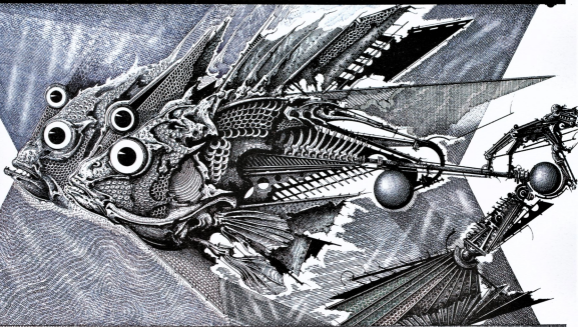


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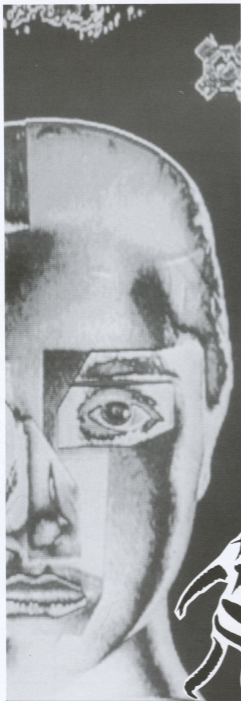
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interzone

No 21 Autumn 1987

EDITORIAL

If our long-suffering typesetter and printers oblige us, this issue of *Interzone* should be out just before the World Science Fiction Convention, the major event in the sf calendar. The Worldcon (also known, rather oddly, as "Conspiracy '87") is of particular interest to us this year because it is taking place in Britain for the first time since 1979. That last British Worldcon – which was held in the Metropole Hotel, Brighton, as is this year's event – was a most enjoyable occasion. Thousands of overseas sf enthusiasts attended, including a large number of writers, artists, editors and publishers. This year, the organizers expect some 5,000 attendees, making it the biggest ever sf jamboree to be held in England. We shall be selling *Interzone* subscriptions in the book room, and so the present issue of the magazine may well be the first to be bought by many new readers (particularly Americans). If this is the first IZ you have seen – welcome! We are Britain's only extant science-fiction magazine, and we hope you'll keep reading us.

Interzone has been appearing for some five-and-a-half years now. It has been a long, slow haul since our first slim issue in early 1982 (the magazine was then 32 pages, exactly half our present size). IZ was begun by a "collective" of eight people, some of whom have now severed their connections with the magazine. For the past two years it has been edited and published jointly by Simon Ounsley and myself – with John Clute, Alan Dorey and Malcolm Edwards (from the original founding group) still serving as advisers. Many other individuals have helped along the way, including our recently-joined Associate Editor, Lee Montgomerie (who has just moved house; we show her new address elsewhere on this page – writers who wish to submit stories please note). The Arts Council of Great Britain have also helped by kindly giving us a "guarantee against loss" which has been essential to the magazine's survival. This Arts Council funding has remained static for several years (which means it has gone down in real terms), and we could perhaps have done without it altogether in recent times if we had not chosen to increase the size of the magazine and to introduce full-colour covers. So public funding has enabled us to improve the product considerably. The next logical step will be for us to go bi-monthly, which we shall endeavour to do when resources permit.

To established readers of IZ who have never attended an sf con before, we recommend the World Convention as the best possible "taster." It's too late to register by post now, but you may pay on the door – the programme commences on Thursday 27th August, and lasts for a full five days. Of course, sf cons are not to everyone's taste – the party atmosphere, masquerades and quizzes may seem trivial to some – but there will be a hefty programme of serious talks and discussions, as well as films, art shows, and the opportunity to buy rare books and magazines. Above all, the Worldcon will be an opportunity to meet numerous writers – Brian Aldiss, Alfred Bester, Doris Lessing and the Strugatsky Brothers are just a few who are expected to attend – and, if you wish, an opportunity to upbraid the field's leading publishers, editors and critics for their sins. You will also be able to attend the Hugo Awards ceremony (see this issue's "News" column for a few more details). So come along to Brighton over August Bank Holiday weekend: contribute to the fun.

David Pringle

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Cover by Ian Miller

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Main Address: 124 Osborne Road, Brighton, BN1 6LU. All subscriptions, back-issue orders, general correspondence, books for review and enquiries about advertising should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions: £7.50 for one year (four issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal orders should be crossed and made payable to *Interzone*. Overseas subscriptions are £8.50, payable by International Money Order. American Subscribers may pay by US dollar check — \$13 (sea mail) or \$16 (air mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £100 (UK); \$200 or equivalent (overseas); \$250 or equivalent (overseas airmail).

Back-issues are available at £1.95 each in the UK (£2.50 each overseas), postage included. [US dollar price: \$4 sea mail or \$5 air mail.] All issues are still in print except number 5. Order them from *Interzone's* main address.

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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Published quarterly.
All material is © *Interzone*, 1987.

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by Allanwood Press,
Stanningley, Pudsey,
West Yorkshire



Eric Brown

Krash-Bangg Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation

I'm dropping acid shorts in the Supernova slouch bar when the call comes through. Gassner stares from the back of my hand, veins corrugating his mugshot. Gassner's white – fat and etiolated like a monster maggot – but my Bangladeshi metacarpus tans him mulatto. He's a xenophobic bastard and the fact that he comes over half-caste on the handset never fails to make me smile.

I like irony almost as much as I dislike Gassner.

He's muttering now, somestuff about young junkies.

"You wrecked?" he queries, peering.

"I'm fine," I lie.

He wants me in ten. He has customers coming. Distraught parents who have evidence their daughter was butchered. "This is big-time, girl. Some high-up in the Wringsby-Saunders outfit. Don't screw it." I feel like telling him to auto-fellate on a cannibal personatape, but I resist the urge. Maybe later, when I have the funds to fly. He still owns me, still has his fat face stamped on the back of my hand, good as any brand.

But it's only a matter of time now.

I've been out for hours. What I did earlier needed a good hit to help me forget. My head's dead and so are my legs. I stagger through a battlescene of prostrate bodies, hanging on the shoulder of a helpful Andy en passant, and make it to the chute.

Outside it's night, and the crowds are beginning to hit the streets. I brazen my way across a packed sidewalk, earning taunts on three counts. I'm a telepath and a junkie – the two go together – and I have no crowd-sense. I admit everything with an insolent yeah-yeah to whoever's complaining and climb aboard the moving boulevard. A breeze, fresh onetime but polluted now with city stench, does its best to revive me. I ride the slide a block and alight at 3rd. Feeling better already, I dodge touts and beggars and home in on the Union towerpile.

"Bangladesh!" The legless oldster grins in my direction, dumped like garbage by the entrance. How does he do it? He gouged his eyes out yearsback and still

he knows when I'm coming. Could be he's on to the scent of my hair oil, or even my crotch. His tag's Old Pete, and he's my regular. I slip him creds and he makes sure I'm stocked with 'gum when I see Gassner. "Any nearer?" he asks now.

I try a probe. All I get is jumblefuzz. He's shielded. We have a game, me and him. He reckons he was someone famous, onetime, and I have to guess who. His face is certainly familiar, disregarding the absent nose and evacuated eye-sockets. He went Buddhist, yearsback. Quit the race and mutilated himself to indicate his repudiation of the modern world. I often wonder what it was that drove him to such extreme action. Maybe he was seeking enlightenment, or perhaps he'd found it. Once again I concede ignorance, pass him ten and chew 'gum in the upchute.

I'm feeling great when I hit the 33rd. Gassner has his office shelved this level, though "office" is a grand title for his place of work. It's little more than a cubby filled with Batan II terminals and link-ups and however much of his blubber isn't spilling through the hatch. I enter bright, my metabolism pumping ersatz adrenalin. It doesn't do to let him see me any other way. He'd gloat if he knew how low I was at being his slave.

A metal desk-top, the bonnet of a pre-fusion automobile, pins his fat up against the floor-to-ceiling window. He's scanning case notes and his grunt acknowledges the fact that I got in with about three seconds to spare. The only light in the place is the silver glow from the computer screen. I clamber over this and sit cross-legged in the hammock where Gassner slings his meat between shifts. Every ten seconds the chiaroscuro gloom is relieved from outside by the electric blue sweep of a misaligned photon display, strobing sub-lim flashes of "Patel's Masala Dosa" into our forebrains.

I slip my ferronnière from its case and loop it round my head. And instantly all the minds in the building,

previously mere distant flickering candles, torch painfully. I phase out the extraneous mindmush, editing the occasional burst of brainhowl from psychopathic individuals, and work at keeping my head together.

Gassner, of course, is shielded. It wouldn't be good policy for someone who employed a telepath to go about with his head open. I'm shut out, persona non grata in his meatball. Times are when I'd love to read my master. Then again, times are when I'm glad I'm barred entry. I read too many screwballs in the course of a day without Gassner opening up.

Minutes later Mr and Mrs Distraught roll in.

The guy is Kennedy, and he's playing it cool. I'll be lying if I call him distraught; on the Richterscale of personal upheaval he'd hardly register. He's chewing *djamba* to calm himself and he carries his boned-out body with a certain hauteur. Or call it arrogance. Under one arm he has the silver envelope containing the evidence, and under the other his wife. She's Scandinavian, beautiful in better circumstances, but grief plays havoc with good looks and right now Mrs Kennedy is ugly. She's sobbing into a drier and I get the impression that Mr Kennedy is embarrassed by the degree of his wife's distress.

They sit down while Gassner murmurs pleasantries, then jerks a thumb up at me. "Bangladesh," he says. "My assistant."

My name's Sita, but ever since the invasion I got the national tag. Here in the West they reckon it's kinda cute. I'm just glad I wasn't born in Bulgaria.

My presence, perched aloft, surprises Mrs Kennedy. She flickers a timid smile, then sees the connected-minds symbol on my cheek. She recoils mentally; she has no wish to have her grief made any more public than she can allow. I think reassurance at her, telling her that I have no intentions of prying – at least, not *too* much. There's no way I'm probing deep into the angst-ridden maelstrom of her psyche; grief and regret and self-pity boil down there, and I have my own quota of these emotions to contend with at the best of times.

As for Mr Kennedy... He's shielded, so I don't waste sweat trying to probe. And anyway I already know enough about him, everything I want to know, and even things his little Oslo-born third wife doesn't know.

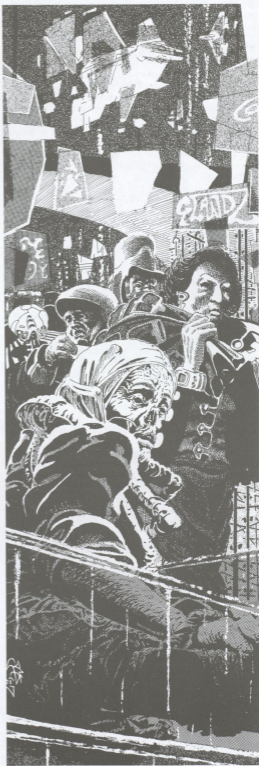
He nods at me, his gaze coolly observant.

I give him my best wink.

And my presence here is token, now. Gassner questions them and they answer, and I probe Mrs Kennedy to ensure veracity, not that I really need to. I was into her head and had the facts of the case even before she crossed the threshold.

Becky Kennedy was snatched inside an uptown gymnasium at ten this morning, her bodyguard taken out with a neural-incapacitator. Their assailant came and went so fast that the bodyguard saw nothing. Around noon the Kennedys, waiting anxiously in their suburban ranch, received a silver envelope mailed collect...

Kennedy glances at Gassner, who nods. He lays the envelope on the desk and amid fresh whimperings from his wife slides out a glossy photograph. I lean forward. It isn't pretty. The still shows a young girl, spreadeagled in a leotard, with a massive bullet wound



in her pubescent chest. Her dead eyes stare at the camera, frozen with terror.

"No note or message of any kind?" Gassner wheezes.

Kennedy replaces the photograph in the envelope. "Nothing. Just this," he says, and adds, without the slightest hint of appeal in his tone, "can you get my daughter back, Mr Gassner?"

My boss fingers the folds of fat at his neck. "I'm almost certain we can, Mr Kennedy."

"Within the three-day limit? She's due on the Vienna sub-orbital next month. We'd like her to make it —"

And Mrs Kennedy breaks down again. She knows that the majority of missing kids are never found, except after the three-day limit. Despite Gassner's reassurances, she can't believe she'll ever see her little Becky again.

Gassner is saying, "The fact that your daughter's abductor sent you this photograph indicates to me that what we have here is no ordinary abduction —" By which he means that Becky might not end up as the meat in a necrophilic orgy.

"My guess is that you'll receive a ransom demand for your daughter pretty soon. My agency will handle the negotiations. On top of whatever ransom demand is made, my fee for the case is two million creds..."

Kennedy waves. "Just get my daughter back, Mr Gassner. And you'll get your fee."

"Excellent. I'm glad to see that someone appreciates how dangerous our line of work can be. We are dealing with criminal psychopaths, Mr Kennedy. No price can fully compensate for the dangers involved..."

But two million creds will do nicely, thanks... Two millions that Gassner needs desperately. Trade is bad nowadays, and Gassner is struggling to keep his fat head above the choppy water-level of Big City business.

He arranges to keep in touch and the Kennedys quit. I jump down and squat by the hatch, watching them go. "You got everything?" Gassner wheezes.

I nod. "Everything I need."

Gassner catches my eye as I'm about to leave. "Hey — and if you find the body before they get a ransom demand, you know how to work it, girl..."

I wink, point a blaster made out of fingers to show that I'm on his wavelength — but his instructions worry me. Does he suspect?

"I'm flying, Gassner," I say.

"Hey, how's Joe? I haven't seen him around."

The bastard sure knows how to land a cruel one. "Joe's just fine," I lie. I pray Allah give me strength to make minestrone of his meatball. But what the hell? "Ciao," I call, blow him a kiss and quit.

Drifting...

I was drifting monthsback when I found Krash-Bang Joe, or plain Joe Gomez as he was then. Drifting? It's a state of mind as well as a physical act. You can't have one without the other; they're sort of mutually inter-dependent. To drift, get high on whatever's-your-kick, fill your head with some sublime and unattainable goal, and hit the night. Ride the moving boulevard a-ways, alongside the safe-city civvies out for the thrill of slumming, and when their mundane minds become just *too* much, quit the boulevard and try out the mews and alleyways. Drift forever and lose track of time. There's something for

everyone down there; was even something for me.

Back then I was a screwed up, neurotic wreck. My past was a time in my head I tried to forget about, and my present wasn't so strawberries-and-cream, either. A second-grade telepath indentured to a fifth-rate, one man Investigative Agency. I worked a twelve-hour shift and the work was hard: try probing a mind seething with evil, sometime. I had another ten years of this hand-to-mouth, mind-to-mind existence ahead of me, and there were times when I thought I could take no more... If I survived the ten years I could leave the agency, discard my ferrière and let my tele-sense atrophy — but even then I'd always be aware that taken as a race we weren't up to much... So I had no hopes for the future and the only way I could take the present was to chew my 'gum and live from day to day. Even so, I neglected myself. I'd go days without eating; I was never fat, but after a stretch of working and drifting and starving I'd be famine-thin, wasted.

I suppose the drifting helped, though. It was part of the day to day routine. My goal? You'd laugh — but they say if you seek long enough, you'll find. And I found. My goal was someone.

I had no idea who. I sometimes kid myself I was looking for Joe all along, that I knew he existed out there among the millions and it was just a matter of time before I found him. But that's just old retrospect, playing tricks. Truth is, I was looking for a good and pure mind to prove to myself that we weren't all bad, that hope existed.

So I'd get high at the end of a shift, ride the boulevard and slip into the tributaries. On the prow, drifting...

I was a familiar face down the lighted darktime quarter. I'd be given rat-and-sparrow kebabs by the Chinese food-stall owners who wanted to fatten me up. The touts, they left me alone after the first few weeks when I declined to buy. They hawked everything from themselves to pure smack, from spare parts for illicit surgery to the Goodbye Express itself — Pineal-z. The drug from the third planet of star Aldebaran that'd give you the trip of a lifetime and total you in the process. It freaked me, that hit. Onetime monthsback I was drinking shorts in a seedy slouch and through the wall I probed a jaded businessman who'd had his fill of everything and wanted out. He'd paid a cool half million for the pleasure of ending his life, and he went with an extravaganza. Subjectively he lived another eighty years and his pineal bloomed to show him the evolution of his kind. I tripped along with him until he died, then I staggered back to my pad. I was zonked for three days following, and for another week hallucinated Pithecanthropus and Java Man dancing the light fantastic on the boulevard. Only later did I get vague flashbacks, memories of the vast, impenetrable blackness that swallowed the oldster when the drug blew his head. It frightened me at first, this intangible nothingness I could neither experience nor understand. In time, a month maybe, I managed to push it away somewhere and forget.

Then I was back drifting again, seeking...

I'd black my connected-minds symbol and probe, discarding heads by the thousand one after the other as they each displayed the same flawed formulas. Some heads were better than others, but even the

better ones were tainted with greed and selfishness and hate. And then there were the really bad ones, the heads that struck me at a distance with their freight of evil, that stood out in a crowd like cancer cells in a lymph gland.

But worse than these were the shielded minds, in which anything might be lurking.

I found Joe Gomez in a bar called the Yin-Yang.

It's an underground dive with a street level entrance washed in the flutter of a defective fluorescent. Three figures were standing in the silver sometimes-light that night, and something about them caught my attention. They wore the fashionable greys of rich businessmen, and their minds were shielded. They were discussing something among themselves in a tone which suggested they had no wish to be overheard. And one of the guys had oo tattooed on his cheek.

Now what the hell were three uptown executives doing whispering outside a slum bar at four in the morning? As sure as Allah is Allah not transacting boardroom business, I reasoned.

But I was wrong. They were.

I got close and listened in on their whispers. At the same time I became aware of an emanation from the subterranean Yin-Yang. The two connected. Casual-wise, I slipped past the three execs and, once out of sight, jumped the steps two by two. The emanation was the sweet music of violin over din. My quest was almost over.

But not quite. I had to get him out, first.

The bar was a slouch. Felled junkies littered the various levels of the padded floor. The barman was an Andy. I asked him if the place had another entrance, and he indicated west.

Then I looked around and probed.

The guy with the harmonious brainwaves sat against the far wall, drinking beer. He wore the blue one-piece of an off-duty spacer, and I read with surprise that he was an Engineman. He was good-looking too in a dark, Spanish kind of way. And he was unshielded...

I glanced at the entrance. There was no sign of the executives. They were no doubt still debating whether this was the guy they intended to scrape. Obviously their telepath was a few grades below me; I knew immediately that the spacer was prime material for what they had in mind.

I projected an aura of authority and crossed the slouch. "Joe Gomez?"

He looked up, startled; surprised at being paged by a not-so-good-looking black girl. I realized that the telepath outside would be getting all this, too. So I slipped my shield from my tunic and palmed it into his coverall. Then I grabbed his arm and blitzed him with a burst of life-or-death urgency.

As we hurried to the far door and up the steps I caught the tantalizing whiff of flux on his body. Then we were outside and swamped with the collective odours of a dozen ethnic fast-foods. "This way -"

I ran him up the alley and under an arch, then down a parallel thruway and up an overpass. Crowds got in the way and we barged through, making good progress. Years of drifting had superimposed a routemap of the quarter on my cortex. The exec-dudes would be floundering now, cursing their lost opportunity.

I'd grabbed the golden goose and I could hardly believe my luck. To be on the safe side I took him across the boulevard and up a towerpile into a cheap Mexican restaurant I used when I was eating.

Outside, the city extended in a never-ending, jewelled stretch. The million coruscating points of light might have indicated as many foci of evil that night - but we were away from it all up here and I had Joe Gomez. I could hardly control my shaking.

Then it came to me how close he'd been to annihilation, and I broke down. "You stupid, stupid bastard," I cried.

"Look, Sita - that's your name, isn't it?" He was bemused and embarrassed; he'd caught bits of me as I rushed him out, and he knew he owed me. "Who were those guys?"

"Who? Just your funeral directors, is who." My tears were tears of relief now. "They were pirates in the scrape-tape industry. I overheard them before I got your vibes -"

"So? I could have been a star."

"Yeah, a dead star, kid. Not many ways you can be killed nowadays, but they would've killed you dead."

His tan disappeared and he looked sick. "But I thought the industry was legal? I've seen personatapes on sale in the marts -"

His naivety amazed me. "The personatape side of things is legal. They make tapes of the famous, or how they think the famous might've been. But these pirates make personatapes of real people by squeezing fools like you dry. You're so good you gave me raptures, and they wanted that." And I was already wanting to snatch my shield away from him, wanting more...

He stared at his drink. He didn't seem very convinced.

"Listen, kid. You know what they'd've done to you if I hadn't happened along? They'd've killed you and taken your corpse to their workshop. They can scrape stiff, and they're easier to handle - don't struggle. Then these guys, these pirates...they'd open your skull and go deep and scrape the cerebellum, leaving your nervous system wrung out and fucked up. They'd get more than just emotions, they'd get everything. They'd rob you of your very self just to make a few fast creds, and then dump your body. And there'd be nothing no rep-surgeon could do to put you back together. You'd be dead. The only place you'd exist is on tape and as a ghost in the heads of rich non-telepaths who want the sensation of experiencing other states of being without having the operation."

I took a long drink then, angry with him. "And keep that shield. I want you to stay alive. Consider it a present."

"Thanks," he said.

"For chrissake!" I exploded. "Where the hell do you usually drop? Don't you know what a shield is for?"

"I work a line out of Lhasa, Kathmandu, Gorakhpur... They're quiet cities. I never really needed a shield there. This is my first time West..." He avoided my eyes and gazed out at the city.

"Yeah, well - think on next time. This isn't no second world dive. This is for real. Mean City Central where you have to think to survive."

He nodded, sipped his drink.

I cooled. "Where you from, Joe?"

"Seville, Europe. You?"

"Chittagong, in what was onetime Bangladesh. China now."

His gaze lingered on my tattoo. Then he saw the face on the back of my hand. "Your husband?"

I laughed. "Hey, Mr Innocent – you never seen one of these before?" I waved my hand around theatrically. "This guy's my boss. He owns me. I'm indentured to him for another ten years..."

"I never realized..."

"No, well you wouldn't, would you?" I glared at him, bitter. Then I smiled. I had to remind myself that I had a Mr-Nice-Guy here, who was naive-for-real and wasn't playing me along.

I sighed, gave him history. "My parents sold me when I was four. They were poor and they needed the Rupees. I was one of six kids, and a girl, so I guess they didn't miss me...I checked out psi-positive when I was five and had the operation. I had no say in the matter, they just cut me and hey-presto I had the curse of *ability*. I was taken by an agency, trained, and sold to Gassner when I was six. I've been reading for small cred, 'gum and a bed in an Android quarter slum dwelling for nine years now..."

Joe Gomez was shocked. "Can't you...I mean," he shrugged. "Get out?"

"Like I said, in ten years when my indenture runs its course. This makes sure I don't do anything stupid." I held up the miniature of Gassner, his face stilled now; it'd come to life when he contacted me. "With this he knows where I am at all times. There's nothing I can do about it..."

We rapped for ages, ordered *tostadas*, drank. Beneath the jive-assed, streetwise exterior I was like a little girl on her first date. I was trembling, and my voice cracked falsetto with excitement.

Joe Gomez... He was short, dark, around twenty. He had a strong, handsome face, but his eyes were evasive and shy. It was what lived behind those eyes that I was interested in, though... He was pure, and I needed pure. I wanted to get into him, become one. I was nothing special to look at, but I was sure that if I let him take a look inside my head, gave him the experience... But at the same time I was scared shitless I might frighten him away.

We watched the dawn spread behind distant tower-piles.

My heart was hammering when I said tentatively, "Where you staying, Joe?"

"I just got in. I haven't fixed a place yet. Maybe you know somewhere?"

"I..." There was something in my mouth, preventing words. "You can always stay at my place. It's not much, but..." Sweet Allah, my eyes were brimming again.

"I don't know..."

"Give me the shield," I said.

"I get it. If I don't come with you, you want your present back, right?" He sounded hurt.

"Balls. I might be other things but I'm no cheat. I want to show you something."

He passed me the shield, a silver oval a little smaller than a joint case, and I put it out of range on a nearby table. His goodness swamped me, and I swooned in

the glow. I pushed myself at him, invaded him, showed him what it was like to have someone inside his head... We staggered from the towerpile and rode the boulevard to the Android quarter.

Joe was on a three-week furlough, and we spent every day together. We were inseparable, cute lovers like you see on the boulevard Sunday afternoons. The girl from Chittagong and the boy from Seville...I got better quick, saned-up and began enjoying life. I stopped drifting and phased out the 'gum. I didn't need them, now. Joe was my kick, and I overdosed.

We explored the city together. I saw life through his eyes, and what I saw was good. We tried personatapes. He'd be an Elizabethan dandy for a day, and I'd be Bo Ventura, latest hologram movie queen. Once we even sexed as Sir Richard Burton and Queen Victoria, just for the hell of it. We made straight love often, and sometimes we'd exchange bodies; I'd become him and he'd become me. I'd move into him, pushing into his autonomic nervous system and transferring him to mine. I'd experiment with the novelty of a male body, in control of slabs of muscle new to me, and Joe would thrill to the sensation of vagina and breasts. At climax we'd be unable to hold on any longer and the rapture of returning, our disembodied personas twanging back to base, left us wiped out for hours.

Then one day towards the end of his furlough Joe pulled me out of bed and dressed me in my black skinsuit like a kid. We boarded a flyer and mach'd uptown. "Where to?" I asked, sleepy 'gainst his shoulder.

"I'm a spacer –" he said, which I'd figured already. He was an Engineman, a fluxer whose shift was three months in a sen-dep tank pushing a Satori Line starship through the *nada*-continuum. "And I want to show you something."

We decanted atop the Satori Line towerpile that housed the space museum, and entered a triangular portal flanked by Andy militia. The chamber inside corresponded to the shape of the portal, a steel grey wedge, and we were the only visitors that day. By the entrance was the holographic sculpture of a man, vaguely familiar; the scientist who discovered the *nada*-continuum and opened the way for the starships.

Through Joe I had experienced everything that he'd experienced. His past was mine, his every sensation a shared event. I'd travelled with him to Timbuctoo – and as far as Epsilon Indi. But there was one experience of his that defied my comprehension. When he entered the sen-dep tank of a Satori Line starship I could not go with him; I had no idea what it was to flux. Joe knew, of course, but he was unable to describe the sensation, unable to recall the feeling so that I might read him and understand. He likened it to a mystical experience, but when I pressed him he could draw no real analogues. To flux was an experience of the soul, he said, and not of the mind – which was perhaps why I floundered.

We walked down the ringing aisle of the space museum. At the far end, on a plinth and cordoned by a low powered laser-guard, was a trapezoid of blackness framed in a stasis-brace. What we had here,

according to the inscription, was a harnessed chunk of the *nada*-continuum.

It did nothing to impress a sleepy Bangladeshi, until she saw the expression on the face of her lover. Gomez was a goner; even transfer-sex had failed to wipe him like this. "Joe...?"

