When I was a little boy, I used to tell the other kids dreams I'd had, but I'd really make them up. I'd say 'Guess what I dreamed last night?', and I'd tell this fantastic story. They'd all gather around and go 'Holy shit.' The story would be really exciting. It would be an adventure, and it would be bizarre.

"I've always had a dreaminess that stood between me and the world. I remember when I was trying to play baseball as a boy. I was looking at the sky in the outfield thinking 'Isn't it amazing that so much of what's in the sky is spherical? The sun, the moon, the planets.' Then I saw this white sphere coming towards me, spinning. I thought, 'Yes, fantastic. There it is, the embodiment of these celestial spheres.' And it slammed into the ground next to me and I stared at it for a few moments. I thought it was a meteor or something. I completely forgot about the game. And then I heard people screaming at me. 'Shirley, you idiot!'"

John Shirley has been a story-teller and performer all his life. Born in Houston, Texas in 1953, he spent much of his childhood on the move. "My parents were always looking for greener pastures. They were very restless. I seem to have some of that, too." In the seventies, he was a singer and sometimes promoter for some of the first punk bands on the US West Coast. He attended the Clarion writing workshop in 1972, and in 1979 his novel *Transmaniacon* was published by Zebra Books. This was, in fact, his second novel. "My first novel was called *Change World*. I wrote that for Terry Carr who was at Berkley Books at the time. I didn't have the money to xerox the book and it was lost in the mail. He'd accepted it, too."

Since then, Shirley has published a series of violent, thoughtful, challenging novels, including *City Come a-Walkin'*, a book that in 1980 presaged the cyberpunk movement in science fiction. His most recent novel, *Eclipse* (Bluejay Books, US; Methuen, UK), is the first book in a trilogy with the overall title of *A Song Called Youth*.

Eclipse tells the story of a group of

partisans, known as the New Resistance, who are fighting a fascist uprising in the streets of Paris. The action of the book examines the effects of political struggle from several points of view, moving from Paris to the United States to a massive floating city in the Atlantic Ocean to a violent power struggle on an L5 colony orbiting the Earth. *Eclipse* also explores the nature of the extreme right-wing of the Christian Fundamentalist movement

its followers. In *The Sorrow and the Pity*, a Frenchman who was one of seven thousand French volunteers in the Waffen SS during the Occupation, described the indoctrination ceremonies as a 'kind of Mass' and fascism as 'a kind of religion...' The Nazi mythology had a Biblical quality. The man also explained that in France at the time the choice seemed to be between Communism and Fascism. Much the same feeling is arising in



and what Shirley perceives as resurgence of genuine political fascism in the West.

"Fascism is making a comeback, but it's been updated somewhat. Fascists have incorporated what's useful to them from sociobiology and Christian fundamentalism. Fascism always uses religion of some sort in the ritualistic indoctrination of

France and other places right now, to my great dismay. Much of the resurgence of US nationalism is a reaction to the national trauma of our having lost the Vietnam war, and to all the drumbeating about the threat of the USSR. Nationalism is the spouse of Fascism, and we are basically being told we have a choice: either Nationalism or Communist totalitarianism. Does this 'choice' sound familiar?

"I think a war as described in *Eclipse* is quite possible. It's more or less the sort described in the book *World War Three*, written by various British military authorities. Except my war takes longer. A great many people high in the State and Defense Departments of the US believe that we can fight a 'limited nuclear war,' and that most of the war would be conventional because both sides would restrain themselves out of self-preservation. Actually, I think it would escalate into a full-scale nuclear holocaust, as soon as one side was sure it was going to lose. But a conventional World War Three is at least possible, if not altogether probable. And I think in any world war Europe will be caught between the engines of the USSR and USA – once more, its people will suffer because imbeciles use their homes as a battleground."

But for all the grand themes of war, religion and Fascism, *Eclipse* remains a book of character. Character, however, and the relationships between characters has not always been Shirley's chief concern. "In my earlier science-fiction works (*Transmaniacon*, *Dracula in Love*, *Psychus* and *City Come a-Walkin'*), my main ambition was to create worlds where people would find themselves believing in completely unbelievable situations. I wanted them to suspend their disbelief farther than they ever had before. I wanted to rock their sanity, and pry them loose from what they believed was reality. And I wanted to make metaphysical statements. Now I'm alarmed at the course the world is taking, and I feel the need to make more down-to-earth statements in order to sound that alarm. And, I want to explore characterization, the nature of relationships, to find insight into the human condition, and to illuminate the new world we are now hurrying into."

Shirley's other passion, aside from his writing, is music. Since he has sung in a number of bands and recorded one album for Celluloid Records, it is not surprising that musicians appear frequently in Shirley's work. One of the principal characters in *Eclipse* is Rickenharp, a rock musician who is fighting not only an apathetic public, but also his own drug problems. He ends up as one of the partisans fighting the Fascists in the ruins of Paris. His death is one of the key images in *Eclipse*. "Rock musicians often have megalomaniacal visions of their own apotheosis. In a way, Rickenharp's death was a satire on my own adolescent fantasies. But Rickenharp's death meant more than that. It's the song of Youth. Youth is ridiculous, acting out

travesties and capering about in its own ritual of self-realization. But it's also the sword that cuts our Sociological Gordian knot. Youth cuts through accumulated bullshit. In the 60s, the prevailing ethos was foolish, naive, hopeless. But it was also a source of energy and raw inspiration for those who resisted the war and the 60s intellectuals. They drew on it; they thrived because of it. It's easy to laugh at youth's naïveté, but that naïveté is a truth. It's wrong and it's right. It's the raw stuff of courage. Nothing important is achieved without an infusion of it. It is absurd to be idealistic – but without idealism there is no social evolution. It's a cliché and a perennial revelation.

"I was in some of the first West Coast punk bands in the 70s. I was always attracted to rock concerts. I was an alienated kid, dreamy and bookwormish, a little too smart and just not like the others. This made me lonely and angry. I needed an outlet for my anger and pent up energy and, of course, my roaring puerile sexuality. It was natural for me to be a punk singer. I've always been compelled to perform – I think it was innate in me. Even deeper than psychologically inherent. I think I was genetically programmed to be a writer and performer.

"I was drawn to the Doors and the Stooges – I always identified with Iggy Pop. And the Stones. And the Pistols. Patti Smith. Jim Carroll. Henry Rollins. I outgrew basic punk – though I still listen to it sometimes – and into more melodic stuff, but it's a mistake to believe that punk doesn't have its own complex music esthetic and technique. It is, as Rudy Rucker pointed out, a barrage of information, and that information is not as chaotic as it seems. The punk energy level informs my writing. I try to invoke a sense of ongoing background music in my prose. I work rock rhythms into the writing. But my writing is by no means punk simplistic. I'm influenced by people like Evelyn Waugh and Paul Theroux and even Thomas Hardy stylistically and structurally."

Not all of Shirley's work has been in the science fiction field. He has written a horror novel, *Cellars* (Avon, US; Sphere, UK), and a mainstream thriller, *The Brigade* (Avon, US). He is currently working on a novel about the music industry and payola. This broad view of the publishing world has left him ambivalent about science fiction. "A lot of the trappings of the field embarrass me. *Eclipse* was reviewed in the *Washington Post*. It was given a good review, and that pleased me, but it was reviewed in a science-fiction column with a picture of a girl in a futuristic costume with a ray gun in

her hand.

"I think the better science-fiction writers are going to transcend the field. I don't know if they'll become mainstream. They'll become something outside what we normally recognize as the field. A new genre. Mutant literature."

Mutant literature could, in fact, be an alternate name for the type of writing Shirley is most often associated with: cyberpunk or punk sf, terms he initially despised, but now has come to accept. "I've revised my opinion on the term cyberpunk because of Rudy Rucker's essay in *R.E.M. 3* (a little magazine published by Charles Platt). He essentially defined cyberpunk as a more intense level of ideation, information input and imagery. It's also more contemporary in feel than the average science fiction. And probably more energetic. And that is like punk."

"I think cyberpunk is going to revitalize the science-fiction field because it's bringing in important new sources of inspiration. It's a writing concerned with transformations, with things as they're happening now. It's always going to be reporting. It's almost like a form of journalism. A journalism of social change. So it's going to have different rules. When Bruce Sterling said that science fiction should be considered not as literature, but as a 'pop culture phenomenon' (*Interzone* interview, issue 15), I think he was talking about the way things grow and change in culture. The fact that things are constantly changing, and what we as writers are doing is monitoring the changes as they're happening. Some of what science fiction and cyberpunk are trying to do is show us the ways the world can be re-created. And some of the ways it shouldn't be.

"But I think there's a bias against so-called cyberpunk writers. There will be a reaction against *Count Zero* (William Gibson's new novel), which is ridiculous since it's a great book. It's better than *Neuromancer*. However, Gibson has been appreciated. Sterling is beginning to be. But I think, in general, the more literary science fiction writers are not. And I think something else you'll find that characterizes cyberpunk is the belief that science fiction can be literary without being self-indulgent or boring. It can be very entertaining. But there's no reason entertaining should mean badly written. I think that cyberpunk is raising the standards of the field.

"Cyberpunk isn't a mirror. It's more like a video process. It has more depth than a mirror and you can't edit a mirror. Cyberpunk is a mirror you can edit. A mirror you can shape."

D.C. Haynes Soundspinner

Gabriel Voz was born in and died near the small town of Martines in the foothills of the Andes. Martines has a population of approximately 5000 and serves as a focal point for the silver mines which have perforated the surrounding hills since the middle ages. Its fortunes have risen and fallen with those of the mining industry, but it has never been a wealthy town. The climate is extreme, both in winter and in summer, and the landscape is bleak. The nearest city is Parados, some 80km to the south along the Cordillera de Vilcana. There is one church, Santo Felipo, which is larger than one would expect. It contains a 17th Century silver altar screen which is moderately famous for its depiction of six Indian martyrs. The one (very) local newspaper, *La Prensa Grafica*, claims to be the oldest in the province. Certainly some of its news is. Cuttings from this newspaper collated by Dr A. Andersson have been a useful source of background information. The newspaper has recently been taken over by a Canadian television company.

The church records confirm Gabriel's date of birth as 1st January. His father, Jorge Voz, was a groom. His mother had no regular employment. Gabriel was to have no brothers or sisters.

We may presume that he went to the local school, although no records exist today for the period of his childhood.

He was given a diary for his 16th birthday. This small book still exists. It contains, perhaps surprisingly, an entry for every day. There are details of the weather, friends' birthdays and so on. There are also extracts from books that he has read. He spent much time in the Biblioteca, possibly due to the influence of an uncle who worked there. Certainly the idea of keeping a diary seems to have appealed to Gabriel as he was to keep some form of journal for the rest of his life. A large number of these still survive, some having disappeared during the past few years (see separate report by Dr Thomas Curry).

At the age of 18 Gabriel Voz was apprenticed to Minerva, the main mining company in Martines, whose buildings dominate the eastern edge of the town. He became a fully skilled man at the age of 23. His name can be easily traced in Minerva's records for this period. During this year there are numerous comments in his diary concerning a female "L". (poems etc. of a rather banal nature). In his 24th year he married Lisa whose family had connections with the church.

The couple rented an abandoned mine to the south of Martines (shaft 277 in Minerva's records). There were many old workings, and the arrangement was a common one. It provided the couple with a cabin in which to live, and the hope that "we may some day find riches of our own." This need not mean silver, as tin and other minerals had been found in the area.

So Gabriel did his shifts for Minerva, and in between he and Lisa worked their own mine which they had christened El Colorado. It was a tongue-in-cheek name for what must have been little more than a hole in the hard ground and some rusting machinery, but it gave them a slender dream to cling to. We know that the couple wanted a child, which fate did not seem to bring them.

Two years after their marriage, Minerva was taken over by a company that made shoes and parasols. The Minerva name was retained but wages were lowered. Gabriel now had to work longer shifts. There was little time now to exploit their own mine.

In an effort to increase profits, Minerva apparently began to dispense with certain safety measures, and two of Gabriel's friends on the maintenance staff were laid off. A couple of minor accidents are mentioned in the diary. Then on 5th May the main tunnel collapsed. For two days the rescuers worked to recover the living and the dead. (The first of Andersson's cuttings relates to this incident. Minerva's records confirm that 12 men died, and contain various technical reports. See also the affidavits laid before the ensuing

enquiry.)

After two days' digging the company tried to call a halt, but the men refused. On the 8th May they heard the sound of a pick tapping beyond the rocks ahead. They dug with renewed energy and heard more noises, some of which were puzzling. Breaking through the final wall of rubble they discovered a tiny chamber in which Gabriel and two other men lay locked in a sweaty heap, barely alive. There were no tools. No sign of a pick. But the sound of tapping could still be heard. Lights were fetched, and the rescuers saw that these sounds came from Gabriel's throat. With each feeble exhalation came the distant sound of metal on rock. Not some bronchial imitation, but the real thing, from inside his body. The men crossed themselves and pulled the bodies to safety. As fresher air reached Gabriel's lungs, it seems that a confusion of noises emerged: the splash of a river, windblown sand over rocks, distant broken echoes of men working.

At the enquiry, Gabriel Voz was able to demonstrate his strange powers of mimicry. He produced the sound of a hammer striking rock with such precision that those present all turned to the spot from which it appeared to come. Some swore later that they saw the glint of steel.

He found that he could focus and project these sounds over a considerable distance. And though Gabriel copied on demand every conceivable sound from the slamming of a door to the rub of bare feet on carpet, he did not understand where the power to do this had come from. He discovered that he could not copy voices, and confesses in his diary that he is unable to see the physical manifestations that occasionally appeared to others. The enquiry recorded that Voz had kept the other two men alive with his encouraging noises of the outside world. He had produced varieties of birdsong for them, and so vividly that the chamber had seemed to fill with the creatures' busy chirping bodies as they hovered and sang.

Gabriel returned to work after a brief rest as a somewhat embarrassed hero. He mentions difficulties with Lisa but gives no details. He is persuaded to demonstrate his abilities before an audience in the church as part of a publicity campaign by the local newspaper. Things did not go according to plan. The report (see Andersson's file) says that he appeared to fill the church with so many birds that the congregation was terrified into fleeing into the streets. The illusion was so real that some claimed to have received cuts from the swirling mass of beaks and claws. The priest made him swear never to exercise his powers again. Those few journalists from the world outside who had turned up for the demonstration were persuaded that the whole thing was trickery. A brief report to this effect appeared in *Paris Match*.

Gabriel's diary shows that he had been drained by the whole experience, and was finding Lisa less of a support than she had been. She mocked his powers as being infantile exhibitions, and when (June/July) he mentions her at all it is to complain. She accuses him of blasphemy. He is a heathen mestizo, an embarrassment to his family and to the whole town. His entries are bitter, and at times impossible to read. He mentions meeting new friends in the bars of the town.

There are two short verses scribbled in November which are from a folk song about a fair-haired lover. We know that Lisa was dark. Towards December his tone becomes extremely melancholy as he looks ahead to the next year. He knows that Lisa has visited the priest to discuss their marriage and other matters.

A short entry in December mentions that he can now imitate the swirling of winds in the highest rocks. Louder than he can shout. He has lost his voice attempting to scream at the same volume. And yet the other sounds still come. He has perfected the tread of a dozen different animals on many different surfaces. He can copy the shift of a claw on a branch, and the slide of fur amongst moving grass. Despite the priest's warning to stop, he is now testing his powers to their limits. He mentions practical jokes played on fellow miners, but gives no details.

In February he begins a period of scathing comments about his wife. Brief, angry, hurt. "I am still a man!" is scrawled across one whole page. His entries had always been short, but are now reduced to one line exclamations, usually undated. They are like headlines. "She's at it again!" "That fucking priest!" "You useless cow!" "You money-mad shit!" (There are many obscenities.) He also hints here and there that he is attempting some kind of reconciliation, but his remarks are garbled, and probably the result of drinking. Some pages have been ripped out.

There is one entry for May, then just two pages further on it is September. I suspect that a diary is missing for this period, and that Gabriel has spent some time working in Brujas, some 15km distant. He has mentioned this town previously, when a man offered to employ him in a local circus.

We have a newspaper cutting for 5th December. Minerva are rumoured to be ceasing their operations in the area. The priest is arranging for a special prayer service.

In January there is a slight change of tone. Voz has been reading all the books he can lay his hands on in an attempt to understand more about his abnormal abilities. He notes the name of a Pai de Santo who could extinguish candles at 50 metres with his breath. Also that the Toltec god Cotzuma was born on January 1st according to legend, and that this day was known as Four-Wind in the old calendar. Cotzuma was also called The Silver-Throated, and Voz notes how Toltec legend has him shifting giant rocks across the sky to build city walls using his voice alone. The story is well known and used locally to explain the vast ruins south of Parados which attract tourists to this day. Wedged inside the diary between entries for 15th and 17th January is a scrap torn from a Brazilian magazine. There is a smudgy photograph of a man named José Celestino who could, the article claims, produce a hundred birds at once from out of the air. Real birds. The man's name has been underlined with a thick red pencil. I have not managed to trace him in the normal press archives.

The diary entry for 12th February comes as a shock, initially for its appearance (three pages of rambling script after so many terse but tidy paragraphs) but also for the content. It begins with curses, aimed at himself. He is worthless. He is a fool.

Lower than an animal, etc. Then Lisa's name is written over and over. The pen has carved the letters into the page, tearing through the paper. Voz curses himself again. God was wise, he says, to give him no children. He then recounts the events of that day, but in a crazy scrambled fashion (I have rearranged these passages to make some sense of it all).

Gabriel had gone to the cabin after a long absence to make some sort of peace with Lisa. It was a hot day. On the way he rested on the ground to think things out. Eyes closed, mouth open, his thoughts drifted on the edge of sleep. As he relaxed and ideas turned over slowly in his head, he saw them as birds that cruised and fluttered in the spaces of his mind. He sensed that these movements were breaking the air above him, swooping and chattering in the sun. As he opened his eyes the excited sounds circled and circled as more birds and yet more were created from his inner turmoil. Here and there he glimpsed a slight blurring, tiny whirlpools dimpling the surface of the air like fingertips touching pondwater. But he saw no birds. He forgot his worries as he concentrated to maintain this armada that spun both inside and somehow outside his head.

He was disturbed by a sudden shriek. Lisa was approaching him, screaming and pointing to the sky. He stood slowly as the illusion evaporated and "one lone bird was left to cross the heavens to the horizon of my mind." Lisa still screamed, accusing him of devil worship, whoring and drinking. His reasoned arguments deserted him as she flung rocks and stones along with the insults spat at him. Angry himself now, he too began to shout. Then his frustration finally exploded as he uttered what he describes as a bark, that echoed for some minutes around the hills, disturbing real birds into the sky. That bark must have been a fearsome thing. Lisa fell backwards "as though shot by a cannon," killed instantly by the blast of the sound. He found that her face and chest were caved in as though by iron bars. Her eyes bulged and blood ran from her ears. Her mouth was locked open in the rigid silent scream that Voz could still hear echoing inside his numbed head. He dragged her body, which was stiffer than a day-old corpse, to the mineshaft and threw it down. When he finally reached the cabin he burned all of Lisa's possessions.

The entries that follow are a tangle of self pity and anger. Many lines are illegible and many pages are torn. One day his brain is bursting, and the next it is frozen without feeling. I feel sure that he was drinking heavily. He mentions that he is running out of food. It is not clear whether he visited the town during this period. The few dates that appear show that the entries are no longer made regularly. There are hints of time passing. He says that he can hear the local Indians celebrating Corpus Christi by exploding fireworks in the hills. He sees the black powder rocket trails in the sky. It must be June 5th. There are further signs of celebration on June 24th, St John's day, which the Indians link with worship of the Sun God. He says that he has never missed the celebrations before.

Then the scrawled entries come to an end, and a clear but hurried series of notes begins around the end of June.

He has found a photograph of Lisa, taken before their marriage. He longs for her company again. He recalls the touch of her hand on his, and the rub of cloth on cloth as her dresses turned. Anxiously, he begins an imitation of these sounds and with some success. He adds more detail: the brush of her palms on an apron, the remembered whisper of hair as her head turned, the slow flow of air that filled the cage of her chest. Fearfully he assembles and focuses these sound impressions until something begins to appear. A hazy sketch of the woman that he still loves floats before him, and this time he sees his misty creation. He adds the subtle flutter of lashes as her eyes blink and turn, and the faintest drag of saliva as her tongue wets her lips. He remembers the soft pulse at her neck, the lazy stretching of muscles as her face relaxed into smiles and her jaw lifted. Each tiny sound an added line in the cross-hatching that will substantiate her body. Finally the effort is too much and he collapses in tears.

He repeats the experiment a number of times with varying success. He records that his throat is burning with his futile efforts to mimic her voice. He must have the voice. To hold her will not be enough. He must hear her speak again. But despite his success with her figure, her every remembered movement and gesture, he cannot do it. Lisa approaches him, smiling, arms reaching. Every tiny sound of her body and clothing real to him. But she is dumb. No sound will come from that lovely opening mouth. The voices that he projects lack precision and will not adhere to or embed themselves within her. Will not spring from the depths of the figure that moves so slowly across the creaking boards towards him.

He writes on 3rd July that he has a sickness. He can no longer stand properly and is now confined to his bed. He is drinking again. He has decided that Lisa must finally remain dead.

The spell of excitement has left him. His entries are gloomy and self-pitying again. The snows have come. Somehow he manages to scratch the final entries in the diary, mentioning the spreading numbness in his body.

In his loneliness he recalls his friends from his schooldays, from the mines and the bars. He remembers their laughter and their warm company. Six names from his past are mentioned in these last pages. In his dying delirium he hears them arrive to hammer at his door, and grin with offered bottles by the rags of his bed. His final almost illegible entry prays for the snow and the cold to end. It is all love and death he says. Amor y muerte.

The last of the cuttings in Andersson's file reports how a party led by the priest finally broke into Gabriel Voz's cabin. The dead man's wasted body was still warm, the men said. The priest later confirmed this but evidently became angry when the reporter pressed him on other details. Others in the party said that they had heard laughter and the clink of glasses inside the cabin just before they broke down the door. They also claimed that six sets of tracks led from different directions through the snow and right up to the cabin walls. These footprints did not lead away. The priest denied these stories at the inquest. Curiously though, he arranged for the careful

removal of Gabriel's papers to the Biblioteca before burning the cabin to the ground.

The Church has no burial record for Gabriel Voz, and his name does not appear on any tombstone in the cemetery.

(Translated by M. de Caldas)

David Haynes has contributed three short stories to *Practical Computing* magazine. He says: "I seem to spend a lot of time writing computer programs that can converse with people, and am fascinated by styles of language. I read a lot of plays, and have ideas of writing one." He lives in Folkestone, Kent.

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NEWS

This year's Nebula Award winners are *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card (Best Novel), "Sailing to Byzantium" by Robert Silverberg (Best Novella), "Portraits of His Children" by George R.R. Martin (Best Novelette), "Out of All Them Bright Stars" by Nancy Kress (Best Short Story) and Arthur C. Clarke (Grand Master Award). The Nebulas are voted upon by the members of the SF Writers of America.

Among the interesting titles listed in Gollancz's Autumn 1986 catalogue is *Trillion-Year Sprre: The History of Science Fiction* by Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove. This is an updated and considerably expanded version of Aldiss's pioneering *Billion-Year Sprre*

(1973). It is 544 pages long, with 16 pages of illustrations, and it is due to appear in simultaneous hardcover and paperback editions in October.

Hutchinson have announced that they intend to publish a new series of 96-page novellas by well-known writers. Their first three titles are due on 23rd October this year, and one of them is *Ruins* by Brian Aldiss. Among the writers who are due to contribute to the Hutchinson Novellas in 1987 is J.G. Ballard.

New magazines come and go. We watch with interest. Words, mentioned (and advertised) in these pages several issues ago, has been in financial difficulties and has not been published for some time. Its owner-editor, Phillip Vine, tells us that he still hopes to relaunch the magazine. Meanwhile, *Women's Review*, "the only British

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magazine written by women and about women," has issued an appeal for money just nine months after it began publication. According to their unsigned circular letter, "Women's Review is intelligent, provocative, diverse and pleasurable: it is dedicated to critically celebrating and thoughtfully criticizing issues which are of importance to women everywhere. We are therefore appealing for donations... A £12 donation would be treated as a simultaneous subscription: a £250 donation as a life subscription." The address for the generously-inclined to write to is *Women's Review Ltd.*, Unit 1, 2nd Floor, 1-4 Christina Street, London, EC2.

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

It's late 1980s, the ten-year boom in fantasy film is dipping towards the horizon, and science fiction in the movies aspires as never before to the condition of pop. Wit, style, and energy are the axes of the current aesthetic; saurian values like speculative ambition and intellectual consistency sound middle-aged, and aspirations to seriousness need heavy disguise before they're even allowed on the dancefloor. What counts in today's darkened rooms is an efficient product that can administer a swift dose of transient fun to an increasingly sharp audience of young consumers, which is why the action comedy like *Superman* and *Indiana Jones* is so definitively the film genre of the 80s. I don't think there's anything unhealthy about this, particularly; on the contrary, I welcome the best of these empty-headed, hi-speed confections for their lively sense of irony and virtuosic manipulation of audience. Nobody's demeaned by a film like *Aliens*, least of all the audience – the fashionable lightning edits, the sly games with genre and narrative conventions all testify to the immense sophistication of the current movie audience, such that the language of contemporary pop cinema would be incomprehensible to their counterparts fifty years back. I positively look forward to the inevitable day when films outstrip my power to follow the darting edit and half-ingested dialogue; when the ever-evolving codes of cinematic narrative leave the written word, and those it nurtured, permanently behind in the march of signs.

But this assimilation of film to pop is, I'm sure, the reason why flavour of the year in sf films is Silly, and why the year's inadvertent new genre is bastard mid-Atlantic pastiches of our great national myths. Who, even half a decade ago, could have imagined we'd ever be watching a film called *Young Sherlock Holmes and the Pyramid of Fear*? Who could have conceived we'd hear Peter Cushing, clearly cast for his legendary straightness of face, explain "Biggles is your time twin"? For better or worse, silly is the chic of the moment. The surest sign of the times is the one authentic supernova on the scene at present: the astonishing expansion of Charles Band's Empire Pictures, who have progressed from

witty low-budget fantasy entertainment like *Trancers* and *Re-Animator* to exactly the same but in twelve times the volume. This year's *Zone Troopers* and *Critters* have been middle-rank productions, but with a good twenty features currently pipelined, including the Herbert West sequel already in the cans, some heavy action in the coming year seems assured. In the world of cinepop, Empire dominate the indie charts; they don't score too many top ten hits, but they turn over comfortably on inexpensive invention and sheer idiot cheek.

It's against this background you have to appreciate *Highlander*, a film as perfectly of its time as *It Conquered the World*, *Fantastic Voyage*, or *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. It's impossible to categorize such films by everyday critical labels like "good", "flawed", or "unsuccessful," any more than you can water your plants with a barometer. They simply express their epoch with complete and unnering frankness. Generations to come, who have no concept of the meaning of such resonant artistic contextualizers as "songs by Queen," will discard this film in bafflement. But inhabitants of the brief cultural timezone in which *Highlander* has its ephemeral being will understand that

the terse credit "songs by Queen" makes a richer statement about the film's milieu, affinities, and pretensions than any amount of directorial manifesto ever could.

If it weren't for *Biggles*, which in many ways it uncannily recalls, *Highlander* would romp home as the silliest film of this year or any. The premise alone, of immortal Scotsmen roaming the world with concealed swords trying to chop each other's heads off, should be enough to send giggling queues all round the block and away into Chinatown. Oz wizard Russell Mulcahy directs this extraordinary intercontinental farrago with the bravura visual aggression, insistent editing, and jolly indifference to stylistic coherence we recognize from those absurd Duran Duran videos.

In *Highlander*, Christophe Lambert dons again his cosmopolitan R and re-engages his long-suffering accent coach to create Connor McLeod, a strapping highland laddie who in 1532 recovers mysteriously from a mortal wound dealt him in battle by the lumbering Kurgan (wonderful Arnieques realization by Clancy Brown, whose monster performance nearly redeemed *The Bride*); and is banished from his clan to take up residence in a disused castle with a nice but regrettably mortal lass called Heather, Sean Connery,



Sean Connery and Christopher Lambert in 'Highlander'

and the latter's extremely silly false moustache. Connery explains how he and our hero and unfortunately also the Kurgan are of a select band of ageless heroes who can only be killed by severing of the head, and who are destined to Gather at a Time that shall Come to Pass and duel until Only One Remains to collect The Prize (all capitals faithfully enunciated in the script). Re-enter Kurgan to decapitate Connery, and the stage is set for a fight to the finish in present-day New York - the Kurgan having polished all the rest off while Christophe is lying low getting rich on antique dealing. To wind it up further our hero is smitten, against his resolve and despite a curse of sterility which goes with the job, by forensic metallurgist Roxanne Hart, who isn't a patch on Heather but at least doesn't talk like the *Sunday Post*. Out come the swords for the final showdown, and anyone who can't guess The Prize by this stage is condemned to sit through the noxious final scene of an otherwise passable entertainment.

Highlander is a major product of the new silliness, and woe betide the punter who looks for narrative logic or rational explanation to glue this astounding assemblage together. *Highlander* is held together by Fun, which has structural rules of its own, and

pokes its tongue at the faculty of reason. Beguiling as is the momentary conceit that we might be confronted with some authentic 16th-century Scottish history ("Hullo! Ah'm Wee Johnnie Knox, and ah'd like a wurd wi' yiz about the relationship between feudal authority structures, neotribal social organization, an' the historical crisis of popery..."), it's clear from the start that this is the Scotland where everyone is called Angus and Dougal and speaks in the dialect of Brigadoon, and that this 16th century was spent hacking at one another with claymores and traipsing round the most photogenic prospects of Eilean Donan. As the screenplay comes from a class project by a UCLA film student, it would be rash to expect more. It's entertaining drive! packaged with professionalism and flair, free of the trammels of substance and signifying nothing but its own cockeyed cultural moment. With songs by Queen.

At the other end of the pop spectrum we have Mark Romanek's *Static*, which nails its colours just as firmly to music from The The, Brian Eno and Japan. *Static*'s a quiet, almost painfully unassuming little film that shrinks away nearly to nothing the instant you try to summarize the story, analyze its pleasures, or draw the

inevitable comparisons with *Repo Man*, from which it can only suffer. It has a similar desert highway look, a wide-eyed teen hero, a nice line in weirdo supports and off-the-wall throwaway humour, and a completely absurd central sf conceit that has to qualify for the cheapest special effects budget of the decade. But the pellmell pace and modish street wit that animated *Repo Man* have no part in the muted, affectionate humour of *Static*, despite some nifty French-style narrative cuts in the early sequences; and after a magical opening half-hour, the pace of ideas and developments slows abruptly. What we get is the story of two grown-up kids in smalltown Arizona: Julie, who got out, became a minor pop star, and comes home for Christmas to see how much hasn't changed; and Ernie, her best friend, who stayed behind after his parents' tragic death to work on a secret invention of devastating simplicity that will change the world beyond recognition and make people happy instead of sad. Against a leisurely backcloth of screwy local characters and surreal vignettes of desert American life, Ernie unveils his invention; but an unforeseen technical drawback drives him to desperate means to advertise his work to the world...

I could understand anyone's dis-



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satisfaction with *Static*. The central idea is so whimsical it almost blows away; the central performances are, for all their delicacy and freshness, a touch over-directed, and the jokes slightly too widely spaced to support a mood of manic lunacy. Perhaps the eccentricities of Ernie and his survivalist preacher uncle are too strainedly wacky to convince; perhaps the soundtrack is an overdeliberate collage of tacky Xmas music and teen-cred guitar bashing. It doesn't help that the final scenes hint at pretensions to meaning way beyond the capricious substance of the film to deliver – after all, if you've been told what Ernie's invention is and what happens to him at the end, there isn't any more story to know, and you'll have to be content with watching the delicate touches of incidental humour and gently observed characterization. But these are ample reward, so long as you're not expecting a shotgun massage of all sensory inputs.

Unfortunately, in these days of audiovisual overload, virtuoso editing, and slickly ridiculous screen relationships, a sweetly whimsical tragicom about ideals and maturity and boys and girls being just best friends is an idea whose time hasn't come. I wouldn't say *Static* is a better

or even a more substantial film than *Highlander*; they're both adroit pop movies, in more than a single sense, in tune with the moment. But no Prize for guessing which one is even now packing in the public at a cinema near you, while the other ticks over quietly on the provincial arthouse circuit.

Which inevitably brings us to *Aliens*, as pure and pulsating a specimen of dancefloor cinema as we'll see all year: an amazingly accomplished and immaculately content-free 12" buzz of hot adrenalin in which Ripley returns to that horrid planet with a troop of funky space-marine slime-fodder to find out what's happened to a colony of settlers. (Can you guess?) At once a sequel and a kind of back-handed homage to its famous original, it pastes most of the plot of the first film, little disguised, into its own while determinedly junking all the Ridley Scott affectations of art. The lighting and focus are harder, the strong supporting cast banishes star names, the production design scraps those clean overlit whites for a grimmer, more factory look, and Sigourney Weaver gets a much meatier part and (to the film's great credit) is allowed not to look pretty for a change. What J. Cameron delivers is just what *The Terminator* promised: a state-of-the-art suspenser that punches all the buttons with complete technical assurance, climaxing in another nerve-thumping succession of false endings



From *Aliens*, directed by James Cameron

and a cheer-yourself-hoarse finale – the last welded elegantly out of one strand of genuine plotting and a handful of favourite moments from the original, affectionately lifted and inventively surpassed. Idea content is, of course, nil, unless you count the continuing theme of evil duplicitous commercial forces in the exploitation of space. But it's just the kind of film that's being done better now than ever before, a clever, well-written entertainment that respects its audience's intelligence even as it yanks mechanistically on their strings; and it couldn't have been done at all without the visual range and narrative shorthand of genre science fiction. It's tremendous testimony to the vitality of sf that it can so enlarge the compulsive power of even this kind of blatantly formula product. Never mind the lyrics, just feel that hotfoot rhythm.

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Thomas M. Disch Hard Work or, The Secrets of Success

T¹his is the story of a great American product, about the men who made it, and the men who made it famous. This is the story of successful merchandising strategies applied to a mature product-line that the accountants had already written off the books. This is a story of courage, know-how, teamwork, and erotic torment. This is the story of one man, Sal Mineo, who dared to stand up tall against the forces destroying his corporation. This is the story of how America, 100 years after the Japs began it, finally won the war in the Pacific.

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"Wait a minute," you may be saying to yourself, "how can one piece of fiction do all that? This writer must be trying to bullshit me."

That would be a shrewd observation, for of course a story like this is only a way of passing the time when there's nothing exciting on tv. And if you should happen to be inspired by reading it and if it makes you want to go out and do something special for your company, maybe that's just a coincidence, I wouldn't know. I'm just passing along the story the way it first was told to me.

It all began on a winter's night in the year 2041 when a man of ordinary appearance in a leisure suit of red white and blue camo was emerging from the entertainment complex of Level 7 of the urban arcology of Cornucopolis. He had just seen a psychically amplified remake of the classic film *Rambo Part 5: The Hostage Crisis*, in which the great folk hero Rambo rescues the American hostages in Iran from the torture chambers of the Ayatollah Kho-

meini, and he was feeling, as anyone would, uplifted, aggressive, and proud to be an American. It was then, as he was strolling along an arcade of glittering lights and seductive advertising displays, that he came upon a little troupe of volunteers promoting a product he'd never heard of. RIMBAUD CHOCOLATES, the banner above them read, and beneath that, in faded mauve letters on a field of opalescent yellow, *Hand-Dipped Candies for Today's Gay Consumer*. The volunteers were performing an elaborate precision scarf-juggling drill, creating an ever-changing cascade of pastel chiffon while their leader chanted a kind of song. The words were meaningless to the man who'd stopped to view this pleasant spectacle, for they'd been written long ago in a dead language called French. "*Bien apres les jours et les saisons*," declaimed the drill leader, "*et les etres et les pays*,"

"*Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie des mers et des fleurs arctiques; (elles n'existent pas).* . . ."

And so on, all in French and all quite silly in a pretty way that seemed well-suited to the flow and flutter of the coloured veils as the drill-team went through their manoeuvres. At last, with a cry of "O douceurs!" in which the entire team joined, the performance came to an end. The coloured scarves disappeared into the sleeves of the jugglers, who began to distribute free samples of Rimbaud Chocolates to the meagre gathering of onlookers their performance had attracted.

"Voulez-vous des chocolates?" the drill leader asked.

"What's that?" said the hero of our tale, who went at that time by the name of Gabby Hayes.

"Would you like to try one of our chocolates?" the young man translated.

Gabby, though he was not gay, was not one to refuse a free sample of anything. "Don't mind if I do," he said, taking one of the foil-wrapped candies from the box being offered him. The foil wrapping and the box itself were attractively got up in the colours of the flag,

and it turned out that that's what all the French jabbering had been about. Not the American flag, however, but the French tricolour, which had also been red white and blue.

The drill leader, whose name was John Asbury, insisted on explaining the whole thing. It was a poem called "Barbare", which means "barbarian", by a French kid famous for having gone crazy and for having stopped writing poetry to become a slave trader and gun smuggler in North Africa. The line of chocolates was named for him - Rimbaud."

"Rambo?" Gabby repeated, thinking he hadn't heard right.

"Yes," said the drill leader, "Arthur Rimbaud. He was the first world-class poet to come completely out of the closet. He and Verlaine became lovers when Rimbaud was still only seventeen.

"Hey," said Gabby politely. "How about that."

"Would you like another chocolate?"