He came to his sense and glanced over his shoulder at the entrance. Then he vaulted over the laser-guard and lifted me quickly after him. "This is it, Sita. Take a good look..."

After a time the blackness became more than just an absence of light. It swirled and eddied in a mystical vortex like obsidian made fluid. I too became mesmerized, drawn towards a fathomless secret never to be revealed.

"What is it?" I asked, stupidly. I leaned forward. Joe held me back. He warned me that the interface could decapitate me as neat as any guillotine.

"It's the essence of nothing, Sita. That which underpins everything. It's Heaven and Nirvana and Enlightenment. The ultimate Zen state..."

His voice became inaudible, and then he said, "I've been there..." And I recalled something – the ineffable blackness I had known monthsback. My mind reached out for something just beyond its grasp, a mental spectre as elusive as the wind... Then the spell was broken.

Joe laughed, pulled himself away and smiled at me. He jumped back over the laser-guard and plucked me out. We held each other then, and merged. His period of furlough was coming to an end. Soon he would be leaving me, drawn away to another rendezvous with the *nada*-continuum. I should have been jealous, perhaps. But instead I was grateful to whatever it was that made him... himself.

Hand in hand we ran through the chamber like kids.

Allah, those three weeks...

They had to end, and they did.

And it happened that Joe died a fluxdeath pushing his boat through the Out-there beyond star Groom-bridge. That which had nourished him kicked back and killed him, with just three days to go before he came home to me.

I quit Gassner's and drop to the boulevard, my head full of Becky Kennedy and her loving parents. As I leave the towerpile a shadow latches on to me and tails, keeping a safe distance. I ride the boulevard to the coast.

Carnival town is a lighted parabola delineating the black bite of the bay. I choose myself a quiet jett away from the sonic vibes and photon strobes, fold myself into the lotus position and wait.

Overhead, below a million burning stars, big starships drift in noiseless, clamped secure in phosphorescent stasis-grids. Ten kilometres out to sea the spaceport pontoon is a blazing inferno, with a constant flow of starships arriving and departing. Joe blasted out from here on his last trip, and for weeks after his departure the dull thunder of the ships, phasing out of this reality, brought tears to my eyes. Oftentimes I'd come out here and sit and contemplate the constellations, the stars where Joe might be. He's back now, but I still like to stare into space and try to figure out just where the accident happened.

A noise along the jetty, the clapping of a sun-warped



board, indicates my shadow has arrived. I sense his presence, towering over me. "Spider," I say. "Sit down. I've been expecting you." And I have - he's one of the few people I can rely on to help me.

Spider Lo is a first-grade telepath and he works for the biggest Agency in the West. He's about as thin as me, but twice as tall. He earned enough last year to buy himself a femur-extension, and I was the first to admit he looked really impressive riding the boulevard, especially in a crowd. He's a Chink, and I should hate him for that, but he's a gentle guy and we get along fine.

"Gassner sent me, Sita."

"That much I figured."

"He told me to make sure you did your stuff. To me, it doesn't look like you're doing that out here..."

He hesitates, watching me. "I'll let you into a secret, Sita. Gassner's in big trouble. Business is bad and a few of the bigger Agencies are going for the takeover. They'd buy Gassner out for peanuts and employ him as a nothing button-pusher. As for you - you'd be taken on by whichever Agency buys. You'd be on longer shifts for less pay. You're a second-grader, remember..."

I let him mouth off. His secret is no secret at all. He's telling me nothing I don't already know. I let my lazy posture describe apathy, and stare at the stars.

Spider tries again. "This case is worth two million to Gassner. It would mean solvency for him, and who knows even a rise for you. But you're blowing it -"

"And won't Mr Gassner be angry with me," I say.

"Sita... this is the biggest case you've ever had to crack. You don't seem to be trying..."

Languid, I give him a look, long and cool. "Maybe I don't need to try," I say.

"Sita..." His Oriental features pantomime despair.

"I'm serious, Spider. Hasn't it occurred to you that maybe the reason I'm lazing around here is because I've got the case wrapped up?"

His eyes glint with quick respect, then suspicion.

"No shit," I say. "I know where Becky Kennedy's meat is hidden."

"You just this minute left the office, Sita."

I shrug. "How would you like to earn your Agency the two million riding on this case?" I ask him.

He tries a probe. I feel it prickle my head like a mental porcupine in a savage mood. But my shield is up to it.

"You don't have to probe, Spider. I'm honest - I'll tell you. Your Agency can pick up the creds from Kennedy when you find the body and deliver it to the resurrection ward -"

"But Gassner..." Understanding hits him.

"Yeah," I say. "You've got it."

Spider looks at me.

"Why you doing this, Sita? If Gassner folds, you get transferred, and that won't be a picnic for you -"

"Listen, Spider. I'm getting out of it altogether. No more probing for this kid after tomorrow."

"You're not -" Alarm in his voice.

I laugh. "No, I'm not. I'm getting out and I want to see Gassner sink..." But there's an easier way than this to tell him.

I take my shield and toss it to him. He catches it, holds it for a few seconds, then throws it back. That's all it takes for him to read what I'm planning. And he

reads everything: my love for Joe and the reason I need big money, what I did early yesterday and why I did it. He reads what I want him to do, and he slowly nods his head. "Very well, Sita. Fine..." We finalize the arrangements, and then slap on it. We sit for a while, watching the starships and chatting, until Spider's handset calls him away on a case. He cranes himself upright and strides off down the jetty like someone on stilts.

I stay put a while. Above the city a hologram projection, like a stage in the sky, is beaming out world news. I watch the pictures but can't be bothered with the sub-titles. Only when the business review comes on do I take an interest. After five minutes the takeover bids are flashed up. Multi-Tec International today made bids for a dozen small-fry - one of them, I learn, Gassner's Investigative Agency. But the bid didn't make it and Gassner is still independent... I smile to myself. By the time I finish with Gassner he'll be wishing he never bought me, all those years ago.

I leave the coast and ride back into the city. I stop off at a call booth and get through to the Kennedys, using the teleprinter to make the demand. Then, instead of going straight to the Union towerpile, I make a detour to take in the cryogenic-hive complex, uptown. I ride the chute to the seventh level and squat beside Joe's pod. If I concentrate I can just make out his thoughts, deep down and indistinct. Even diluted, crystallized and fragmented by the freeze, his emotions are still as good and pure as always. I tell him that soon it'll all be over, and he responds with a distant, mental smile.

I'm tearful when I leave the hive and ride across town.

After I heard about Joe's death I began drifting again.

I got back on the 'gum and stopped eating and hit the darktime quarter. When I wasn't working I got high and drifted without sleep for nights, probing, seeking... It was impossible, of course. What I was seeking I had found and lost, and there could be no substitutes, however good. There were no more Joes, and it was no good telling myself that there had to be. It was too soon after his death and I was still too close to him to accept anyone else.

Then I got it into my head that Joe was still alive. I thought I could feel his brainwaves in the air, as if he existed somewhere in the world and was trying to get through to me. I concentrated and struggled to contact him, to prove to myself that he was alive. Crazy, I know...

But I was right.

It was a month after the accident and I was beginning to lose hope. I spent more and more time tripping on acid shorts and trying to forget. I reckoned that if maybe I could lose my identity, then the pain wouldn't be so bad.

Joe called a couple of nights later.

I was laid out on my bunk, coming down after a week of crazy, crazy nights drifting and tripping. My head was alive with vivid nightmares and Joe played a starring role.

When his face appeared on the vidscreen I knew it was a hallucination. "Sita!" It shouted. "It's me - Joe!"

I giggled. "I know you're dead, Joe. You died Out-

there. You can't kid me..."

"Sita..." His arms were braced on either side of the screen, and his head hung close. It looked like Joe, but there was something wrong with the geometry of the features. They were too clean-cut and perfect to be Joe's, even though they resembled his. Obviously some effect of the acid..."

"Sita, please - listen!" He was near to tears. "I know I died a fluxdeath. But they got me out in time. They saved me. They put me back together in a Soma-Sim and..."

"Where are you?" But I didn't believe. I was still hallucinating. Joe was dead, and what I saw on the screen was a phantom of my imagination.

"That's why I called. I need your help. I'm at the city sub-orb station. I just got in. I need your help..." He looked over the screen, then behind him. When he stared at me again I saw that he was swaying, holding the set for support.

I crawled across the bunk and sat on the edge. I could not bring myself to believe, however much I wanted to. If I rested all my hope on what turned out to be a cruel illusion..."

"Joe... What's wrong, Joe?"

"They're after me, Sita. The pirates. They almost had me. I got away. Please... come and get me." He grinned then, a wry quirk of the lips I knew so well and loved. "I can't move. They hit me and I can't move. I managed to get this far..."

I staggered around the room and collected my clothes. I struggled into the bare minimum required for decency and dropped to the street. I hailed a flyer, gave the destination and collapsed in the back seat. I knew there'd be no Joe when I got there; already our dialogue was becoming dreamlike. It was too much to hope that I could save him a second time...

At the station I told the flyer to wait and stumbled into the crowded foyer. I wasn't wearing my ferrounère and the absence of brainhowl was a relief. The call-booths were ranked at the far end by a Somalian fast-food joint. I pushed through the crowd and collapsed against the first crystal pod. The caller inside gestured me away. I staggered from booth to booth, my desperation increasing when each one turned out to be empty. With three to go and still no sign of Joe I gave up and went berserk. I crashed against them one after the other, flailing at the doors with my fists. The last door remained stubbornly shut, as if pinned by a weight on the inside. I peered over the privacy screen and my heart went nova. Joe had slipped to the floor with his cyber-legs folded beneath him at crazy angles. He grinned when he saw me and reached out his arms...

I managed somehow to get him into the flyer and back to my pad.

Once inside he collapsed on the bunk, the Joe Gomez I knew and loved, but *different*. The only part of him that had survived the fluxdeath was his brain, and the rest of him was a power-assisted Krash-Bang Somatic-Simulation with all the sex bits and the latest Nikkon optics. It was impossible to tell that the body was a Soma-Sim; the surgeons had been faithful to Joe's old appearance, if anything making him even more good-looking than the original version.

I thought maybe I was still hallucinating...

"They were waiting at the port," he said. "They

waited till I got in from the medic-base and they shot me, Sita. But I got away..." And he indicated his leg.

There was a hole in his thigh big enough to contain my fist. Charred strands of microcircuitry fuzzed the circumference, and the synthetic flesh had melted and congealed in dribbles like cold wax.

"It doesn't hurt," Joe reassured me, peering down. "I don't feel a thing. It's just that I can't walk..."

"We'll get you fixed up," I said.

"You got a spare half million?"

"Surely the Line - ?"

He laughed. "They took all my savings to put me in this."

"We'll find some way," I said. "Can't you go back - ?"

His hand moved to touch the hole, with just the faintest whirr of servo-motors. "The Line's fired me, Sita. I'm in no condition to flux and I'm out of a job..." Tears were beyond the expertise of 21st-century cyberneticists, or Joe would have cried, then.

"Can you remember anything about the attack?" I asked him.

"Not much. Three guys piled out of an air-car and called me. When I began to run, they opened fire -"

"Did you get the flyer's plate?"

"I was too busy trying to survive, Sita."

I probed. I relived the attack and saw the same three guys I'd seen outside the Yin-Yang. The subconscious mind forgets nothing, and the quick glance Joe had taken at the air-car had lodged the plate code in his head. I memorized the code and came out. It was a slim lead, but perhaps a valuable one.

Joe reached out and pulled me to him. "You haven't said how good it is to have me back, Sita."

"No?" I opened up, and we merged. Beyond his relief at being with me I saw a dark shadow in the background, a sharp regret that he would never flux again. He was like a junkie deprived his fix, and the withdrawal symptoms were craving and melancholia. I shouldn't have felt jealous, but I did.

The following day I decided that my pad was not a safe place for Joe. Too many people had seen his arrival, and all it would take was for the scrape-tape pirate's telepath to send out a chance probe in the vicinity...

I had a contact in the cryogenic-hive complex uptown and Joe agreed that this would be the best place for him until I came up with the creds to buy the services of a cyber-surgeon. I had a few ideas I wanted to think over during the next couple of days. I installed him in the hive, then left for Gassner's office.

I told my boss I was using the Batan II to check detail on the current case, and instead tapped into the city plate file. I found the number of the flyer Joe had seen, and I was in luck. The flyer was a company vehicle belonging to the Wringsby-Saunders Corporation. I looked them up and found they were into everything, but their biggest turnover was in the persona-tape market...

So I dropped to the boulevard and rode uptown.

The Wringsby-Saunders corporation had a tower-pile all to themselves, a hundred storey obelisk with a flashy WS entwined and rotating above the pent-house suite.

I marched in, exuding bravura.

I roamed. I was looking for company personnel with faces that matched those I carried around in my head. I took in every level and a couple of hours later found what I wanted. A tall executive left his office and strode along the corridor towards me. He wore silvered shades and an arrogant expression. He was shielded, of course – as he was on the last occasion I had encountered him. In the defective fluorescent lighting outside the Yin-Yang bar...

The glow-tag on the door of his office told me: Martin Kennedy. He was the marketing director of the personatape division, one of the top jobs in the Corporation. And not satisfied with a director's fat salary, Kennedy dirtied his fingers with illegal scrape-tape dealings. Some people...

Over the next few days I neglected my duties for Gassner and followed Kennedy. It was my intention to blackmail him; his superiors at Wringsby-Saunders would not be amused that one of their top executives was dealing in death...

Then something happened to make me change my mind. There was a better way of extracting what I wanted from Kennedy, one that did away with the risk to myself.

It came to me as I watched him arrive home one evening and meet his daughter in the drive. It was one of the few occasions when he was unshielded, and I learned that the only pure and unswayed emotion in Kennedy's head was the love he had for his daughter, Becky.

Next time I found Kennedy unshielded I slipped him the sly, subliminal suggestion that Gassner's Investigative Agency was the best in town, specializing in murders, kidnappings, missing persons... The first place he'd think of when he found his daughter gone would be Gassner's.

Then I turned my attention to Becky and checked her movements. She had her own bodyguard and he escorted her everywhere. Well, almost everywhere. He was a big, ugly brute, but I was not going to let him stand in the way at this stage of the game.

I decided the best place to strike would be in the gym she used every Tuesday morning. I joined up for the classes and obeyed all the instructions like a good girl, despite the protests from my drug-wrecked body. I arrived early Tuesday morning and watched Becky at her calisthenics while her minder did the same, only with more interest in how she filled her leotard in all the erogenous zones-to-be.

I was right behind them when the left the free-fall chamber. I'd taken the precaution of putting the chute out of action and barring all the communicating doors. We were quite alone.

I hit the bodyguard with the neural-incapacitator and he dropped like a sack of wet sand. Then I did the same to Becky before she got a look at me. While the guy was still jerking his beef on the floor I dragged Becky along the corridor and into the service chute.

I'd prepared myself for this part of the operation all week. I'd told myself over and over that this was not murder, that before the three days had elapsed little Becky would be patched up and resurrected and as good as new. If not better. Inside a fortnight she'd be back working out at the gym, her death a thing of the past. Even so, as I pulled the trigger of the pistol I had to close my eyes and think of Joe... Then I photo-

graphed the corpse and concealed it behind an inspection panel. The next inspection was due in a week. I'd done my homework and checked.

I left the gym and mailed the developed print to the Kennedys. Then I made for the Supernova and drank acid shorts to help me forget... Hours later, the call from Gassner came through.

I cross town and head for the Union towerpile. "Bangladesh!" the cackle greets me. Old Pete the beggar grins toothless along the sidewalk. I slip him ten and he lays 'gum on me. I'm high by the time I hit the foyer.

Spider Lo has done his stuff. He sits with Kennedy in the ground-floor bar, done out in the deco of a starship. I hoist myself onto a highstool, businesslike.

Kennedy gives me the inscrutable look through his silvered shades, but the empty glasses at his elbow belie his cool. "I'd like to know what's going on?" he asks me. "This...this gentleman apprehended me outside and claimed to be working with you on the case. I hope you've found my daughter –"

"Do you have the crystals?" I ask.

Kennedy hesitates, then lifts a valise onto the table. He opens it to reveal two sparkling crystals burning within the leatherette gloom. They're for real. The substance locked inside them glints like powdered diamond. I take the valise.

"The Gassner Agency has been taken over," I tell Kennedy now. "As such, it no longer exists. Mr Lo here represents the Massingberd Agency. You will pay his Agency upon the completion of the case."

"My daughter?"

"By the time I deliver the crystals, your daughter will be in the safe care of the city hospital."

Kennedy nods his understanding. Spider Lo pushes papers across the table and Kennedy signs. "Mr Lo will take you to the hospital, Mr Kennedy." I shake him formally by the hand, but his shield deflects my probe.

We move outside and Spider and I slap palms and go our separate ways. Little Becky Kennedy will be alive again in a short while. Thirty minutes ago Spider rushed a medic-squad to the gym to retrieve her corpse, and soon she'll be respiring normally in the resurrection ward, the attack edited from her memory, looking forward to whatever it is little girls look forward to nowadays. Her sub-orbital trip to Vienna, maybe.

I ride the boulevard, one last time. In case Kennedy suspected something and put a watch on me, I dodge clever. I alight on 5th and take a devious detour through the downtown quarter, lose myself in crowds and backtrack numerously. Then I hire a flyer and mach uptown to the cryogenic-hive.

After the formalities of payment and after-care instructions, I decant my shining knight from his sarcophagus and assist him to the flyer. His head is hardly awake yet, barely thawed from the cryogenic state, and it's his power-assisted Soma-Sim that walks him from the ziggurat.

I think love at him to help the thaw.

I programme the destination of Rio de Janeiro into the flyer, but before we set off there's the small matter of my indenture to sort out. I fly to the Satori Line towerpile, Joe immobile beside me. I leave the flyer

on the landing pad, drop to the twentieth level and enter the museum.

I have to wait a while before a rich family decide they've had their fill of wonder, and when they leave I leap over the laser-guard surrounding the shimmering shield of the *nada*-continuum.

I stand mesmerized, regardless of the danger should anyone enter and find me here. Before me is the ultimate, the primal state we all aspire to – the only thing ever to be wholly beyond my ability to grasp.

My contemplation is interrupted by a glow at the end of my arm. My hand tingles. Gassner's miniature portrait becomes animated. I hold up my arm, as if shielding my eyes from the *nada*-continuum, and stare at him. "What do you want, Gassner?"

"Sita!" he cries, and he uses my real name only in times of stress. His regular pallor is suffused now with the crimson of rage, and he's sweating. "Sita – where's Kennedy? I thought you –"

"I didn't crack the case, Gassner. Spider Lo got there first. Kennedy owes the Massingberd Agency, not you."

"Sita!" He's almost in tears. "Get back here!"

I smile. "I'm sorry, Gassner. I'm through. I've had enough and I'm getting out. Goodbye –"

He panics. He knows that without a telepath he's nothing. "You can't! Bangla –"

I can, and the *desh* is lost as I thrust my hand into the *nada*-continuum/reality interface. The satisfaction of getting rid of Gassner dilutes the pain of losing my hand; my tele-ability repels the frenzied communications shooting up my arm and keeps the agony below the tolerance threshold. The wrist is neatly severed when I stagger back, the stump cauterized and blackened. I jump the barrier and stumble through the chamber.

The hologram of the scientist stands beside the portal. Pedro Fernandez, discoverer of the *nada*-continuum and opener of the way. He seems to be smiling at me, and I know the smile. I give him a wink as I leave.

Joe touches my arm as I climb into the flyer and take off. We bank over the city and head towards the ocean. I probe him. His head is slowly coming to life, warming as if to the sunlight that shines through the screen. I read Joe's need, his craving.

Above the city, canted at an angle, the hologram screen pours morning news over a waking world. Did the Gassner Agency surrender to the take-over bids that must surely come now? Come on, an ending like that would be just too storybook. I can only wait until we reach Rio and find out then.

Meantime, I hope.

Weakly, Joe says, "You get the creds?"

I open the valise and shake the crystals out onto his lap.

"Pineal-z," I tell him, and I open up and let him have the experience I had monthsback when I tripped on Pineal-z and lived.

"It's Pineal-z or me, kid," I tell him. "Enlightenment or love. Take your pick." And I withdraw, close up. I don't want to influence his decision and I don't want to eavesdrop on his infatuation with something I can never hope to understand.

Old Pete? Yeah, he kidded me not. He was someone



famous, once. He was probably the most famous person in the world. He was Pedro Fernandez years-back, discoverer of the *nado*-continuum and opener of the way.

I know for sure now that Old Pete is good, behind that shield of his...

I glance across at Joe. He's staring at the crystals in his hands, weighing the experience he had and lost against whatever I can give him. He drops the crystals back into the valise, looks at me. "We'll sell them when we get to Rio, Sita. Find a cyber-surgeon to fix me up and get you a new paw..."

Enlightenment, or love? Perhaps they're one and the same thing.

Tears fill my eyes as I fly us away from the city and into the sunrise, one-handed.

Eric Brown was born in England in 1960, left school at fourteen, and lived for four years in Melbourne, Australia. He sold a children's play, *Noel's Ark*, in 1982, but the above is his first published short story. In recent years he has lived in India and Greece, but now resides mainly in Haworth, West Yorkshire (home of the Brontës).

NEWS

The first **Arthur C. Clarke Award**, for the best science-fiction novel published in Britain last year, has been given to Canadian writer **Margaret Atwood** for her harrowing book *The Handmaid's Tale* (published in Britain by Cape and Virago). The British Science Fiction Association Awards, announced simultaneously at this year's Easter SF Convention in Birmingham, went to **Bob Shaw** for *The Rogged Astronauts* (best novel); **Keith Roberts** for "Kaeti and the Hangman" (best short fiction); the film **Aliens** (best media presentation); and Keith Roberts again (best art).

This year's **Nebula Award** winners, as decided by the membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America, are:

Best novel: *Speaker for the Dead* by **Orson Scott Card**

Best novella: "R & R" by **Lucius Shepard**

Best novelette: "The Girl Who Fell into the Sky" by **Kate Wilhelm**

Best short story: "Tangents" by **Greg Bear**

Grand Master: **Isaac Asimov**

The **Philip K. Dick Award** for best paperback original of last year has gone to **James P. Blaylock** for his novel *Homunculus* (an Ace Book in the US). Like his friends Tim Powers and K.W. Jeter, Blaylock tends to write "neo-Victorian" sf, and this group has been appropriately labelled *The Steam Punks*.

The other major science-fiction prizes, the **Hugo Awards**, will be announced at the World Science Fiction Convention ("Conspiracy '87"), to be held in Brighton from 27th August to 1st September this year. Among the nominees are *Interzone* writers **William Gibson** (for his novel *Count Zero*

and for his novelette "The Winter Market") and **David S. Garnett** (for his short story "Still Life"); IZ co-editor **Simon Ounsley** ("Best Fan Writer"); artist **Jim Burns** ("Best Pro Artist"); and *Interzone* itself ("Best Semi-Prozine", in competition with *Fantasy Review*, *Locus*, *SF Chronicle* and *SF Review* - may the best mag win).

American science-fiction writer **James Tiptree Jr** (real name Alice Sheldon) died on 19th May 1987, apparently as a result of "self-inflicted gunshot wounds." She was seventy years old. Tiptree, a late starter in the sf field, published her first short stories in 1968, and her first novel, *Up the Walls of the World*, in 1978. Other sf/fantasy writers recently deceased are **Theodore R. Cogswell** (aged 68), **Gardner F. Fox** (aged 75) and **Richard Wilson** (aged 66).

Brighter news: **Arthur C. Clarke** has given himself an advance seventieth birthday present by writing a new novel entitled *2061: Odyssey Three*. Evidently, this took his publishers, Del Rey Books, entirely by surprise. They hope to release it in January 1988. Another veteran, **Robert A. Heinlein**, celebrates his eightieth birthday this summer with a new novel, *To Soil Beyond the Sunset*. According to an advance review, this features such characters as John Carter of Mars and Dr Fu Manchu, not to mention Heinlein's own Jubal Harshaw. "Heinlein's voice and his prose are stronger and fresher than they have been in some time," says *Locus* reviewer Dan Chow.

S.M. Baxter, whose first story, "The Xeelee Flower," appeared in *Interzone* 19, has just won a science-fiction short-story competition in *Jennings Magazine*. The latter is available at £2 a copy from 336 Westbourne Park

Road, London W11 1EQ. **David Pringle**, IZ co-editor, has delivered a new tome entitled *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* to Grafton Books for hard-cover publication in October 1987.

Small-press items received: *Dave Langford's* news fanzine **Ansible** (also nominated for a Hugo) contains interesting snippets of gossip, as ever. In the "Serious & Constructive" section of his April issue Mr Langford reported: "**Samuel Delany** says *The Splendour and Misery of Bodies, of Cities* (sequel to *Stars in My Pocket Like Bodily Fluids*) is 'in the publication process', i.e. he's delivered it, a couple of years overdue. But *Avedon Carol* warns: 'The two biggest booksellers in the US (60% of the market, together) are not carrying any new books by Delany. Why? "He's writing gay content now." I understand one of those chains is also refusing any work from Tanith Lee and Barbara Hambly.' Same alleged reason..." Alas, *Dave Langford* is currently accepting no more subscriptions for *Ansible*.

Mad Dog no. 11, an A4-size comic-strip magazine, contains work by SMS, Chris Brasted, Matt Howarth and others. It's available for 85p (or £3.60 for a four-issue subscription) from *Oddmags*, 78 Oxford Avenue, Southampton, Hants. SO2 0DN. **Opus Quarterly** is a new fiction magazine, "devoted to encouraging science-fiction, fantasy and horror in art and the written word." It's an A5-size amateur publication, also priced at 85p (or £3.25 for a four-issue sub). Issue no. 1, Spring 1987, features work by Garry Kilworth among others. Write to Michael Hearn, House 2, Broxbournebury School, Broxbourne, Herts. EN10 7PY.

John Crowley

Interview by Gregory Feeley

John Crowley's first three novels – *The Deep* (1975), described by John Clute in *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* as “an extremely impressive debut,” *Beasts* (1976), and the complex and moving *Engine Summer* (1979) – marked Crowley as an unusually literate and assured science-fiction writer. The ambition and formal virtues of these works, however, seem in retrospect only partial preparation for *Little, Big* (1981), a long and extravagant novel about faerie and the everyday world that seems effortlessly to subsume most of Western history and literature into its encompassing reach. Called “the greatest fantasy novel ever” by Thomas M. Disch, it won the World Fantasy Award. Since then Crowley has been working on a large project, *Aegypt*, whose first volume will appear in England from Gollancz this autumn. A stately and pastoral meditation on humankind's propensity to impose meanings upon history, *Aegypt* comprises numerous strands running in parallel – imaginary treatises, fragments of historical novels, and Crowley's own tales or tale – whose provenance and relationship to “the secret history of the world” Crowley recently discussed.

Your novels prior to *Aegypt* were evidently written in a different order, or in different versions, than what finally appeared. Wasn't an earlier draft of *Engine Summer* the first of all?

Yes. I came to New York in 1964, not as a writer. What I wanted was to make movies, and I was encouraged by a friend – with whom I have since done a lot of work in films – to learn photography. So I worked for a year or two in commercial photography, found I had no special vocation, and quit or was fired, I forget which.

I was twenty-five, sitting around with nothing to do, smoking a lot of dope. It was 1967, and I was thinking about the future. I was in that millennialist state of mind that seemed common at the time: things were falling apart, the center cannot hold. What will succeed it? I gave myself over to these kinds of thoughts, and eventually decided to write a book.



Photograph by Jerry Bauer

I didn't plan a science-fiction novel, exactly, but rather a romance of the future of a very peculiar kind. I wrote a version, odder and much more ill-written than what eventually appeared, called *Learning to Live With It*. It was sent around to various high-class publishers – Viking, Knopf – as a modern novel, and was rejected all around. Still, I had written an entire novel, a wonderful experience. So I thought, Now let's try and write one that someone will want to publish. And went about writing the next one, *The Deep*, in a much more practical state of mind. I assembled a lot of it from what I remembered of readings in medieval history; part of it came out of a novel about the Middle Ages that I had tried to write in high school. It was put

together in a fairly direct way, with publication in mind, although I did not try to write down.

So *The Deep* preceded any version of *Little, Big*.

Oh, yes. Although I did conceive the notion that became *Little, Big* right after that first book. What I wanted was to write a long family chronicle that, rather than beginning in the last century and working up to the present, would begin in the present and proceed into the future. As I started to write I came to believe that this is not really possible to do. But the idea of a family chronicle that would be about the future as well as the genesis of *Little, Big*.

No fairies?

The whole idea of the fairies came very

late in its conception. While I was developing those ideas I began a second straightforward book, which became *Beasts*. I took some ideas for various short stories I had long cherished – the city-sized commune ideas of Paolo Soleri, recombinant DNA, a wild dog pack living in the city – and just put them together into a novel. Some people have noticed those miscellaneous origins.

After that I took Doubleday the manuscript of *Learning to Live With It* and said: Now maybe you'll want to publish this. I'll make a lot of nice changes that will make much better sense; you'll see; I'll do it real good. And they accepted that, although the first thing they told me was to get rid of the title. I rewrote it extensively over the next six months, while still writing *Little, Big*.

Sharon Jarvis said once that she wanted very much to buy *Little, Big* for Doubleday, but couldn't.

That's true. I brought her the idea for *Little, Big*, and maybe some early chapters. She saw that it was not for the science-fiction line, but genre editors at Doubleday cannot buy for the trade line on their own. So she had to bring it before a board, and they turned it down.

She said their response was: "We don't understand this book about a talking fish."

(Laughs) That may well be. The fairies put people off terribly. Editors and salesmen would ask, "Is this book really about...fairies?" And it had to be admitted, in the end, yes. British reviews were at pains to assure readers that the novel was not, as they put it, twee. Bantam went to a lot of trouble keeping fairies out of any promotion about the book as you may have noticed.

They just invoked magic realism and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Bantam actually kept the full title, *Little, Big; or, the Fairies' Parliament*, off the cover and title page, allowing it only in the Table of Contents. One of my editors, a special projects person who really liked the book but did not like fantasy, science fiction, or anything to do with those genres or those people, said: "We want fairies out of it. With fairies, this book could go right down the toilet."

My other funny story about titles has to do with *The Deep*, which is also the title of a novel by Peter Benchley, which Doubleday published almost simultaneously with mine. They weren't happy with the coincidence of titles, but could not change mine, as my book had gone into production even while, upstairs in Doubleday's best-seller wing, they were deciding what the title of Peter Benchley's new book ought to be. They did offer me some unstated premium to change my title before its paperback appearance,

so that my *The Deep* would not compete in paperback with "theirs."

Did you have a hand in the design of *Little, Big*, with the cherubim and decorations?

Yes, I did. They weren't as effective in the end as I had hoped. The trouble is that they derive from a design period that is a bit too early. They should be 1890's, Art Nouveau – they ought to be like the decorations in that last edition of *The Architecture of Country Houses*, with red type for the titles, tracing paper over the illustrations, and graphics such as Mucha might have done. The German edition, in fact, came a good deal closer to realizing this.

Was Bantam troubled by anything about *Aegypt*, such as the title (which, as Pierce Moffett notes, is "hard to file")?

No, not really. Though when they got the first part of the manuscript, they were a bit disconcerted by the early adventures with the porno movie and the coke-dealer girlfriend. It wasn't what they expected from the author of that heart-warming *Little, Big*.

***Aegypt* is being packaged by Bantam as a self-contained novel, but its structure – after two prologues, the text runs under a single section called "The Solitudes", comprising the first three houses of the zodiac – strongly suggests more to come.**

The work will span four volumes with the overall title *Aegypt*. The title of this volume is "The Solitudes."

Was Bantam chary of packaging it as the first volume of a tetralogy?

Well, they did contract for a single novel called *Aegypt*. The book grew much longer as I worked on it – I have a great deal yet to tell – and became a book of twelve parts, then two volumes of six parts each...after that, four was the only remaining possibility.

Not a trilogy of four parts each?

No, because the houses of the zodiac are never divided into three. They fall into fours, as do many conventions for describing the world.

The seasons.

Right. (I just found out recently, by the way, that the idea that there are four seasons, which is not really self-evident in living through the year, is a Greek convention.) Anyway, the drama I was telling seemed to fall very naturally into those twelve houses, although whether that constitutes evidence for the truth of astrology I couldn't say.

Your stories frequently proffer arcane intellectual constructs, in part, it seems, for their beauty as systems: the plausible heresy of "Where Spirits GAT Them Home," the astrology and hermetica in *Aegypt*, or the recast Renaissance in "Novelty." You seem to take a great pleasure in the working-out of these systems.

Although I don't take them seriously for their own sakes. I have no real

interest in that prolepsis, or what in Hollywood they call "backstory." I once sat down and tried to figure out all the cards in the Least Trumps in *Little, Big*, but gave it up after a while. I also tried to make up the names for all fifty-two weeks in *The Deep*, but realized that I didn't need to have them in hand, as it were, to make the illusion real for me, any more than a reader, a real reader, needs a complete calendar or map to make a story real for him.

It's an abiding critical question, how much the reader should wonder about the landscape beyond the edge of the canvas.

I think that very work of assembling an illusion suggests that the reader, every once in a while, tilt his head at a certain angle and see – "Oh, it's all pretend; the flats stop just past over there and the painting kind of runs out; it's not complete, there's someone back there shifting the scenes. Who is it? Oh, I bet I know: his name's on the cover."

It is an artifice, but a successful artifice will reflect the poignancy of my attempt at creating it, and of the characters' efforts to comprehend the constructs – like Smoky trying to figure out what the Story is he is involved in, or Rush trying to find his own story, or Pierce the secret history of the world. I hope that the poignancy of their quests will redound to my story-telling also, and that readers will not fear that I am creating an artifice for its own sake, simply to play a trick on them, but will feel the poignancy of my need and desire to tell stories and make sense – and their own too, the readers' own desire to have stories told, and to have meaning drawn out of the stories that life presents.

Will your next project be the next three volumes of *Aegypt*?

I hope so. I have a contract with Bantam to deliver a collection of four novellas, entitled *Novelty*, of which only the title story has been published [in *Interzone* 5 – Eds.]. After that it will be back to *Aegypt*.

You put half a dozen years into *Aegypt*.

Extrapolating that pace, are you worried about having to spend the next generation completing the sequence?

It terrifies me. *Aegypt* was a hard book to write in the first place. It went through a lot of drafts; I don't usually write drafts. I may write slowly, but once I have decided what to set down, I rarely rewrite much. The book's form changed; originally it was to have been solely a historical novel, with only a modern epilogue, and not an entire modern novel too. There were times I felt it had all gone dead on me, and would only return to life with much cardiovascular thumping.

I know the next nine houses, of course; I know how they generally inform the lives of Pierce and those

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Garry Kilworth Dop*elgan*er

In 1838, Ambrosia de Magdalana wrote: "Provided psychological resistance to the incredible is overmastered by the strength of need, the effect of directing applied concentration towards a desired entity, is to call that entity into existence."

Of course, Ambrosia was primarily concerned with deities and apparitions – we first experience the need and then provide whatever satisfies that desire – but certainly a very diluted form of the antithesis of that statement has some truth in the modern world, where unwanted objects suddenly proliferate. For instance, if you purchase, an unusual second-hand automobile, a type which you have not seen before you notice dozens of the same model and year of manufacture. You will see them purring at every set of traffic lights, speeding past you on the motorway and parked outside supermarkets of a Friday evening. You will be piqued to find that the world and his wife seems to have acquired the car you believed to be of uncommon make, style and colour.

However, it would be more appropriate to go back to Ambrosia and his ideas on the birth of devils and gods, before I begin to unfold the nightmare which has been with me for two weeks now.

I first saw her in the library of Queen's College, Edinburgh, poring over some fusty facsimile of Hoffman's "Die Elixiere des Teufels" – no, perhaps I should start the story a few moments before that point, where I was giving a subject deep consideration.

That subject was *doppelgängers*, which as a student I was studying for the purpose of doing a tutorial on Edgar Allan Poe. I was sitting in my usual seat by the main window, where the light was good and the radiator actually worked efficiently, it being winter and drawing towards evening. I remember being delighted at finding what I believed to be a connection between Poe's "William Wilson" and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified*

Sinner. It said in some notes that the plot of Poe's *doppelgänger* story was suggested by Washington Irving's "Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron," but while idling my way through the Introduction of Hogg's work I came across the names of Hogg's most outspoken critics – William Howith and Professor Wilson.

Quickly investigating the dates, I discovered that "William Wilson" was published 15 years after Hogg's own *doppelgänger* tale. There were other factors. Poe's only story set in England; Poe regularly read *Blackwood's Magazine*, where "Justified Sinner" was reviewed; there were similarities in the authors' descriptions of their *doppelgängers*.

Clearly, to me, Poe had read Hogg's work, had seen the reviews and borrowed a Christian and a surname from each of the critics, and had given the tale a similar background to that of *Justified Sinner*. My discovery, which for all I knew was exceptional, precipitated a feeling of feverish excitement, manifesting itself in a hot flush which (I had no doubt) turned my face a brilliant scarlet.

At that point I looked up to find myself being observed by a woman three tables away, whereupon I blushed even more furiously. The reason for my embarrassment was not because I generally disliked being scrutinised, but because the woman who was looking at me so hard was my ex-girlfriend, Gillian Grovenor.

I gathered up my books and left the room. Gill and I, both in our third year at the university, had parted because of her family's strong objection to me. They believed Gill was too young to become seriously involved and in any case they disapproved of my working-class origins. Gillian, I found out, always bowed to her parents' wishes, which were to her, inviolable.

The split had left me feeling miserable and wretched, still in love and unable to put distance between myself and Gill. I still saw her, quite often, at the college. Were we not thrown into each other's paths so often,

I expect we would both have handled it a great deal better than we were able to at the time. More often than not, when we did meet by accident, she would turn her back on me and feign interest in the notice board or another student, until I had passed. In turn, this left me feeling frustrated and angry, and I would write some note to her about her manners, saying things that would make me wince, inwardly, when I recalled them later.

I revealed feelings so ambivalent in those notes that she struck back with an effective character assassination. If we did stop to speak, her efforts would be directed towards trapping me into a contradiction, which she could then fling back at me as an example of my supposed deception during the time we had been together. This, after much brooding, would precipitate more notes from me, until the whole thing became so entangled in a welter of recriminations, regrets and accusations that the facts of love were turned into an unbelievable fantasy dreamed-up by the past. Somehow the truth became buried beneath layers of bad taste and unpleasant words. We dug a grave for the love we had once felt, threw it in, and shovelled earth on top. There was not even a cross to mark the spot.

It was with some surprise therefore that I had caught her staring at me. I had no doubt that gaze was critical and I had to get out of the library before I exploded with wrath.

Once in the corridor I breathed more easily and made slow steps towards the office in which I was to have my tutorial. On my way I passed several of the lecture rooms and glanced in as a matter of course.

Suddenly, I stopped and gaped.

To my utter astonishment, Gill was sitting in the back row of Room 17, listening intently to a lecture. She glanced up, saw me staring through the glass-panelled door, and quickly turned away again: that gesture I knew so well. This was Gill. There was no mistaking that angry flick of the head, on witnessing my presence. I could see her cheekbones turning red. And the cold fire in her eyes.

My first thought was to wait for her and accost her: explain my presence and attack her for misinterpreting the reasons as to why I had stopped to stare. But, on further reflection, I could see this was a mistake. Instead, I went back to the library, fascinated by the fact that Gill had a double. Was there a twin sister? She had never mentioned it.

The girl was still there. I circumnavigated the bookshelves and came up behind her. Looking over her shoulder I saw what she was reading and decided to use that as an introduction.

"Excuse me – when you're finished with the Hoffman..."

She looked up, startled, and once again I was shocked by her resemblance to Gill. The only difference, so far as I could see, was that her complexion was much paler than Gill's – it had a wanness to it, as if someone had brushed the bloom from her skin. Also the colour of her hair and eyes would have appeared diluted compared with those of Gill.

She gave me a wide-mouthed, big-eyed smile.

Had she been the real Gill I think I would have

passed-out from sheer joy.

"I'm sorry," I managed to blurt out a few seconds later, "I thought I knew you. There's a girl named Grovenor on my course, and..."

She interrupted me in a deep, throaty voice quite unlike Gill's musical tones.

"But that is my name."

I was taken aback.

"What – Grovenor?"

"Yes."

Some of the other students were beginning to glare at us and I realized we were making too much noise. I sat down in the empty seat behind her and whispered, "Are you twins?"

"Who? Oh, no. I have no sisters. I'm an only child."

"Oh – my name's Paul by the way," I held out my hand and she shook it. At that precise moment I wanted Gill to come into the library and see us together – me with this Xerox copy of herself – deep in intimate conversation. And she did! She *did* come in. But the instant she saw me, she turned and immediately walked out again. For once a miracle had happened – but too fast, much too fast. (Why is nothing perfect?) She had not seen...

"What's your first name?" I asked.

"Gillian." Another brilliant smile.

Something did a flip-flop in my stomach. I should have got up, then, and left. I should have followed my instincts and run. But we never do what we see in retrospect as sensible. We always stay just that little bit too long. Cats are supposed to die of it.

I repeated slowly, "Gillian Grovenor? Your name is – Gillian..."

...Grovenor," she finished for me. "And your name is Paul." She touched the back of my hand with her fingertips. Then she added that she would be finished with the Hoffman in a short while. Where could she find me?

"In the refectory," I replied, hoarsely. "I'll be having a coffee."

"Fine. See you then?"

I left the library on unsteady legs and made my way through corridors lined with oak, glass-fronted bookcases, my reflection keeping pace with me all the way. Gill – my Gill – was in the refectory when I arrived, but she left the minute I entered, a half-cup of steaming coffee remained on the table at which she had been sitting. I almost threw it after her in exasperation.

It was only after I had sat down myself and had slipped into a calmer sea of thought that the word *doppelgänger* actually entered my consciousness. It was immediately followed by the consideration that I might be going mad. I dismissed the idea. My obsession with Gill, over the past few months, had obviously drilled a hole deep into some forbidden and normally sealed part of my mind and hallucinations were beginning to seep through. Gill could not possibly have a double, bearing exactly the same name: things like that did not happen in the real world – not to such exactitude.

My doubts were fortified by the fact that the second Gillian never arrived. At five o'clock I gave up waiting, took a quick look in the library (there was no one in there that even remotely resembled Gill) and made my way back to my flat in St Andrew's Street. Obviously I was very disturbed by the afternoon's events,

but was determined to get some rest. I then intended asking for a year's sabbatical and getting the hell away from Edinburgh and Gill while I still retained shreds of my sanity.

She was waiting for me in my room.

I stared at the new Gillian.

"Your landlady let me in," she said, "I hope you don't mind? I went to the refectory, but couldn't see you. You don't mind, do you?"

I shook my head, dumbly.

She held up a ticket. "I've reserved the Hoffman for you. They said they'd keep it until tomorrow lunchtime."

"Thanks – look, I'm still a bit thrown by your resemblance to a girl I know – a girl of the same name. I find it difficult..."

She interrupted me.

"I know. I've seen her. She does look a bit like me, superficially. Actually, if you saw us together, you'd see we weren't very much alike at all."

I wondered about the truth of this and had to admit I had not seen them together in order to compare them. Perhaps they weren't really that much alike? After all, Gill and I had not been in each other's company for more than a minute or two in the past few months. She was more of a fuzzy image-recall than a flesh-and-blood person, even though I had had glimpses of her from time to time. Since we had parted, Gill had changed her hairstyle and use of cosmetics, and I carried another picture which had to be reinforced by imperfect memories. Perhaps I was superimposing my idealized Gill on this different woman, because of a co-incidence of names.

Turning on the lamp I studied the new Gillian's features, trying not to be rude. There was a small mole on her pointed chin – exactly the same as Gill's – but I would have sworn that whereas Gill's had been a fraction to the left of centre, this mole favoured the right side.

"Well?" she said, "I feel as though I'm hanging on the wall of an art gallery."

"I'm sorry." I threw my books on the bed. "I've been reading too much lately. Forgive me."

"That's okay." She grinned. "You know, I like you, despite your funny ways. Perhaps because of them. Would you take me for a drink?"

"Gladly," I said. If there was one thing I wanted at that precise moment, it was a good stiff whisky.

We left the flat and went to the nearest hotel bar. I bought the first round and she the second, and so on. She talked all evening, about very little, and I noticed that her face gradually deepened in colour until it almost equalled that of her counterpart in tone. I put that down to the drink and the warmth of the atmosphere in the bar. I remember getting very drunk and being supported back to my room where, it seemed without asking one another, we crawled between the sheets together, and made love. At least, we tried. I was a little too far gone to be of much use, but I did notice the freckles on her shoulder. It was impossible to recall, given my state, whether the position of this constellation of brown stars – the left shoulder – matched with my memories of Gill's cosmography. All I can say is I did my best to navigate between them with my lips, and fell asleep halfway through the

voyage.

She left before I woke. I staggered from my bed to the bathroom mirror and noted, with gloomy satisfaction, that I looked ghastly. My bristled face was a grey colour and on sticking out my tongue, saw that it was covered in a rash of white spots. I needed at least two hours more of sleep, but I had a lecture to attend. I did the best I could with an already well-used razor and palsied hand, and then went to college, resolving never to drink that much again.

Gill, with the rightsided mole, was also at the lecture. Sitting behind and to the side of her, I was able to study her profile without fear of receiving one of her looks. She appeared just a little pale herself that morning, as if she too had been hitting the bottle. So far as I could make out, she was not wearing any make-up however, and it could be that her appearance was due to a lack of cosmetics. She didn't look my way and I was glad of it. I didn't want to see anyone – anyone at all – much less her.

Without any effort on my part I managed to run into the new Gillian in the most unlikely places: in the museum, outside a cinema, while walking the battlements of the castle of a frosty morning. These chance meetings almost always ended in our going to bed together, though nothing was ever planned – at least on my part. I found, to my surprise, that I did not fall in love with her. I enjoyed being with a copy of my Gill, though we talked about very little of importance (she seemed to discourage questions about herself and in all honesty I was not that interested in her private life) but I certainly enjoyed the physical contact with someone who was, to my eyes, a replica of my beloved Gill. Without too much trouble I was able to fantasize during our frantic sessions between the sheets, that my life had not taken a backward step. I was being given a second chance.

I was horrified to learn that she stole. Not just small things – but money and expensive items. She practically stripped my flat of all my movable possessions, such as they were, and secreted something out each time she came. Of course I challenged her, only to be met with denials and tears. I never actually caught her red-handed, but it could only have been her, no one else ever visited me. And I was desperate for her company. In the end I thought that if she needed the things that badly, then good luck to her. So long as she left me with a change of clothes.

There was another strange twist to events. She began to wear clothes that I had seen on Gill. I wondered about this, lying awake at nights, thinking, could she be stealing them? But when questioned she replied that she was aware that I was still carrying a torch for her namesake, and she had bought similar clothes in order to please me. She had taken the trouble to study what Gillian Grovener had been wearing and had purchased similar items to make me feel good. How close that was to the truth – that she actually bought the things – I had no way of knowing, but she was right about me. I did like the fact that she copied Gill's styles and colours. It helped me nearer to my previous position in the world: the one I had held and lost, those year-long months ago.

The week following our first meeting was half-term

and by that time I was aware that I was looking ill. In the morning I would get up and study myself in the mirror, hoping to see some improvement in my colour. I felt okay inside – a little hollow and wasted, but that had been so since Gill had left me. But my normally ruddy complexion took on a permanent waxy look, which seemed to worsen with each passing day.

No one commented on the alteration in my physical appearance – not my landlady, nor the one or two shopkeepers who knew me by sight. The new Gillian said I looked fine – she hadn't noticed any change in me. Perhaps I was hitting the books too hard? It was half-term after all. I should be enjoying myself a little. I accepted this quite readily. No one wants to believe they are ill. I put my increasing lethargy down to dispirited feelings and a general lack of enthusiasm. I tried, thereafter, to avoid looking at myself in the mirror. I thought perhaps that I was becoming too obsessed with my appearance and this was influencing me psychologically, further exacerbating my depressed state.

I determined to study hard, to take my mind off these problems, hoping to relieve some of the stress. However, once the books were out and I tried to apply myself, I found my concentration slipping before I had read three sentences of Poe, and even when I switched to Hawthorne it was no better. My mind seemed full of trivia, and yet those mundane details were somehow a heavy responsibility. The decision to make a cup of tea would take half-an-hour of deep thought.

Dwelling on minor things, I became overtired, constantly taking to my bed to replenish the energy I burned in doing nothing. The new Gillian expressed sympathy for my condition and brought me some iron tablets.

"You're just a little run down – anaemic. The iron will pick you up."

"Only if I take enough to bolt my spinal cord together," I managed to joke, hoping a change of attitude would help me improve. I was aware that such conditions were often psychosomatic.

Gillian fussed over me in many ways, but it usually had one end: to get me into bed with her. She was an insatiable lover. I didn't mind that at all. It helped me forget the present and remember the past. I talked incessantly to the new Gillian about the old. It should have made her angry, but it didn't. She encouraged it, saying that I had to get it out of me, and once that was done, then perhaps my condition would improve.

"You've bottled her up inside you. Just let it come," she would say, stroking my hair.

The truth always has to lay itself at our feet, before we recognize its terrible form. Truth is an ugly creature, when it confirms our nightmares.

For three days, in the middle of half-term, I did not leave the flat. Gillian brought me food from take-aways and she and I lay in bed all day playing word games. I shuffled letters around the page playing hangman with her in a desultory fashion. She seemed full of life. Her skin glowed with the ripeness of a woman in late pregnancy.

On Friday afternoon Gillian handed two figures before I asked her to leave me alone.

Once she had gone I stared at the two stick characters she had drawn, dangling from their scaffolds. She

had given one of them a skirt. One man, one woman, decorating two sets of gallows. Just a word game. Only a word game.

I decided to play one of my own. On a blank part of the same piece of paper I wrote down EDGAR ALLAN POE and began rearranging the letters to form an anagram. Eventually I came up with a possibility:

A LA DOP*ELGAN*ER.

Almost, Edgar my friend, almost there. Two characters were missing – but it was close. I found that if I injected Hogg's nickname, PIC into what I already had, the result was:

A LA DOPPELGÄNGER.

But there was an "I" left over. "I" was redundant, superfluous to requirements, unnecessary. It had to be erased. "I" had to go. I was no longer of any use.

Shit! What was I doing? Who was this person laying in bed waiting to drift away into the ether? I was me. I was... I was...

I had forgotten my own name.

I rose and ran to the bathroom to look into the mirror. I stared in anguish...

...and cried out in fear.

My hair had turned a semitransparent white: a mass of glass-fibre filaments.

I rushed to my bed and threw myself onto the covers, sobbing in frustration. The hands that gripped the sheets were bloodless and opalescent. I think I cried myself to sleep.

When I woke it was evening. I checked the mirror again, feeling better able to withstand the shock of my appearance. A faint copy of an albino would have had more colour in his cheeks.

I threw on what clothes I still owned and went for a walk. I expected people in Princes Street, well-lit as it was, to turn and stare. They did not. In fact, they hardly seemed aware of me at all, brushing my shoulder as I tried to avoid collision.

I managed to muster a dim spark of anger for Gillian – the *doppelgänger* of my ex-girlfriend. I had no doubt now that I had called her into existence. The internalized desire for Gill had been so strong, albeit subliminal, that I had unwittingly created her double to take her place. What I could not understand was how Gillian was managing to rob me of my vitality. What was she doing to me, that was causing the very energy of life to drain from me? There was something which Ambrosia had written, which I tried to call to mind, but the necessary concentration was too much for my weakened powers of reasoning. Putting one foot in front of the other – walking – was a problem in itself.

I stopped and watched the strong flow of living people flood around me.

It was about ten-thirty and patrons were coming out of the cinema across the road, pouring onto the pavements and running for parked cars. No one took any notice of me and I watched couples spilling into the streets, envious of their togetherness. Then I saw a pair I recognized.

They were one of the last couples to come through the double doors, pausing on the threshold.

Of course, I noticed her first – my beloved Gill – but her appearance brought a lump of anguish to my throat. She was – how can I say it? – yes, she was as translucent as frosted glass. I could almost see through

her. The lights of the foyer behind her revealed the bones beneath the facial flesh, and such thin, wasted bones they seemed too!

I think I let out a cry, and then he stepped forward, peering into the darkness. On seeing me, he grinned. A few months ago that smile would have been familiar to me, especially since it was framed by the upturned collar of my own overcoat. But I had not grinned like that, myself, for a long time. Especially not into a mirror.

Did I feel a loss of identity? Did I feel threatened? Did I feel helplessly lost?

Yes, all those, and more. But mostly I felt despair. The double-trap had caught us both, sapped us both, drained us both dry of personality, character, spirit. We had stolen each other from each other. I recalled then, Ambrosia's qualifying statement on the creation of desired entities: "If the unique already exists, and a replica is elevated from the conscious or subconscious mind, then displacement must occur."

I waved to Gill, still standing there on the steps of the cinema, and saw the delicate internal structure of my own hand, like a bird flying against the sun. She tried to wave back, but even as I watched there was a marked deterioration of her form, as it blended with the light behind her. Then I turned away, before I had to look at that other thing again: the manifestation of

my beloved Gill's unconscious desire.

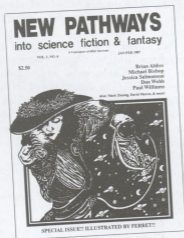
That was three hours ago. As I sit here writing, the lamp which shines upon the paper seems to grow brighter, but that is an illusion caused by my condition. It is me that is growing dimmer, not the world increasing in luminescence. The fingers that hold my pen begin to take on the consistency of air. I know that I shall soon cease to exist, in this place, where the dispossessed become unnoticeable, and simply fade from being...

Garry Kilworth's novel *Spiral Winds* – an expansion of his short story of that title, which has now been reprinted in *Interzone: The 2nd Anthology* as "Spiral Sands" – is due for publication in the near future. His last novel was *Witchwater County* (Bodley Head, 1986), and his last appearance in *IZ* was with "The Vivarium" (issue 15).