Gabby looked at the box, which was almost empty. "Thanks all the same, pardner, but I'm pretty full."

"Oh, don't worry about your waistline," Asbury said. "Rimbaud Chocolates are totally non-nutritive. Only four calories in an entire box. And (rumour has it) they are also a potent aphrodisiac."

"No shit," said Gabby.

"You have my parole d'honneur."

"Well, in that case..." He unwrapped another chocolate and popped it in his mouth. The cream centre spurted out and drooled from the side of his mouth into the tangle of his beard. As he wadded up the foil he noticed for the first time the small print that said, "Another fine product from General Edibles."

"Well, I'll be gosh-darned," he said. "You're with General Edibles!"

Asbury sighed. "At the moment, yes, but rumour has it we may be taken over by Tojo Foods."

"Son of a gun, that's bad news. I'm sorry to hear it. I'm part of the General Edibles team myself."

"Really," said Asbury in a tone of voice that showed no hint of company loyalty. "That's nice."

"So what's the problem?"

"Oh, the usual. Rimbaud is a mature product-line, and our share of the gay male chocolate market has been declining for fifteen years or more. And it isn't the competition. Our two chief competitors, Watteau Chocolatiers and Candyman Sweets, have been phased out as national brands, and they only exist now as franchise shops in a few gay retirement arcologies. We are trying to do what we can at Rimbaud. All the employees give over every spare minute to volunteer work. Not just drill teams, though those are most visible to the public. Three or four times a week I visit prisons and give readings of Rimbaud's more accessible poems to the inmates. The lifers seem particularly receptive, though none of them, so far as I can see, speaks a word of French. Just the music of the verse is so compelling that they sit there, behind the glass partitions, and seem mesmerized. Yet none of our efforts seem to have the least effect on sales. It's very sad."

"Maybe you need a different approach."

"Undoubtedly, we do. I myself have gone so far as to suggest translations, but our Product Manager, Mr Burgess-King, feels that would be a betrayal of the

entire Rimbaud tradition. And he is the Product Manager. Oh dear, look at the time. I'll have to bid you adieu. The drill team has got another performance at ten o'clock on Level 46. It's been nice talking to you, and I do hope you'll consider Rimbaud the next time you're buying chocolates for yourself or a gay friend. Well, au revoir!"

"So long," said Gabby, who was left feeling strangely upset by this encounter.

But not unproductively upset (and there's a lesson in that!) for that very evening, passing the Suggestion Box in his dorm he had an incredible inspiration for how to bring new vigour and life to Rimbaud Chocolates. He wrote it down then and there and put it in the box, and thus began one of the most remarkable sagas in the annals of modern merchandising!

2

Though he considered himself a company man, Gabby was not, at that stage in his career, entirely happy in his job. Officially his self-concept was of a trainee in "K" Division with the prospect of tenure in only two more years; unofficially he was just another chip, a human microcomponent wired in passively with a surge suppressor to correct Beta-pattern overloads on a GE program developing simulations of the cost-overruns planned for the proposed Agri-Sat-15. It was, quite literally, mindless work, and so Gabby's cerebrum (though not his cerebellum) was free in the hours he was wired for work to tune in to the company's educational network. In his five years on the training program he'd taken courses in Marketing, Mood Control, Leathercraft Theory and Practice (this only because he had to have three credits in Handicrafts to get his B.B.A.), and the History of the Movies. Now he was taking a seminar in Repressive Desublimation that had him networking with some of the top executives in GE. For all this, and for the associated benefits of being a GE employee (chiefly, the visa that allowed him to live in Cornucopolis), Gabby was grateful, and if his efforts at self-improvement did not lead to immediate recognition or rewards, he knew better than to fret. "All in good time," as his Mood Control textbook bid him repeat at moments of impatience or discouragement. "All in good time."

The problem was Rod Steiger. Steiger was Gabby's Boss, a tenured team-leader with one of the highest productivity ratings in "K" Division and a man consumed by a passion for 20th Century Baseball Statistics. Steiger had organised Quiz Teams on this popular subject that had twice reached the company's Semi-Finals, and he had offered Gabby some strong suggestions and one or two veiled threats that he should apply some part of his disengaged on-the-job consciousness toward memorizing tables of RBIs, lifetime batting averages, and famous salaries. Whenever Gabby attended one of the company's own baseball games, Steiger would make a point of taking a seat by him and "throwing some easy ones" at him.

"Here's an easy one, kid," he'd say. "Who was the first pitcher to hurl four no-hit games?"

"I'm sorry, Mr Steiger, I don't know."

"It was Sandy Koufax. Jesus Christ, I'd of thought anyone knew that. Okay, here's one you got to know. Who hit the most home runs in one season?"

"Babe Ruth?"

Steiger groaned. "With a brain like you got," he lamented. "With your potential, and me to coach you, we could put a Quiz Team together that would fill the whole "K" Division lounge with trophies. But no, you've got to improve yourself with all these bullshit courses you think are going to make you a Manager. What are you studying these days, lace making?"

Steiger's sarcasm was directed at the hand-tooled boots that Gabby had made for him as a present the previous Christmas. Gabby had engraved the uppers of the boots with the name "Rod Steiger" in a scroll above a portrait of the actor in his Academy-Award-winning role in *In the Heat of the Night*. The boots had got Gabby an "A" in his Leathercraft course, but they had done nothing to mollify his Boss, who would be satisfied with nothing less than Gabby's training for the Quiz Team. It was the same dilemma that Montgomery Clift had faced in *From Here to Eternity*, and Gabby was being made to suffer for his principles in the same way. Steiger gave him consistently low ratings for Attitude and Team Spirit, ratings that effectively prevented Gabby's mounting the next rung of the corporate ladder and had made him the oldest unpromoted chip in the Division. At the 10 a.m. sports breaks, when Gabby took up his oar on the stationary galley in the exercise hall, Steiger tyrannized over him quite as though he were a slave on one of the original ancient triremes of *Ben Hur*. It wasn't easy, in this situation, to look on the bright side, as the Mood Control handbook advised. Indeed, in moments of deepest despondency he had even considered leaving General Edibles for another company, but a sense of shame, a real love for his corporation, and a fear that the Personnel Office would learn of such an action had kept him from accessing the want ads.

And then, just as the Mood Control handbook had said would happen if he kept his nose to the grindstone, he got his big break. "Attention, Gabby Hayes," an unfamiliar voice addressed him over his great auricular splice, as he was wiring himself up for work on the morning after he'd dropped his suggestion in the Suggestion Box. "Report at once to the Personnel Office, Level 25. Repeat: attention, Gabby Hayes --" He tongued an acknowledgement, and the voice fell silent.

Slipping out of his circuits, Gabby made his way past Rod Steiger's rostrum and out to the elevator bank. In the elevator mirror he teased out the snarls and tangles of his hair and beard, adjusted the knot of his bandana, and positioned the corncob pipe in the corner of his mouth so as to look creditably like his namesake and role-model, the immortal sidekick of a hundred Grade-B westerns. It was a role he'd adopted shortly before being employed by GE, on the advice of his high school Identity Crisis counsellor. At the time it had seemed funky, rebellious, and very grown-up, but fashions in personas had changed. Rebellion and funk were *déclassé*, and the new look, for those who could afford it, was the Italian *Conformità* style. Gabby, on his salary as a trainee chip, could barely afford a weekly identity tune-up. Getting re-tooled was out of the question. Anyhow, he was happy being Gabby Hayes. It was a role he could bum around in anywhere, like a pair of old jeans. He just had to ignore the looks he got from the trendy Con-

formistas, like the receptionist in the Personnel Office. She gave him, along with the look, a questionnaire to fill out.

"Thanks, M'am," he twanged at her.

"Grazie a Lei," she replied, averting her eyes and giving a protective pat to her beautifully conditioned hair.

He took the questionnaire into an isolation booth, booted it, and began to tap out his multiple-choice answers. His favourite cola was (C) Koala Kola. When he started feeling worried about personal matters, he would (A) tune in to a cheerful country 'n' western song. His idea of a really good time was (B) rooting for his home team. General Edibles was like (A) one big family. If he had the spare time and a long enough line of credit, he would like to . . . Here he hesitated. None of the choices seemed modest enough. Wrecking a new car was a pleasure reserved strictly for Upper Management, and in fact he didn't think he wanted to wreck a new car, or to father quadruplets, or to own one-quarter of a race horse. Finally, but not without misgivings, he checked (D) Retool his personality.

The questionnaire shrank to a bright green dot, and the dot blossomed into the kindly simulated face of Dr Erica Fromm. "Good morning, Gabby!" she said, smiling warmly.

"Howdy, M'am," Gabby said stiffly. He wasn't used to interacting with simulations of such high resolution. He felt flattered, but also a bit unnerved.

"I have good news for you, Gabby. You are to be the Product Manager of the Rimbaud Chocolate Division, with a mandate to develop and test-market a new product-line aimed at younger affluent urban males irrespective of their affectional preferences. The exact nature of that new product has been classified as confidential, and I don't have clearance to discuss that with you. Apparently the new product-line is to be based on a suggestion you submitted recently."

"That was only last night I did that!" Gabby marvelled.

"Time enough to run a simulation and to process your profile. Concerning the latter, I have some other information to impart that will also be news to you. You are not -- how shall I put this? -- exactly who you think you are."

"I know, I know. Gabby Hayes was my counsellor's idea. I had my heart set on Clint Eastwood, but he said no, I wasn't right for that, and he showed me a bunch of graphs with my character on them, and he showed how they made a perfect match with the graphs of Gabby Hayes, and I didn't know how to argue with him."

"Undoubtedly at your new salary-level you'll be able to remedy that early mistake, though I doubt Clint Eastwood would suit your position as Product Manager. But it was not your persona I was referring to, but rather your c.v."

"My what?" Gabby asked, scratching his beard in puzzlement.

"Your curriculum vitae: your life history. You see, Gabby, you've been recycled."

Gabby's jaw went slack, and the corncob pipe fell onto the keyboard, hitting a key that solarized the

colours of Dr Fromm's face into vivid contrasts of magenta and lime green. "How . . . many times?" he asked.

"More than once. It's all in your file, and you have clearance now to examine the file at your leisure."

"Was it on account of some crime I committed?"

"No, nothing like that. Apart from a tendency towards tardiness, your problem was entirely attitudinal. Again, I can only suggest that you examine your file."

"So I'm not twenty-two years old?"

Dr Fromm pursed her violet lips and shook her magenta head.

"How old am I?"

"Forty-six."

"And in those missing years, what happened?" he asked, dismayed.

"You've been working as a chip, and taking extension courses, and gradually adjusting and laying the groundwork for this promotion. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know, Gabby. Hard work – that's the secret of success."

Gabby nodded. He wanted to slip away from the doctor's surveillance and digest the idea of being forty-six years old in private. He figured the best way to accomplish that was to demonstrate a positive attitude. "When can I start at my new job?" he asked.

"As soon as you hit the Return key, to indicate your acceptance."

Gabby hit the Return key. Dr Fromm disappeared and was replaced by Gabby's new work-contract. It was full of wonderful plums and perks, stock options and productivity bonuses and the option of drafting a single one of his "K" Division co-workers to accompany him to Rimbaud as his executive assistant. Did he wish to exercise that option? the screen wanted to know. He typed a Y, and when the screen asked *Who?* he answered without hesitation: Rod Steiger.

Then he entered the authorization code to examine his own file and scanned the records of the 24 years he'd lost in the course of being recycled. In those 24 years he'd functioned as a chip in every major division of GE, from Bellywash to Fish Products, from Soup to Nuts, and he'd taken enough extension courses to have qualified for a B-school diploma four or five times over. Amazing to think that all that data was coded, filed, and instantly retrievable without his having any conscious memory of it, but then he knew from his daily operation as a chip that consciousness was often beside the point, or even a hindrance, in getting a job done.

The suggestion he'd put in the box was a case in point. He hadn't thought that much about it. Inspiration had struck him like lightning hitting a pine tree that's been growing on a mountainside for years and years totally unaware that such a major event is in store for it. He had, it's true, used some of the insights he'd gained from the seminars in Repressive Desublimation in writing up the suggestion in its final form, but that was just icing on the cake, and the cake itself was straight from his id, or his heart, or his soul, depending on the theoretical framework used to account for inspiration and its source.

He was just about to exit from his Personnel File when he noticed an item on the menu that was flagged with a Restricted dagger: Interview 3/21/11. All those

years as a chip served him in good stead now, and with only a little jimmying he had the restricted subfile unlocked. It contained a video transcription of an interview he'd taken under the influence of a truth serum on his fifth employment anniversary, almost 24 years ago. He could not recognize the face on the screen as his own, much less credit that the sentiments he'd expressed had once been his true feelings.

"Tell me," the interviewer had asked, "how do you feel about Work?"

To which the young man on the screen had replied. "Work? Work don't mean a whole fuck of a lot to me. I know I got to do it, we've all got to do it, but if you mean do I like to do it, shit no."

There was more, and worse. He had ridiculed the idea of Team Spirit. He'd denied having the least sense of loyalty toward General Edibles. He said he would have no regrets to leave GE and go to work for any company that offered him a higher salary. It was exactly the kind of thoughtless, me-first attitude, Gabby realized, that had once led America to the verge of financial ruin and industrial collapse and allowed Japan to move into a position of global economic leadership. No wonder he'd been recycled! With a shudder of shame and aversion he exited the file and left the isolation booth.

3

A few days later, promptly at 6 a.m. on a cheerful Monday morning with the P/A playing a medley of Philip Glass favourites, Gabby – who was Gabby no longer, but a new man retooled from ear to ear – appeared before his assembled staff for their first conference and pep rally together. He was dressed plainly as an American Teenager in jeans and tee-shirt. Clean-shaven. His hair dyed black, curled, and pomaded after the fashion of his new namesake and role-model, Sal Mineo. Physically, the salon had done wonders with him, and he didn't look a day over nineteen, which was reassuring after having gained 24 years overnight. Behaviourally, the transformation had not yet entirely gelled, and a ghost of the old Gabby would occasionally glimmer through Sal's patina of sullen teenage niceness.

"Howdy, gentlemen," Sal addressed the men at the table. "My name is Mineo, but you boys can just call me Sal, and as I guess you were informed last week I'm going to be the new Product Manager here. In time I hope I'll be able to develop a deep personal relationship with each and every one of you –" He illustrated this hope by gently squeezing the shoulder of the man sitting to his right, a white-bearded old gent called Walt Whitman, who was Rimbaud's Morale Officer. "But first I'd like to tell you about the vision I have of Rambo Chocolates and the brave men who will eat them, men who should not be forgotten or passed over as America enters a new era. I hope you all agree."

There was a general nodding of heads, though one head, at the other end of the table, did not join in this mute consensus, and this was the head of the former Product Manager, and now Assistant for Quality Control, A.A. Burgess-King. No doubt (Sal thought) Burgess-King felt some resentment and perhaps even bitterness at his demotion, and in due course he'd have to apply first aid to the man's ego, but before that some harsh truths had to be stated.

"I think you'll all also agree that the Rimbaud team hasn't been performing up to capacity for a long time. Look at that sales graph! Read the report of the market research team. Three out of four gay consumers in Cheyenne, when asked to name and grade seven male chocolates in order of preference ranked Rimbaud Chocolates last on their list. As to the advertising . . ." Here Sal practised the sneer that his namesake had used to such effect in the unjustly neglected *Dino* (1957, script by Reginald Rose). "Aside from the fact one, that the ads nowhere refer to the product and two, that their scripts are written in a dead language, and three that half the ad budget has been in *The New Yorker* and other scholarly quarterlies that have a combined estimated readership of 4,000, aside from all that they're probably great ads. Not speaking French myself, I wouldn't know."

Burgess-King withdrew a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and honked into it with discrete defiance.

"It's clear as the nose on the face of the Statue of Liberty that the product needs a face-lift, and here's the scenario I've proposed." Sal summoned a screen from the ceiling of the room and dimmed the lights. "Not Rimbaud Chocolates spelled the French way, but spelled like it sounds - Rambo! And a slogan that promises action, adventure, excitement, aggression - the things that a man is looking for in a man's chocolate. Here, I'll show you." He clicked the first slide into place, and the screen burst into giant fizzing red white and blue letters:

RAMBO CHOCOLATES

Straight or gay, they'll blow you away!

Slide 2 followed:

**Attack Your Problems
with the Fighting Man's Chocolate
RAMBO!**

Slide 3:

**BIFF! POW! SOCKO! BLAM!
RAMBO GIVES A GOOD GOD-DAMN**

Slide 4:

**RAMBO!
The Chocolate that Led to Victory in Viet Nam
Can Lead YOU to Meaningful Success!**

"Of course, slogans and promises are just the wax on the paint job. To achieve real success a product has got to penetrate more than a consumer's consciousness. It's got to change his life. When he looks at his face in the bathroom mirror, or better yet in the bedroom mirror, he shouldn't see himself there - he should see the product. 'Mythologize,' as all the marketing textbooks tell us, 'eroticize, and taunt.' Consider the Harley-Davidson motorcycle, one of the greatest products in American history. In its heyday there were seven magazines devoted to the proposition that riding a Harley and wearing its livery were a guarantee of sexual potency and homicidal prowess. For its consumers it provided quite literally a meaning for their lives, as can be seen from its most famous slogan, *Live to Ride, Ride to Live*. Consider, as well, another classic male-oriented product, Jack Daniel's Bourbon. At the turn of the century, many men in the Sun Belt states developed such obsessive product loyalty that they spent from 20% to 50% of their discretionary incomes on not simply the product but on dressing themselves and furnishing their homes with

with advertisements for the product. Truly, a marketer's dream come true. The only problem in both these cases was the higher mortality rates associated with frequency of product use. However, Rambo needn't face that dilemma. There is no inherent danger in eating a pound or two of non-nutritive candy. Only if it engendered dangerous levels of aggression among those aspiring to fulfil its image and become, themselves, Rambo chocolate soldiers, only then would there be a risk of the market self-destructing. So let's have a look at the Rambo man."

Sal zapped a message to his assistant's auricular splice. "Rod, would you step in now and model that uniform?"

On this cue the doors to the Conference Room parted with a trumpet voluntary, and Rod Steiger, in his new position as Sal's executive secretary, entered in the product livery that would one day earn its own proud niche in the Marketing Hall of Fame in beautiful Tuxedo Park in the state of New York. There Rod stood before the astonished manager, the first recruit to the Legion of the Chocolate Soldiers.

Sal went up to him and plucked a bullet from his bandolier, stripped off the foil, and tossed it to Eddie Albee, the Assistant Marketing Director, who was sitting beside old Walt Whitman. "Eat lead, sweetheart!"