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1.

The Angle of Consciousness

Art by Ian Miller

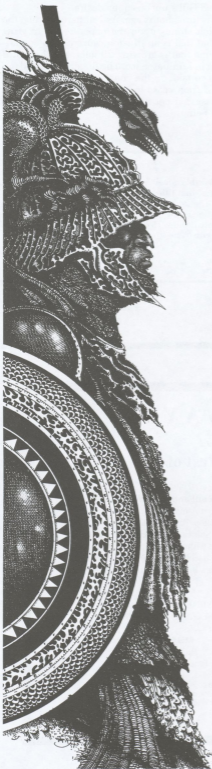
"My images are the stuff of dreams and apparition, the tremors that touch the skirt of day. Unspoken thoughts, stored memories, drawn up, to be aired – then twisted by fancy." So says Ian Miller, one of Britain's most lauded sf and fantasy artists.

Miller began his freelance career in the early 1970s, after graduating from St Martin's School of Art, London. His illustrations have appeared in many books, including David Day's *The Tolkien Bestiary* and a special Avon edition of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. Two volumes of Miller's work, *Green Dog Trumpet* and *Secret Art*, were issued by Dragon's Dream in the late 1970s.

He worked in Hollywood with animator Ralph Bakshi on the films *Wizards* and *Lord of the Rings*, and has been involved with many multi-media productions for theatre, video and television. For over two years, 1983 to 1985, he was Art Editor of *Interzone*.

Ian Miller is much in demand as a book and magazine illustrator, but his more serious work also enjoys the patronage of private collectors all over the world. He is something of an "artist's artist," highly regarded by his peers and an inspiration to younger talents. An exhibition of his work will be featured at the World SF Convention, to be held in Brighton over this year's August bank holiday weekend.

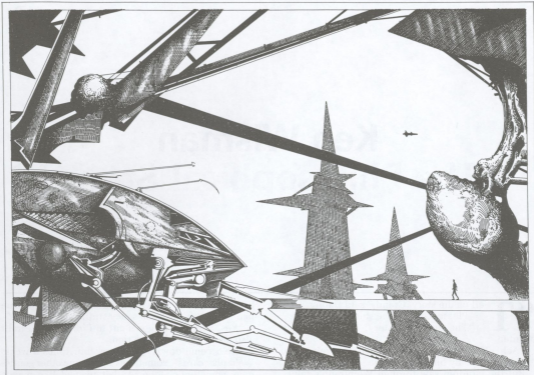
1. Figure from *The Tolkien Bestiary*
2. Doric spindle
3. Unfinished dream
4. Skyway
5. Cityscape



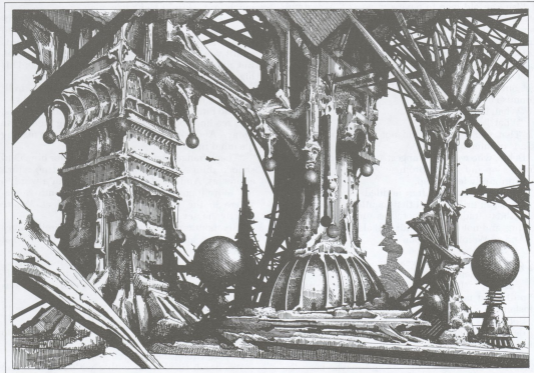


3.





4.



5.

Ken Wisman

The Philosophical Stone

Tell us the story, Grand," said Danny.
"Please, Grand. The story!" said Greg.
"The story! The story! The story!" Lois chanted.

"Ach! The story!" said Grandfather Weintraub. "Every year at my birthday it's the same thing."

But the children saw through Weintraub's reluctance. "The story! The story! The story!" they sang.

"Isn't an old man to have any peace?" Weintraub sighed. "Go see how far the grownups are with my birthday dinner. If there's time – who knows?" Weintraub threw his hands in the air.

David and Miriam ran into the kitchen. They were back in a wink. "An hour," they said.

"Oy," Weintraub said. "Then how's an old man to get out of telling his story? But you children got to promise one thing."

"What, Grand?"

"What?"

"That you'll sit still and not bother me with all kinds of interruptions."

Debra, who was the youngest, crawled up on Weintraub's lap and said: "I promise." Then she curled up and promptly fell asleep.

The rest of the children nodded. And the adults (who began drifting in at first mention of the story – a birthday tradition as sacred as turkey on Thanksgiving, and not one to be missed) also nodded.

And so Weintraub began.

Hah! So many years ago. Who could count them all?

"In those days I had a friend named Pirelli. And he had the apartment a couple flights upstairs.

Both of us are retired in those days. Me? I sold my little coat business, made some small investments and lived off them. Modest. But comfortable.

"Pirelli was a retired salesman. And I think he could have sold anything to anyone and maybe been the

best salesman in the whole world. Except a battle he had all his life with the saucy stuff.

"Yes. Selling was god's gift to Pirelli. And Pirelli also had a big wish to be rich.

"He'd come down here three, four times a week. We'd play cards – sometimes with some other gentlemen, sometimes alone. And it seemed like maybe once a month – around the time the sky's got the full moon in it – Pirelli had a new plan.

"A few times Pirelli talked some of our acquaintances into his plans. Once or twice he even talked me. It was like something electrical was in his words and if you listened you got plugged into his socket. But all we got was lighter pockets with Pirelli and his big schemes.

"Then one day all that changes. No more big Pirelli plans. No more rich Pirelli. Weeks go by. Months.

"And Pirelli don't come down so often for the cards. He's reading books he says and spending time in the library. And who am I to condemn a man for making his mind intellectual?

"Then strange packages start arriving for him. Odd shaped things with brown wrappers and no return addresses. And all of a sudden – without a word to me – Pirelli goes off somewhere for a month. Somewhere in the Far East he once hinted at. Where exactly, he never told me.

"Six months of this go by and finally Pirelli comes down to my apartment and he says: 'Weintraub, what your problem is is you never take a chance.'

"And I says: 'Pirelli, I'm too old for taking chances.' And all the time I'm thinking: Watch it, Weintraub, 'cause the moon's full up in the sky and as bright as that gleam in Pirelli's eyes.

"Then Pirelli says to me: 'Weintraub, how would you like to be the richest man in the world?'

"And I says: 'Pirelli, at my age I'm just happy to have a good bowel movement –'

At that, two of the children giggled.

Weintraub fixed them with a withering eye, and

David and Penny retreated behind the wall of adults and kids who were still gathering.

"Sorry, Grand," said a tiny voice from behind the wall.

"Sorry."

And Weintraub continued.

"Of course Pirelli had an answer for my answer and an answer for the one after that. And he wore me down until I shouted: 'Pirelli, I can see by the full moon you got a new scheme.'

"And Pirelli gets suddenly secret and whispers: 'Lead into gold.'

"'Chicken livers into palm trees,' I whisper back.

'What're you talking here, Pirelli?'

"'Alchemy.'

"And Pirelli goes into a big explanation about something called the Philosophical Stone and how it could turn base metal to gold. Then he brings down some books, strange books by nutty people I never heard of.

"I read through some of these books, and I pass judgment: 'This is the worst nonsense I ever heard. What's 'the Secret Process' and 'the Mysteries of the Ancients' and 'the Elusive Truth of the Initiate?'"

"And Pirelli says: 'Code, Weintraub.'

"And I says: 'If they're going to write in code, why write at all?'"

"And he says: 'To separate the chaff from the wheat, the amateur from the true seeker.'

"And I says: 'So you fit the bill, Pirelli?'"

"And he says: 'Forget that stuff, Weintraub. I got something better here. I got books that break the code.'

"So he's got half my interest now. And I read some of his books. But only three. And at the end of a week I tell Pirelli: 'Three books. Three different conclusions. What you got is more nonsense.'

"But Pirelli could talk. Pirelli could sell. There must've been something infectual like cold germs in his sentences. The longer I listened the more germs got inside and clogged my head as thick as Pirelli's.

"By two in the morning he had me worn down with his talk of a Philosophical Stone. Besides, he made a promise: 'Weintraub, all you gotta do is assist me. Never a red cent will I ask --'"

At that moment, Lydia waltzed from the kitchen and innocently announced: "Dinner in half an hour."

She was greeted with catcalls and shushes from the army of children and adults now assembled. Grandfather Weintraub fixed her with the withering glare.

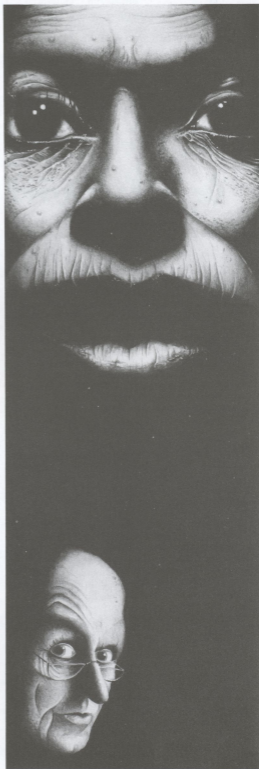
"The Story - right?" Lydia asked. Without waiting for an answer, she slunk back into the kitchen.

And Weintraub picked up The Story's thread.

"Pirelli goes out and buys all kinds equipment. 'Instruments of the Adept,' he called them. 'Instruments of the inept,' I said. He gets this special furnace he hooks to the gas. And a mortar made of agate or something. And a crucial bull and a retart. Then there was something called a mattress, only it wasn't for sleeping. It was a glass thing. For distillering stuff.

"The reason I remember it so well is I made it into a goldfish bowl. It was the only thing what survived Pirelli's disaster.

"There was lots of other stuff, but most of all there



was all kinds of metals. Silver. Gold. Mercury. Lead. And chemicalistic stuff like night-rights and sulfurs.

"It set Pirelli back a pretty penny – the bars of silver and gold especially. One day Pirelli says to me: 'I'm about broke with what I invested.'

"And I says: 'Not a dime, Pirelli.'

"And he looks hurt. 'Of course not, Weintraub. But if you should find a couple of likely investors –'

"And I says: 'If I bump into a couple of those I'll be sure to bring them by. When do we make this Philosophical Stone?'

"And Pirelli says: 'Next week you begin gathering morning dew for purifying the Philosopher's Mercury.'

"And one week later, before the sun's up in the sky, I find myself on a subway going uptown. When I get out at Central Park, I start collecting annoying little dew drops with a tiny spoon and big glass jar. I'm cursing Pirelli in all that cold and damp and don't bother looking up when two gentlemen come up behind me.

"The first gentleman says: 'Whatcha doin'?"

"I still don't look up. 'Collecting dew,' I says.

"And the first gentleman says: 'What kinda doo you collectin'? Dog doo?' Then he turns to the second gentleman and he says: 'Elroy, this old guy's collectin' dog doo.'

"And Elroy says to me: 'What you gonna do with that doo?'

"Use it to make gold,' I says.

"And Elroy turns to the first gentleman and says: 'Delron, this old guy says he's gonna make doo into gold.'

"And without a word Delron smiles and pulls out a knife the size of the Chrysler Building."

Weintraub paused and sighed and said, "Anyone want to break for a snack before dinner?"

The crowd of children went wild. "No!" they shouted.

The grownups, who had heard The Story before and who knew Grandfather Weintraub's dramatic tricks, smiled secretly.

"Okay, okay," Weintraub sighed.

And he began again.

"So Delron starts picking at his cuticles with that knife – so much so you'd think he was a manicurist.

"Then I look up for the first time and face those two gentlemen and calmly tell them about Pirelli and Mercury and alchemists and the Philosophical Stone. Maybe my words got just enough Pirelli germs 'cause Delron and Elroy look like they're about to sneeze.

"And Elroy says to me: 'Take us to this cat, Pirelli.'

"So I take Elroy and Delron to Pirelli's philosophical laboratory. And Pirelli begins working on them with his electrical voice. Soon Delron's sitting with his mouth open and Elroy's nodding and asking all kinds questions.

"Then Elroy and Delron go away carrying a big load of Pirelli's books. Seven days later Elroy and Delron come back with a big roll of dollars, three gold watches and a couple wedding rings.

"Pirelli's got his investors. So Elroy starts assisting Pirelli, and Delron and I start playing cards. Gin. Penny a point.

"In neither case was it a marriage in heaven. Delron cheated at the cards. And Elroy argued with Pirelli on points of The Work – as they called it.

"Oy! One argument I remember was something about 'prime matter.'

"Elroy says to Pirelli: 'Armand Barbault in *The Gold of the Thousandth Morn* says you got to be guided to the prime matter by a medium through 'strology. I know this woman uptown does them Tar-roh cards and horror-scopes, and she says the prime matter was silver.'

"And Pirelli says: 'I'm telling you Fulanelli says the prime matter is mercury.'

"While they're arguing, I says to Delron: 'Not only are you a crummy gin player, you're a crummy cheater.'

"And Delron says to me: 'My hand slipped, man.' And he takes out his Chrysler Building and starts his manicure.'

"So, like gentlemen we all worked out our compromises. Elroy and Pirelli decided on both mercury and silver to work with. Me and Delron switched to Scrabble.

"Unfortunately, Elroy and Pirelli never got to settle who was right. Three or four weeks after they got to be investors, Delron and Elroy exited our lives – five to ten, armed robbery.

"Now, with Delron and Elroy out of the picture, I'm re-elected to help Pirelli. Six months into this alchemy business I notice Pirelli's been sneaking visits to his old enemy – the sauce. A man's business is his business, but I see it's affecting The Work.

"One time Pirelli explained about how each stage in The Work is called a certain thing. And you know whether the stage is successful by whether the thing you made looks like something else.

"And this one day Pirelli comes to me and drags me in front of a big glass beaker where he's been distilling stuff. Pirelli, who's been tipping all day, smiles and points proudly and says: 'Virgin's Milk.'

"And I says: 'If that's supposed to look like the milk of a virgin, then we got troubles.'

"And Pirelli says: 'Well, what does it look like to you, Weintraub?'

"And I says: 'A tunafish sandwich.'

"And Pirelli says: 'The trouble with you, Weintraub, is the whole world looks like a tunafish sandwich.'

"So I reach in and pull out the tunafish sandwich and take a bite.

"Needs mayonnaise,' I says.

"And Pirelli swears off the liquor.

"So The Work continued. Me and Pirelli took his prime matter through a thousand distillations. Toward the end we were working round the clock and were sleeping on the floor.

"The terrible thing about it all was that Pirelli was fooling with junk like sulfurs and charcoals and something called potsum night-right – the ingredients you make gunpowder with.

"On the last day Pirelli wakes me up with his shouting: 'Weintraub! We got it!'

"I looked at the stuff in the big, glass mattress. Tapioca pudding. Except maybe it burped once or twice like alka-seltzer in a clump of dough.

"I don't say anything to Pirelli. Secretly I'm happy

it's over. I'm convinced Pirelli's mind snuck under the door weeks ago and went on vacation.

"And Pirelli says to me: 'Just one more process.'

"He runs around looking like a crazy man – Pirelli ain't showered or shaved or eaten in a month – and he puts things in a pot over his little furnace.

"And I says: 'Pirelli, that stuff you're burning smells like an egg what's one year old. Is that sulfur –?'

"That's the last thing I say for a while 'cause there's this big explosion. When I wake up, Pirelli's philosophical laboratory is wrecked. Except for the glass mattress here which was turned over and leaking on the floor.

"In a clearing in the smoke I see Pirelli on his knees, his face all black except where his two eyes shining like a man with a fever. He's bending over the puddle of tapioca pudding and spooning it into a tiny bottle.

"Pirelli sees I'm awake, crawls over and holds the bottle in my face. 'My dream,' Pirelli says.

"And I says: 'With tapioca pudding you turn lead into gold?'

"And Pirelli says: 'Forgive me, Weintraub. I lied. This stuff is not what I told you it would be. It's 'Drinkable Gold.'"

"And I says: 'What?'

"And he says: "'The Universal Medicine.'"

"And I says: 'What?'

"And he says: 'All that stuff about metallic gold was to mislead the gullible, Weintraub. What the alchemists were really making was the "Elixir of Life," the "Fountain of Youth," the "Golden Water of Immortality.'"

"And I managed one more: 'What?'

"Then Pirelli pulled the stopper on his tiny bottle of tapioca pudding and put it to his mouth. He paused and said: 'The great alchemists lived nearly forever. Like Albertus Magnus. Eighty-seven years. Flammel to 88. Roger Bacon to 80.'

"I shrugged and said: 'Big deal.'

"And Pirelli says: 'Hah! The average age then was 38. Eighty ain't so unusual anymore, Weintraub. But nowadays 140, 160, 200 would be. And some of those guys disappeared. Just dropped out of sight and were never found. Immortal.' Pirelli shoved the bottle against my lips. 'Here, old friend. Take the first sip.'

"I sputtered and spat but a drop or two got through and made my tongue burn. Pirelli laughed like a maniac and took the bottle and finished the whole thing. While he was doing it I felt not so good in my stomach, and I fainted.

"The next I know I'm in a hospital and they're telling me Pirelli's dead. Poisoned. And they tell me I had a real close call. But I'm lucky even though my hair and teeth and fingernails have fallen out."

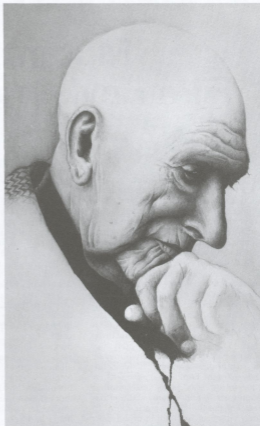
Weintraub paused and sighed. The Story was done.

But one of the children pointed out: "Your hair's on your head, Grand. And you've got your fingernails."

"Grew back," Weintraub said. "But the teeth now – oy, don't ask."

At that moment, Lydia popped out of the kitchen followed by a bevy of other women. Lydia carried the cake.

Then everyone burst into song.



*Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday, Grand Weintraub.
Happy birthday to you.*

To which some of the children added:

*How old are you now?
How old are you now?
How old are you, dear Gra-and?
How old are you now?*

Debra, who had curled up and fallen asleep at the beginning of The Story, woke in Weintraub's lap and said, "How old are you Great, Great, Great Grand?"

"Ach!" Weintraub said. "Never ask a man over a hundred his age. I'm 129 today, sweetheart. With god's blessing I'll reach 130."

Ken Wisman has sold a couple of short stories to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* recently, and one to Charles L. Grant's anthology series *Shadows*. Born in New York, he has a Master's degree in English Literature. He now lives in the Massachusetts countryside, and works as a supervisor of technical writers. "Work has my head and body; writing has my heart and soul."

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Other celebrations apart, it's the tenth anniversary of the summer of fun: the year of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* and what seemed at the time the dawn of a new golden age in science-fiction film. At this commemorative moment, it seems meanhearted to regret some of the dicky windfalls borne in on that first gust of fresh air. It takes a real effort of memory to recapture just how blah films were in the seventies, when all the good movies were either French, Australian, or East Coast Catholic, and the box office was dominated by middle-aged stars in off-the-peg urban thrillers. In those far-off flared-leg days the future was either a plastic whimsy or a lugubrious warning; it took the advent of the Force to get us to see that the future was really just another comic strip, and whatever the crassness of the *Star Wars* era it's hard to deny it's been something of a *decennium mirabile* in sf cinema.

The all-time top ten box-office chart, stagnant till the mid-seventies, has been swamped by fantasy adventures. The eighties phenomenon of long-running series titles continues to print money, with *Star Trek* now pulling ahead of *Rocky*, *Superman*, *Star Wars*, thanks to the increasing threat of elderly stars dying on the picture. We've seen amazing technical strides in effects, editing, and design; the emergence of a whole class of eminently bankable specialist fantasy directors like Spielberg, Lucas, Zemeckis, Cameron, Ridley Scott, Terry Gilliam, David Lynch, John Badham, Jim Henson, Ron Howard, Leonard Nimoy (haha, just kidding); even a new generation of performers (Ford, Lambert, Reeve, Hauer, Gibson, Schwarzenegger) who've made international reputations primarily through their fantasy roles. By contrast, even the better seventies product like *Sleeper*, *A Boy and his Dog*, *Dark Star*, *Rocky Horror*, *Death Race 2000* has mostly dated past the point of watchability with pleasure. I suppose it's conceivable that ten years hence we'll think the same about *Brazil*, *Alien* and progeny, *ET*, *Blade Runner*, *Mad Max 2*, *Back to the Future*, *Splash!*, *Time Bandits*,

Superman, *The Fly*, and a host of lesser hits that feature fondly on personal lists; it is, after all, an endearing feature of cinema that the artform's still young enough for its products to date rapidly, passing from chic to nostalgia with barely a blink between. But I'd defy anyone to come up with a list of ten really wonderful sf films from the seventies, or to limit such a list from the eighties to ten.

Of course it would be naive to credit all this to the *Star Wars* phenomenon. Sf movies have found themselves at the happy intersection of a number of genre booms: the surge in stunt movies, horror and suspense, teen pictures, even lamebrain comedy has all helped the genre to float, and the emergent homevid market planted an invaluable breakeven safety net for modest genre entertainments, allowing far more oddball cheapies to get made and seen. Pop video, too, has contributed, inputting a flash period style heavy on visual flair, fast edits, and technical innovation; and new technology has kept six achievements in a perpetual leapfrog of progress. After the initial blurge of imitations, *Star Wars* itself has proved a film of only limited direct influence, a door-opener rather than a model in its own right. With hindsight, the most mimicked film of the eighties could turn out to have been *Blade Runner*, chief pioneer of the distinctive (and already fast-dating) film bleu urban romanticism so glumly prevalent in heavy metal promos and ads for financial services. But it couldn't have happened without a phenomenon unique in motion picture history, a durable and lucrative genre market created almost overnight by a single motion picture.

Whether 87 will prove a worthy anniversary is hard yet to judge, though it's had a good share of blockbusters in the first half and will no doubt manage at least one in the second half out of *Spaceballs*, *Superman IV*, and *The Princess Bride*. A strong New Year (*The Fly*, *Peggy Sue*) was spoiled by a generally damp spring (*Flight of the Navigator*, *Little*

Shop of Horrors) – though it was nice to see the extremely strange *Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai across the Eighth Dimension* get a UK release at last, even if it closed the only cinema that showed it and slid straight off on to video. *The Voyage Home* had a grating sense of barrel-scraping to me, but a lot of people were quite entertained, perhaps because they'd just seen the other big spring import, in comparison with which *Logan's Run* would have seemed scintillating. The thing that makes *Mannequin* remarkable is that nobody, neither the critics nor the movie business, can understand why it was such a massive hit, or indeed why it was a hit at all. It's not as if there's a gaping hole in the market for films about a legendary princess from a vanished era magically reincarnated as a plastic dummy (who said *Grace Slick*? let's keep the cheap shots out of it). And apart from the vacuous plot, forlorn performances, and gags that would need jump-leads just to get them to turn over, it manages to sustain a seamless run of moments any one of which would be the kiss of death to any normal movie. "Epru, Egypt," runs the first title, and after a pause: "A Really Long Time Ago." Another, slightly longer pause. "Right Before Lunch." Anyone who doesn't run out screaming then has to sit mesmerized through what has to be the worst credit sequence since *Carry On at your Convenience*. Everyone, actors included, seems embarrassed by the witlessness of the basic concept, and the film almost falls over itself to apologize; there's little more depressing than a protractedly hysterical "I must be going mad! This is too wacky!" sequence – something wisely avoided in the prototype *Splash!*, whose premise was after all even more idiotic. So why the Stateside success? I can only blame it on this mush about true love across the millennia/light-years/species barrier, which needs a lot of nerve to try these days and *Starman* wimped out on by trying to be sensible. Presumably once the studios crack the formula we can look forward to zany romantic comedies about a boy's love for his bitch labrador, headless cadaver, oven-

ready chicken, or transient viral infection. Serve us all right.

In fact, there's only been one sf film this year that's so astonished me by its daring and ingenuity as to leave me in a kind of physical shock, and it's a film that cleverly bypassed altogether the audience that would have understood it best. I don't suppose anybody over the age of consent would be seen dead going into a movie called **Space Camp** without the help of horn-rim specs, a heavy blond wig and false droopy moustache, so let me, without exaggeration, spill the story. Three or four years hence, five variously unlovely stereotype adolescents sign up for NASA's Space Camp at Huntsville, Alabama. Kit includes one spunky feminist who wants to be the world's first woman Shuttle commander, one brash dickhead who wants to get off with her, one girl genius who dresses keen and giggles a lot, one underprivileged black youth who really digs science and needs to show the world he can cut it intellectually, and for the, ehem, younger element in the audience one ghastly ten-year-old who dreams he's Luke Skywalker. (This is Leaf Phoenix, brother of the more talented River, whose toked-out hippie parents clearly have a lot to answer for. Didn't Leaf use to be the name of Robin Williamson's dog?) They spend the first half training under tuff starlady role-model Kate Capshaw, learning astronaut skills in an uncanny approximation to a certain kind of grisly management course, and setting up character goals and plot devices for the second half with brisk transparency ("Why do I have to learn to take orders/make decisions in an emergency/bring the shuttle out of a spin?") For reasons passed over, kid Phoenix is able to steal a \$27m baby robot, reprogram it with a screwdriver, and keep it holed up in his wardrobe without any of the NASA staff seeming too bothered; and this puking machine determines to fix his human chum a ride in space by converting a cockpit Shuttle trial to a real launch. A dull plot comes to life at last after an engineered accident forces blastoff with insufficient oxygen, no radio link, and only Capshaw's experience to draw on (with clear signals she's due for imminent decommissioning from the story); and successive nail-biting crises are overcome by the resourceful kids in a series of increasingly preposterous plunges through the credibility barrier.

The audacity of all this (let it be said at once) lies not in any breadth of invention or ground-breaking novelty in this dusty old plotline, but in the film's quite shameless promotion of a partisan political interest at a carefully-targeted juvenile audience. Of course this movie was in planning well before January 1986; of course to an extent the moment found its film

rather than vice-versa. But the disingenuousness is staggering all the same. "The cooperation," runs the end-credit disclaimer, "of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the making of this motion picture does not indicate approval of its contents or the treatment of the characters depicted therein." (Somebody obviously fought hard to get that last clause included; why?)

Well, pull the other one, John. The whole movie is a blatant and spectacularly-timed PR job for NASA which someone, presumably not the divine hand of providence, has tailored with considerable shrewdness to current centres of public suspicion about the

lar that the accidental launch scenario was developed with NASA's help to be technically possible. But just look what you get when NASA is let loose to create its own designer cockup. Even if you discount the ex machina role of a \$27m animated espresso machine, you're still left with the odds-against of once in four million launches so carefully quoted in the script. And even if the unthinkable were to happen, this born-again shuttle is so safe and the ground admin so scrupulous that a random bunch of Hollywood zitbags could pilot it into orbit and back to base more or less unaided. One by one, in fact, all the dodgy myths line up. "What's the



From 'Space Camp'

Administration. There is, understandably, no reference even in passing to events of 1986, unless you count the unfortunate way Capshaw's makeup highlights her passing resemblance to Christa McAuliffe. The setting is an optimistic couple of years on, when the Shuttle programme is back on top, space station *Delalus* is well under way, and the Huntsville Space Camp is a national institution. The film's publicity has in fact been careful to stress NASA's full collaboration in the quest for authenticity, and in particu-

ple of going into space when we're all going to get nuked?" grumps the occasionally-perceptive dickhead. "Maybe," says the idealistic heroine, "we won't screw up like we have down here." "That sounds terrific. Let's really total this planet and blast off into space in the distant hope of finding another," he mysteriously fails to quip back.