Albee nibbled nervously at the tip of the milk-chocolate bullet, and Rod, blushing with shame but proud to serve General Edibles in any way he could, went round the table dispensing a bullet from his bandolier to each of the managers. As he did so, Sal pointed out, and the managers noted, the other features of Rod's uniform: the I LOVE RAMBO jumpsuit; the chocolate-capped toe of his high-lacing boots (which Burgess-King was encouraged to lick); the Rambo C-Rations backpack with its fifty-pounds of assorted candles that the more gung-ho chocolate soldiers would be able to sell to their buddies in the time-honoured sales-pyramid fashion of Amway and Herbal Life; the Rambo Chocolate Milk canteen prettily embossed with the nude body of the immortal Italian Stallion as movie-goers first got to see him in his earlier porno films, and other chocolate accessories for belt and bandolier too numerous to mention. Sal then ran through the figures R & D had developed concerning possible profit margins on each item of the Rambo uniform.

At the end of the presentation, Burgess-King stood up and, after wiping away the last traces of Rod's toe-caps from his lips with his handkerchief, said: "Sal, I think I speak for all of us here when I say this is a truly interesting and bizarre marketing concept. If consumers can be made to buy one-half the product you're proposing, Rambo could assume a role of leadership throughout the male chocolate industry, and not just in the gay segment. Indeed, it could represent a revolution in the whole field of Recreational Foods. The only problem, as I see it. . ." Here Burgess-King allowed a tinge of sarcasm to colour the polished neutrality of his BBC baritone. ". . . how are consumers to be persuaded to cultivate such an intensity of brand loyalty? Short of their being abducted, tortured and brainwashed, which I gather the FDA will not yet allow."

There was a rustling sound round the Conference

Table, as of leaves or stifled laughter.

"The answer to that, Burger-King, is simple. We are going to set an example. Not here in Cornucopolis, or not yet anyhow. This market's saturated. So we're moving the office to where the shit actually hits the fan. For the last five years most of our chocolates were produced under a subcontract to Harper & Row in one of the splinter ghettoes of what used to be one of the big Innercities on our home planet, before they all went bankrupt. Poor New Topia it's called now, and General Edibles owns it, since H & R is exiting from chocolates. So as of tomorrow all the Rambo staff is relocating to this Poor New Topia. We're going to make it our test market, and before we leave we are going to turn that dump into a camp of chocolate soldiers. What do you say to that, A.A.?"

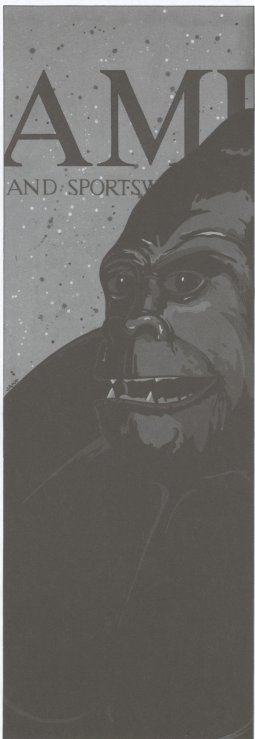
Burgess-King licked his lips, and said, "Aye-aye, Sir!"

"Then let's hear it for Rambo!"

The pep rally began.

4
By the time his staff had been strait-jacketed into their Business Class pods for the journey to Earth, Sal Mineo was blissing out soundly in the First Class Cloud Chamber. Being a Manager had some definite advantages. During the long flight Sal would often float down to Business Class and watch the ongoing process of Dream Induction. It was rather like watching, instead of the movie on the screen, the reflection of that movie on the faces of the audience. The lips of the dreaming men would form in unison the mottoes of their new allegiance to Rambo, Rambo, Rambo. Oh, it tastes so good, so masculine. Firm brown chunks of chocolate made for a man to sink his teeth into. A chocolate that's got all America behind it. Rambo! Some of the men seemed already to have found a way into these revised priorities, for their faces were smooth with the roudures and glow of a fully integrated faith. Others still struggled against that faith, notably A.A. Burgess-King, in whose mouth the words seemed to churn like a large indigestible cud of raw extender before it has been fused with any kind of fibre. Saliva drooled from the sides of his convulsing lips, tears from the corner of his tight-shut eyelids. Burgess-King was evidently not going to have an easy transition to the product's repositioning in the market. If he was going to fit into the new scheme of things, he would probably have to invest in a new persona. Sal made a note to himself to comb through some possibilities on his micro.

Most of the voyage, when he wasn't blissing out or exploring the ship, Sal networked with his fellow-seminarists back on Cornucopolis, taking this last-minute off-planet opportunity for cheap talk to relate the general theory of Repressive Desublimation to the specifics of the reformulated Rambo product-line. As so often before, the most pertinent inputs he got came from the individual who logged into the network as "Brother Marx." Marx expressed enthusiasm for the Rambo concept, and related it to his own concern for arms sales in developing arcologies. "All men need to assume a fighting posture," Marx interfaced, "and the fewer options they're offered for overt physical aggression the stronger their need to be witnessed and commended as tough mothers. Nicht wahr, Salvatore?"



"Ganz recht, mein Herr," Sal agreed. "And it will be our primary goal to equate the consumption of Rambo chocolates with overt physical aggression. We've got plans in place for that, but the details are proprietary information. But maybe you could kibitz in another area – which is how to move the product from its previous exclusively gay orientation to one perceived as bi – without sacrificing its existing erotic components."

"Just move to the next level down. Almost all sexual scenarios these days relate to the workplace as a subtext. Don't think straight and gay. Think active and passive, rich and poor, slave and master, resented and resenter. Those categories are universal. Everyone has deeper feelings about his job than about his significant other. Jobs give us hypertension, ulcers, heart attacks, Love leads to gas or heartburn."

"Ha ha!" Sal interfaced, though in fact he thought Brother Marx was being not only cynical but a little insincere. In fact, love was the cause of some major medical problems, and sex, well, the last decades of the 20th Century had shown what sex could do epidemiologically. Sex was a killer and had been all the way back to Adam and Eve and Greece and Rome. Perhaps it was the perception of that fact that made killers seem sexy. Witness the famous chaste passion of Norman Mailer and Jack Abbott as immortalized in John Denver's smash 1996 operetta *Tough Guys Don't Do That Either*.

"I've got it," Sal interfaced, switching menus.

"...?"

"A new persona possibility for my Assistant in Quality Control. Not Burgess-King. But King Kong."

"Ha ha!"

"Seriously."

"Selbstverständlich."

A bell rang, summoning Sal to his pod. He blipped the handshake icon and signed off with a sigh. Already he thought he could feel the terrible gravity of Earth tugging at his bones and aging his tissues.

Considerations of time and space require that we leave Sal at this fateful juncture just before his arrival at the spaceport of Poor New Utopia and cut forward to the day, almost a year later, when he made a startling discovery in the Peek Experience Topless Laundromat there in his new hometown. But before we zoom in on his look of shock and amazement, some background has to be filled in concerning the erotic torment referred to briefly at the beginning of this narrative. In the full-length four-hour wide-screen version coming soon to your neighbourhood theatre this part of the story will receive an ampler and quite explicit treatment, but here, because it is only a subplot and because some readers would find the details insupportably shocking, a bare summary of the facts will have to suffice.

This subplot concerns the controversial relationship between Rod Steiger and a young man with whom the reader is already familiar, John Asbury. Sal, ever alert to fresh talent, had promoted Asbury to the editorship of *Chocolate Soldier Monthly*, a microfiction periodical devoted to the adventures of the product's spokesperson and ringleader, the mighty Rambo. Of all Sal's subordinates Asbury had shown himself to be the most adaptable to the product's

repositioning and the most resourceful in exploiting the latent aggressions of the new demographic slice of the market. His nostalgia for the original product-image was manifest only in his editorial penchant for introducing the figure of Rambo into historical situations in which the historical Rimbaud might have ventured, as when Rambo singlehandedly defeats the Commundar scum during the Siege of Paris in 1871 and, rather more anachronistically, when he leads his Chocolate Soldiers to victory at Verdun and the Battle of the Bulge. Historical verity aside, these new adventures of Rambo were critically acclaimed and highly popular floppies, and *Chocolate Soldier Monthly* had soon rivalled such established successes as *Lifestyles of the Gay Mercenaries* and *Psycho Soldiers Jokebook*. Clearly, the times were ready for a more aggressive line of chocolates.

The inspiration for Asbury's achievements had been Sal's old team-leader and current executive assistant and gopher, Rod Steiger. Rod had not adjusted as easily as Asbury to his altered circumstances, but being the good company man he was he'd done his level best. The military fixation was easy enough, ditto the Falstaffian aspect of a devotion to chocolates, but he had trouble dealing with that old unmentionable Sex. Rod had strong homophobic tendencies and though he did his best to repress them they would keep bubbling up, and he was given to odd little fits of rage and brutality towards his co-workers, who for their part were quite understanding and only looked forward to the day when they could get together in secret and brutalize him. And then Eros shot his arrow and it fell to earth in Rod's heart.

Readers who remember having viewed Steiger's portrayal of the title role in *The Sergeant* (1968; co-starring John Philip Law) will be able to picture the scenario, but it was not an especially popular movie so you may have missed it. If so, do track it down, or better yet, rent the wide-screen version of this story, which includes some droll quotations from that earlier film intercut with scenes between our Rod and his Asbury as together they rediscover the ancient and paradoxical perversion of Bondage!

People who enjoy sex guiltlessly, in the spirit that they might enjoy a tasty non-nutritive pizza or a glass of Beaujolais, will have difficulty imagining that there were once those who could only get it off if they were totally immobilized. An unnatural taste, doubtless. But consider how often art thrives by the limitations an artist may impose on his task – the rhyme-scheme of a sonnet, it may be, or the rule that says ballet dancers mustn't talk or sing. Fetters may take many forms.

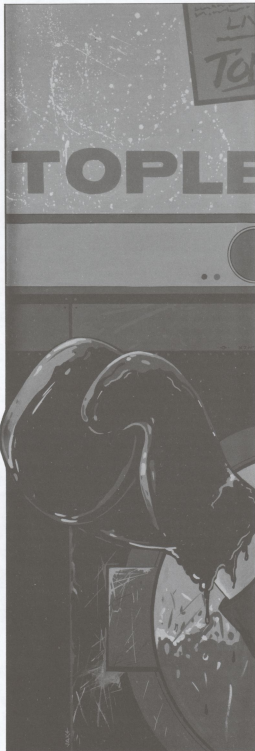
For Rod they took the form of chocolate – initially, a kind of boxing glove R & D had prototyped, with a soft marshmallow centre and a shell of brittle chocolate. Hitting someone with a Rambo glove was like throwing a traditional cream pie in his face, and it cost no more than an ordinary candy bar. Asbury had recruited some volunteers from the division, Rod among them, to give demos of the Rambo glove at leading laundromats and high schools. Rod's basic anxiety to keep up with the prevailing standards of macho, plus his innate pleasure in the rites of pugilism, plus an aptitude for receiving pie in the face (he seemed genuinely surprised every time), had

made him the most successful of the demonstrators. Thanks to the efforts of R & D in developing a product with exceptionally quick-moulding properties, and thanks as well to John Asbury's flair for street theatre, Rod's demos became ever lengthier and more painstaking, so that it took nearly two hours for Rod to be transformed from head to toe into a compleat chocolate soldier, a second Sylvester Stallone with nougat biceps and marshmallow creme pecs, and all other parts of his body – except his face – enlarged, enchocolated, and immobilized. When this process had been completed, the spectators were invited to dip their hands into the patented Rambo glovemaker, and then, when the glove was firm, to pop Rod in the kisser. It was a genuinely innovative way to express an area of feelings that we all have but usually can't desubliminate into a commodity relationship, and the crowd loved it, and the results were edible and no more addictive than the average cola. Once every customer had had a chance to pop Rod, he would be carted back to the companies laboratory, where Asbury then undertook the lengthy process of disen-chocolating him, a process best not described in more detail.

Rod had divided feelings about his nightly enchocolating and disen-chocolating. He loved it and he hated it; he got off on it even as he experienced an agony of shame. Once he had been an object of fearful respect, a figure of authority; now he was an object of derision and a figure of fun. "Look what the Easter Bunny's brought," his co-workers would quip as he came in the door. So it is not altogether surprising that Rod Steiger, despite his years of faithful service to GE and his genuine devotion to the company, should have succumbed to the temptation offered him; should have, almost, perpetrated the deed that Sal, by good luck (which is another of the secrets of success) and in the nick of time, was able to prevent, thanks to the discovery he made that night at the Peek Experience Topless Laundromat.

As a believer that Management should stay in tune with the dorm-life and volunteer activities of the work force, Sal had been on hand to take part in the demo and coincidentally to wash his clothes and enjoy the honkytonk atmosphere of the vast laundromat, which was Poor New Topia's premier entertainment spot. While the music pulsed and the light dimmed and dazzled in counterpoint to that pulse, the customers would strip off their clothes and stuff them provocatively into the favourite model of washing machine, then cruise the washfloor during the Wash, Rinse and Spin cycles, getting spaced on the product demos everywhere in progress, which here in Poor New Topia were much more explicit and X-rated than product demos back in Cornucopolis.

Sal made one full circuit of the Peek Experience, stopping at a kissing booth to make out with a very young mannequin whose face and body glowed with colour-flow scrolls of copy that promised "You'll be as lovely as me with New Skin from Calvin Klein." At the bar in back of the drying arena he boosted his endorphin level with a refreshing quart of Koala Cola and watched a political debate on the tv between a born-again advocate of decimation and a radical opponent. By the time he got bored with the debate



and went to the drying arena to check out the demo, Rod was already fully encochoclated and customers were lining up to purchase their Rambo gloves at the Special Introductory Offer Rate. Sal noticed Rod's *I Love Rambo* jumpsuit lying on a bench at the side of the stage. Seeing a stain of dark, semi-sweet chocolate around the collar (Rod's flattop had a tendency to melt as a result of his continual blushing, a defect Quality Control had not yet corrected), Sal thought he would, as a kindness to his assistant, throw the dirty jumpsuit into a Whirlpool along with his own clothes (for he had not yet stripped for action). First, naturally, he'd gone through Rod's pockets, and there in the right-hand hip pocket with the Almond Crunch embroidery panel, he'd come upon a small round tin bearing the trademark of General Edibles' major competitor, its only equal in sales volume in the entire off-planet marketing area, Tojo Foods!

At first he simply refused to believe it. Could the jumpsuit conceivably belong to some other customer there at Peek Experience? No, for there beneath the bench were the boots Sal had hand-tooled with Rod's name.

He opened the tin. It contained a quantity of tiny whitish granules, or pellets, that resembled a sickly sort of caviar.

Sal went up on the stage, where Rod had just received his first blow of the evening. He wiped the globs of clinging marshmallow creme from Rod's face, held up the tin before his eyes, and demanded, "What's this then, Steiger?"

"What's what?" Rod said in a quavering voice. His eyes darted back and forth, and his chocolate sheathing visibly trembled with his effort to break loose from his chocolate bonds.

"This tin that I found in your pocket, this tin with a Tojo Foods trademark!"

There was a communal gasp of astonishment among the other GE employees who had gathered around.

"I don't know what it is!" Rod protested. "I want to go back to my dorm."

"Sure," said Sal. "But first let's do a little taste comparison." He dipped his finger into the tin of white, gelatinous pellets and held it up to Rod's lips.

Rod puckered his lips tightly and gazed at the proffered fingerful with evident fear and loathing. "Mmmnn!" he protested. "Mmmnn!"

Sal turned to John Asbury. "Do you know anything about this?"

"No. But I'd like to be able to swear to that under serum at the first opportunity. And when you're interrogating him -" Asbury glanced with aversion at Steiger's fearful, creme-smear'd face. "-I'd like to be on hand to help out."

Sal nodded, and turned back to Steiger. He scraped off the fingerful of clinging white pellets on Rod's bulging deltoids.

"No!" Rod protested. "Don't, please! Wipe that stuff off me! Now!"

"What are they?" Sal insisted.

"Help!" Rod screamed to the laundromat at large. "Someone, please - help me out of this shit!"

There was a ripple of laughter through the crowd that had gathered at the foot of the stage, and a smattering of applause.

Asbury nodded permission for the next customer to step forward and pop a glove in Steiger's face. Pow! Rod spat out a mouthful of marshmallow creme and went on protesting and pleading futilely until the last customer had taken his turn. Then, gagged with a hollow chocolate banana that allowed him to breathe but prevented speech, he was taken to the Rambo labs for interrogation.

5

Viewers who have seen *Rambo Part 2* will recall the scene were Rambo unflinchingly endures, among other tortures, having the sadistic Russian general cut off, one after another, the clinging black leeches that have adhered to shoulders, arms, and chest. Yuck! you may have said to yourself, for it was a disgusting moment - but not half as disgusting as what transpired that night in the Rambo laboratory as the egg-clusters that Sal had wiped off on Rod's chocolate-coated shoulders hatched. Within only an hour of their coming in contact with the chocolate in which the Tojo genetic engineers had designed them to flourish a thousand small white maggots were pululating vigorously. The brittle chocolate shell had been completely devoured and the nougat and creme layers within had become ecosystems unto themselves, when Rod, driven half-mad with fear, finally made a full confession (which is something Rambo himself would never have done, but then who would ever have cast Rod Steiger in that role?).

The next morning Sal made a surprise visit to the sprawling Rambo Industrial Complex on the outskirts of Poor New Topia. He went directly to the Quality Control office, where a small furry gorilla in an *I Love Rambo* jumpsuit rose from his desk and greeted him with obsequious jibbering.

Repressing a shiver of disgust, Sal explained that he'd come to the plant to view an inspection of Old Number 7, the vat in which the new quick-drying chocolate for the Rambo glove was now going into full production. The ape-man - who was our old acquaintance, A.A. Burgess-King, in his new persona as King Kong - led the way to Old Number 7 up a series of iron ladders and along a twisting catwalk that looked down over the plant's gigantic vats of molten chocolate.

Did Sal feel any compunction as he listed to the unsuspecting and perfidious double-agent explain, in a series of apelike grunts, the system of Quality Control monitors and gauges arrayed on the console above the vat? As well ask whether Gretel was moved by pity and compassion when she asked the witch to show her how to use an oven. With one quick karate chop that Rambo himself would have had to admire the deed was done, and the human gorilla was plunged, screaming Japanese obscenities, into the bubbling vat below.

To die? you ask. Oh no, death would be too kind a fate for such a traitor, whose plan (as the remorseful Rod Steiger had revealed) had been nothing less than the destruction of Rambo Chocolates and the corporate disgrace of General Edibles. Already the rumour-mills had been set in motion by other agents of Tojo Foods, spreading the treacherous lie that the Rambo vats were infested with maggots.

When the time was ripe Burgess-King was to have ordered his minion, Rod, to infest Old Number 7 with the eggs from the Tojo labs and create a biomicroscopic Pearl Harbour, which all the major networks were then to have reported live on a "fact-finding tour" conducted by Burgess-King. What Rod Steiger hadn't realized (Sal was to learn it only after he'd uncoded the traitor's secret instructions from Tojo Foods) was that he had been destined for assassination after he'd served his purpose so that the blame for his deed might be ascribed not to Tojo's conglomerate greed but on his individual sexual guilt!

Already a week before the events at the laundromat Rod had been ordered to infest Old Number 7, but Hamlet-like he had shilly-shallied, carrying about the incriminating tin that Burgess-King had issued him and trying to figure out exactly how the original Rod Steiger would have dealt with this temptation. On the one hand, he'd have found a sweetly vengeful satisfaction in destroying a product that had become the source of his nightly humiliation; on the other hand, he'd have been thankful for the very hours of enchocolated bondage that prevented him from carrying out an act of treason against the corporation he had long and loyally served. But none of Rod Steiger's actual movies had addressed themselves to precisely this situation, and finally Fate, in the form of Sal Mineo, had intervened and forced Rod's hand. Considerations of dramatic economy forbid us, in this story, to chronicle the repentance, recycling, and rehabilitation that Rod was to undergo in his judicially-mandated persona as Moe of Three Stooges fame. It is a story of heartbreak and laughter, of hard knocks and low blows and of triumph in the face of adversity, but it's another story entirely, so forget about Rod Steiger.

The fate of the perfidious Burgess-King, however, can be chronicled quickly, for his career of treachery was resolved conclusively and once and for all by the jury of inquest who determined (1) that his plunge into Old Number 7 had been an act of God, and (2) that his visa was to be withdrawn in punishment for his intended acts of treason and that he had become, in consequence, a simple commodity, which Sal purchased, immediately after the inquest for \$49.95.

We know, as that jury did not, that God had been assisted in his act by a member of Upper Management, and if it seems that Upper Management was behaving somewhat ruthlessly, well, as Sal was later to confide during a network seminar on the Secrets of Success, a Manager must sometimes be ruthless in order to achieve the goals of his corporation and benefit the community-at-large, and to secure the greatest good of the greatest number and higher quarterly profits.

You may disagree with Sal's advocacy of Ruthlessness, as many of the seminarists did, not to mention leading philosophers and teachers down through the ages, but if you do you must ask yourself whether you'd have been willing to pay the price – the price, in this case, of an America gradually brought within the trading sphere of Tojo Foods and conditioned by the wiles of its marketers to savour the new product with which it had intended to capture our nation's Recreational Food market, a product that was a blatant plagiarism of the Rambo glove. You must ask yourself if you would want yourself and your children to become consumers of Tojo Foods' *Toe Jam* – and if

your answer to that question is a resounding NO! then you may agree with me that Sal Mineo was right and there are times when a man has got to be ruthless and act decisively.

That's the moral of the story, but a work of fiction should end with more than a moral, so here is an image to go with it. Imagine Sal Mineo on the deck of his luxury condo, bathed in the rosy glow of Jupiter, surrounded by the trophies of a long and innovative career as Director of Rambo Foods and Sportswear, and chief among those trophies imagine the strange and now somewhat dessicated (but not yet brain-dead) statue, cast in ageless chocolate, of that greatest of RKO's creations, the immortal, the tragic, the ineffable if not quite believable, the hideously grimacing . . . KING KONG!

Thomas M. Disch's last novel to be published in this country was *The Businessman: A Tale of Terror* (recently reissued in paperback by Grafton Books). His latest book in America is *The Brave Little Toaster*, a children's novella published by Doubleday. He lives in New York.

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Gene Wolfe

Interview by Elliott Swanson

When future scholars look back in some academic quest to determine the point where science fiction made the jump to literature, one of the writers they'll have to contend with is Gene Wolfe. Born in 1931, he has recently abandoned the editing of a technical magazine for full-time fiction writing. His first stories were published in the 60s, but it was not until the appearance of the first volume of *The Book of the New Sun* (Shadow of the Torturer) in 1980 that twenty years of writing turned into an "overnight success."

Many writers with scientific backgrounds stick mainly to "hard" sf. As an ex-engineer, how did you dodge the stereotype?

Actually, I have written a certain amount of hard science fiction. I think that someone like myself who has done a good deal of practical engineering has an appreciation of the difficulties of the thing. I don't find myself very comfortable with characters who build time machines in their basements or whip out super-powered lasers from broken frying pans. I don't believe it can be done. I did manage to learn that things that should work in theory don't always work in practice, and that most of an engineer's really difficult problems are with people and politics.

The numbing effect of technology seems to be a recurring theme in your writing. How do you see technology affecting our short-term future?

Fundamentally, as we let it. Technology is a tool, not a god or a devil. Radio and television could have been the greatest things since the printing press; but we want elevator music, propaganda, and sales pitches, so that's what we're getting, for the most part. Creating and using technology requires a great deal of training and education, but the public is being sold on the idea that technology does away with the need for education — why learn to spell when you can get a spelling checker for your word processor? Why learn to read when the educational channel lets you tune in to *Hamlet*? It's a message we want very much to hear, and we're listening as hard as we can. All this was predicted years

and years ago, by the way, in a story called "The Marching Morons." (By C.M. Kornbluth — E.S.)

In the *Book of the New Sun* series, divisions between magic and technology blur — at least in the eyes of most of the inhabitants of that world — creating a new and bizarre mythology. Are the roots of that future mythology identifiable today?

If you mean the various stories from the brown book (One of the fictional works described within *New Sun* — E.S.), they are tales from our own period or much earlier, mixed and blurred in the fashion that stories are by the passage of time. I had a fan write, saying that I probably thought nobody would realize I was stealing from Kipling in "The Tale of the Boy Called Frog," but that he had caught it. I tried to be polite and replied that I was certainly glad he had. He said just don't try that again. Of course Romulus and Remus are in that story too, as is the pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock.

In one of your short stories, "The Blue Mouse," there is a psychological division among soldiers — those who can kill (Marksmen) and those who cannot (Techs). Yet it's the Techs who are truly brutal. Did your own experience as a soldier have anything to do with shaping that story?

Yes, a great deal. In general, combat soldiers are gentle men who have no desire to fight, although they may very well kill you if you do. In general, clerks, truck drivers, and cooks feel the need to prove that they're as tough as commandos. There are exceptions both ways, of course. Our company clerk in Korea was probably the most intelligent man in the company, and one of the best liked.

After talking about your views on high-tech, this may sound like a loaded question . . . Do you write with a word processor?

I write on what is called a "smart typewriter." It's actually a hard-wired word processor. I'd like to have a home computer too, but I haven't been able to justify spending that much money yet. **Libraries often slap little yellow-and-red "SF" stickers on the spines of your books. How do you feel about being genre labelled?**

I think that's part of the librarians' job. I was in a library once when a nice little old lady came in asking for ghost stories. The library didn't have a ghost story section, and the librarians couldn't think of any ghost-story writers. Any aversion I may have had to labels vanished as I listened to their conversation. At the World Fantasy Convention, my publisher told me that one of the big book chains was unhappy with the jacket of the hardcover *Free Live Free*, because it did not "say" science fiction. He and his chief editor explained that they had been trying to think of something that would say it without giving away the ending. I reminded them that early in the book a beautiful naked witch uses her portable computer to summon a demon, so maybe the paperback will have a new cover. . . **Libraries and librarians often crop in your works — why?**

Probably because I used to ride my bicycle to the magical and mysterious Houston Public Library, then one of the largest public buildings in town. It's one of the smallest buildings downtown now, and has become a "civic centre," or some such. The library is a new, brilliantly lit, and very noisy building that does everything possible to remind you that books are just a sideline. In the town where I live, the library pretty obviously considers itself a branch office of the high-school library; and Chicago, the nearest big city, has improved its library by getting rid of every last book. Yet libraries were magical places once, and could be so again. It seems to me that just as we ought to let the Postal System spend all its time on junk mail and establish an independent organization to handle letters, magazines, and packages, so we ought to let our present libraries handle nothing but sound recordings, software, children's clubs, and video tapes, and establish a new, human-sized institution that would cherish books, occasionally loan them out, and say "Shhh!"

A reviewer said the recent release of your novel *Free Live Free* (Gollancz UK, Tor US — originally a Ziesing limited edition) "can be considered a new book." What kind of changes were made?

The book was cut by about 4000 words, as I remember. About half that came from dropping a chapter, the rest from tightening up the writing. The order of the chapters was changed slightly, and a chronology was added as end matter. The British edition is the same as the Tor edition, by the way, except that it lacks the chronology.

Who, if anyone, have you used as a model in developing a writing style?

Nobody, really... I just try to suit my style to the material.

Which writers do you read?

The brief answer is all of them. Once I told Somtow Sucharitkul that I read everything except westerns, and he said, "Oh yes, easterns are much better!" Last night I read a short story by Doris Pitkin Buck. Try to find five other people who remember Doris Pitkin Buck. I'm currently reading *Benchmarks*, by Algis Budrys, and I recommend it.

How did a someone regarded as a master of the short story come to write a 400,000 word "novel" (the *Book of the New Sun* tetralogy)?

It was a novelette that got out of hand. I planned a two-part story: Severian as a young man in the Citadel, and Severian returning to the Citadel to force the guild to make him a master. I hoped to sell it to Damon Knight's *Orbit* series. Severian grabbed the story and ran away with it, then pulled Dorcas out of that damned swamp - she was a total surprise to me, and I had a hell of a time figuring out who she was - and I was really in the soup. Okay, it would be a novel. Then a trilogy. Thanks for calling me a master of the short story. It isn't true, but I'm working on it.

The *Book of the New Sun* contains enough archaic and arcane words to keep a reader buried in dictionaries...

When John Carter goes to Mars, he throws Martian words like "thark" at us. It seemed to me that a similar story laid on Urth should use terrestrial words as authentic as "thark." James Blish said you shouldn't call a rabbit a sheep. I decided to call it a lapin. Or maybe a hare.

In the *New Sun* lexicon featured in *Castle of the Otter*, you apologize for misspelling "onagers" saying "I should look these things up." The implication is that you keep all this weird language in your head. You're kidding, of course.

Yes, but kidding myself most of all. I really thought I knew how to spell onagers, and I was wrong. Some of those words I know, some I had a vague memory of, and some took hours of searching. Obviously enough, I'm not quite as smart that way as I thought I was. When Ring Lardner wrote those letters from his fictional ballplayer, he misspelled easy words and spelled the difficult words correctly. He had a

hard time getting that past his editors, but he was right. That sort of letter writer uses a dictionary for the difficult words, but believes he can spell the easy one. I know because I belong to the same group.

The world in *Book of the New Sun* is a recognizable place, with Byzantine and medieval overtones. Do you see history as repeating cycles, with bits and pieces constantly going in and out of fashion?

Yes, but not causeless cycles. The Greeks developed democracy because the geography of their country broke them up into small communities. The English revived it because the invention of the horsecollar destroyed the Roman roads, bringing England into little communities. We revived it again, because of the pattern of colonization along our eastern seaboard. Not all the Greek cities were democracies, and not all their democracies were good, because small, scattered communities can produce other things as well. But whenever you have small, scattered communities, democracy is one likely result. We no longer have it by the way - we have a republic, a system by which we elect our rulers, rather than ruling ourselves.

If you stripped away the narrative material and redoubts in *New Sun* you'd have a philosophy book. Gene Wolfe's philosophy or Severian the Torturer's?

Severian's of course. He's writing the book.

In *Citadel of the Autarch*, Severian muses that perhaps all women betray us... Has there been any reaction by militant feminists to women's roles in the series?

I think Severian means that men want to be loved more than any other thing is loved, and that though they may occasionally attract such love, they never have the power to hold it. I doubt that militant feminists read me or any other author that closely. I've had a lot of flak from them because "there are no women in positions of authority," which isn't true, and because Thecla is tortured. Not long ago, my agent passed along a letter from a female editor asking for horror stories free of "child abuse and graphic violence to women." Guess what's okay...

Would you like to see any of your books made into films - other than for the obvious economic reasons?

Not particularly. Film is a junk medium; if that weren't true, you'd see scripts published like plays. Besides, there isn't room enough in a movie for a good book. I'd much rather see films made from some of my short stories, say "The Detective of Dreams," "The Toy Theater," or "Westwind."

There are specialty book-store owners with walls full of screenplays who might argue part of that statement, but

what's more interesting is how you connect script publishing with film as a "junk medium."

It seems to me that in most cases movie scripts have very little to do with the quality of the picture. I think the reason is not that movie scripts cannot have much to do with picture quality, but that most movie scripts are sufficiently bad that successful pictures succeed in spite of them. If this weren't true I think that we would see more published movie scripts than we do. I've never seen a store of the type you described - maybe they're all over America and I've never come across them.

Within the genre, what about films like *Solaris* or *Clockwork Orange* or, arguably, *Blade Runner*?

I happen to love *Blade Runner*. I think it's a superb movie. It did not do well, but the fact that it's a superb movie doesn't give me much impetus to wanting to see some of my own work done as film. I suppose I've seen any number of *Star Wars* dolls, for example, and I think some of them are probably very good dolls. That doesn't particularly make me want to see someone do a Severian doll, other than the financial aspect, which we set aside. Sure, if someone wants to do a movie on one of my things and pay a big buck, I'm going to take the money and run for the train like anybody else, but I'm not going to expect a good movie. I'd be delighted to get one.

Have film rights ever been sold for any of your books?

No. Options have sold to *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* and "The Death of Doctor Island," but the rights themselves have never been sold. Early last year, I got expressions of interest on *New Sun* from Goldrush Studios and Lord and Lady, but nothing has come of them. You didn't ask about game rights, but there's been a good deal of talk - and no action - there.

The word is out that you're working on an opera. If so, what's it like, and when can we expect to see it?

The idea was to do "The Death of Doctor Island" as an opera. I'm not writing the opera in the sense of composing the music, which strikes me as being about 90 per cent of the job. I'm writing the libretto and Somtow Sucharitkul is doing the composing. It hasn't gone terribly far. The last letter I had from him said that he was still working on it, but we have much farther to go than we've gone, and (to date) it's taken us four years. So don't hold your breath!

The big question - when will the fifth *New Sun* book be published?

I have no idea. I should finish it sometime this year. It will have to go to Simon & Schuster/Pocket, which has an option from which it will not release me, although S & S/P may or may not be more or less out of the sf

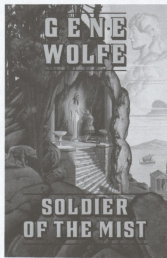
field. S & P may or may not buy it, and if it does, may or may not publish it. In other words, nearly all the decisions are out of my hands.

What else is in the works?

Soldier of the Mist, a science fantasy laid in ancient Greece; I'm told it'll be out in October. And, *There Are Doors*, a parallel universe novel still in first draft. Recently I finished a short story called "The Peace Spy" about ending the threat of nuclear war, but so far nobody's interested. I've also written "Empires of Foliage and Flower," the story about the green and yellow empires to which Severian refers in *The Claw of the Conciliator*.

Stealing an idea from *Castle of the Otter*, how about wrapping things up with a brief Gene Wolfe interviews Gene Wolfe session?

Okay. What do you dislike most about your own writing, Mr Wolfe? Answer: That so often it doesn't work – that I can say X, flatly and in so many words, and later have editors, reviewers, and readers say, "But you never told me X." I point out that I did, at the top of page 22, or whatever, and they say, "Well, it doesn't come through." Obviously it doesn't, and I don't know how to make it. Similarly, at least a dozen reviewers have said Severian has a magic sword. It isn't magic, he doesn't think it's magic. In *Soldier of the Mist* I gave up and gave the hero (he's called Latro) a magic sword – it cuts things.



Cover by Mark Harrison for Gene Wolfe's new novel, forthcoming from Gollancz in October 1986 (£9.95). It is set in "the fantastic historical world of Greece in the year 479 BC, when the Gods still walked the Earth."

BACK ISSUES

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

- 1: "The New Rays" by M. John Harrison; "Kitemaster" by Keith Roberts; "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" by Angela Carter; "Guesting" by John Sladek; "The Brothel in Rosenstrasse" by Michael Moorcock.
- 2: "Memories of the Space Age" by J.G. Ballard; "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart; "The Third Test" by Andrew Weiner; "Angel Baby" by Rachel Pollack; "Cantata '82" by Tom Disch.
- 3: "The Dissemblers" by Garry Kilworth; "Overture for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'" by Angela Carter; "No Coward Soul" by Josephine Saxton; "Cheek to Cheek" by Nicholas Allan; "Saving the Universe" by David Garnett.
- 4: "Calling All Gumdrops" by John Sladek; "The Caulder Requiem" by Alex Stewart; "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd; "After-Images" by Malcolm Edwards; "The Quiet King of the Green South-West" by Andy Soutter; "The Ur-Plant" by Barrington J. Bayley.
- 5: "The Flash! Kid" by Scott Bradfield; "The Tithonian Factor" by Richard Cowper; "Vitamin Memories of B-12" by Edwin Dorf (art feature); "Novelty" by John Crowley; "What Cindy Saw" by John Shirley; "Strange Great Sins" by M. John Harrison.
- 6: "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder; "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson; "The Views of Mohammed El Hassif" by John Hendry; "Radical Architecture" by Roger Dean (art feature); "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos; "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts.
- 7: "The Unconquered Country" by Geoff Ryman; "Kept Women" by Margaret Welbank (art feature); "Life in the Mechanist/Shaper Era" by Bruce Sterling; "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" by Michael Blumlein.
- 8: "Unmistakably the Finest" by Scott Bradfield; "The Electric Zoo" by Chris Jones (art feature); "Dreamers" by Kim Newman; "Strange Memories of Death" by Philip K. Dick; "Experiment with Time" by M.J. Fitzgerald; "McGonagall's Lear" by Andy Soutter; "What I Believe" by J.G. Ballard.
- 9: "The Object of the Attack" by J.G. Ballard; "The Gods in Flight" by Brian Aldiss; "Canned Goods" by Thomas M. Disch; "Synaptic Intrigue" by Richard Kadrey (art feature); "The Luck in the Head" by M. John Harrison; "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson; "Spiral Winds" by Garry Kilworth.
- 10: "John's Return to Liverpool" by Christopher Burns; "Green Hearts" by Lee Montgomerie; "Soulmates" by Alex Stewart; Photographs by Ian Sanderson; "Love, Among the Corridors" by Gene Wolfe; "The Malignant One" by Rachel Pollack; "The Dream of the Wolf" by Scott Bradfield.
- 11: "War and/or Peace" by Lee Montgomerie; "Cube Root" by David Langford; "Fogged Plates" by Christopher Burns; "Rain, Tunnel and Bombfire" by Pete Lyon (art feature); "The Unfolding" by John Shirley & Bruce Sterling; "Kitemistress" by Keith Roberts.
- 12: "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software..." by Michael Bishop; "Little Ilya and Spider and Box" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Fire Catcher" by Richard Kadrey; "Laser Smith's Space Academy" by George Parkin (comic strip); "A Young Man's Journey to Vericonium" by M. John Harrison; "Instructions for Exiting This Building..." by Pamela Zoline.
- 13: "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" by J.G. Ballard; "The People on the Precipice" by Ian Watson; Interview with William Gibson; "If the Driver Vanishes..." by Peter T. Garratt; "Escapist Literature" by Barrington J. Bayley; "Rhinstone Manifesto" by Don Webb; "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" by Neil Ferguson.
- 14: "When the Timegate Failed" by Ian Watson; Interview with Clive Barker; "The Compassionate, the Digital" by Bruce Sterling; "Finn" by Sue Thomason; "Patricia's Profession" by Kim Newman; "The King of the Hill" by Paul J. McAuley; "The New SF" by Vincent Omniaveritas; "Caverns" by David Zindell.
- 15: "The Winter Market" by William Gibson; Interview with Bruce Sterling; "The One and Only Tale..." by John Brosnan; "The Vivarium" by Garry Kilworth; "A Multiplication of Lives" by Diana Reed; "Goodbye – and Thanks for the SF" by Allen A. Lucas; "The Ibis Experiment" by S.W. Widdowson.
- 16: "And He Not Busy Being Born..." by Brian Stableford; art feature by Jim Burns; "The Protector" by Rachel Pollack; "Sex Change Operation Shock" by Gwyneth Jones; "The Brains of Rats" by Michael Blumlein; "His Vegetable Wife" by Pat Murphy; "The Cup is the Wine" by Josephine Saxton; Interview with Iain Banks; "The Final Episode" by Shirley Weinland.