When disaster strikes, it's emphatically not NASA's fault, and the crew, far from frying helpless in their can or plummeting out of the sky, have all

means to save themselves within their own control. Most suspect of all, the space programme is presented throughout as a mission of human enlightenment, all "golly wow doesn't it look beautiful from up here" and not a military payload in sight. And the creepy thing is that it's very, very effective. I didn't realize I still had all those buttons fully-functional, just waiting to be hit: the great sixties space myth, the glory glory up-with-the-stars images and aspirations that bring the water in your eyes, the floating round cabins and watching the blue earth turn and all the rest of that techno-poetical childhood dream. You think you can beat it, but film is just so seductive; and like any well-made youth exploitation picture (and this one gives a new meaning to the term), *Space Camp* keeps a sure hold on its audience by deft pacing of the tension, a cast rather better than their parts deserve, and the simple, effective man-

ipulation of some solidly primitive story ideas. It has the nostalgic buzz of technological suspense remembered from *Fantastic Voyage*, *Marooned*, or those once-wonderful Hugh Walters juveniles you either lived on or lived without, and for an untrained new generation it's irresistible. When radio contact with ground control is finally established on re-entry, and Kelly Preston shrieks "It's NASA," the Bank Holiday matinee jives cheered the name with whoops and applause. Not one of them stayed for the disclaimer.

So what can we prognose for the next decade? I know what I'd like to see, though I can't imagine it bears much likeness to anyone else's shopping list or to what we'll eventually be made to consume. I'd like to see *Empire of the Sun* sweep the 1988 Oscars (probable) and deserve it (optimistic). I'd like to see Jeff Goldblum play Richard Feynman, Martin Scorsese win the 1992

Democratic nomination, and lots more films about depressive architects photocopying the navel of Augustus Caesar. But most of all I want faster films for shrinking attention spans, more snazzy whiplash editing, stuff that reeducates our popular semiology by forcing us to process images at hitherto undreamed-of speeds. I suppose I could offer a pious wish for scripts with imagination, intelligence, and political and emotional maturity, but who would I be kidding? If you can't live without that stuff, you'll have a pretty wretched time at the movies. Film is at heart a manipulative medium, a throat-grabber; great films should crush your resistance and nail you to your seat, then turn on your emotions like playing a bank of switches. If, some time in the next ten years, they evolve the first primitive glintings of intelligence as well, I'll be more than satisfied.

JOHN CROWLEY

Continued from p. 16

around him. The journey of the soul that sets out at the novel's beginning, which Kelley the medium sees in a glass, continues through all the books. But while I know the next volumes' structures, what their largest contents are, I don't yet know their inner lives, and that's the thing that carries books through to completion.

You don't know that now?

I don't feel I do. The motive force of a book, I think, arises in the writer, not out of the subject matter. If you have an unhappy love affair, you won't necessarily write a book about an unhappy love affair, but whatever it is in you that causes you to have unhappy love affairs, and the pain and harm it does you, is going to inform whatever book you do write. If you start writing a book that is going to take ten years, though, that motive force might not last you through. But others

will come up. So you hope.

But the overarching design is projected by the original inspiration, and has to be followed.

Yes, indeed. It's like setting the rhyme scheme for a long poem, then making everything that comes bend to it as though naturally. In Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, what is almost uncanny is how events he set up in the 1950s pay off in volumes that take place in the 1970s, turning on historical developments Powell couldn't have known about. They seemed to have evolved out of the characters' earliest dispositions, an illusion Powell is able to pull off by sheer craftsmanship, developing those elements in the early novels that can seem inevitable in light of later history. You come upon things as you work through.

Have you come upon things, in that sense?

The historical story that starts in Aegypt and will continue through all four volumes, the story of Bruno, is not mine except in detail; its outlines are dictated by history. It has cast funny reverberations on the modern story, which I had not foreseen. I think that Pierce is going to undergo a Counter-Reformation, and a set of Wars of Religion, and come to his own heresy trials.

He's already had a War of the Roses. (Laughs) Right. Well, he's got a long way to go yet, a lot of suffering. It will not be until the last sentence of the last book that the travelling soul that sets out in the Prologue will arrive with Pierce's wake-up call, and a great deal will happen before then.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Excellent new stories by Cherry Wilder, Lisa Tuttle, David S. Garnett, Christopher Burns and others. Also: an interview with J.G. Ballard, plus all our usual features.

Brian Stableford

Layers of Meaning

There are, it is said, visionary moments of intense experience which can carry us beyond the fragile sliver of the present into the greater reaches of time, when we can grasp the context which gives meaning to the apparently trivial incidents of everyday life. Proust experienced such a moment when the taste of the *madeleine* dipped in tea recalled in him not merely the memory but the whole texture and significance of childhood. This is the story of a similar moment when a young curate, in the act of slicing the top from a boiled egg, was thrown by the merest whiff of hydrogen sulphide into an experience which, though it occupied only a fraction of a second in itself, linked past and future into a vast panorama.

The odour of hydrogen sulphide is not pleasant, but it is powerful, and thus can easily constitute a trigger releasing memories associated with it in the distant past which have long lain dormant. It is not renowned as a hallucinogen, but there may be resources locked up in the human mind which themselves need only an appropriate trigger, and the explosive release of pent-up memories might conceivably, in this case at least, have acted like a detonator priming a more devastating mental event. Whether this event was the product of the curate's imagination, or some amazing inflow of divine truth, there is no way we can know. However we choose to regard it, though, we must surely take the curate's revelation seriously, for there is no doubt that insights do visit holy men in the most mysterious ways.

The first impression summoned to the curate's mind was certainly a memory, of days gone by when his family kept a flock of chickens and the first duty ever to give his youthful existence a purpose was to collect the eggs which they laid. This was not usually a difficult task, but was not unskilful, for the chickens had the run of a big wooden barn, and were sometimes inclined to lay in secret places. It was as if they were consciously engaged in a game

with him, by which their task was to conserve their eggs for the making of hatchlings instead of surrendering them to the breakfast table. They rarely succeeded in this, because the curate as a boy had been too clever, and the broody chickens would often unwittingly lead him to the prize; when eggs were lost it was almost invariably because their layers had abandoned them, so that they went rotten, and when broken produced that unmistakable unpleasant stench.

No sooner had the curate caught the image of himself in the barn, though, than the barn began to change, and he saw another boy, who was not himself but perhaps a son or grandson in some future time, wandering an aisle between great banks of tiny cages, where literally thousands of hens were penned, with food delivered to them by plastic tubes and their eggs conveyed away by helter-skelter chutes. There was no labour now for the boy to do save check that all was well, and while he watched the scene continued to shift, so that the degree of automation of the system increased. Outside the barn, he knew, a forest of electric cables slowly extended to connect the apparatus within to control mechanisms without: green screens where words and figures marched aloft in militaristic orderliness.

Soon, the hens began to change too. The curate knew nothing of electronics, and could understand only vaguely what was happening to the regulatory mechanisms of the factory farm, but he did know a little of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and was able to grasp the basic idea of genetic engineering even though he knew nothing of DNA and the techniques by which it would one day be manipulated. He understood that scientists had learned how to interfere with the "blueprints" which eggs contained in order to grow into hens, and could thus remake the hens in subtle ways, to make them better layers. From his viewpoint in the aisle the curate (seeming to move now from one descendant *persona* to another with thoughtless ease) watched the hens become

fatter, watched their heads disappear so that the tubes conveying food went directly into their bodies, and watched the production of eggs become faster and faster. These curious headless, wingless, legless hens grew bigger and bigger, losing even their feather coats, until they were nothing but great white mounds of flesh, as big as elephants, churning out eggs with incredible speed.

At this point the curate – or perhaps one of the others whose consciousness he seemed to be sharing in series – remembered a kind of sermon which had been preached to him.

“Think,” someone had said, “not of an egg as a hen’s way of making another hen; think rather of a hen as an egg’s way of making another egg. Everything that the hen is to be is written in the molecules of the egg, and a hen is only one being which might be inscribed there. All bird, all animals, even human beings, grow from eggs into which their identities are written by the hand of God, and all the beings in Creation are merely ways by which eggs make more eggs. If the nature of God is to be judged by the contemplation of nature – if we and other of His creations are deemed to be made in His image – then we might easily conceive of God as the Cosmic Egg, and of the moment when His universe was set in motion as the moment when that Egg began to develop. If this be so, then there is nothing ungodly in the belief that all life in the universe has evolved from common ancestry, for there is nothing in the developing pattern of evolution but the unfolding of a plan by which primordial eggs devise better and better ways of making more eggs. Human beings may be nothing more than the eggs’ first attempts to reach a knowledge of the nature of their Creation, and by that means, a knowledge of their Creator. If we realize this, it will teach us a true humility, because it will become clear to us that there may in future be other beings better adapted by their eggs to this purpose, compared to whom we might be but the first feeble experiments.”

The curate now found that his vantage point was no longer confined to the egg-farm; his vision expanded to take in the work that was being done to eggs in order to make them grow into these strange forms, which could produce more eggs in such abundance. He became aware that it was not simply the eggs of birds that were being altered, but the eggs of fish, the eggs of silkworms, the eggs of oysters, the eggs of frogs, and even eggs stripped from the wombs of sheep and cattle. Eventually the information encoded in eggs taken from the ovaries of human beings also began to be rewritten by these ambitious creators. These reworkings of genetic blueprints grew so ambitious, as time extended into the curate’s far future, that it ceased to matter where an egg had come from, for many that were used had not come from natural organisms at all, but from other laboratory-created entities whose appointed function it was to produce various multitudes of eggs.

The curate saw eggs designed to produce foodstuffs, and eggs designed to produce materials used in building, in the manufacture of machines, and ever and always eggs for the production of more eggs. He realized, remembering the sermon he had heard, that this was simply part and parcel of the expanding

pattern of evolution and Creation; and that genetic engineers were simply one more way devised by eggs for the production of more and more eggs, which would in their turn produce eggs more abundantly and more cleverly than they had ever been produced before.

As the story that had somehow been pregnant in his own ill-fated breakfast egg went on, reaching further and further into the future, he saw eggs produced which were designed to be eaten alive, to grow within the bodies of human beings as symbiotes which would gradually devour the flesh of the body, merging with it and replacing the organs which nature had provided with more efficient ones. He watched humans, under the influence of such eggs, transformed like Achilles’ ship, part by part, until nothing remained of them that had been blueprinted into their own original eggs; even their brains had been consumed and regenerated, without interruption to the continuity of their inhabiting personalities.

These eggs, the curate saw, were rebuilding the fleshly envelopes of human souls, remoulding them into finer clay. The beings which emerged from such metamorphoses were stronger, much longer-lived, immune to all disease. At first, they seemed simply to be men, more perfect but essentially unaltered, but the processes of self-change which men had instituted did not stop there. He saw men adapted for shapeshifting, so that they could alter themselves fluidly, like werewolves of old but in controlled and much more various fashion. He saw men adapted in their limbs so that their organic nerves could be interfaced with the electronic wires of machines, so that men could blend themselves with their instruments: their vehicles, their factories, their artificial intelligences. He saw men adapted so that they could link their nervous systems one to another, to fuse their being with one another in many different ways. And all this was controlled and managed by the living eggs on which they feasted.

There came to his mind now more sermons, which he or the others with whom he was in tune might one day hear, though they took a crazy form in which the play with genes was reflected in play with words. He had heard of a philosopher named Nietzsche, who had promised the world of the future *Übermensch*, and he heard now that the promise had come true, and that the world had passed into the charge of over-men, who were also ova-men; that the world he lived in was ova-thrown and ova-taken, and a new one ova-grown and ova-wrought, governed more by ova-seers than ova-lords, and that all of this was but part of the great ova-flow which had been instituted in the moment of Creation and which must proceed until a kind of great circle was complete and the souls of men, reunited into the single great soul of *all mankind*, would become what they or it had in reality always been: the intelligence of God, the ultimate JEH-OVA-H; the Cosmic Egg which was all the eggs that there had been or that ever would be.

In the climax of this vision, which had been reached with an almighty rush that hardly gave the visionary time to wonder what on Earth had possessed him, the point of view which had in the beginning been contained within a single small boy, and had unfolded through the myriad minds of that boy’s descendants,

exploded into a galaxy of points of consciousness which were one as well as many: a sidereal system of souls infinite in extent. In spite of this, the sensation was as sharp as the initial sensation of memory; it seemed to the curate just as real, just as compelling, just as powerful and as urgent as any sensation ever could be or ever would be, as long as he might live.

“My dear fellow,” said the bishop, his host – the voice dispelling utterly by its awful mundanity the vision which had momentarily occupied his mind – “I fear that your egg is bad.”

“Oh no, my lord,” said the curate, anxious polite-ness compelling his reply. “Indeed it is quite good – in parts.”

Brian Stableford was recently given the Distinguished Scholarship Award by the Eighth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (Houston, Texas). He has been much in demand around the world of late, with invitations to give lectures in France and Japan. After producing a spate of short stories in the past year or two (some of them still to see print), he is now at work on a new sf novel, his first since the early 1980s.

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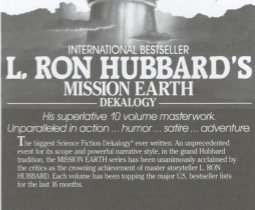
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Geoff Ryman

Love Sickness

Part Two

Synopsis of Part 1:

Marye is a self-obsessed, rather dour young actress. She lives in London, in a future in which education, law, manners and even traits of personality are all contagious viruses. She seems to be immune to some of them.

Marye yearns to love another woman. Such lust is a product of capitalism, bad deep grammar, according to the Party. The Party can cure bad grammar. At a kind of coming-of-age ceremony sometime in early adulthood, people are "read," and made ill with viruses, in order to cure them. No one knows when it will happen to them. Marye, for example, has not yet been read.

The models of personalities taken during the reading are made part of a universal "parliament" called the Consensus. The Consensus rules, the Party executes, and representative democracy is a thing of the past. The viruses that teach in babyhood and the concern with preserving personality might stem from an accident that happened before the Second Revolution: a contagious cure for cancer escaped. Without the life-extending benefits given by the oncogene, human beings die about age thirty five. The signs of health and the signs of disease are confused and indistinguishable.

Marye works at the National Theatre of Southern Britain, known affectionately or otherwise as the Zoo. At age 16, half-way through her life, she is still playing the bit part of Constable Dull in a production of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Trying to exchange a pair of boots, she meets in a wardrobe graveyard a woman called Rolfa. Rolfa is a seven-foot tall, drunken Woolfie of great musical talent. Woolfies are a clan that some years before the Revolution altered their own genes so that they could survive in the Antarctic, mining metals. They are covered from head to toe in fur. Woolfies co-exist with the Consensus, outside of its Laws. Their bodies resist the viruses. Rolfa, therefore, would not have been cured of any form of bad grammar. Buoyed up by this thought, and inspired by Rolfa's musical talent, Marye falls in love with her. This love appears not to be reciprocated.

Marye adjusts gradually to the idea that they will be friends. She dedicates herself to getting Rolfa's music known. Rolfa sings every night, thinking she is alone in the wardrobe graveyard. The music she sings is music of her own composition. Marye persuades Joseph the Postperson, who has a prodigious viral memory, to listen to the songs Rolfa composes and "store" them. In the meantime, Marye's fellow actors begin to learn of her generosity towards a Woolfie. Some of them are in a group of poseurs who call themselves the Vampires of History. The Vampires begin to help Marye in various ways.

Rolfa invites Marye to dine at the Woolfie' London house. Marye is stunned by the wealth on display. She meets Rolfa's two burly sisters and her father, who in Woolfie terms is a dwarf. The Family insist that Rolfa must take her turn working in the Antarctic. Any

acceptance by Rolfa into a human institution would put at risk the legal definition of Woolfies as being non-human. It is this definition that allows the Woolfies to make money outside the rules of the Consensus. Rolfa will not be permitted to sing lest she be used against her own people. Rolfa, quiet, withdrawn, seems unable to resist.

Marye leaves the dinner in a rage, drunk for the first time in her life. She returns to the Woolfie house to rail against them. Rolfa goes out to her in the street, hugs her, and she faints. The next morning, Marye wakes up in a park, covered with a blanket. Instead of being love-sick over Rolfa, she is now merely sick of her. She walks home to the Shell, a communal dormitory for actors. She sees a stranger, sitting on her bed. It is Rolfa, who has shaved off her fur and run away from home.

"Can I stay?" Rolfa asks.

Marye was not sure what she felt. "Yes. Yes, of course you can stay. What have you brought with you?" She meant clothes, shoes, toothbrush....

"Piglet," said Rolfa, and held up a shapeless lump. It was some kind of stuffed toy. "Piglet goes everywhere with me." She sat it on her lap, facing her, and looked at it fondly. Even from where Marye stood, Piglet smelled of biscuit crumbs.

"You didn't bring anything else with you?" Marye asked softly.

"Wasn't anything else to bring." Rolfa smiled at her. "I took some money. They'll say I stole it." She looked back down at Piglet. "I did."

"Will they come looking for you?"

Rolfa nodded. "They're scared. Papa will be scared. The Family says his genes are impure because he's so short. He'll try to keep me quiet, not let them know. He'll try to find me himself. We'll be safe for a while. We'll be OK for a while." She looked at Marye and seemed to be making a promise. "After that, they'll call out the bloodhounds."

"I'd better go and tell people not to let anyone know where I live."

"There's a problem," said Rolfa and turned. Underneath the cheap new blouse there was a dark swelling of fur. Rolfa held up a razor. "I couldn't reach," she said.

Marye came back from the showers with a bucket of hot water. They were silent and awkward with each other. Rolfa took off her blouse, but held it over herself, something she had never done when she had fur. Her skin had been stripped, cut, outraged. There were long straggles of fur that the razor had missed. Marye sawed at the fur on her back with the kitchen knife and used soap from the showers to get up a lather. Then she used the razor. Rolfa mewed quietly as the hair came off in soapy clumps. "I'm cold," she complained. To Marye, she felt hot, feverish. "We'll put you under a blanket," she said. She left Rolfa wrapped up on the bed and looking at her with a trust that made Marye doubt herself.

Well, Marye thought. I've got her. Now what do I do with her? The gift had been too sudden, too complete.

She went to each of the over-staffed information desks at the National and told them not to tell anyone where she lived. "Say I don't work here, say there is no record of me," she told them.

Marye had grown up as an orphan, surrounded by people she kept at a distance, and after the orphanages she had lived alone, had wanted to live alone. Her memories of her mother were faint; she saw her as a dim, warm maiveness. Her ideas of the forms that love could take were just as vague. She was full of misgivings.

She came back to find that her tiny room – with its bed, its sink, its cooker – had been covered in paper. Rolfa had found the books and papers rescued from her ruined nest. Rolfa lay on her stomach, filling the floor. Broken-backed books and loose sheets of paper filled the sink, sat on the cooker. How, Marye was wondering, did she do this?

"Look what I found," Rolfa said, and held up a book. It looked rumpled as if it had been left out in the rain, and there were ring stains on the cover.

"Oh," said Marye. The title of the book was unreadable.

"Do you think," Rolfa asked, "that you could possibly call me Pooh?"

The word Pooh meant something very specific and unpleasant to Marye. It did not mean teddy bear.

"Pooh," repeated Rolfa. "Pooh. You must have heard of Pooh. He's a bear. He's in a book." She shook the book at Marye. "This one." She showed Marye a drawing of him.

"He's not part of the cultures," said Marye and thought: she reads unheard-of books.

"You could call me Pooh. And I could call you Christopher Robin."

"Why?" said Marye warily.

"Here, look. That's Christopher Robin."

There was a drawing of a small neat person with a page-boy bob and shorts and sandals and loose blouse and a large umbrella. There was no doubt. Marye did indeed look exactly like Christopher Robin.

"No," said Marye.

"I was going to call you Eeyore," said Rolfa. "He's grumpy too."

"I'll tell you what," said Marye, "If I call you Pooh" – it really was very unpleasant – "do you promise, promise not to call me Christopher Robin?"

Rolfa nodded solemnly, up and down. Her hair still dangled into her eyes. She blinked. She saw Marye

looking at the state of the room.

"Pooh's very untidy," said Rolfa.

"Yes," said Marye nodding.

"But she does have other qualities." Rolfa paused and bit her lip. "I'm sorry about the beans."

"What about the beans?"

"I was feeling peckish, and all I could find was some bamboo full of beans, so I tried to warm it up."

Underneath most of the score for Peer Gynt, Marye found her only sauceman. Light, crispy, burned-black beans were now a permanent part of it.

"I'll buy you another one," said Rolfa.

"Good," said Marye, wiping the charcoal from the tips of her fingers. She took a deep breath, to calm herself, and began to explain the house rules. Dirty laundry in this bag here. Clean clothes in this bag. Dirty dishes there. Rolfa nodded in eager agreement. Oh yes, they must always wash up, just after dinner. Why, thought Marye, don't I believe you?

"I'm hungry," said Rolfa, with tame expectation.

They went to Gardens along the river, where no one would think to look for them, on the other side of Battersea. Beside an old Buddhist shrine, the first in London, they ate on benches under a marquee. It was crowded and noisy, full of people eating seafood, spicy squid and chillis. There was steam and sizzling sounds from the rows of woks. There were acrobats on the lawn. Marye watched the people in couples. People live with each other, she thought. Most people live with each other. Watching them usually makes me feel like a bottle with a message, washed up and left unread.

"What do we do now?" Rolfa asked, as if everything in this new world followed a polished routine.

They walked back along the other side of the river. There were children along the embankment, playing with hoops on moored barges. There was a traffic jam of carts heading back to the outreaches full of goods from the markets to be sold again. Young men on them leaned back onto melons and played harmonicas. A circle of women sat cross-legged on the pavement, shoving slivers of bamboo into shoes. They were cobblers. A small blonde woman with spectacles and a thimble was talking. "Well, my Johnny..." she began, her voice full of pride.

Rolfa and Marye sat in an old church in John Smith Square and listened to a choir rehearsing madrigals. They went to a market outside Westminster Abbey. Rolfa was hungry again. She bought some dried fish and munched it like candy. She bought a new sauceman and vegetables and bread and more fish. They walked through the September dusk, along Westminster Bridge, past fire-eaters, who blew sheets of flame toward the sky as children watched. Fat men in plaid shorts, Party members perhaps, laughed and passed money. There was to be an ostrich race across the bridge. Jockeys were trying to clamber up onto the backs of the birds. Hoods were snatched from the ostriches' eyes and they sprang forward. One of them spun in circles and then ran off in the wrong direction. There were cheers. For the first time she could remember, Marye felt young. She and Rolfa walked back to the Shell.

They lit a candle in the room and sorted out the

paper. They put pages back in bindings and reunited different halves of musical scores. They worked in silence. They were going to have to share the bed.

It was a small bed and Marye, Rolfa and Piglet were all going to have to fit in it. When the time came, Marye was surprised at how straightforward sleeping with Rolfa was. Rolfa simply took off her clothes and slipped under the counterpane. Without any preliminaries, she began to snore. Marye climbed in next to her with only the slightest trembling in her belly.

Rolfa was hot. Her feet stuck out of the end of the bed to cool. Her snoring was dragon-like, great gurgling snorts, agonized asthmatic wheezes, ruffles of sound like a horse blowing through its loose nostrils. Marye stared at the ceiling in the dark, and felt a trickle of sweat on her forehead.

"Rolf. Please?" she asked.

"Yum. Um." said Rolfa.

Marye reached around and pushed shut her mouth. The snoring stopped and then started again. Marye's hand brushed Rolfa's shoulder. It was as warm as a radiator, made piquant by the stubble of whiskers.

Piglet, Marye decided, also smelled of childhood sick.

Finally she slept, as if in a fever, a skittish sleep with dreams. She dreamt that Rolfa rose up all around her and covered her and that they made love. It was a bit like being rubbed by warm sandpaper. Marye could feel the bristles against her cheek and with the tips of her fingers. She awoke in the dark, overjoyed, thinking it had been real, and reached out to find the bed empty and cool.

There was a sizzling sound. Marye looked up and saw a flame. Rolfa was cooking. Marye sat up in the bed, propped her head on her arm and watched her. It wasn't going to be like that, it wasn't going to be like the dream or like the sickness either. It was going to be something calmer and more certain.

"I'm making some fried bread and sardine sandwiches," whispered Rolfa. "Want one?"

"No thanks," whispered Marye. Rolfa came back to the bed and sat on it cross-legged and began to munch. The bed, thought Marye, will be full of crumbs and smell of fish for weeks. She didn't mind.

The next day she got up and went to rehearsals. She left Rolfa reading one of the torn books. As she went down the stairs and walked along the pavements that reflected the low morning sun, she thought that Rolfa would be in the room when she got back was like a handwarmer. People carried them in winter, little boxes in which an ember of charcoal smouldered. She didn't even mind going to *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Inside the bare rehearsal hall, there was an air of high excitement.

"Oh Marye, you missed it!" said one of the Princess's ladies. She and Marye did not normally speak.

"Missed what?"

"Oh!" said the actress, wondering where to begin. "We're not doing the old production any more, we're doing a new one, our own."

The director came in. He looked feverish, eyes glistening. Marye thought he might be unwell. "Right!" he said. "All ready for the Birth of the New, Part Two. Marye. You weren't here yesterday. We're going to

do Dull's first scene. Now."

Brisk, brisk, thought Marye, what's got into him? She did Dull as she always did him, the only way she was capable of doing him, but now each time that she spoke there were affectionate chuckles from the cast.

"You see what I mean?" the director challenged them.

"Dull's not dumb, he's smart," said Berowne.

What is going on? thought Marye. They liked my Dull? It was like being back at the orphanage games of hockey, when people had cheered wildly, for no reason that Marye had ever understood.

"Right, back to Armado and Mote." The director peremptorily clapped his hands. The cast bustled into place.

Enter the Spanish braggart Armado and the boy called Mote. In the original production which the cast had so hated imitating, Mote was as arch and florid as his arch and florid master. He was going to become his master. It was a subtlety that was beyond these young actors. What this Mote had was innocence. He danced with the joy of the wards. "...but to jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary it to your feet...." When he was done, the cast applauded him.

"It's the words," he said shyly. "They're virulent!"

Marye watched as each performance fell into place. The Princess was less superior now, more wary and confused. The King was less of a fool and more of a good and quiet man. You could believe that they would love each other. It's alive, Marye thought. The whole damn play is like some huge wriggling fish.

This is what it's supposed to be like.

When the rehearsal was done, Marye felt like running back to Rolfa to tell her. The news felt heavy, like a ripe fruit about to drop. It had been ripened by the knowledge that Marye had someone to tell it to. Everything is happening all at once, she thought, walking quickly. She was aware that her life had taken wing.

But when she got back to the room, Joseph was waiting for her. He stood up from the bed and said, "Someone's been hunting for you. You and Rolfa."