Barbara Hills

Future Fish

Green-blue, blue-green, cold, cold it falls. We smile and sit, sit and smile as water splashes our foreheads, separates and streams across our gills, runs cold, cold, down our backs and round our bellies. Sky-wet, life-washed and drinking we are found, growing, moving again. We can breathe, a joyous drawing. Blood is pumping, we are awakening, spared, restored.

It happens like that. It has happened like that to me, others, years past. It will come, surely it will come, the green-blue, blue-green life, the hard bolts bursting silver, the knowledge that it is so and has always been even in our doubts.

I lie on one side and flap. Mud clouds up, choking. Brown drifts spread between me and the merciless. They smile in the blaze of its heat. They call it life, I heard them once as I hid in the reeds. I have not seen them lately, the sitters. They do not see reflections sucked from me, do not heed as I am drunk dry.

I flounder but others are gasping or dead. Some dried up years back. We who shared the deep reach are apart now. Many swam out to rest in comfortable nooks or to explore the sea, well used to the taste of brine, mindless of current and swell. A few went where poisonous water lies, where stunted things grope at survival. Others were caught by the sitters. They used to come with tasty tidbits especially at dawn and twilight when we searched for food. So easy to be mistaken and so deadly. I stayed, growing, waiting. Perhaps I will die staring at the sky but no, surely it will come, the green-blue, blue-green life.

Tips of feet pierce my world, little black pinpoint skate over my hopes. A shadow of food.

"Dream fish," he whispers, "the clouds are in your head, no more. Now me, I am real, I am here, I am now." If I lurch at him he will disappear but he will come back when I am dead to feed on me. He will bring his friends and they will have a banquet.

A dark, bristly flesh dips and blows. Hooves stir the mud. The elk is here again.

The animal's head hung low, sniffing the puddles. Then he turned and gathered his bulk to spring like a monstrous goat. Gaining the ledge he rested, muddied and gnarled. He could have been an old felled tree, a crumble of musty bark and lichen or a piece of cliff that has learned to move and breathe.

The man sat on a boulder dangling string down above the water. He was there every day, old and, like the elk, one with the rock, dry, weathered.

"Why do you come here?" the animal asked.

The old man's eyes looked across the divide to the little church where white-faced saints peeled and mouldered. The icy fingers of the Arctic had reached them. Their music ceased, their throats stopped. It was a sepulchre now, a monument to the forgotten. Ice and sun had cracked it beyond repair.

"In my youth this was a good place, you know. Full of fish. We would take a boat out early and sit hidden in the mists. The water was like grey milk, smooth, cool. We had no rods then of course. All you needed was a hook, string, some little fish for bait and you could wind them in until the boat was loaded. Yes, in those days we ate our fill all right. Whiting for breakfast then."

"Full stomach, slow travel," grunted the elk. The old man did not hear.

"As a fish slips a hook this year is slipped or our boats would be here now, bobbing at the jetty, the jellyfish collecting round them all colours and the size of dinner plates. Ah, what I would give to see a jellyfish now."

"The sky is darkening," said the elk. "Will you come to the forest?"

"No. Here is the only place I know."

He peered down the rock face. It was bizarre, wrong. A precipice had sprung from a place he knew as well as the back of his own hand. Familiarity was unveiling, depth upon depth; beauty was turning hag, raw and blistered with stinking weed.



We wait, we of the deep reach that was, in our separate holes, eyes turned to the merciless until we are blind with staring. Water sways, a breeze, a stirring. A cloud drifts, a cloud, full and heavy-bottomed comes, fast and low, swollen black. We summon our energies, every last effort to reach, heads bobbing out of the water, eager for the storm. Our bones shake with the vibration of thunder. The mud is rumbling, our hearts are turning to sound. The world fractures. Noise, noise and the torrent is beating the brown puddles clear.

Are we dead? We live beyond ourselves. They have made us that way, the sitters. They who make the acid rain make us to endure it but no beating hearts will hatch here.

At first the man looked different, swathed in dark green waterproofs, a battered hat firmly on his head but still he sat like an extension of rock. His gaze wandered the opposite shore pausing among skeletal pines, painting brutalised limbs with fresh, green needles and strands of lichen. He tried to put back the water, to see again the ebb and sway, the little rings and disturbances of fish, but the vision would not come. It was all barnacled rock and weed become mud-baked-hard, shelf upon shelf like the rusted hulk of a ship that should never have been raised.

"Do you know they say the Russians once hid a submarine here?"

The elk flicked an ear and dislodged a fly.

"Rally?" he said.

"Oh yes, it was deep then. It could hide all manner

of things. Not now though. Thin and clear as glass now."

The elk curled his lip.

"My forebears ruled this country," he snorted rolling an eye across the granite and the sickly landward trees. "Before men learned to cross the snows we were chasing stars. Yes, even after the roads came they were afraid of us. We could jump their fences you see. They could not afford to high fence all the roads."

"Rulers, rulers, they are all the same," grumbled the old man, "promises of better days, no germs here, less pollution there. All very well but there are other pollutions, more homely, equally toxic. A man who knows it fences his land and keeps out or he travels through thumbing his nose at sucking whirlpools and quicksands. Either way he is destroyed."

"Men always esteem themselves so highly," said the elk, "perhaps they travel without a light. Not even owls venture into the forest without the moon."

The old man spat on the ground.

"Whatever, whatever."

Whispers evaporate. My words are born dumb. False food is at the shallows eating in the flattened pools where fish float white. There is no weed and I am caked in mud. When morning comes the merciless will crack my scales and let in the flies.

"Perhaps I am sorry," said the man. "No, sorry is too simple a word. My sorrow is bottomless, it has no hope and no mending. There is a song" – he whistled a few bars – "you

know?"

The elk shook his head.

"No, of course not. Well, my way, our way, was full of mistakes and I am not glad. If I could forget how it was when the water lived . . ."

"If the future fish had been different . . ."

"Future fish, a joke isn't it? They were always ludicrous, so adaptable, nothing should be that adaptable. They learned to live in our polluted lakes, to thrive under the ice, even to tolerate salt water but something else changed. We lost countless numbers out in the forests of kelp. What did they know of gales or waves that travel hundreds of miles to crash into shores? What did they ever really know of us except that we fed and caught them? They couldn't see forests wasting, people moving out. And yet, they did change, their minds, you know, the taming made them headstrong, like their keepers, must have their own way in everything. So much for the economic miracle. We nearly fed ourselves and the world besides."

The elk hung his head and snorted.

"Nearly is a hard word," he said. "It is both despair and hope."

"And what sort of a word is drought?" spat the old man. "So unthinkable they never thought of it. Not our fault, they say, catastrophes, disasters, they have drifted in on the air, bubbled up from the sea bed. Politicians! All they can do is cry freak, freak, unprecedented, and throw up their blameless hands. And all our plans are air, clouds off the sea, wherever that is."

He searched the sky.

"Who can trowl clouds?"

In the dark of night the moon disappears. A gentle, moistening drizzle comes silently now I no longer see. In a fine vapour it is falling, without noise, without exhibition. Pure rain from a place the sitters do not know. It does not come from them, neither is its coming useful. It is here as a promise always kept. And now it turns to rain, steady, lasting, washing out our poisoned world, draining down from the high lands, lifting us in gentle joy until we see each other and marvel.

And the sitters? They are reflections waiting in places where no one goes. We watch them from far off baiting their hooks, fishing in empty water. They cannot dream anymore so we must dream for them. They will not catch us; we shall offer ourselves for them to eat. Our dreams shall live and shape and give substance where there is none, nourishment where there is no food.

Dream and reality. Only time lies between the thought and the act, the conception and the birth, vision and its fulfilment. We quiver with the current, twist and turn, strong, with purpose in our tails, our scales polished as a thousand eyes. The deeps and shallows are ours, the open water and reed forests await us. Our rain has fallen and we drink wholeness, freedom, life.

The string moved. At first it did not impinge upon the man as he watched shrouded in the gloom of the landscape and his own imagination. Again it tugged. He stared at his fingers, immobilized. Then slowly he began to wind. Something disturbed the water. He felt the weight of it but it did not seem to be fighting him. His fingers gathered speed and then it was trembling in his hand, its eye mild, not desperate or afraid but interested. They exchanged reflections. It shivered and was gone.

For a while he stared, disbelieving. He fingered the fins, turned it so the light caught the scales of its belly, slightly orange, its flanks marbled orange and black. Then he turned for home, numb. After supper he sat outside the house and watched the Plough overhead. The stars were bright and clear, the space between them infinite. Dreams coursed in his veins.

Barbara Hills was formerly head of the music department in a Coventry junior school. She has abandoned full-time teaching in order to look after her two young sons: "I spend most of my time at home and write whenever I can grab a couple of hours to myself." The above is her first published story.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

A hard-sf novella by Gregory Benford, a subtle tale of horror by Ramsay Campbell, and four more stories. Plus all our usual features. Provisional line-up for the issue-after-next: an All New Star Issue, with excellent stories by Neil Ferguson, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman and others.

Simon Ounsley Adam Found

Ever since I woke up in the hospital bed, I've known that something was missing. The surgeon flashed up a big plan on the wall and pointed to the parts he had taken out. But the plan didn't look like my brain at all. It looked like an ornamental garden. He had taken out several flower-beds.

"You mustn't brood about what's happened," Dawn told me. "You should think about the future." She showed me my new muscles and told me to test out the grip of my new hands. They are as big as the surgeon's hands now but the fingers are short and thick and strong. They're very good for taking the lids off ketchup bottles.

"Look at that," I said to Dawn, as a shaft of sunlight appeared beside the bed. She said it would be summer soon. In a few days, I would be out in the fresh air. She thought I should try to find a job in the fresh air. It would be better than working inside.

I kept staring at the sunlight. I wanted to dive into it and capture the dancing specks of dust in my hands.

Next to Dawn's studio there was another, similar room but this one was empty. When I first got back from the hospital, I used to sit in it for hours, staring at my blurred reflection in the smooth floor.

"There's nothing here," Dawn used to tell me, but I kept thinking that here, somewhere, was whatever I'd lost.

I tried to imagine the room full of furniture. What would it be like, I wondered?

I got a job helping to build a garden. All the men who wanted a job had to carry boulders from one side of a pond to the other while the bosses watched. Some of the men had strange stares and stiff limbs and could carry three times as many boulders as everyone else, but after a while the damp got to them and they stood still like statues in the middle of the water. Another one got hot and caught fire and his head blew off and landed on the ground with a clatter.

"No," Dawn told me, "your head won't blow off if you get hot." But she didn't seem happy with what I'd told her.

"You'd better save the money you earn in the next few years," she said. "They'll get the things right sooner or later and then there won't be any more jobs in that line of work."

"I can always paint," I said.

She looked at me as though she'd seen a ghost.

"The garden shed," I reminded her. "You said it could do with a lick of paint."

Dawn and I had been lovers for a long time but I was a better lover now that I was stronger. Holding her in my arms was like squeezing a flower between my fingers. I was powerful and swift and she squealed and screamed when I pushed myself inside her. Fucking her was like killing a pig. I would lie back afterwards and hear her beside me, crying because I'd fucked her so good. I could hear her crying deep into the night.

Once I tried watching Dawn at work in her studio but she kept telling me I should go outside, that the fumes weren't good for me. I didn't like her paintings much anyway – they reminded me of the hi-fi and the washing machine. Why didn't she paint the birds and the flowers in the garden instead?

I went to fetch a brush and started painting the shed. There were clouds in the sky like candy floss, like bandages and brains.

One day, Dawn told me we could not be lovers any longer.

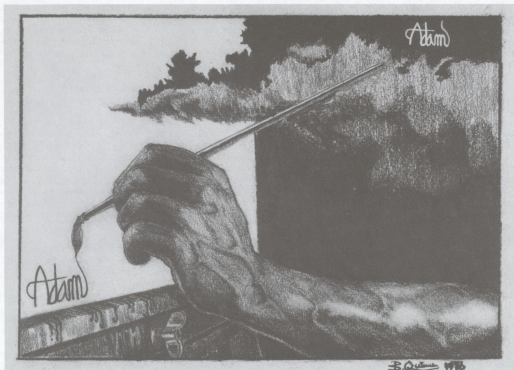
"I didn't think it would have to be like this," she told me. "I'm sorry."

"But we've always lived together," I said.

"No we haven't."

"Well it seems like it."

"I suppose it must do," said Dawn. "That's the trouble. You've become like a child."



"I'm strong. I can work. I can open ketchup bottles."

"You've got to understand that we talked it over, you and I, we decided it would be for the best. Since you couldn't support yourself, it seemed sensible for you to get rid of the creative urge altogether."

"I can fuck you good."

"But we never realized it would change you so much."

"I want to fuck you."

"I'm sorry, Adam."

She took her things into the spare bedroom but I wouldn't let her stay there. I dragged her back onto the bed and hit her and fucked her, holding her down as she struggled. Afterwards, while I was resting, she slipped away and locked herself in the other room. I could hear her in there, sobbing and moaning. I knocked on the door and asked her to let me in but she wouldn't answer. So I sat there all night by the door, crying, feeling sorry for hitting her, knowing that something else had been taken from me now, something else that I didn't understand.

"Look at the pattern on the table," I said to Dawn.

"You're not listening to me," she said.

The sun was shining through the stained glass at the top of the dining room window, making coloured patches where the light struck the table. I tried lifting up the edge of the table to change the patterns but Dawn's bowl of breakfast cereal slipped off the end and smashed on the floor.

"What the hell are you doing?" she said, jumping up. "It's like living with a five-year-old."

I started wondering what I had been doing. Since feeling guilty for making Dawn fuck with me, I'd been trying to think out my reasons for doing things. I decided I'd been trying to make the patterns on the table look prettier.

I don't think I'd felt any hatred towards the cereal bowl.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"And you haven't been listening to a word I've been saying," said Dawn, as she started mopping up the mess.

"Yes I have," I said. "You want to use the empty room with the shiny floor as a studio."

"I want to rent it out to someone. We could use the money."

"It sounds like a good idea to me. I can't think why we haven't used that room as a studio before."

"So is that all right then?"

Why did she bother to ask me? She knew I would do anything to please her, to make up for hurting her so much. I had started bringing her cups of tea while she worked but I don't think she loved me for it. I felt like a waiter.

"Yes, that's all right," I said.

"I have someone in mind. He's called Auberon."

"I don't understand."

"Well, he's a friend."

"I mean I don't understand why I wanted to hurt you. And I don't understand why I want to make the patterns look prettier."

I placed my right hand over the light on the table, so that it glowed with many colours. I sat and stared at it all morning.

Auberon had a head as big as the surgeon's, with a pole coming out of the small of his back to help prop it up. His drawings had words on them: "Plate width 3mm," "Ten megabyte memory implant capacity," things like that.

"I met someone once with a face like that," I told him, looking at one of the drawings.

He didn't answer. He just kept on working. Sometimes he didn't seem to notice me at all. So I just stood there and thought about that face, how the head had clattered to the ground and the nose got muddy as it rolled in the dirt.

Dawn was spending a lot of time with Auberon. Often they argued. Auberon would talk about "the destiny of man" and how his work was "the greatest challenge in history."

"The more we develop these facsimiles of Man," he said, "the greater is the challenge for Man Himself to transcend them."

"But it's like a lizard eating its own tail," said Dawn. Auberon got angry and pointed at his own head.

"This is the result of that challenge," he said.

I thought a lot about all this, but the meaning of it seemed to be just outside my grasp, like those specks of dust in the sunlight. That was the way I felt about a lot of things. It was as though I was walking in a dream from which I would soon awake and all would be simple and clear. But the dream just carried on.

I took great comfort in my job. Vast mountains and valleys had been moved by the earth-swallowing machines. I helped to hammer in the stakes to show where the flower-beds would go.

Auberon was planning to build something, I decided, but it wasn't a garden. I looked over his shoulder, trying to think.

"Don't mope around in here," said Dawn, who didn't like to see me in the studios. "Why don't you go and dig in the garden?"

"I'm trying to understand," I said.

"Why bother?" said Dawn. "Look at your hands. You're strong. You too can transcend the machines."

"I only want to understand," I said.

"It's too late for that," said Dawn. "You have to accept what you are."

"Even if it's someone who forces you to go to bed with him?" I asked. "I want to get away from that. I want to discover what I've lost."

Dawn seemed upset by this. She said I was the chewed end of the lizard's tail. And she walked away when I asked her what she meant.

When Dawn was out, I borrowed her brushes and started painting. I painted a house with a garden and smoke coming out of the chimney.

I showed it to Dawn when she got back but she started crying.

"Look," I said, "there's the sun." I'd shown it as a yellow circle with yellow lines like rays coming out of it. But Dawn just carried on crying. I hugged her but it seemed to make her worse.

"Please," she said, "go outside."

So I went to put another coat of paint on the shed.

I couldn't find the stepladder so I looked inside the shed for it. The door creaked open like in the horror movies. It was dark and musty inside. Spiders and

things were crawling around in it. I put my foot on one as it tried to get away. I realized that I hadn't been inside the shed since before my stay in the hospital. All at once, I had the idea that whatever I'd lost was in there, stored out of sight, along with the spiders, the dust, and the stepladder.

So I went to get a torch.

I don't know what I expected to find in there. Maybe bits of my brain stacked on the shelves. I wasn't prepared for the forests and oceans, to reach out my hand to the end of the torch beam and touch the sky.

I brought one of the dusty canvases out into the light of the garden. With my finger, I traced a shaft of sunlight as it broke through clouds and swept down to sparkle on a torrent of water. From under the surface, a face stared up into the sunlight, its dead eyes seeming to focus on the specks of dust which danced over the waves. In the bottom right hand corner of the picture, submerged beneath the deluge, was my name: Adam.

"I really should have destroyed them" said Dawn, "but I couldn't bring myself to do it." "I could even capture specks of dust," I said.