"A Snide," said Rolfa, leaning back on the bed, looking pleased. "Papa would have hired him."

"A tall, thin man," said Joseph. "I told him no one of your name lived here."

Marye listened to the silence in the room. Snides had viruses that helped them sneak and search.

"They can hear thoughts," she whispered in fear.

"Not exactly," said Joseph, with a sideways grin. "It's not like that."

The air seemed to prickle. "What is it like?" Marye asked quietly. You know, don't you Joseph?

Still the angelic smile. "You catch thoughts. You see things. You feel things in your head. They are very difficult to understand. If you are with many people, the thoughts are jumbled. Marye, you must stay with people."

So I can still be part of the play.

"What if he finds me alone?"

Joseph still smiled. "You are many people, Marye. The viruses come from many people. Let them talk for you. Let them recite your lines. Let them add up things. Let them read books. You won't be traced. All these things are not personal."

"And Rolfa? She's here all alone."



Hood-eyed, Joseph turned, smiling to Rolfa. "Oh, Rolfa, her thoughts are not personal."

So Postpeople are Snides as well. What, wondered Marye, are Postpeople for?

"We better change rooms," said Marye.

Joseph nodded. Rolfa lay on the bed as if none of it mattered.

Marye went to Cilla. "We've got to trade rooms," she told her.

"Drop anchor. Hold. Why?" Cilla asked. She was told the story and was thrilled. "Right. Right away," she said. "We move."

"A new room?" Rolfa beamed, and jumped up from the floor. There was a bustling of bags. Rolfa kept cheerfully hitting her head on the lintels of doorways. The beds, the cookers, the pans, the armfuls of paper, were all exchanged in less than an hour.

"I'll go buy us all supper. See you," promised Cilla.

The new room was even smaller and did not have a view of the river. After the excitement of the move and of being hunted, Rolfa sat staring, disgruntled and pouting.

"There's no space," she said.

"There's space enough. We got everything in."

"There's no space for a piano."

For a piano?

Rolfa, how much money do you have? Enough to keep you in food for a month? How much money do you think I have? Marye had to tell her that life would be different now. Rolfa would have to live the cramped and constricted life of a human being.

"We live in little boxes, Rolfa," Marye said. "For us there is no buying a way out. We don't have pianos.

We don't have rooms big enough for them."

"Then where can I play?"

"There are practice rooms, in the Zoo."

"They won't let me into them." Rolfa began to pace.

Something is going to have to happen, quickly, Marye realized. We won't be able to live like this for long. Something is going to have to happen with her music.

"You can always sing," said Marye.

"Where? Where can I sing? If I try to sing here, people ask me to be quiet. And if there's a Snide after me, I've got to keep quiet."

Cilla did not come bringing supper. Joseph came instead with a message.

"He is in your old room," said Joseph. "The tall, thin man. He will not go away. He is sitting on the bed. Cilla was playing *Madam Butterfly* over and over in her mind. He knew that. I said, Cilla your friends are waiting at the cafe. So she could leave. She asked him to go, and he shook his head. How long he will stay there I don't know. But I think he will soon come here."

They had to move again. To move a second time was not fun. It was wearing. They traded rooms with Cilla's boyfriend, a well known young actor, who made a great show of condescending. Marye did not like being grateful to him.

They spent the night in their new, glum room and did not even light a candle in case the Snide was watching. They spoke in whispers. Rolfa walked back and forth at the foot of the bed.

"When I was bad, Papa would lock me in the closet," she said. "It was very dark and I knew there

was no one to come for me. So I used to sing to myself in the dark. And it got so that I would do bad things just so that I could be locked away. It was the only place I could sing. But I can't sing here. I can't even sing."

Marye knew why people who lost their homes, even ones they had hated, wept for them. She had spent many nights comforting newcomers to the orphanage. It was the role of people on the bottom of the social ladder to offer friendship first. The ones with power waited.

"Whisper a song then."

"Tuh."

She will have to become part of the Consensus, Marye decided. If she is part of the Consensus, she will be a human being and they will let her use the practice rooms, they will look at her music, they will give her money and a place to live.

If nothing happens she will go. She will have to go. What is the difference between this and Antarctica? It is still exile. The thought did not come to Marye that she herself was the difference.

That night she couldn't sleep again. She was trying to think of what she could do. Could she ask Joseph to sing the music that he remembered? Could she coax Rolfa into one of the rooms of the powerful who waited, and persuade her to sing, cold? Marye finally fell asleep, sitting on the floor, only her head and shoulders resting on the bed.

She sat up suddenly some time later, knowing that she had been asleep. It was still dark outside. The counterpane was over her shoulders.

"I have been in bed forever," said Rolfa. "Isn't there something we can do?"

"There's a market open now. It's for stallowners, open early. We could go there!"

They crept down the unlighted stairs of the Shell, clutching on to each other, dreading a tall thin shadow. They slipped through the streets, their hearts pounding. They followed a butcher's cart, pulled by a huge and plodding white horse with a beautiful white mane. They reached the gas lamps, with their shining cotton wicks, and they saw the heaps of things to buy. Sparrows in cages had been dyed bright colours. There were whole smoked chickens, old furniture, T-shirts with pictures printed on them, musical instruments, and piles of fruit and vegetables.

"Pooh wants this," said Rolfa. "Pooh shall have it." She bought a pineapple. The stallowner was looking at them.

"Isn't it funny how a bear likes money," Rolfa said, sorting coins. Marye felt her mouth go taut with embarrassment and the danger of it. He will remember us, she thought. They left as a corner of the sky was turning silver and the sound of horses' hooves announced the city was waking up. Streetsweepers in blue uniform nodded hello as they passed.

It became their routine. Rolfa went to the market in the mornings in the dark. It was her time out. Marye would get up with her, and help her shave in the showers, a candle planted on the floor. Then Marye would go back to bed and lounge in its warmth. That was her time. When the sky was lighter, she would get up and clean the cooker, and undo whatever damage Rolfa had done with her pre-dawn fry-up.

"I hope you bought a new alcohol cannister," she

said once, when Rolfa got back. "You used this one up."

"You mean the cooker won't work?" Rolfa asked in dismay. "And I got us something special for breakfast."

"What is it?" Marye asked ruefully. "Seal?"

"No. Penguin." Rolfa held it up. It still had its feathers and horny feet, but at least it didn't kick.

"Well, I hope you can eat it raw."

"I suppose it is all right in a salad," said Rolfa, still looking crestfallen.

She'd also bought some peaches and some seaweed, and so they had a peach and penguin seaweed salad for breakfast – or rather, Rolfa did. Marye ate a peach and watched Rolfa bite through sinews as thick as her little finger. The sink was full of feathers. Marye smiled.

"Pooh," she pronounced Rolfa, as if knighting her.

After breakfast, Marye would leave Rolfa for the day, reading a book. At the entrance of the Shell, the cast of the play would be waiting. Marye would walk in their midst to rehearsals at the Zoo, protected by a cloud of thought.

Marye learned things about them. She learned that Berowne was in love with the Princess and wanted to be a father. The Princess did not want to carry a baby. Berowne was thinking of carrying the child himself. The King, handsome, kind, faraway, loved nobody, but was one of those people who are, effortlessly, loved. The girls felt warmth and sympathy for him, as well as loving his blonde-green curls and luxuriant beard.

They were all so ambitious. They all had such plans – characters they wanted to play, pictures they wanted to paint. Marye, as always, was quiet among them, but for once she was not full of resentment. She was content to go unnoticed. She found she liked being part of a group. And when she did say something, it would sound obvious and banal to her, but the actors would exclaim, "Oh, Marye, you're always so sensible!" She would understand that it was not an insult. "Not like you butterflies," she replied once, with a chuckle. There was a kind of quiet acknowledgement on both sides of who she was.

Then one morning, on the walkway, the Princess whispered, "Marye. That's the Snide!"

It was like swimming in the ocean and seeing a shark.

A tall man in a black coat was coming towards them. He ambled, hands in his pockets. It was a windy day and the tails of his black coat flapped. The Snide had a lean and dreamy face, with hooded eyes and a slight smile. His hair was like a pale mist, disordered and thinning.

Marye forced herself to look away from him, but she still saw the face in her mind. She hated it. It was sly and soft at the same time, sleepy, almost gentle, except for something glinting within the slits of the puffy eyes.

Think of something else! Marye told herself.

Me, an't shall please you. Marye remembered one of her 13 lines. *I am Anthony Dull*. Nothing happened. Think of his coat, she told herself, what did it cost, how many labour-hours? Count them. The viral clock in her mind refused to work.

Marye had spent a lifetime beating down the viruses. They now deserted her. In her terror, she could not dredge up one of them.

Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Jane Austen. *It is a truth universally acknowledged*, she recited to herself, *that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife*. There was no answering spark of life.

The walkway was elevated and narrow; they would have to pass the Snide. "Ack!" exclaimed the King, loudly. "We've taken the wrong walkway."

All the actors turned at once, and walked in the opposite direction. The Snide followed. Marye could hear the clattering of his shoes behind her on the resin surface. Wooden clogs. He wears them so that people will hear and be afraid.

Marx! Marye thought, where is Marx, they must have fed me Marx by the gram. Lenin, Mao, Chao Li Song. All right, music, then. Brahms, Elgar, anything. She began to hum *Das Lied von der Erde*. That's not a virus, she remembered. I learned that myself.

"Marye," called the Snide. His voice was light and mellifluous. "I'm singing to you, Marye. Can you hear me?"

Marye could feel terror seeping out of her, as if she were a leaking balloon. She heard his shoes, clip-clopping like horses' hooves. They were beside her now. The actors walked faster, looking at their feet, not knowing what else to do. Surely this was illegal! Of course it was illegal, but where was the Law? The Law was everywhere, invisible and alive. But there were no policemen.

"Eastern Europe, Marye," said the Snide. "Do you remember the trip on the train? You went to St Malo. An island with walls. Do you remember the sailboat, Marye? Rocking back and forth on the sea? Do you remember the sails, and the sailwomen, all in stripes?"

Marye glanced to one side, and saw him, walking with them, smiling. Her eyes darted back to the ground in front of her like frightened birds.

Me, an't shall please you. I am Anthony Dull!

"I can feel you, Marye," said the Snide. "Do you remember Brecknell Orphanage, the first place they sent you? Mrs Tate, your teacher, remember her? June 23rd. You were just two years old and they had to give you an English virus before you could understand what was being said. Do you remember suddenly understanding what was being said?"

Marye remembered none of it. She had blotted all of it out.

The Princess spoke, angrily. "Go away and leave us alone!"

The Snide stepped in front of her. The Princess had to stop walking. "Marye?" he asked, grinning hopefully, leaning down to peer into her eyes.

Marye swayed. It was as if the ground beneath had lurched. She stood still, beside the Princess, as if to help her. Instead of fear, Marye had a strange and most complete sensation of desperate and impending boredom. Maddening ennui rose up all around her like steam from the pavement.

She remembered words, German words, badly printed, in Gothic lettering.

DAS KAPITAL.

Marye remembered reading them. She remembered reading them in a very small, very cold room, smoking

cigarettes. She had rolled them herself, straggles of tobacco in thin papers that were held together with spit. Her legs were limply fleshed and useless. She sat in a wheelchair, by a window, on the ground floor of a block of flats. Just outside her window, noisy children were playing with a ball.

Marye began to walk again, but in her mind, she was sitting in a wheelchair.

"You're not Marye," said the Snide, gently, to the Princess.

Words on top of another page – Chapter One: The Commodity.

A forest of associations sprang up, thoughts and references neatly husbanded, ready for use. The thought came to the person who was reading: this will show the amateurs.

1. THE TWO FACTORS OF THE COMMODITY: USE-VALUE AND VALUE (SUBSTANCE OF VALUE AND MAGNITUDE OF VALUE).

The one who was reading sucked in smoke, past teeth that tasted of tobacco, down a leathery throat. Marye, who did not smoke, coughed.

The Snide looked up at her.

"Marye?" he asked.

Badly printed words were scrolling up through her mind, and embedded in them were aching joints and a tight band of nicotine poisoning across the chest and iron determination and icy pride. Embedded in the reading was an entire way of responding to the world, another sense of self. Me, thought the one who read, they chose me to read this. I understand it better than anyone. I am reading it for everyone. No more amateurs, ever again. They will all understand. There was a tingling in the middle of the cortex, a dancing of receptive virus, waiting to be turned into Marx. The one who read let out a triumphant blast of smoke from her nostrils. She was alive again, though she did not know it.

"I don't know anyone called Marye," said Marye, quite truthfully. "My name is Hazel. What do you want?"

"You like Marx," said the Snide, to let her know he could read her.

"Never met him," replied Hazel. "I wouldn't say I like his books. They've eaten up my life. But I do understand them."

Bourgeois fluff, she thought. God, I could tear you in half.

The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach or the imagination, makes no difference.

The use-value is intrinsic. Like the value of music.

"Does anyone know anyone called Marye?" Hazel demanded of the actors. Hazel's voice was harsh and her smile, meant to disarm, was fixed and chilling. Marye saw the face in memory, long and freckled with huge front teeth, black-framed spectacles, and a thickness of the neck that was the first sign of the physical distortion below.

"They do know Marye, but they're trying not to think," said the Snide. Suddenly he chortled. "They're all churning over their lines. They're all seeing exactly the same play in their heads. Except for you."

Hazel was without pity. She had grown up a cripple in Belfast and pity was her enemy, pity was the thing

that had held her back. What she wanted was respect, and if respect was not forthcoming, then she wanted fear. She had learned how to get it.

Hazel stared into the eyes of the Snide, and gave him the full blast of her contempt. Crawler, money-snake, you have a talent and what do you do with it? Then she showed him, carefully and clearly in her mind, one of the things that she might do to him if he did not leave. She would hit him in the throat. He would swallow his Adam's apple, and choke.

"My God, you're scary," he chuckled. "I think I love you."

Hazel was not above being flattered, and she recognized submission when she saw it. She chuckled too, warmly. "Fuck off," she said, and made a motion of brushing something aside.

The discovery of these ways and the manifold uses of things is the work of history.

Very calmly, deliberately, Hazel thought: it's a good job he doesn't know that Marye has gone away to Bournemouth.

"Bournemouth?" asked the Snide, amused.

"How did you know that?" said Hazel, grinning her poker smile and failing to sound surprised.

The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air.

"I don't," replied the Snide. "Know it, I mean." He made a brushing-aside motion now. "Bournemouth. Perhaps I will go to Bournemouth, perhaps I won't. But I will be back." As if his wooden clogs had suddenly grown roots, he stood still.

The actors walked on quickly, almost scuttling. Hazel went back to reading, bound up in the reading, inherent in it.

I only hope, thought Marye safe within a cloud of thought, that I can get her to stop.

She glanced behind, and saw the Snide, still standing, buffeted by wind as if by the thoughts of other people. He was looking at her and smiling a happy smile of discovery.

That night Marye dreamed that Hazel was sitting on the foot of her bed. She could see her, with the horse-mouth smile and the tiny legs, folded up under her. Hazel, Hazel, go away, get out, leave me alone! Hazel kept on reading. The words rolled past, projected onto the walls. You will understand. You will get it right. Of course the most useful things are free, like air, and do not require labour. But value is an economic concept, a function of particular social relations.

Yes, yes, Marye answered, rolling her head from side to side.

There was a knock at the door...

Marye woke up, drenched in sweat, feverish, ill. ... a soft insinuating rapping on her door, in the dark.

Marye felt the bed beside her and it was empty. The sky beyond the window was going silver. Rolfa was gone. Rolfa would be at the market, buying food.

And the Snide had come knocking.

Good, good, let him in, let him see the empty room, no Rolfa hidden. Don't think, she warned herself, don't think. Marye found clothing in the dark, her hands shaking, and as she dressed, she pushed her own self, her own ego, down into the recesses. Hazel

floated up to the surface of her mind, like a corpse on a river.

The door opened. This was a culture that did not need locks.

"Hello, Hazel," said a soft, mellifluous voice. "I wanted to talk to you."

He moved in the darkness, unseen. There was a crumpling of the quilt. He sat on the foot of the bed, where Hazel had sat.

"You could have hit me this morning. None of the others could. You've broken the viruses. So have I." He reached out and took her hand. "We're alike," he said.

There came a shy, apologetic rapping on Marye's door.

What the hell now? Hazel snatched her hand away. Rolfa?

"Oh my God, it's my boyfriend," said Hazel. She could hardly say it was her girlfriend. "Quick, under the bed." It was the only line she could think of.

"It's not your boyfriend," said the Snide. "It's a girlfriend."

Hazel tried to push him under the bed anyway, and flung open the door before she had time to think.

Cilla stood there in the corridor, clutching a bamboo box. Hazel kicked her in the shins, to occupy her mind.

"The Snide is here," Hazel told her, smiling with scorn. "He's come to call. I think he's going to make a pass."

In the alcohol light of the corridor, Cilla's eyes went wide with terror. She hobbled away as quickly as she could, rubbing her ankle.

"I've seen this boyfriend of yours," said the Snide, lounging on the bed. He actually thought he was being provocative, poor lamb. "I saw him in your head. He sleeps right here, doesn't he?" The Snide gave the bed a pat. "Big, broad shoulders. And a beard?"

Hazel just smiled and thought of dialectical materialism.

"Ah," said the Snide, catching a glimpse of something else. "But he shaves now." He rolled forward onto his knees, wrapping himself in the quilt. "Your room is just as I imagined it," he said. "Lots of books. That's how you break a virus. You read it for yourself. I knew you hated the viruses too. I know why you're reading Marx. To be free. I broke the virus for Marx too," he boasted. "I wouldn't know it if I saw it."

He picked up a small, stained volume from the window ledge. "The Communist Manifesto?" he asked. "No one reads it now. They want to control it. And they call this a Marxist state."

He was holding Rolfa's copy of *Winnie the Pooh*.

"I want you to go," said Hazel.

"Not until I know for certain that you do not need me," said the Snide, "as much as I need you."

There were bells on each floor of the Shell, linked by ropes. They rang now, over and over. From the far end of the corridor, Cilla was shouting, "Fire! Fire!"

"The building is burning down," said Hazel.

"No it's not. Your friend just wants me to go. She brought you some paper so you could write your music." He crawled towards her on the bed and took her hands. "I know people, Hazel. I know you're what I want. We could live together, outside the Law. Blister all the old paint of the walls. You're a bullsh-

stripper, Hazel. I am a sneak. I don't like sucking arse-holes. You could save me."

Oh God, thought Hazel, another one who wants his mother.

"OK. OK. You're right. I need help."

Vampire, thought Hazel. All around her, across the ceiling, through the walls came the thumpings of people awakened in the night by an alarm.

The Snide looked up, dismayed. Too many people, thinking too many things at once, thought Marye. He won't be able to read me as clearly. The quilt fell from his shoulders, and he stepped down from the bed. He gazed at her mournfully, as the light grew stronger, tall but frail-boned, not as young as he used to be, afraid.

"I take people's thoughts," he said, "and I weave them into tapestries. And I hang them," he said, "like in a gallery. There's no one else to see them."

"Stop being a Snide," said Hazel.

He opened the door, adjusting a broad-brimmed black hat for sinister effect, and stepped into a crowd of people in their underwear. He's a fool, thought Hazel, quite simply a fool. He heard her think it, faltering as he closed the door. The bells kept ringing. But could people love fools?

Hazel waited a few minutes, to let him leave. Then she joined the press of people on the staircase. They clutched their most treasured possessions, tooth-brushes or saucepans. Cilla was no longer ringing the bells. The alarm had been taken up, by each floor's fire wardens, according to the drill. No one would be able to trace the false alarm back to Cilla.

Marye found Cilla outside, holding her bamboo box. Marye hugged her. "I'm sorry about your shins," she said. Marye lifted the lid of the box, and saw it, the precious paper, ruled in staves. People were generous. Marye had never believed that.

Value therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead, rather it transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic.

"Oh, Cilla. Who did this?" Marye asked.

"Just us Vampires," said Cilla, shyly, pleased. "Just us Vampires of History."

The all-clear, a trumpet blast, sounded. Elsewhere, in memory, Hazel fixed the book to a holder on her wheelchair. Continuing to read, she began to wheel herself round and round her room for exercise.

That morning, Marye intercepted Joseph on the stairs. "Look at what I've got!" she said and held up the paper. "Joseph! We can write the music down. Can we meet this morning, this afternoon?"

"You have a performance this afternoon," he said.

"I'll miss it. Won't be the first time."

Joseph went very still, his eyes closed. "I get tired, Marye," he said.

She could see it in the flesh around his eyes, and she knew she shouldn't ask again. But without him, the paper would be no use.

"The Vampires bought it," she said, flipping through it. "They saved up money and got together and bought it. All of them." She didn't want to manipulate him, but she couldn't hide the disappointment.

"I have to sleep in the afternoons," he said. "If I don't, I start to forget things." The two friends looked



at each other. Joseph sighed and shifted on his feet. "But they will clean me out soon. I'll forget everything, then. The music too. I'll forget the music." He nodded up and down, almost imperceptibly. "All right, Marye. All right. We meet. This afternoon."

How could she pay all these people back?

"Thanks, Joseph," she murmured.

Life crowded round.

Marye and Joseph met every afternoon in the practice rooms of the Zoo. Marye was not sure why, but she did not want Rolfa to know what they were doing. She and Joseph would sit hunched and whispering over an old wooden table they carried in each day from a storeroom. Joseph dictated the notes in a low worn voice, his head in his hands. When he got too tired to translate them into notation, he sang the melody in a rich but restricted voice. It went as rusty as a rooster's, and the workings of Marye's hand began to ache from writing. Then Joseph would stop and look at her silently, and she would nod. And together they would carry the wooden table out again.

People would murmur an explanation to each other as Marye and Joseph passed. It was as if a stone had been dropped in water. Word was spreading. The world was beginning to do its work, finding what it needed. Sooner or later, the Snide would find them too.

"Are you Marye?" a girl, a stranger, asked. Green-blond hair and Vampire make-up. With a kind of heave, Marye hauled the virus to the front of her mind. Hazel. I am Hazel. She didn't get around to answering aloud.

"Good," said the girl. "Don't tell me. But we're all keeping an eye out for the Snide. If he pokes around here while you're in there..." the girl nodded towards the practice room, "... we'll keep him talking and send someone to warn you. That fits?"

Marye did not dare even nod in response. The girl left, half-running in black pixie boots. If you really want to help, Marye thought, how about carrying the table?

All the time, she had to battle with Hazel. By day, by night, the virus did not stop reading. Hazel gripped and Hazel held, with powers of organization and concentration that were beyond Marye, hauling her through the tangled forest that was Marx, pointing out a debt to Locke or Hume, refining a thought with a quote from Engels or Gramsci, always, always, making sure that Marye understood, understood in the same way that Hazel did.

What, Marye wondered, have I called up in my mind? Viruses were supposed to be a passive reservoir of information, like your own memory. They were not supposed to drag you through the minutiae of experience. *Das Kapital* was over three thousand pages long, and Hazel was determined to read it all, exploring every last dreary, undeniable nuance. She had no intention of ever finishing, she would go on and on, determined to control, without a shred of self-doubt or pity. God, the woman must have been a pain. When she was alive.

Hazel, Witch Hazel, if only there were some softness about you, some hidden anguish or pain, then I could feel sorry for you, I could understand, sympathize, but there is something inhuman about you. You wanted to be a disease. The match between you and the virus was perfect. You and the virus both need

minds to inhabit, DNA to remould. Like Helen Lane's tumour, you are immortal, undead, and you have hold of me.

Marye began to think that what she had was an illness, in the old sense of something that did not cure, but wounded. Hazel was like arthritis, a continual pain that had to be managed. The boredom was excruciating. Marye managed it by asking herself if it was worse than the boredom she usually inflicted on herself. Was it any worse, for example, than humming over and over to herself a song that she hated? Was it any worse than sitting alone in the Zoo cafe and examining, one by one, all her many faults of personality? If Marye was now infected by a dedicated Marxist philosopher, who had infected her before? Someone who hated Marye, who tormented her; someone who chattered away at her, who kept her distracted with a stream of useless quibbling that she would have tolerated from no one else.

Marye began to yearn for silence. As Hazel read, as the music mounted, as Joseph faded, as she wondered what was happening with *Love's Labour's*, as the fear of the Snide continually nibbled at her, Marye developed a most profound and earnest desire for stillness.

She would return each afternoon from the practice rooms to find Rolfa growing distant and wan. Rolfa would smile at her in a soft and hazy way, eyes dim. It was a smile that was too accepting, that was without hope. Marye would know from that smile, and from the pallid sunlight on the walls, and from the shadows grown long from waiting that she did not have much time to do her work.

And there would be a toothbrush in the candleholder and a foundation garment in a saucepan, and the floor underfoot would be both sticky and crunchy at the same time from a meal of toast and honey. Marye would perceive and regret the disruption that had ploughed its way through her life. She would miss it, were it to go.

Then one afternoon, Marye came back, and Rolfa was not there.

Well, this is it, she thought, this is how it begins. One day she simply will not be here and I will never know, never know if she was caught, or simply went away. There is nothing I can do. She slumped onto the bed and closed her eyes and waited, listening for a familiar footfall. She opened her eyes again, and it had grown darker. She stood up and began to tidy things away.

She piled up the papers that Rolfa had disordered. She cleared away the washing up that Rolfa had done, leaving honey on the bottom of the plates. She found chicken bones in her clean clothes bag, and held them up, looking at the traces of Rolfa, the shreds of meat her teeth had left behind. It grew dark, and Marye became more and more certain that Rolfa had gone, and that it had all been for nothing.

Then, sitting in the dark, she heard a door slam far below and a great roaring voice. Marye jumped up, overjoyed. Rolfa was singing. Marye had time to become enraged. Rolfa! Why the hell couldn't you tell Joseph where you were going? And for God's sake, shut up! Do you want to post a sign and tell the Snide that you're here? She heard Rolfa whistling as she

came toward the door. Then she heard a thump.
"I do not seem," said Rolfa, in her mellowest tones, "to be able to open the door."

Drunk, thought Marye. "Try turning the handle," she said.

Rolfa thumped against the door again. "Why am I unable to open the door?" she asked heaven.

Oooh, thought Marye. More low comedy. She went to the door to open it and couldn't. The handle would not move.

"Why won't you open the door?" Rolfa asked.

"Because you're pulling the handle up, Rolfa. Rolfa? Let go of the handle, Rolfa." Marye was enunciating very clearly and slowly.

"How can I open a door by letting go of the handle?" Rolfa asked. There was a thump as she threw her full weight against it. "The door is jammed. I shall have to break it down."

"Rolfa, Rolfa please. Just push the handle down."

"The handle," announced Rolfa, "has just come off."

Then there was a silence. "Rolfa?" Marye asked. The handle of the door was as limp as a dead fish. When Marye pushed the door open, she saw Rolfa, half crouching, with an expression of mingled delight and horror fixed like glaze on her face.

She was looking at her sister Zoe.

Although capitalist and worker confront each other in the marketplace...

"Oh, Rolfa," said Zoe, looking at the shaved arms and face. She glanced miserably at Marye.

...only as buyer with money on the one hand and

seller, a commodity, on the other...

Hazel, shut up!

"Do you want to come in?" Marye asked Zoe, stepping aside.

Zoe shouldered her way through the doorway as if past an obstacle, and stopped, distraught, and stared about the tiny room.

Rolfa followed, swinging a whisky bottle in one hand. The two Woolies filled the room like air bladders. Zoe looked for a chair to sit on. There wasn't one.

"Do you know," said Rolfa, holding up the bottle towards the window and what was beyond it. "There are people out there. The whole place. Full of people. Like a string of pearls."

"Do you know what the Family would do if they saw you like this?" Zoe said, enraged. "They'd tie a mask soaked in ether over your face and ship you south in a box." She turned away, arms folded in front of her stomach.

"If you break the string," Rolfa continued, "the pearls all go rolling down the steps." She sank to the floor. "Oh God, my bloody beads."

"This is the first time she's been drunk," said Marye.

"We wondered how you were keeping her quiet," said Zoe.

Zoe is the one I can talk to, Marye remembered. "Would you like something to drink, Zoe? A cup of tea? It's about all we have."

Zoe shook her head, and turned towards Marye. "How can you live like this?" she asked. It was an honest, if unguarded question.

"By limiting our expectations," said Marye. An honest answer.

...both sides appear constantly, repeatedly, in the marketplace playing the same opposed roles.

Zoe looked about the bare and tiny room, and did a kind of shrug with her eyebrows. She was wearing a white toga, and her braided hair was piled on her head. "I was going to ask you to come home, Rolfa, but you can't, looking like that. Do you really hate us so much?"

"Yes," replied Rolfa, grinning. "Oooops." She covered her mouth.

"The Family doesn't know yet. Papa hasn't told them. We managed to get him to call off the Snide. The sneak wasn't any good anyway, he got all love-sick over some female called Hazel."

"I suppose he cost too much," said Rolfa, and took a swig.

"Angie and I wanted to give you time!"

"How does it feel to be an economy measure?"

"If you came back by yourself, Papa would be more forgiving. He's nearly given up on you, Rolfa." There was a swollen silence between them. Zoe's face looked limp and puffy, and flesh showed through, as if the fur were patchy. "I have."

That's good, thought Marye, without quite knowing why. She seemed to feel a way.

...in the course of time everyone assumes all the roles in the sphere of circulation.

"Zoe," Marye said. "Would it make any difference if something happened to Rolfa's music?"

Zoe glumly watched her white sandals as they scuffed the resin-tiled floor. "I'd be grateful for anything," she murmured.

"And if it were done in such a way that no one knew it was Rolfa, no one knew it was a Woolie, not even the Family, would that help?"

Zoe looked at the floor without responding.

"Look, I don't understand how the Family works. But I do know that Rolfa is an embarrassment to your father."

Zoe's eyes were full of warning.

"Tuh." Rolfa's shudder. "Pocket Caesar. Wants to be Consul."

Zoe's head turned so sharply, the tendons of her neck showed through the fur. "He wants to be accepted by his own People, and he never has been!"

Marye intervened. "If...if Rolfa's music came to something and we all stopped the Family finding out..." Marye sighed with the difficulty and delicacy of what she had to say. "Would that be enough?"

"Enough for what?"

"Suppose...suppose you simply tell the Family that Rolfa has disappeared. You don't know where, or why, but she's always been odd, and she's gone, somewhere. Now that would have nothing to do with the legal position of the Family in relation to the Consensus. It might not even have anything to do with... oh, I don't know what to call it...genetic drift back towards the average, or whatever. Which is all they care about."

"You are a cold little fish, aren't you?" said Zoe.

"Look, having Rolfa with you is not going to do your father any good either. If she's a black mark against him now, she always will be. You're the only one who cares about Rolfa. This is what she wants."

Something in Zoe relented. "It's not so easy, Ms Shibush, to watch a sister Slide away." She said it

quietly. "Especially when you're wondering why someone wants to give her such a good push."

"Don't let her go! Just give her time."

"Give you time, you mean."

"Give her music time. The music is good."

"How long?" Zoe asked abruptly.

Marye felt a prickling. "A year," she said. She thought she was overestimating.

Zoe leaned against the wall and chewed the inside of her cheek, looking out the window.

"All right, Ms Shibush. All right." She rocked herself away from the wall. She looked at Rolfa, considered, and found that she had nothing to say. The broken door was still open. She walked to it and turned to Marye.

"Why don't I hate you?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied Marye.

"A year," said Zoe, warning her, and left.

Marye closed the door and started to shake. What had she done? How had she done it? Rolfa sat drinking quietly, staring at the bottle with a faraway smile, as if all of it had nothing to do with her. In a sense, it didn't.

The next morning, Marye bundled up what music she had and took it to the Minister who ran the National Theatre. He was popularly known as the Zookeeper. Even he called himself that at times.

Walking through the upper floor of the Zoo, Marye felt as small and as hard as a nut. There was a groomed young man whose job it was to stop people seeing the Minister. Marye could not afford the luxury of disliking him.

She did not say that she had found an undiscovered genius. She said that she was harbouring a fugitive and that she felt the Minister should know. She explained why. The reason was that the creature was talented. She left the evidence of that talent, the music, as if it were part of a briefing for a policy decision. The young man took a stern line. Why had she not come earlier? He would make sure the Minister saw the papers and attended to her case. He patted them at the corners to make a neat package of them on his otherwise empty table.

Marye devoted the rest of the day to Rolfa. She bought a pack lunch with the last of their money. Roast beef sandwiches and oranges and sticks of celery – things they both could eat. She took Rolfa, who was content and distant, on a ride in an omnibus to Regents Park. The bus stop called it Chao Li Gardens.

It was getting cooler, and there were high, racing clouds in the sky. The leaves were beginning to change colour, fading to an English brown. Marye and Rolfa sat in a circular garden by an artificial waterway. Overhead, a flight of greylag geese passed, on their way to the Thames estuary, from Iceland. The world had been saved.

Marye explained what she had done, and Rolfa appeared unmoved. She threw bits of her sandwich to the ducks on the water.

Rolfa watched the geese. "Everything moves," she said. "You wonder how it all knows where to go. Einstein wondered how birds knew where to migrate to. He thought they might follow lines of light in the sky. He saw everything as lines of light. That's how he was

built. So we don't really know how he moved, either. Any more than the birds."

What was she saying? That people were what they were?

"I don't mind the silence," said Rolfa, smiling gently at her, admonishing her gently. "The music comes out of the silence. I don't mind if it goes back in. We come out of the silence..." Her voice trailed off, and she made an arch with her hand. And we go back into the silence.

What is she saying? That she will go away?

"We have a year, Rolfa."

"But we don't have any food," said Rolfa. She threw the last morsel of bread to the ducks.

It was chilly back in their little room. Rolfa won't mind the winter, Marye thought, but I will. She went up onto the roof to sunbathe, to kill her hunger pangs. Cilla brought Rolfa soup and sausages. In the evening she slipped them both into the Zoo to see *Madam Butterfly*. Rolfa's smile was rapt with the staging, with the music, and her eyes were famished and glistening. If only they had let us be ourselves, Marye thought.

She tried the next day to rejoin *Love's Labour's Lost*.

She was told at one of the information desks that the director had died. Quite suddenly. Thirty-five. Time-expired. The cast were in mourning. They had asked to have the production discontinued. They didn't want to work with anyone else. They can't face going back, thought Marye. They can't face going back to sleepwalking Shakespeare.

It was just like the play, at the end. Welcome Parade, Mr Death. You interrupt our merriment. The King your Father is...

Dead, for my life.

It's a design flaw, thought Marye. We shouldn't have to die. She thought of the director, called him Harry in her mind. She remembered his feverish eyes. You knew you were going, Harry. This was your last leap. A lifetime of sleepwalking, of making other people sleepwalk, broke you. And then you were free. Harry, if I ever direct a play, she promised him, I will do it as you did.

And they are not going to break me.

Marye did not go back to her chilly room. She walked on, up the stairs, to the upper floor of the Zoo.

Out of the silence, into the silence.

She was going to talk to the Minister, before time. "Oh yes, Ms Shibush," said the sleek young man, smiling. "I'll go ask." He went through a door.

Marye sat down. A row of Postpersons sat next to her, staring ahead with expressions of perfect peace. Their conscious minds were fully occupied with the records of the Zoo. But what of underneath? thought Marye. Lined up like Buddhas in a temple.

Her legs jiggled up and down with nerves. Hazel had reached the end of Volume One, the only one that Marx had finished himself. She was fighting against the ending, reading notes and appendices, reading quotes in their original language. She was re-reading the prefaces to all the different editions. It was as if she would die when she finished.

I am ready to welcome scientific criticism.

I don't really know you, Hazel, thought Marye, I only know a virus. You may have loved, you may have

been happy.

As far as the prejudices of what is termed public opinion, to which I have never made any concession...

You were dedicated. You were formidable. You gave your life away. Do your motives matter?

...I shall continue to guide myself by the maxim of the great Florentine:

Sequi il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti.

Follow your own bent, no matter what people say.

Marx quoting Dante. Hazel went on to read the next preface.

As Hazel read, Marye thought of Rolfa and the wellspring of music in her, and of the paper from the Vampires, and of what she was going to say to the Minister, and she found that she had no idea.

"I'm tired," she said aloud.

Marx could not enjoy the pleasure of preparing this third edition for the press.

The sleek young man came out again, asked one of the Postpeople to go in, and said to Marye, "A few minutes, Ms Shibush. Are you thirsty? Can I get you something?"

So I am in favour, thought Marye, but the thought was bleak. The young man tried to engage her in conversation. It was also his job to know what was going on. His combed-back chestnut hair, his busy black and orange shirt, his clear resin spectacles, all annoyed Marye. She did not feel like talking to him. She answered his questions with a yes or a no, or a yo – a Vampire answer that could mean sometimes or maybe. Yes, she was an actress. Yes, the music was very good. Was the friends with the composer? Yo.

A door opened and the Minister himself asked

Marye to come in. Marye followed him into his room.

That mighty thinker...

He slept there. His bed was behind a screen that was painted with green streaks to represent reeds by a river. The walls were covered in cloth that was also decorated with reeds, and a large black sketch of a heron. There was a picture of Marx on the wall. Marye looked at the eyes. They would have been brown and soft. There was a picture of Mao at 25, and of Chao Li Song, the hero of the Second Revolution.

The Minister wore khaki trousers and a khaki shirt. He was a very handsome man of Chinese extraction, with neat black hair, a neat smile, a neat moustache. Marye liked him. There was something informal and direct about him. He had an air of competence and balanced openness, the product of Party training. Was that contagious too?

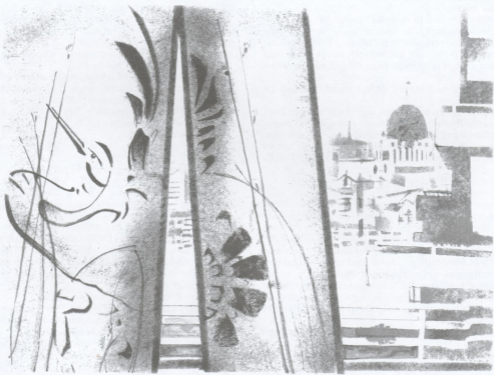
"Do you mind if my Postperson stays with us?" the Minister asked Marye. "I like to keep accurate records."

The Postperson was a woman. She sat on a tiny chair, with her knees pressed together. Her head was wrapped in a kerchief. "That's fine," murmured Marye. The Minister held out a hand for her to sit on a large, upholstered chair.

...died on March 14, 1883.

As Marye settled into it, she felt herself enfolded and cushioned by something else, something that supported her and made the room go still.

Like an ear clearing of air pressure or an infection, her mind was suddenly quiet. Hazel was gone. Marye was well. There was a hush all around her like a pond.



Outside the big window, everything was blue and hazy. The last of summer, the first of autumn, a jumble of old buildings. Marye could hear voices and horses' hooves from below, as life was made and unmade in ignorance of what was going on behind this one high pane of glass on the top floor of the Zoo, this window with its frame of shaded bamboo. She thought of the sticks on which ice cream had come when she was a child. She could melt them together to make toy houses. She heard footsteps in the corridors below. She heard a hissing. It was a hissing of molecules of air against her eardrums.

In the silence, nothing was fragmented. There were no separate strands to gather together, to fumble, to compete for attention. In the silence, all of that fell away, and there was only what was here and what had to be done.

It was as if she, Marye, had finally come into the room and sat down beside her.

"I am told that you have been missing performances, Ms Shibush."

Marye saw no reason to reply. Zookeeper.

"That cannot help your career," the Minister said, gently.

"Nothing could help my career. I am a very bad actress," said Marye.

His eyebrows rose, and he shifted in his chair and smiled, amused.

"What do you think of Ms Patel's music?" Marye asked.

"Personally," he said, "I thought it showed promise. But what I think is of little importance. It may surprise you to learn that we consulted the Consensus on this matter."

Nothing seemed to surprise Marye. "And?"

"The Consensus is an extraordinarily accurate predictor of the success or failure of any artistic endeavour. It may not know much about music, but it knows what it likes. It likes this. It can hum the tunes."

"The Consensus hums?" Marye found she liked the idea.

"Well, if it can talk, it can sing. I understand from its guards that when we do not consult it, it stages entertainments for itself. In its own mind, if you like. The more musically adept personalities in it voiced concern over the roughness of some of Ms Patel's pieces."

"She needs training."

"Exactly. There are other problems."

Marye waited. There was a silence. The Minister's smile widened and he chuckled. He was beginning to find the interview disconcerting.

"There does seem to be a balance in life. We have gained in knowledge and in order. But that peace and wealth of information do not lead us to originality. Out of the disorder of this poor woman's life, something new has come. So." He leaned forward, his two hands pressed together as if in prayer. "Do we as good socialists advise that people should live in disorder and ignorance?"

"No," said Marye. "We advise a love of beauty from whatever source."

"Even," said the Minister, "from the Genetically Engineered?"

"Of course. We believe they are human, even if they don't. And besides," said Marye, engulfed in calm, "we don't have to tell anyone that she is Genetically Engineered. We can accept her and her works as being human."

The Minister chuckled again. "We cannot do that, you see, without disrupting our wider and quite delicate relationship with the GEs. They do not wish to be defined as human."

"So what we're really talking about is mining in the Antarctic."

The Minister's smile did not change.

"I've talked to her sister. The hierarchy of the Woolies..."

"Please. Don't call them that," said the Minister, giving his head a little shake.

Mining and a market for luxury goods, Marye decided. Where, she wondered, am I getting all of this from?

"They don't know. Her sister and immediate family have agreed to keep it from them. It is in their interests to keep it from them. If we pretend the author of this music is human, so will they. They have given us a year to do something with the music. They love her that much."

"We've had a representation from her father asking us to return her if she is found. We couldn't find either of you. No one would tell us where you lived." His smile went crooked. "Which told us that if our own people were so intent, perhaps we did not want to act. Our relationship with the GEs is delicate but not close."

He's amused for now, thought Marye, but I mustn't get too clever.

"Thank you. Thank you very much," she said.

I get this, she decided, from my father. From my father and my mother who dealt this way for years. And from Hazel.

"Did you know that she stole from her family?"

"No," lied Marye.

"Whatever we do must reflect credit on this institution. As part of the socialist programme. Your friend has had a capitalistic upbringing. She will suffer from grave distortions of personality. It is not only that we will have to keep her shaved..."

There are depilatories...

"...or keep her sitting down." The Minister's smile spread.

He thinks he is talking to me on my level.

"We have no guarantee that her behaviour will be acceptable. What we must avoid is making any link in people's minds between talent and childish or inappropriate behaviour."

"I agree of course," said Marye. "But I think it's inaccurate to call the GEs capitalists. Capitalists take the surplus value created by other people's labour. The GEs do all the work themselves. They may be outside the Consensus, but they operate very much like a worker's cooperative."

Oh. The Zookeeper's face was a blank.

"Are they immune to the viruses?" asked Marye.

"Yes... unless." The Minister made a vague gesture.

So, thought Marye. There is an unless. They can cure Woolies. Of course they can. Lower their body temperature, suppress the immune system...

"She is so talented. There must be some way," said

Marye.

"We will give it thought," he promised.

"If she joined the Consensus, was considered human, she could use the practice rooms, take instruction..."

"Of course," he said.

Come on, come on, follow it through. She kept her hands still.

He looked wary. "Of course, if she joined the Consensus..." he mused. "We could correct for all of that. We could ensure that there would be no bad behaviour. And it would be a shame ... it would not be just... if such talent were allowed to wither. All right. We will consider that aspect." He leaned back. The interview was over.

No, thought Marye.

"It has to be done today," said Marye. She began to feel fear. She began to be unsteady. It was like waking up. The Minister's eyes were sombre.

"Please," said Marye, suddenly shorn of her bigger self. "She's hungry. She's not Rhodopsin, she can't just go out into the sun. We've got no money. If she joins the Consensus, she can have a position here, she can eat!" Marye found that she had gone tremulous. "Otherwise she will leave. Please. Can you arrange it for today?"

The Minister seemed to have a question rise in his mind. He was looking at Marye now, not considering what she said. He was considering her.

"I will see if it can be done," he said, no longer smiling. Marye began to quake. It was a rattling in the bottom of her belly. "But what you must do is check with your friend and prepare her. We must make sure that this is acceptable to her."

I've won, thought Marye. I've won. She stood up to go. She did not want to speak. She did not trust herself. She nodded yes to whatever he said.

"Can you come back in an hour?"

Yes, yes. He shook her hand. She walked out of the rooms into the corridors, and began to run. The shaking continued. Her knees wobbled, her hands flapped. There was a sense of fear, of being in a bigger world. She was not who she had thought she was. I may not be a good actress, she thought, but I am good at this. I can arrange things. She had learned in the cushioned silence that every artist is perforce a politician.

Meeting Charlie, Charlie Slide

The Public Reading Rooms – the rooms in which the public were read – were, for historical reasons, underground in bunkers. The bunkers were under what had once been the Department of the Environment. The Department of the Environment had been torn down to plant a forest of thick and fleshy purple trees. In the buttressing marble wall around the park, a plaque had been preserved. "This is Marsham Street," the plaque said "1688."

Underneath were corridors of brick, painted white, and white stairs and air vents and electric lights. Marye stared at the glowing bulbs and their golden, dazzling filaments.

Inside the waiting room, there was a celebratory air. People had brought their friends. They played guitars or thumb pianos and danced with both arms held aloft, hands waving. Or they sat on the floor and rocked back and forth clapping in time. Some of the

girls wore saris. The men wore jewellery through their nostrils.

People in white uniforms danced with them. A huge woman in white saw Rolfa and beamed and worked her way dancing towards her.

"You're Rolfa. I'm Root," she said. "You're our special case. We'll take good care of you, I promise you that." She led Rolfa to one side. "Just a few questions I've got to ask you," she said.

Health. Medical record. There was a cheer from a group sitting in a corner. Root turned and pressed her hands together and chuckled and shook her head. "They're all like that," she said. "Any experiences with the paranormal, Rolfa?"

Instantly, Rolfa's face looked withdrawn.

"Have you ever levitated, or had an out-of-body experience? Any poltergeists in your home? Anything of that sort?"

Rolfa shook her head and gave a shy smile. Who me?

"It's very important. You're sure? OK, then we go in." Root turned to Marye. "You come too, dear, please. We want as many people as possible to see this. We don't want people to come here frightened when it's their turn."

She held open the door, and waved Marye towards her. Together she and Rolfa walked down a white corridor, to a hatch with a seal, that hissed when it opened. Beyond it was a loose and flabby concertina corridor. It was wet and smelled of disinfectant and was lit by an ultraviolet lamp. They stepped through it into a room made of flesh.

The walls were slightly phosphorescent and seemed to pull back as they entered.

"Hello, Baby," said Root. "Time to go for a walk."

She's Terminal, thought Marye. She can talk to the Consensus. It can talk to her. This is the Consensus, here.

"What's it like?" asked Marye, all in one breath.

"Big," said Root the Terminal, warmly. "And alive. Come now, Rolfa love, you sit over here, on the floor, anywhere will do."

This is Charlie, thought Marye, this is the Vacuum Cleaner, Maker of light. The beating heart of her culture, and she had never seen it.

Machines had imitated life, now life returned the compliment – a computer made of flesh, growing new capacity when needed, sending mycelia through the earth like a mushroom and sprouting elsewhere, fed by its purple forests.

Marye had never seen a film, but other people had, and she had their memories, the memories the Party wanted her to have, and she remembered a film now, flickering, a memory of Chao Li Song.

A wry, smiling face, an old gentleman full of good news he could scarcely contain.

"We will have to accept that we have been superseded," he said in a voice like a rusty hinge. "We are like parents who have produced a giant baby. It deals in things we cannot conceive of."

It could unwind matter into a half-state and push it over the speed of light. As predicted, it travelled backwards, not forwards in time. The English called this the Charlie Slide.

"How will it help, to send things to the stars, millennia ago? What we send will mine for wealth, and send it towards the Earth, through the long light years back,

very slowly."

He paused to smile privately. "We have seen it coming towards us. Blocks of metal."

Thought was chemistry moving into electricity, and electricity was unified with other forces. In the fifth dimension, the master of the eleven dimensions, gravity and electromagnetism phenomena were the same thing. The Consensus could think in gravity. It could make personalities out of gravity.

"You comfy, love?" Root asked, giving Rolfa a drink of water.

Chao Li Song spoke in memory. "Gravity pulled the universe into existence, by inflation. It pulled against nothing, and as it pulled, energy increased. Out of nothing. Until there was a flash of heat."

The Consensus was mining the vacuum. It plucked it gently, to release floods of heat. The Consensus would soon be making energy by making tiny, pocket universes.

Chao Li Song had other things in store to say. "For so long now, we have known the universe was not material. Everything calls up its opposites and achieves a new synthesis. Hegel told us, Marx told us. The time has come now. We had Dialectical Materialism. Now we must have Dialectical Immaterialism. Idea precedes reality."

He had to flee for his life. The viruses did not tell Marye this. Her mother had, in the name of her father who had died. Because of Chao Li Song, socialism forged an alliance with resurgent religion. Because of him, socialism won. With only a few compromises, with prudence and common sense. Marye lived in a theological state.

Charlie, the English called him. Charlie Song.

"Sing a song of Charlie, take you for a ride," Root the Terminal was singing, wobbling backwards like a jelly towards Marye. "Sing a song of Charlie, down the Charlie Slide."

We rose out of Africa, thought Marye. We rose out of a drought and survived, not with a bigger jaw, but with a smaller jaw because we had the beginnings of speech. We survived because we worked together. We are designed to survive changes in climate by working in concert. Like music.

Root gripped her hand and shook it. "You stay here with me, love, or we get two readings all mixed up, and that's very weird. You never seen this? You never seen this, you in for a real treat, I can tell you that." She chuckled. She was like a balloon full of chuckles.

We survive, thought Marye, because after everything else, we are good. We survive to the extent that we are good.

The thing that was the room chuckled with them. It chuckled and space chuckled, the space containing Rolfa. There was a wave through it, and her.

Rolf's head was flung back like a cannonball, and it split into a grin. "Yeee-haaa!" she cried. She roared with laughter. "Whooo-eeeee!"

"That's it, that's it!" shouted Root and she jumped up and down with her vast bulk. "Oh, yeah. Ride it love, ride it!"

I had heard, thought Marye. I had heard it was wonderful, and I never believed.

Every synapse is engaged at once, every neural pathway, every cell in the brain works together, all

at once for the first and only time. Like a national grid, all lit up. Each person a nation, a universe.

The Consensus pulled energy up out of nothing, from quantum vacuum, and it could roar back in time by travelling faster than light. It had been known for a century and a half that gravity in the form of inflation had helped spark the beginning. But how was there a viewpoint, a reference, for gravity to work in before space and time? The answer was that gravity had been imported back to the beginning, thought in the form of gravity.

Humankind, working as the Consensus, was going to make the universe. So loved the world that we made God in our own image.

"Oh!" cried Rolfa, in fondness for everything. "Oh!" and her voice broke into a whine of loss and regret and she looked at Marye, smiling and sad.

"That's it," said Root. "Darling, you just been read." She walked to Rolfa, leaned over her, inspected her, stroked her head. "So what did you see, love?" she asked, speaking gently.

"All kinds of things," said Rolfa, faintly.

Root laughed and nodded. "Yes, yes, everything comes back."

"I saw my mother," said Rolfa. "She was picking water lilies in a pond; she had her dress, her big orange dress lifted up out of the water, and she was laughing in case she fell." She sat up and took hold of Root's arm. "The pond was behind an old white farmhouse. We were staying there. On Prince Edward Island. I was five years old. I got in a fight with my sister. She said she was going to grow bigger than me because she drank tea. And big people drink tea."

"I tell you, it's the same for everyone. I see people, they leave her dancing."

"But it doesn't just come back," said Rolfa. "It goes forward as well."

"Hmmm" said Root, turning, as if someone had spoken to her. Someone had. "Back to business," she murmured, and cupped a hand around an ear, and listened, rapt. Marye was given an uncomfortable chance to think.

Root began to smile. "Well you're quite a character, aren't you? You're all over the place." She chuckled and shook her head. "You like your drink, I can tell you that."

Marye felt a familiar chill. "Change as little as you can," she said, in a whisper.

"We do, love. We don't g mucking around."

"She's a genius. That's why this is being done."

"Is she now?" Root was amused. "Well I wouldn't be knowing about that." She bent down. "You feel up to moving now, Rolfa? We've got to make space now for someone else."

Gently, Rolfa nodded. Root helped her to her feet. "In and out like a giant lung," murmured Rolfa.

Marye took the other arm. She felt Rolfa lean on her, exhausted. They walked through the concertina, down a white corridor to a little room with old chairs. As she was leaving, Root gave Marye a wry grin, and waved her to follow into the corridor, to talk.

"Your friend, you know, she shakes with both hands." Root's eyebrows were raised, her cheeks were bursting with amusement, her tiny hand on its fat wrist was placed delicately over her breast.

What was the woman talking about? Marye began

to have an uncomfortable creeping feeling. "I think she's left-handed, actually."

"Now don't let on you don't know!" insisted Root. "We see it all here, nothing bothers us."

"What are you talking about?"

"Your friend. She likes to botty-bump with other ladies." Root covered her face and hooted with laughter. "Oh, the shapies humankind gets in. We see them all! But a little rough justice and it all works out."

Marye went still and cold. "She likes other women."

"Oh, loves them, love. Loves you."

"Can we stop this?" Marye asked. Her voice was a croak.

Root shook her head sadly. "It's the law," she said. Her vast buttocks made her white skirt rustle as she walked away.

Marye turned and walked into the room. She saw Rolfa sitting, smiling, looking through the whole world to somewhere else.

"Rolf," Marye said. "I love you. I want to sleep with you – *I mean* – I want to have sex with you."

Rolf began to grin. She covered her eyes. "This is a fine time to tell me."

"I tried before, but I couldn't."

Rolf began to laugh.

"It's not funny!" Marye did an anguished little dance.