"You've got to understand," said Dawn, "that there wasn't any market for them."

"They would have had a certain value as commercial art," said Auberon, bending down to examine one of the pictures through a magnifying glass, "if not for the morbid element. Bloated corpses and severed heads are unsuitable for chocolate boxes, for instance."

"The best thing to do now is to burn them," said Dawn. "We could have a bonfire tonight. I could put some sausages on the ends of sticks."

"I can't believe I could do all that," I said. But I was touched by a new hope. "Maybe I could learn to do it again."

Dawn took my hand. She looked at me tenderly.

"You could sue the hospital," she said. "You should have lost the will to paint."

"But I don't want to lose it."

"You did before. We agreed . . ."

"I was wrong."

"You'd be miserable. Painting pictures only fit to be locked away in a shed."

"It's all I want to do."

Dawn turned to Auberon.

"What can we say to him?" she said. "He won't understand."

Auberon came and put his arm round Dawn. I didn't like the way he did that – as though he knew her very well.

"You must not upset Dawn," he told me. He said the words carefully, as though speaking to a child. "She has always done what she thought best for you. But now she has other things on her mind."

"We have to grow up or sink under," said Dawn.

"We must all find useful work," Auberon said to me. "You have grown strong hands and strong muscles. Instead of creating imaginary gardens, you can now build real ones."

"And I must grow too," said Dawn. "I have to share in Auberon's work."

"Yesterday," said Auberon, "such opportunities were elusive – like your specks of dust in sunlight."

Today we can seize them with both hands."

"I have no choice, said Dawn, sadly.
She was going to get a brain like Auberon's.

They tell me that my hope now is in my hands – in my strong new hands and muscles, that I must concentrate on what is real and forget what is not. But I tire of my job. We are not building a garden after all. Concrete pillars are sprouting, not flower-beds, and on the wall between them there is a stone which shows a head like the one which rolled in the dirt, like the one which stared out of Auberon's picture. Maybe Auberon himself will come here and build real creatures from his drawings.

Things are making more sense now. I think the garden of my brain is growing again.

The other day, I left my work and found a place by myself and drew in the sand with a stick. Two men in uniform found me and tried to take me back to join my workmates. They had that same look about them, as though they had been drawn by Auberon. I didn't want to leave, so I thought I would show them what I'd been drawing.

"Look," I said, pointing with my stick. "Here is the sea and here is a lighthouse and here, on the top of

the lighthouse, is the face of a clock. Over here, a human hand is reaching out of the water, clutching at the air."

The two men looked at each other and shook their heads. One of them reached down and picked up a handful of sand from the face of the clock.

"You are wrong," he said, "this is not a clock – it is sand."

He let the grains fall, trickling slowly between his fingers.

Simon Ounsley's "Adam Found" was a runner-up in the recent Gollancz/Sunday Times sf short-story competition. He has been writing stories on-and-off for several years, but this is his first to be professionally published. As Co-Editor and Co-Publisher of *Interzone* Simon has been loth to impose his creative writing on the magazine's readership, but David Pringle and Judith Hanna managed to persuade him that the time had come...

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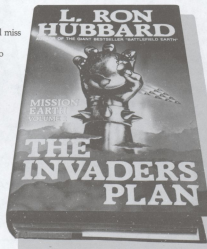
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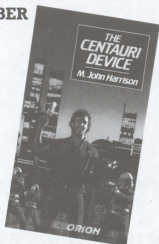
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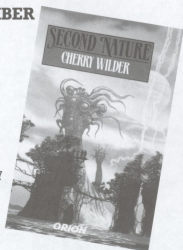
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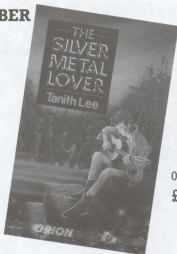
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Book Reviews, 1

Lee Montgomerie

Things weren't going well at all. I was deeply depressed. Night after night. I had been struggling with this book review, trying to find a common theme to unite a critical work, a collection of mathematical puzzles, a strange mainstream fusion of play, novella and poem, two God-forsaken post-holocaust religious science-fiction novels and Keith Roberts' unclassifiable **Kaeti & Company** (Kerosina Books, £12.50). A singular honour for an author to be the first publishee of a firm named after one of his own characters; must get that in somewhere, I thought, wondering how I could integrate that oddity with the rest of the books in the pile, whose only common property was that they all concerned, or reflected upon, or were (or could have been, or should have been) set in the Eighties; not surprisingly, since that was when they were all written.

And I had to say something about science fiction as well, if there was anything left to say. Night after night I tried to rearrange a disorganized mess of prose into something pithy but not flip, credible but not dull; but the unifying concept eluded me, and I was making no progress. The deadline loomed; the time was long past when I could pass off my page as something bashed out in an evening, but the time when all the pieces clicked into place looked as if it was never going to arrive. I sat there, reading my nth draft for the umpteenth time, wondering why it was just like the first, only staler.

Then it happened. The pages of **Kaeti & Company** opened up and the central character slipped out, looking a little damp and rumpled after her adventures. She smoothed her hair, straightened her sweater and walked over.

"Avin' trouble?" she said. "Can I 'elp?" I knew she was Keith's muse, really, but my own had stood me up, and I was sure that Kaeti wouldn't mind standing in, just for a one-off.

"What's yer problem, then?" she said, peering over my shoulder.

"The Eighties," I said. "Science fiction. The relationship between the two." Keith gets away with talking like that. Mind you, I had my doubts as to whether she could help. Despite what Keith says, I can't see her as an Eighties' girl so much as a Sixties' one, especially when she wears that tight green-and-orange striped sweater and uses expressions like "way out" and "dolly bird."

Kaeti shuffled a bit. "Aven't read much sci-fi," she muttered.

"No problem," I said. "This will give you the general idea." I handed her my copy of David Pringle's **Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels** (Xanadu, £9.95 hc, £3.95 pb; Carroll and Graff, \$15.95). One thing I already knew about Kaeti; she could read fast.

Kaeti put the book down thoughtfully.

"Interestin'," she said. She had always thought that science fiction was all Bug-Eyed Monsters and Unidentified Flying Objects, but there was hardly any of that in this selection of short summaries, the pick of the past quarter-century, from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to 1984 (though the author admitted straight off that not more than a dozen of them were masterpieces). One thing that struck her was how different the books were from each other: *Limbo* and *Dune*, *Nova* and *Crash*, just to stick to the really short titles. There was even a book by Keith Roberts: *Pavane*. Kaeti was slightly rattled to learn that her author specialized in lovingly-described old technology and a slow pace of change. And here he was, lumbering her with a leaky roof, a tacky freezer and a dodgy photocopier, making her work her bum off as a barmaid or secretary most of the time, the bastard.

She turned back to the introduction. "This is the most incredible overwhelming period of development and disruption through which the human race has ever passed," she read, "and sf, whatever its shortcomings, is the characteristic literature of the age."

"Trouble is," she said, "I reckon you 'ave to 'ave the same sort o' mind to appreciate change as you do to enjoy science fiction. Most people don't seem to really realize that the world changes at all. They think it's always the same. And they think science fiction is just weird, way out sort o' stuff; nothing to do wiv 'em at all."

"I know," I said. I had just been re-reading my review books. One was a book of mathematical puzzles by Martin Gardner; nothing to do with sf really, except that it was called **Puzzles from Other Worlds** (Oxford, £3.95) and that the problems were dressed up with wonderful old sf clichés. I didn't have any difficulties with this book that the author didn't intend, except that there was a misprint on page 157 which made a nonsense of the answer to the problem set by Puzzle No. 25: Monorails on Mars; and that to do one or two of the puzzles it helped if you were not only an Earthnik but an American, and a reader of *Isaac*

Asimov's *SF Magazine* at that.

D.M. Thomas's **Sphinx** (Gollancz, £9.95) was another braincracker, a much more devious and convoluted one, the enigmas it posed not immediately answerable either on other pages or in *Ararat* and *Swallow*, the previous books in Thomas's unpredictable improvisational quatrolgy, dedicated to Pushkin but taking on board all the sexual double-dealing and cold-war chicanery of the late twentieth century. Unlike its prequels, it was not even marginally science fiction, hardly fiction at all by the internal logic of the series, in which fact and fantasy changed values as each successive piece was added to the deft and dazzling puzzle. The main narrative text, preceded by an extraordinary play and followed by a sixty-page poem, concerned the hilarious and harrowing adventures of a *Guardian* hack in Leningrad; but there was much, much more than that, more than I could do justice to, at least until the concluding volume should appear – finally putting the lid on, finally taking it off.

My real troubles began when I got to the two genuine sf novels in the pile: Graham Dunstan Martin's **Time-Slip** (Orion, £2.95) and Robert Silverberg's **Tom O'Bedlam** (Gollancz, £9.95). Both were set in the aftermath of a world-wide nuclear holocaust, in which everything except the author's home territories (Scotland and California respectively) had been reduced to radioactive rubble. Both concerned the rise of new religions. Both might just as easily have been set in the Eighties, except that that would have required more imagination than the writers were prepared to invest.

Time-Slip did at least have some integrity. The author had at least bothered to invent a reason for his nuclear war (started by pacifist dupes) and for Scotland's survival (saved by the nuclear subs in Holy Loch). He had at least tried to paint a coherent picture of a society afflicted by the ravages of guilt and fallout, against which to set his self-made messiah's inexorable rise to fame, fortune and ethical corruption, peddling his comforting home-brewed creed based on the Many

Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics.

There were no excuses at all for Robert Silverberg, who had allowed 150 years and an unexplained Armageddon to pass leaving California populated by angst-ridden redundant academics, insecure psychiatrists and enormous hordes of jabbering, excitable, colourful ethnic Mexican types, all still driving automobiles, and all afflicted by transcendental annunciations from the far Galactic Empire: fantastic visions of bizarre alien beings against skies resplendent with swarms of many-coloured suns, like a stack of hackneyed old *Analog* covers.

Well, I thought; it has happened at last. The Eighties are here, and changes are finally happening faster than sf writers can think, or even type. D.M. Thomas does not flinch from the challenge of the times. His characters go down with the *Belgrano*, the KAL 007 flight, AIDS. But Silverberg and Martin are prepared to blow the world to bits in a gratuitous nuclear holocaust, not as a terrible warning, not even to return to pastoral simplicities, but just to allow their Scottish gurus and California dreamers to live out their self-indulgent bourgeois destinies in a pseudo-modern setting, safe from the complications of reality.

Sometimes I think time is wearing thin for science fiction, locked in a desperate energy crisis. So much of its conceptual fuel has already been burned up, exhausted, reprocessed into advertising, comic books, claptrap movies and video games, or escaped into the atmosphere to form a looming cloud of anxiety pollution.

Already this year we have had a major space disaster, a major nuclear disaster and an ongoing exponential plague, not to mention the usual wars and famines. And behind the scenes lurk artificial intelligence, automation and genetic engineering, with Homo Superior waiting in the wings to spring from a test tube or computer program and declare the human race redundant. If World War Three doesn't blow up first and make monkeys of us all. Or amorbæ. Or just a cloud of disassociated carbon atoms.

Sometimes I think science fiction is already dead, long since expired from cognitive anaemia in the early flush of youth, and that the literature we have now is just its ghost, endlessly and pointlessly revisiting its old haunts, saying nothing. And so we sit and read and watch the words dance, locked in a sort of banal, brainless Now . . .

I looked up from the typewriter. Kaeti was smiling wryly at me.

"Finished?" she said. "Reckon I'll be getting back to me book then."

She strolled over to the mirror and started combing her hair.

"Just one more thing," I said. "What's

it like, being a Keith Roberts heroine?"

Kaeti shrugged. "Oh, it's not so bad," she said. "I'm just a typical teenage girl of the Eighties most of the time. I smoke a lot. I work in pubs and offices. I try to keep me 'air and fingernails neat. I go out wiv trendy blokes in flash motors. I see the occasional ghost, but then I'm one meself, ain't I? I go to cultural festivals in Henley. I got 'anged, once. An' I chat up ol' Keith now an' then, show 'im a bit o' leg, stuff like that. Really get 'im going. I do, sometimes." She giggled.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" I said. "Whoever heard of an Eighties girl without any feminist consciousness at all?"

For a moment I thought I had got the better of Kaeti. But like all Keith Roberts' women, she was indomitable. She paused at the door of her book, turned, and looked me squarely in the eye.

"Eff orf," she said, "I got you orf the 'ook, didn't I?"

BOOK REVIEWS, 2 Judith Hanna

"Form is only a tense, a sense, a lens. I will shake my kaleidoscope and rearrange it all," says Rhoda Lerman's *Book of the Night* (Women's Press, £2.50). So Celeste becomes Curoi the novice becomes the cow Thirty-three. Possibilities ferment like the yeast Muncas tends in the crypt below the chapel. The sea-swept rock lona is the head of a pin on which dance abbot and demon, death and desire, significance and meaninglessness. Generous, chronicler, records for eternity in illuminated uncial script the battle between the mysteries of monastic lona and the authority of episcopal Rome.

To the holy isle of lona come the bodies of dead kings. A vast woman is washed up on shore, her fingerbone the measure of the balance between what is and what is not, AD 900 the Annals record it, beside her a soldier whose jacket is embroidered "France, 1918." The crazy hermit Manuel sends crates of dead birds to Edinburgh Natural History Society, 1892, and teaches Celeste lists of questions, no answers, and beware of linear logic. Witless John Joe Amadan, who jumped into the sea near Glasgow with four red cabbages tied to his feet, crosses the boundary stones that separate the ancient monastery from the mean crofts of the Splitnoses in another time, and from the Other Side, the land of Darkness, of the Pig God, Seth, Sin, Nick, Night, Not, who is change and chance and choice. "There is no difference between perception and hallucination. . . When you change your

mind, you change the world." Looking backward to the heretical, half-pagan Celts, Lerman writes a scholastic *imramo*, a dream-voyage in an Other-world adrift in time and death.

Like *Book of the Night*, Gwyneth Jones's new novel *Escape Plans* (Unwin/Orion, £3.50) is an accumulation of subtle detail: the sum of its parts cannot be reduced to a facile summary. A future where computers have taken over is a staple of scenario, which with the accelerator down to the floor and burning chrome surface gloss has become a trademark of the "cyberpunk" new wave. But *Escape Plans* is not about a frenzied climb to the top of the pile and the core of the system: PIONEER ALIC who loses herself among the "basic numbers" who populate the Underworld, and discovers them, in their struggles to devise or draw out meaning from the CHTHON system they do not control, more human than the sky-borne VENTURan elite she has come from.

It's with protest, almost with fear that we follow her fall, as of an Olympian losing her way into a maze of mortality, initially a game, a foolish flirtation with slumming; we want quests to be heroic, invitations to the easy indulgence of escapism. In the end we're handed no easy answer why "Alice" opts for the greater humanity of joining in the revolutionary struggle to wrest possibilities from networks of limitations. Only — the very bowels of socialism — "I'd rather eat shit than be shit."

Josephine Saxton's *Queen of the States* (Women's Press, £1.95) is no subtle undermining but an uncompromising assault on the limitations of convention which, Saxton demonstrates, is not at all the same as practical commonsense and has little to do with logic. What is the logical thing to do when kidnapped by aliens — but to enjoy the gourmet meals they can create? Down-to-earth disconcertingness coupled with gutsy sensual relish is Saxton's trade-mark. Magdalen, committed to a mental hospital, prone to hallucinations (or open to other states of existence?) which are much more interesting than ordinary life, is certainly crazy in conventional terms. Saxton here, as in the short story "Living Wild" in her recent collection *The Power of Time*, explores madness as argument with reality, escape from the straitjacket of "sanity," a liberation that allows the self to redefine and so take vigorous control of life.

Jeanette Winterson too engages with convention. Evangelical Christianity is the edifice she tackles, and the tools she uses are, as a character, escape through imagination, and as a writer, wit: "My needlework teacher suffered a problem of vision. She rec-

ognized things according to expectation and environment. If you were in a particular place, you expected to see particular things... if there was an elephant in the supermarket, she'd either not see it at all, or call it Mrs Jones and talk about fishcakes."

Both Oranges are not the Only Fruit (Pandora, £4.50) and **Boating for Beginners** (Methuen, £3.50) are riotously funny. Oranges is autobiographical, *Boating* the true story of Noah's Flood. Mothers strong as primal forces dominate both Gloria Munde, working towards a state of continuous prose in *Boating*, and Jeanette in *Oranges*: "That mother's mad, that knows," she kept saying. She might have been right but there was nothing I could do about it."

Fiction helps her escape madness: "When the children of Israel left Egypt, they were guided by the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. For them this did not seem a problem. For me it was an enormous problem. The pillar of cloud was a fog, perplexing and impossible. I didn't understand the ground rules. The daily world was a world of Strange Notions, without form, and therefore void."

So far, great stuff. Though feminism and women's viewpoints provide the framework within which these books are written — and I hope I've conveyed some of the verve and spirit with which they do so — the issues they tackle are universal human concerns. Books by women, yes, but not to be dismissed as only written for women. From odd angles — sideways, underneath — they inspect the human condition, picking up the unacknowledged, ignored, but once pointed out obvious, quirks and contradictions that underlie the public, male-constructed and accepted world.

They finger no baddies. Other women's sf, however, pins down Men as the bristly bug-eyed monsters among us. No-one's yet written (or if they have, I haven't seen it) the story a Francesca Kafka might have penned, about waking one morning to find a giant cockroach sharing your pillow — and realizing it's no overnight transformation, but he's always been like that!

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland (first published 1915 as a serial in her suffragist magazine *The Forerunner*, now reprinted by *The Women's Press*, £1.95) is gentle satire: three men discover a women-only utopia. They learn about its civilization, and they explain the world they come from to their hosts. "The men do everything, with us. We do not allow our women to work," the very manly Terry says grandly. Questioned, it emerged that "Some have to, of the poorer sort." In fact, "about seven or eight million" in the United States alone. The irony behind the polite Edwardian diction

would be less cutting were it not that so many of the anomalies, hypocrisies and abuses Gilman pinned down then still flourish today. Gilman was right not to look to the near future for a society in which women could be free.

Suzette Haden Elgin's **Native Tongue** (*Women's Press*, £2.50) is more bitter, its savagery fuelled by the persistence of the attitudes Gilman pokes fun at. It is about prejudice, that human tendency to "habitual grooves of thought" which, like language, condition the way we perceive our world. Not only prejudice against women, who by the 1991 Article XXV amending the US Constitution, have become legal minors without adult rights to vote, own property or make legal contracts, just like back last century. Prejudice also against the thirteen Lines of linguistic families, whose monopoly of translating non-Terrestrial humanoid alien languages and cultures has made them a wealthy, powerful, disciplined and hated elite. Prejudice against the aliens themselves is pushed out to the fringes — only the damned Lingoos actually have to deal with the repulsive Aliens, whether in trade negotiations or as infants put into Interfaces to acquire native speaker competence in the Alien language while their innate learning ability (see Chomsky) is at its keenest. Sharply satirical, especially in descriptions of the perfect wife, extrapolating past patronising authority and the present Hard Right backlash, linguistic speculations soundly based (Haden Elgin lectures in linguistics), this is a good read. Through the rigid grid of limitations Elgin depicts, the women's language *Láadan*, and the potentialities it might hold grow surreptitiously.

Ever since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, or *Prometheus Unbound* widely regarded as the first real science fiction novel, women have been writing sf. Some has been almost indistinguishable from the space adventure stories written by men — the works of C.L. Moore and Leigh Brackett, for instance. Note the androgynous names, felt necessary to get work into the boys' clubs of the pulp magazines. In that milieu, where space meant men bearing big blasters, Naomi Mitchinson's **Memoirs of a Spacewoman** (1962, reprinted *Women's Press*, £1.95) carried a revolutionary force it has lost today — the message that space is not just for men, that communication is more important than conquest. That a woman can love, and bear children, without being relegated to a domestic appendage, is a central feminist message which the world has still not entirely accepted. The chattiness of the style, uncompromisingly "feminine", declaring fellowship with the readers of women's magazines, was a deliberate challenge to the genre.

Since its launch in spring '85, the *Women's Press* of line has served as a focus — seeking new work, eg the anthology *Despatches From the Frontiers of the Female Mind* (£2.50), reprinting classics allowed to go out of print, not only from within the sf field, like Russ's *The Adventures of Alyx* (£2.95), time-skipping fantasy adventure with a gutsy female hero, and *The Female Man* (£1.95) with its "rosy single-minded assassin" Jael, seeking works like *Herland* and Sally Miller Gearhart's separatist utopia *The Wanderground* (£1.95) which, for the variety of reasons sketched in Russ's (neither fiction nor fantasy) *How To Suppress Women's Writing* (*Women's Press*, £3.50), never became part of the history of the sf field.

Sf by women is no longer only scattered particles among a male dominated mass, but a significant trend with a recognized publishing base. Equally speculation, utopian — *The Wanderground*, dystopian — *Zoe Fairbairns Benefits*, Anna Wilson's anecdotal and subfusc sketches of the women whose hobby is a night-time vigilante group, *Altogether Elsewhere* (Onlywomen, £2.95), and fantastic — Suniti Namjoshi's *The Conversations of Cow* (*Women's Press*, £2.95) — is being used by radical feminist writers to expose the absurdities and injustices of the way things are, and to explore alternatives.

BOOK REVIEWS, 3

John Clute

After some years of dippydoodling like a semi-despondent fury through the wet plot-spaghetti of the kind of book he writes when he cannot keep his mind on the awful job, Bob Shaw has finally once again, in **The Rugged Astronauts** (Gollancz, £9.95), returned to his grave and good best form as a teller of full-bodied sf tales. It is interesting that this novel — the first of a trilogy — might not have taken shape had Brian Aldiss not written the *Helliconia* sequence, establishing for British sf in the 1980s an adult model for writing large-scale epic narrative, and managing, in the process, to write something like a tragedy. Never has our oorboreal Weltschmerz seemed less redolent of the Edisonian whimsy that plausibly serves as its twentieth-century provenance. The *Helliconia* epic is a superbly subversive couching of a world-view deeply inimical to the dominant world-view of hard sf — it is of course a hard sf exercise — and it must be said that Shaw, while sharing with Aldiss a sense of scope and a narrative weighting that significantly

foregrounds the world itself, by no means shares Aldiss's sense of the mortal frailty of his protagonists. After all, as has surely been noticed by most readers, Aldiss's trilogy ends in Winter. Shaw gives off some pretty strong hints that in his trilogy humanity – as in Aldiss it is an alternate-universe version of humanity – will somehow manage to break the wheel of eternal return, and triumph.

Land and Overland are twin planets, conjoined by physics and a thin fund of air. In this part of the cycle, it is Land that is overpopulated, Overland that is treated by ignorant priests as Heaven. But the kingdom of Kolcorron – as in Aldiss, one of many kingdoms – is sliding into an ecological cul-de-sac. The frantic destruction of the brakka trees to extract their explosive energy sacs has caused the airborne ptertha to engage in compensatory destruction of people, though no one seems to be able to work out the connection (and it is a miscalculation on Shaw's part to attempt to conceal so obvious a link from the reader, while bodypunching him with telegraphed hints about brakka/ptertha symbiosis for hundreds of pages until finally fessing up mere yards from the finishing line). It soon becomes clear that either something drastic is done, or humanity is doomed. How the power elite of Kolcorron is persuaded of the efficacy of a hot-air balloon emigration to Overland, and how the personal career of Toller Maraquine almost fatally intersects with the skewed personality of Prince Leddravohr Neldeaver, make up the nuts and bolts of Shaw's storytelling; and very neatly mechanicked the book is, too. But it is the first flight from Land to Overland that will haunt the dreams of some, for it is a genuinely inspired centrepiece. One is almost sorry to come to Land where, unlike Overland, it looks (more bodypunches here) as though there might be metal in the ground, and as though (oof) humankind had made the trip before, back and forth. Will Toller break the cycle? Read on. But remember the balloon, and the divine afflatus that makes it rise.

The jacket illustration for Phillip Mann's *Master of Paxwax* (Gollancz, £9.95) depicts a scene which does not appear in the book, though it will undoubtedly loom large in the second volume of "The Story of Pawl Paxwax, the Gardener," which is entitled *The Fall of the Families*, and which is due Spring 1987. As Pawl Paxwax also does almost everything in this first volume except garden, one feels mildly drawn to the conclusion that it might be the fairest course all round to proclaim Mr Mann as of continuing interest (his first novel, *The Eye of the Queen* had exceptional moments), and to serve him best by

awaiting the full Paxwax. I shall do this.

It is, all the same, possible to add a few remarkably provisional comments. There is a space-opera fundament to Mr Mann's galaxy-spanning tale in which Eleven Families rule known space on behalf of humanity, and oppress aliens everywhere. Provisionally, Mr Mann should concentrate on this fundament – his descriptions of aliens are deft and melancholy and estranged; he does a good little space war; some of his planets could be returned to with profit; and the arabesque body-sculpturing his bioengineered humans put themselves through gives off a rank beguiling frisson. When he's cavorting with his fundament, Mr Mann is very impressively in gear. But when he transcribes his exuberantly prosaic poetry of his moodily young Paxwax, and when he talks about adolescent love hats, which he does rather too much of early on, he gives us dead wood. Most of it is in the first half of this first volume. Provisionally, and with real high hopes, persevere.

After several novels between 1957 and 1975, a couple of them *sf/fantasy* texts of an obdurate self-reflexivity, Christine Brooke-Rose left fiction for almost a decade, until the publication in 1984 of the rebarbative *Amalgamemnon*, an assemblage of desperate tirades in the future tense by a near-future Cassandra about the destiny of Europe and women and men and language and computers. Of course none of us believed a word of it. Her new novel is rather more likely to seduce. Though its concerns are similar, *Xorander* (Carcant, £8.95) is not much like *Amalgamemnon*. It is the story of two children in Cornwall. Their father's a boffin and their mother a distracted actress. There are quaint villagers and a foreign spy and at least one uncle figure. It is Enid Blyton country, or more precisely (because his children were numerate) John Pudney country. The children stumble across a sentient rock, which turns out to be a silicon-based lifeform, possibly from Mars, and which or whom they name Xorander; it operates like a computer. As the children communicate with it through dictions it can cope with, and as the text of *Xorander* is comprised of their dictated attempts to construct narrative sequences out of raw "reality," the novel soon reveals itself to be the figure and the ground of a discourse on precisely narrativity, language, the nature of consciousness, how to formulate the world. A Maggot, last year's novel by John Fowles, is also (in part) about First Contact, and also dazzles with intertextuality. Here likewise the plot – which is about how to save the world from us, and about

how Xorander can hope to survive his self-exposure to the relentless superflux of us – trundles safely on overhead, but the action is in the dazzling tesserae of words wording words. Fowles and Brooke-Rose. As one might put it, the adults are coming, the adults are coming.

REVIEWS IN BRIEF

Blood Music by Greg Bear (Gollancz, £9.95)

Research worker Vergil Ulam develops cells which can think and, when ordered to destroy them by the university authorities, gets round the problem by injecting them into his own bloodstream. The cells begin to spread across North America like a plague and, despite some vivid descriptions of the strange forms which life begins to assume, *Blood Music* begins to read like just another "disaster" novel. But it comes good in the end, as Bear develops his vision of a tirelessly efficient microscopic universe, in which all information gets where it's needed and everything is remembered – even human beings.

(Simon Ounsley)

The Needle on Full: Lesbian Feminist SF by Caroline Forbes (Onlywomen Press, £3.95)

Some of these stories are so slight they seem like entries in a writer's dream notebook. But the grumpy disorganized "post-holocaust lesbian utopia" of "London Fields" is a fair tonic. The last long story, "Comet's Tail," concerns two women trapped together in a space project that goes into unplanned and indefinite overtime – a study in terminal alienation. Although "Comet's Tail" has some hard (and even very hard) science in it, there is an extraordinary lack of *sf* or tech jargon in this book – no brand names. I couldn't decide if this was a political statement or unconscious allergy. I couldn't decide if I liked the effect or not, either. But it did make me wonder.

(Gwyneth Jones)

A Place Among the Fallen by Adrian Cole (Allen & Unwin, £10.95);

Khalindaine by Richard Burns (Allen & Unwin, £10.95)

Unwin's are obviously spending their Tolkien profits trying to imitate their Tolkien success. These two books are very much in the great man's footsteps although Adrian Cole has learned his lessons better. In Richard Burns's *Khalindaine* three young men of stock character go wandering. One becomes

Emperor, one dies, and one gets the girl. They see a few decadent and exotic rituals, and drive back an invasion of creatures who get irresistible Urges to overthrow civilization every ice age or so. Cole's *A Place Among the Fallen* has more men, another Emperor, still only one woman, various talking animals, a lot of heavy-metal sorcery, and much more wandering. The world is in danger from an Evil Power in the East, and our heroes have to be prepared to sacrifice all they hold most dear . . . Turning out books like these is a craft, like writing COBOL programs or making chairs. They aren't exactly original — who needs a breakthrough in armchair design? — but the Cole is the better done (I wanted to finish it once I'd started it). Cole has more control over the details of his sub-creation than Burns has. He knows things about his imaginary world he hasn't told us; he has applied some thought to his compulsory map and made-up names. There is a consistency which is lacking in the other work.

Mission Earth, Vol. 1: The Invaders Plan by L. Ron Hubbard (New Era, £10.95)

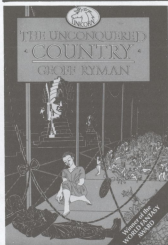
Officials are corrupt, spies incompetent and aristocrats vile. Guns are "blasters" (or "blasticks" or "blasrods"), cars are "aircars," there's a map on the flysheet, and there isn't one idea in the book. It's rather proud of being "satire" and tells us about it at length, just after the map and the definition of "dekalogy," but a few pages before the apology for the number of clichés. Apparently, as the narrator is thick the author has to write down to his level. And he does. I was looking forward to something offensive from the perpetrator of Dianetics, but — apart from a grotesquely homophobic aside that Hubbard's minders must have missed (the omniscient hero's violent assault on a male nurse, assumed to be gay) — the novel is about as extreme as *The Empire Strikes Back*. It's a dull, bland cardboard book. If I had a captive audience — indeed, a captive publishing company — I'd have thrown my weight around a little, gone over the top. But Hubbard, if he really wrote this fudge, must have been past it. The general feel is very much like a second-rate Eric Frank Russell short story distended to a quarter of a million words by long-winded repetition. Nice big print though.

Science-Fiction Studies Vol. 13 No. 39, July 1986 (SFS Publications, c/o R.M. Philmus, English Dept., Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke St., Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada — \$14.50 US to subscribers outside North America)

The main business of this respectable Canadian journal is not sf so much as the study of sf, criticism of critics,

stories about stories about stories, meta-meta-fictions. The conceptual difficulties of reviewing reviews of reviews force me to pass straight to this issue's special feature: "Nuclear War and SF," eight articles which trace the history and prehistory of the literary response to the threat of destruction. Despite some excellent trivia on the 19th century and an interesting contribution from Dominic Manganello on *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, this "special" is disappointing. Even stories about stories about nuclear war refer to things so horrible that if they inspire neither fear (of war) nor hate (of the promoters of war) then there has been a failure somewhere. Many of the contributors to this issue haven't really got to grips with their subject, listing ideas rather than communicating or criticizing them, producing a kind of criticism as annotated bibliography.

(Ken Brown)



Cover by Sacha Ackerman for Ryman's novella (Unwin, £2.95) — slightly expanded from the version which appeared in *IZ*

The Unlikely Ones by Mary Brown (Century, £5.95)

Guardians of the Tall Stones by Moyra Caldecott (Arrow, £4.95)

Firelord by Parke Godwin (Futura, £2.50)

Here are three different faces of semi-historical fantasy. I could raise no enthusiasm for Mary Brown's *The Unlikely Ones*, which is wall-to-wall whimsy set in a tired world of mock-medieval romance that it does nothing to rejuvenate. But for the frequent sexual references I would have assumed it was intended for children — any adults who enjoy it will be the true *Unlikely Ones*. *Guardians of the Tall Stones* by Moyra Caldecott is not much better. Set in a tame Megalithic framework, it would appear to be intended as a prehistory lesson for some dull but

worthy adolescent group such as the Woodcraft Folk. Sadly, it is written in a dreadfully pedestrian style which totally fails to capture the enchantment of the Celts and their lost predecessors.

Parke Godwin's *Firelord* is an entirely different matter, a worthy addition to the recent canon of restrained fantasies in realistic historical settings. The seemingly inexhaustible seam of Arthuriana is again mined to good purpose. Godwin contrasts Arthur's career as ruler of a still-civilized Britain with his period among the Faerie, here depicted as Bushman-like survivors from the Stone Age (looked down on as savages even by the Picts). The magic is mostly in the mind; Merlin for instance is a kind of alter ego to Arthur. The novel draws on anthropological work which uses analysis of compared languages to reconstruct elements of the lost tongue of the early Indo-Europeans. This makes for a fascinating read, head and helmet above the run of recent fantasies.

(Peter Garratt)

Bars of America by Neil Ferguson (Hamilton, £9.95)

Snakewrist by Christopher Burns (Cape, £9.95)

First books, both of them non-sf, by Interzone authors. Ferguson's is a collection of atmospheric travel stories, brilliantly written — the description of an Englishman's love affair with the USA, its people and its language. Burns' novel is an ingenious anthropological mystery story, largely set in South America. In a sense, both these writers are alive to alien worlds; they are bringing a freshness to contemporary British fiction, and one hopes that they achieve the "mainstream" recognition they deserve.

Three Go Back by J. Leslie Mitchell (Greenhill Books)

The Inner House by Walter Besant (Greenhill Books)

The first two volumes in a commendable new series of long-out-of-print sf novels, selected by Brian Stableford. No prices are printed on the jackets (when will publishers learn that accompanying letters tend to get thrown away before the review is written?). Mitchell's *Three Go Back* is a fun tale about a trio of ever-so-modern folk from the 1930s who are cast back in time to ancient Atlantis in the days when Neanderthals still roamed that continent. It makes some serious philosophical points, although the style is at times irritatingly eccentric. I was surprised to learn that Mitchell was also "Lewis Grassic Gibbon," distinguished author of *A Scots Quair*. Walter Besant's *The Inner House* is less readable but no less interesting: a late-Victorian fantasy about longevity and the Meaning of Life.

The Best of the Fiction Magazine edited by Judy Cooke and Elizabeth Bunster (Dent, £4.95)

The first anthology from our "rival," *The Fiction Magazine* (founded at the same time as *Interzone*, in early 1982). There is some good writing here, but many of the stories seem slight and mundane: you wouldn't have seen them in *IZ* – *vive la difference*. The Brian Aldiss story, "Vietnam Encore," is pure sf and rather good, even if it is a reprise of Ballard's "The Killing Ground" (and also similar to Paul McAuley's "The King of the Hill"). There is an intriguing fantasy by Lisa St Aubin de Terán, and there are lively little interviews with Alasdair Gray and Anthony Burgess.

The Scope of the Fantastic – Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature edited by Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce (Greenwood Press, no price shown)

A large and exceedingly various collection of essays on aspects of fantasy. It covers authors from Alexander Pope and Benjamin Disraeli to Robert Coover and Richard Brautigan. Among the fascinating and wayward pieces of scholarship herein is a study of book illustrators' interpretations of the last paragraph of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Another stimulating article is Joseph Sanders's "O'Brien and Monsters from the Id" – all about King Kong. If ever there was a curate's egg, this volume is it.

L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future edited by Algis Budrys (New Era, £2.75)

A worthwhile sf anthology, packed full with completely unknown writers. One of these authors, David Zindell, has been published in *Interzone*: his "Shanidar" is a moving story about homo neanderthalensis – and more. The book also contains mini-essays by Budrys, Silverberg, Sturgeon, etc.

(David Pringle)

ALSO RECEIVED

Top Fantasy edited by Josh Pachter (Dent, £3.95). A good anthology.

The Anubis Gates by Tim Powers (Grafton, £2.95). A romping Tall Tale, reviewed in *IZ* 12.

The Skook by J.P. Miller (Arrow, £3.50). Enjoyable fantasy.

A Creed for the Third Millennium by Colleen McCullough (Futura, £2.95). Blockbuster sf.

Kiteworld by Keith Roberts (Penguin, £2.95). Part-published in *Interzone*, and reviewed in *IZ* 14.

Hart's Hope by Orson Scott Card (Unwin, £2.95). Fantasy.

Neuroancer by William Gibson (Grafton, £2.50). Now a famous book (reviewed in *IZ* 10).

The Status Civilization and The Alchemical Marriage of Alistair

Crompton by Robert Sheckley (Methuen, £2.25 each). Entertaining Sheckleys – one early, one late.

The Blackcollar by Timothy Zahn (Arrow/Venture, £1.95). Space opera.

The Shattered Stars by Richard S. McEnroe (Futura, £1.95). More space opera.

Maggots by Edward Jarvis (Arrow, £1.95). Vile stuff.

City Jitters by Christopher Fowler (Sphere, £2.50). More horror.

Dragonlance Chronicles, Vol. 1: Dragons of Autumn Twilight by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (Penguin, £2.95). Seems typical Penguin fare these days (alas).

City of Sorcery by Marion Zimmer Bradley (Arrow, £2.95). Yet another fat "Darkover" novel.

Gilgamesh the King by Robert Silverberg (Pan, £2.95). Thoroughly researched historical.

Only Apparently Real: The World of Philip K. Dick by Paul Williams (Arbor House, \$7.95). Lively study by a fine critic.

Daybreak on a Different Mountain by Colin Greenland (Unwin, £3.50). Paperback of a fantasy novel reviewed in *IZ* 12.

The Palace of Eternity by Bob Shaw (Grafton, £2.50). Excellent sf novel from 1969.

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