"It's fucking hilarious! It's the funniest fucking thing I ever heard!" Rolfa took her hand and shook it hard. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"Why didn't you?"

"Because you're a human and I thought you'd have to be cured."

"I hugged you."

"I hugged you." Rolfa shook her head. "All those nights! Should I touch her, shouldn't I touch her." She looked down at Marye's hand, played with its fingers. "Who needs viruses when you've got fear?" She looked up at Marye. "We'll have some time," she promised. "However long, we'll have it."

Root rustled back into the room. Involuntarily, Marye jumped away. Rolfa pulled her back.

"A little bit of honey," Root said, "and a touch of immuno-suppression." She bounced her hips back and forth with the rhythm of the words. She was wearing pink gloves. "Now. Stick out your tongue at me."

Run away, thought Marye. She contemplated violence, pushing the huge nurse over and running. But where? Where was the way out?

Rolf stuck her tongue out like a naughty girl. Root said, "That's the spirit," and dabbed the tongue with a finger of the glove.

"And that's all there is to it. You'll begin to feel ill in about three hours. Just relax, drink some fluids. No booze, now. Any complications, use your Postperson and let me know, and I'll be straight around." She turned and her eyes flicked towards Marye. "It's contagious," she told her.

Marye looked back at her bleakly.

"Rough justice," said Root the Terminal. "But less rough than it used to be, I tell you that."

Then she helped Rolfa to her feet and led her out of the room. Marye followed. There was nothing else she could do.

An Ultimately Fatal Condition

Outside, it was Indian Summer, almost warm with patchy sunlight and racing shadows of clouds. Fat pigeons limped across the stretch of green beside Lambeth Bridge. It was mid-afternoon and most people were working. A circle of older men, their shirts open, sat on the lawn drinking and playing a desultory game of cards. On the bridge, a wagon had broken its axle and kegs of beer had split open on the slope of the bridge, sudsy and bitter-smelling. Children paddled in it, kicking at the seagulls that had gathered.

"I didn't know about your mother," said Marye as they walked.

"She left us," said Rolfa. "She didn't like Papa. He thought he'd make a fortune in Hudson's Bay."

"Where did she go?" Marye asked.

Rolf turned and gave her a very peculiar smile. "Antarctica," she said.

They walked on in silence past the Bishop's Palace. They knew they were going to make love, and Marye knew that she was going to catch the virus. She wanted to catch the virus. She did not want to be left behind. It was not something she needed to think about. Sex complicates, but it is the power of love to simplify.

They walked past the hospital that Florence Nightingale had founded, and past another small park, listening to seagull cries. They passed into the enfolding stone arms of the Shell, its forecourt, and then up the stairs.

Finally, in their small, cold, crowded room, they made love and it was both more ordinary and more strange than Marye had imagined, as ordinary and as strange as rainfall.

Then the shivering began. Rolfa was cold. Marye piled on blankets. Rolfa complained how dry and sore her sinuses were. Marye kept a kettle boiling in the little room, to keep the air moist. The steam hung in the air like a fog.

"It's like a buzz," said Rolfa. "It goes all along your arm and right into your head." Marye got her cups of hot water. The steam seemed to help. Rolfa's voice went smooth again, and she drank the water thirstily, gulping, and sat up on the bed. Marye lay beside her, put her head on her stomach. It gurgled, and they both laughed. Outside, it was growing dark. The city disappeared.

"I'm going to sing," said Rolfa.

Marye fumbled for the candle, fumbled under the bed for the paper and before she found it, the song began. Hold, hold! it she thought and began without the beginning.

It was like the final chorus of Beethoven's Ninth or the Hallelujah Chorus, simple and powerful and happy. Rolfa smiled as she sang it. She was singing about her life seen whole. Somewhere, Marye was part of it.

"Give it a rest!" someone shouted from an upper floor.

Rolf's smile was broader, and she raised her voice.

"Qui—et!" howled someone else.

Marye slammed open her window. "Someone's

dying!" she roared in fury. For her, it was true.

When it ended, slowly, peacefully complete, Rolfa made a tracing in the air with her hand. She and Marye looked at each other in the unsteady light, in silence.

Then, with a self-mocking smile, Rolfa made, perfectly, the sound of massed applause. To an actor, it is nothing less than the sound of justice being done.

Marye pulled the counterpane up over her, and kissed her, and Rolfa slept, and during the night, the illness passed. In the morning, when Marye tried to kiss her, Rolfa turned her head. Marye passed her a cup of tea. "I drink this, I get bigger. Like a big person," said Rolfa. That afternoon she said, "I think I'm well enough to get out of bed." She threw back the counterpane. Her cheeks, her arms, her shoulders were covered in stubble. Slowly, still slightly dazed, she began to pack her few things – the huge cheap clothes, her apron, her frying fork.

She stood by the door and said, feeble and embarrassed. "I'd better find somewhere else to live. They will find me somewhere else to live, won't they?"

Marye sat on the edge of her bed, looking away from her, and nodded. "Yes, they will," she said. "Come back for your books when you've got somewhere." There was nothing else to be done. She heard the door close, a soft, considerate clicking.

She stayed sitting on her bed. She didn't move. She didn't think she felt particularly sad. She simply didn't move. For the last three months, Rolfa had been almost the only thing she had thought of, and without her Marye found she had nothing to do. She could think of nothing to do.

She didn't want to eat, she didn't want to go outside. Go outside for what? To be an actress? She didn't want to be an actress. Sunlight poured in through the windows, the room became hot, Marye was as silent as a ghost. This is what it was like when Rolfa was here and I was away, she thought.

When she began to smell herself, she went to the showers and washed. She looked glumly at the trails of stubble around the drains where Rolfa had shaved. Stoney-faced, she turned the jet of water on them and washed them down the drain with her foot.

She came back and tried to sleep and found Piglet jammed behind the bed. She had always hated the doll. Now I'm stuck with the bloody thing, she thought and threw it into a corner. It lay there face down, nose pressed against the cold floor. Finally, as if it were alive, she picked it up again, and stroked the grubby felt ears. It had been almost the only thing Rolfa had brought with her from her old life and now it was left behind, deserted.

Part of you didn't want to go, Rolfa. That's why you left so much of yourself behind, all the books, all the papers. She kept on stroking Piglet's ears, and began to weep, and then stopped, angry with herself for weeping. She blamed herself. Well you did it. You made it happen.

Marye felt no rage against her oppressors. The Consensus was to do such great and extraordinary things. How could she argue against those? She was the one who had got things wrong. On balance she believed that the Consensus was good and just.

Tyranny is a form of perversion. We come to love it. Every government is a tyranny to a degree, and the more evil it is, the more it is loved. The difficulty is

in judging the degree of tyranny under which you live.

Marye had relied on her tyranny. She had believed that it would cure her of longing and of fear. But although she felt the least bit feverish, she was not ill. She was going to stay as she was. She was doomed to be herself.

The viruses, she thought, they must be mutating. They must be acting like vaccines against themselves. Or they were changing into something else. She remembered the men in the pub with their sweaty lips and ferret eyes. Not only as vaccines.

New, contagious modes of behaviour? Retroviruses worked backwards. They didn't hijack RNA, but DNA itself. Retroviruses had become a permanent part of human genetic makeup before, like the segment of DNA that produces soluble suppressor factor, or perhaps the oncogene itself. What would be next? Babies born talking? Babies born talking backwards?

Marye feared for the future. Everything was going to come apart. What will save us? she wondered. But then, that's always been the question.

In the morning, in the afternoon, Joe the Postperson called. "There's a new play. They want you to act in it," he said. "Do you want me to say that you are ill?"

"Yes, Joseph, tell them that," she said.

A day passed. She didn't eat. The next morning there was a shy, apologetic rapping on her door. Cilla called with some bread and cheese. Marye told her she wasn't hungry. People often were not; Cilla assumed she had been photosynthesizing in the sun. "I've heard the news about Rolfa," she said. "You must be very happy."

"Yes," said Marye. "Very happy."

"Everybody thinks you've been gutter top," Cilla told her, sensing sadness, and wanting to make Marye smile.

Marye did smile, at the slang. Gutter top. Grate. Great.

"You're all gutter top, too," she said, and meant it.

Cilla left, taking the food, her face crossed with a perplexed scowl, knowing that there had been a loss, and not understanding what it could be. Had the old, withdrawn Marye returned?

In the middle of the afternoon, without knocking, the Snide walked in, wearing his sinister hat at a rakish angle.

"Lo, Hazel, I'm back," he said.

His face fell.

"Hazel?" he asked in horror.

Marye looked at him and shook her head. No. Not Hazel. Hazel is dead. There's just me.

He sank down beside her on the bed. "She was a virus?" He covered his eyes. Masked by his hand, sheltered by it, he found again his edged and bitter, nervous smile.

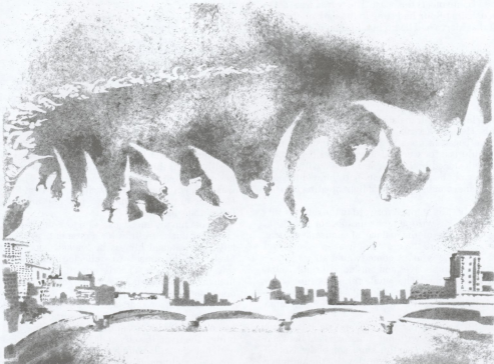
"And you are Marye," he said. "That was good. Good trick. You must have laughed."

"I was too scared," said Marye.

"I sensed something, you know. It's just that viruses aren't usually that complete."

"They aren't usually Hazel," replied Marye.

"I've stopped being a Snide anyway," he said, looking down at the quilt, beginning to pick at it. The smile had turned in on himself. "I was going to tell



her that."

I don't have the time or the energy for this, thought Marye. You must know what was between me and Rolfa, you must know what you tried to do to us and yet you want my help. My help. You're not just a fool, you're a shit. You're a fool because you are a shit.

"That's why I needed Hazel," he said, completing the thought for her. "Can I catch the virus from you?" It was a worn, hopeless question. He already knew the answer.

"I stopped being contagious long ago," said Marye.

"I wonder if they'll give it to me if I ask?"

I don't know. I don't care.

"Did...when she was with you...did she ever respond to you. Did...did she ever talk to you?"

Wearily, Marye shook her head. No, she just read. All she did was read. It was all she could do. She needed me to do anything else.

He stood up and went to the door. He turned and looked at her, searching her face, searching her mind. I was Hazel, thought Marye. For him, I had Hazel's mind and face.

"I'm glad you're unhappy," she said.

But I'll get over it. You won't.

Reluctantly, pity stirred. Pity, that was Hazel's enemy. Marye showed him Hazel's face, its great freckled length, the pebble spectacles. She thought you were a fool, but I think she could have loved you. She needed someone to manage.

He started to put on his sinister hat, then thought better of it. "There's a bit more to me than that," he told her.

"Then go and find it," replied Marye. Like a

shadow, he turned and was gone.

She tried to sleep and couldn't. She picked up one of Rolfa's books, brown and battered, and it fell open on the last page.

...at the top of the Forest, a little boy and his bear will always be playing.

She would have immediately thrown down the book, except that under each word, or rather, each syllable, there was a tiny, pencilled note of music on a tiny, pencilled stave.

Quickly, she flipped through the other pages. It had all been set to music, the entire book, re-written to be sung.

She had left Rolfa reading all day.

Marye picked up the next book in the stack. It was bashed and anonymous and huge, with a beige cover, slumping sideways on its expensive binding. Before its title page there was a picture of Dante. All three books of the Comedy – *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* – had been bound together in one volume. There was music under all the words, all the way through.

The handwriting was small and neat, crabbed, as if trying to hide. Some of it was in pencil, some of it was in ink, some of it was written on pieces of paper stitched into the book with white thread. Some of it was written in gold. There were often several different lines of music under the text, with messages: "trumpets here" or "Virgil descant." Marye turned back to the first page.

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita...

Midway in the journey of our life, I found myself

in a dark wood, the straight way lost...

Then Dante meets the beast. The words were set to the music that Rolfa had sung in the dark on the first night that Marye had heard her, hidden in the Graveyard.

"Rolf!" said Marye and shook the book. To do this and keep it hidden! While Joseph and I copied out the rags of what we'd heard. You didn't say anything, I didn't say anything, what else didn't we talk about? Did we ever tell each other a word of truth?

Marye read *The Divine Comedy* buoyed up by music. Her viruses translated the notes into imagined sounds. Her viruses sang.

Marye began to imagine it, a great abstract opera that would last for weeks if it were ever performed. She saw it staged in the sky, amid stars, with bars of colour, symbolic angels, beasts with human faces, a hell in honeycombs, tunnels of light opening into the heavens.

Suddenly Cilla stepped forward in the robes of Virgil. The part was written for a soprano. For no reason, Lucy, old Lucy of the palace of amusement, was Beatrice. She wore the crown of heaven askew, and gave a sideways wink. A comedy after all.

Marye closed her eyes and smiled. All right, Rolfa, all right. It's funny. The whole thing is funny – my not speaking, your not speaking, it's funny. We could have sat down together with the paper and written this.

Now I'll have to put it on. Thanks a lot. Marye looked at the book, with her finger wedged between the pages. I'll have to get this sung, somehow. Not all at one time, you understand, my love, or the audience would die of starvation or old age. Over several weeks. But on what kind of stage? What kind of stage could hold this? You knew, God damn it, Rolfa, you knew I'd have to do something about this!

Marye went on reading and seeing and hearing while her viruses made a tally and followed the structure. She saw the themes dart and dive and interweave like swallows. And return, in and out of the silence.

You've done it. You've done it Rolfa. It's better than your bloody Wagner. It's better put together, the songs are better, it's even longer. This is Mozart, Rolfa, this is Bach. How could you do it? How could you do it to me?

Marye began to feel the terrible weight that genius, like death, leaves behind for other people.

And you won't be here, Rolfa. You won't be able to hear it. You'll be someone else. You'll be like a ghost, Rolfa, I'll see you walking through the Zoo, but you'll be dead, undead. I'll hear you sing, but it won't really be you. All of this may have been a comedy, Rolfa, but it hurts, hurts like slapstick full in the face. So it wasn't high comedy, my love. I would call it low.

It was sunset, and there was a knock on the door, and it was Joseph the Postperson.

"I bought you an ice cream," he said, and held it out to her.

Marye gave a pale, grateful chuckle, and reached out for it. Joseph jumped forward to pass it to her. "It is very good, Marye, it is very good that you eat. You have not eaten."

The vanilla was meltingly delicious, and Marye felt weak to the point of nausea. Her Rhodopsin skin was

itching for sunlight. As she ate, Marye realized something.

"You take care of us, Joseph."

"Oh, yes," he said. "I carry your messages. I also know when you are ill or unhappy. I am the one who finds you when you die. That is my job."

"And you know all of us."

He smiled. "When I dream," he said, "I dream all your messages, all scrambled up. But now, because of you and Rolfa, when I dream, I also hear the music."

Hunger pangs returned. "I need to get some sun," said Marye.

So Marye and Joseph walked down the steps of the Shell together. He had to boost her up, help her as if she were old. Her knees felt shivery and weak. This is silly, to do this to yourself, she thought. He took her outside onto the walkways facing the Thames. It was cool, with a strong breeze from the river. Marye's face was turned towards the wind, and towards the last of the sunset sky.

"I must run my messages," said Joseph. Their hand-clasp became more firm for a moment, and then he left. She watched him as he walked back into the Shell, and the sunset was reflected like fire on the rows of windows. That is how it is for him, she thought. Each room is alive with light. Each room has one of us in it.

She went for a short and gentle walk and found herself standing on Hungerford Footbridge, where she had once stood before, and she was shaking, as if the bridge, the river, the city and the sky were all shaking with her. Seagulls were fustooned about her, calling, not needing to move their wings in the wind, dropping parcels of waste into the river.

Life was a disease, thriving, and it was given breath by love. That was what it seemed to Marye. Water, clouds, wind, they came at her in a rush. What am I feeling? she thought. It was as if something had pulled her up with it, snatched her up, made her its own.

She looked at the Thames, with its heavy-bodied barges and their thick, waxy sails hanging in crisp folds as if carved out of wood; and at the rowboats painted in bright colours; and at the brown autumn leaves being gathered up for storage by organized parties of schoolchildren; and the press of bicycles and horses on the South Bank; and the sun panels on the roofs of the ancient white buildings. Farther round the sweep of the river just behind St Paul's were the Coral Reefs, the new houses looking like giant cauliflower flowers and sparkling in the last of the light, as if it had snowed.

How much work had made it? How many billions of hours, to build the roads, the carts, the boats, the embankments? How many billions more to learn how to do it, and to store the information? To write the songs in people's heads, to tame the horses, to grow the food? Her viral clock began to count.

On the opposite bank, a great green drum was being pulled by dry-horses.

It was laying cable. The power would soon be on again. There would be metal, sent back along the Slide. The world was going to be rich again, and hung with light. There would be stages big enough for Paradiso. There would be no need for mines in the Antarctic.

Four billion hours and counting.

And all of this will go, sometime. Here it was, in

front of her: history, if only for someone else.

Everything goes, everything is lost, eventually. But if something is good, it doesn't matter what happens. The ending is still happy.

We might have lived in the Antarctic, my love. We would have visited your mother, and you would still have sung, if only to sled dogs. We might have run away to Scotland and been sheep farmers in smelly old jumpers. Or we could have stayed as we were, until we hated each other.

Or there could have been this. You will be great, and I will stand in the wings and hear your music, and the applause will rise up.

Ten billion and counting.

There was a lot to do. Marye had 17, maybe 18 years left to live. Time to get busy. But whatever work she did would not be lost, could not be negated, even by the death of the sun.

Twelve billion and counting.

Marye walked backwards to keep her face toward the sunlight, unaware that she was humming to herself.

*Just a Dog of a Song, But...
Jump.*

Somewhere else, the voices of the Consensus were falling like rain, calling
Rolfa

Rolfa

Rolfa

Rolfa.

We want to hear your music.

They awoke the pattern of a mind that had not been touched by virus. It did not come awake in the orderly way the Consensus expected. It erupted. It knew at once where it was, and what it was, and what had been asked of it. It knew at once the things it now could do.

There was a blast of imagined light, engulfing, blinding, and a striking of musical chords that were sustained. Very faintly at first, like a ringing in the ear, came voices.

"In the end is my beginning," whispered the one who had come awake.

A hidden thought followed like a dart: and this is the end of the Comedy, and the music at the end is the same as at the beginning.

The one who had come awake could orchestrate thought and sensation. The blinding light seemed to fade; eyes were adjusting to it. There were clouds, mountainous, rumbled, going off into many layers of distance, with shafts of light and lakes of shadow and cloud-valleys full of icy mist. There was an infinity of light and air, a world without end.

The audience felt wind in its face and a throbbing of blood in its temples and cold air being pulled into lungs – it felt nostalgia for flesh. And out of the mists, Angels came streaming in black, their round and innocent faces painted white. Their robes and lips and eyesockets were black.

The Angels were the Vampires. They had been a chorus all along. There was T.S. Eliot, his face painted green to make him look ill. There was Madame Curie, glowing with her discovery. T.E. Lawrence had the marks of the lash, and the Brontës coughed, their arms

about each other. The Vampires of History held each other back. They bore each other up. The signs of health were indistinguishable from the signs of disease.

The song they sung was this:

All'alta fantasia qui mano possa...

Here high fantasy failed

Yet, like a smoothly spinning wheel

Desire and my will were turned as one by Love.

Then everything dropped out. The audience fell into night, into a sky dark and blue and full of stars. The darkness, the sky, had been below the light.

The Love that moves the sun and all the other stars.

Drums beat. The imagined music drew to a firm and conclusive end. The thought came that this was a prediction: we will all live in the spirit. Rolfa was free.

Then, silence.

for Jon Hosking, for Johanna Firbank, for Bob Geldof

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Geoff Ryman is a keen writer of plays as well as novels and stories (some of his dramatic work will be featured at the World SF Convention in Brighton this August). His dramatization of Philip K. Dick's novel *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* won much praise in British sf circles a couple of years ago. He divides his time between London and Oxford, and is currently working on a new novel.

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Book Reviews, 1

Lee Montgomerie

After Gollancz Classic Science Fiction comes Penguin Classic Science Fiction. Both harbour semiological messages in their cover art. The Gollancz Classics are emblazoned with a triangle, familiar from traffic signs as a warning. The dignified black covers of the Penguins broadcast contradictory signals – superimposed on Halley's Comet, harbinger of doom, is something that looks suspiciously like the British Nuclear Fuels logo: the Peaceful Atom, nucleus reassuringly confined in a cage of electron orbits. An instrument of destructive power domesticated to provide a source of permanent comfort: safe, clean, cheap and respectable. Or so we are told.

The ideas and imagery which fuel the powerhouse of science fiction decay and cool with the passage of time, their emissions becoming indistinguishable from the literary background. But their poisons still slowly seep out to pollute the field, and hot spots still smoulder in the vitrified slag.

It is hardly necessary to read Edwin A. Abbott's 1884 *Flatland* (Penguin, £2.50), encapsulated as it is as a small crystalline inclusion in every sociotopological fantasy that derives from it. Ingenuity and idiosyncrasy still radiate through the glassified prose. His two-dimensional characters with limited perspective, inextricably embedded in their narrow matrix and operating rigid sex and class distinctions on the basis of inborn shape, are as much a satire on the inflexibility of Abbott's native society as a discourse on plane geometry, and it is a token of the success of "Victorian Values" in penetrating public consciousness that the values of *Flatland*, its unbending rules of straightness and regularity, should still emanate rays of ghastly relevance, as do many of the social incidentals in H.G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (Penguin, £3.50), with its self-serving entrepreneurial narrator and its super-efficient Selenite society in the cavernous bowels of the Moon.

The First Men in the Moon, like its featured spacecraft, is intimate, craftsmanlike and travels effortlessly between world with minimal gravity, taking on board everything from intoxicating mushrooms to demarcation disputes to altered states of consciousness induced by the alienation of space travel, plus as much state-of-the-art science as the author can pack in. Its language still familiar through generations of pastiche, its hardware, structure and plot still a model for the industry, it is not a decommissioned fossil but a working part of the Wells powerhouse which still illuminates the sf landscape and breeds fuel for the whole genre.

Wells's sub-lunar labyrinth, lit by luminous fungi and phosphorescent

waters and populated by a hyper-organized alien community, is recycled in gloomier and profounder form in Joseph O'Neill's 1935 *Land Under England* (Penguin, £3.95); an interminable journey through a dismal subterranean warren, inhabited by repellent insectile predators and dour, authoritarian descendants of the Romans, among whom the protagonist eventually encounters his father, transfigured into a monster of fanatical conformism.

Only readable as a prescient critique of the Nazis, it almost deserves its humourless modern introduction by psychiatrist Anthony Storr, dignifying it as an anticipator of various subsequent psychological theories and offhandedly giving away the entire plot. *Flatland* is similarly ill-served by the reprinting of a 1952 preface by Banesh Hoffmann (who?), conscientiously explaining why the four-dimensional spacetime manifold of General Relativity cannot liberate us from our own incarceration in Cubeland. I am surprised H.G. Wells escaped a literal-minded editorial invoking Apollo and arguing against anti-gravity...

The daughter products of classical sf are still with us today – imagination, humour, social criticism, a touch of scientific enlightenment and more than a touch of darkness. Robert Sheckley's *Victim Prime* (Methuen, £9.95) re-uses exhausted downbeat clichés to provide a steady stream of low-powered entertainment – his protagonist's progress through the twists of quest that lead him from his dilapidated American hometown to the chance of fame and fortune as a professional killer on the holiday island of Esmeralda being accompanied by TV sports-style commentary and acerbic down-putting in the manner of high-handed book reviews. The ending is abruptly chopped off, leaving numerous threads of sub-plot twitching helplessly in space.

Frederik Pohl's *The Coming of the Quantum Cats* (Gollancz, £9.95) is likewise relentlessly lighthearted and less confusing than it could have been, considering that it is set in an infinity of intercommunicating parallel Americas and features seven first-person

narrators, four of them variants of the same chap. There is an excess of scenes in which the current protagonist experiences a startling confrontation with his/her doppelgänger, and not much room for plot once all the alter egos have been put in context, the alternate politicians (e.g. Presidents Daley, Brown and Nancy Reagan, not to mention Ronald Reagan the maverick liberal) introduced, the compulsory lecture on quantum mechanics and the eclectic dissertation on binary mathematics delivered. What there is is professional and pleasant – the acceptable face of sf as a low-risk, clean and efficient industry, suitable for conducted tours by parties of intelligent school-children and as a medium for the boiling of pots.

Ian Watson's short-story plots begin with familiar elements which unexpectedly transmute into bizarre isotopes under the intensity of the interaction between author and material. *Evil Water* (Gollancz, £10.95) is a collection of ten stories which begin in the territory where sf, horror and social comedy intersect and rapidly twist out of alignment with all three dimensions of literary Cubeland. Enticed into Watson's cunning traps, one is never again sure whether the world glimpsed through the bars of the cage is the real one, or even the intriguing sf construct in which an agnostic bishop grows a halo, a schoolteacher's dreams are interrupted by commercial breaks, or a yuppie commuter becomes ensnared in the devious thaumaturgical practices of a rustic temptress. "The People on the Precipice" and "When the Timegate Failed" are from *Interzone*; the others are as good – stories as classical as anything written a century ago, and as modern as Sizewell B.

Keith Roberts' moody *Grainne* (Kerosina, £12.50) recounts an advertising artist's progress from angst-ridden Fifties' schooldays to Millennial apocalypse in Ireland in the form of a third-person monologue interrupted by shadowy interviewers and mediated by the eponymous heroine – part mystical Celtic myth-figure, part superconfident media charisma-merchant; leader of a cult of calm, autonomous handmaidens. It is not so

much classical as romantic; vivid, fresh and desperately nostalgic.

But why invoke the classics at all? *Sf* is a literature for neophiles, not necrophiles; best sampled when it is hot and incandescent, scattering penetrating rays of insight, not smouldering in the holding pits of history, authenticated by Einstein, Skinner, NASA or the Nazis.

K.W. Jeter's *Dr Adder* (Grafton, £2.95) is neither clean nor safe nor respectable, though it is as cheap as all but the all-but two-dimensional 91-page *Flatland*. Set at the Interface between a sordid, subcultural Los Angeles and the uptight citizens of Orange County, promulgating Moral Force and patronizing mutilated whores, it is a fulminating mix of sex, drugs, electronics, mass murder and black humour; simultaneously rib-ticking and gut-wrenching.

An agonized 1979 afterword by Philip K. Dick (who is encrypted in the text as radio station KCID, dispensing turgid German music and oracular messages) reveals that the book has been languishing unpublished since 1972, while the sword-wielding wizards and hobbit clones that Dick castigates have flourished and multiplied and evolved into triple-decker door-stoppers. Even with Dick's impassioned endorsement, *Dr Adder* did not see American publication until 1984, or British publication until now. A shame. Its scatological argot and eschatological climax, in which drug-enhanced subconscious minds lock horns in a hallucinatory battle through the TV network, refigured Cyberpunk by a decade.

If *Dr Adder* had burst all over the scene in 1972, its fallout might have mutated the whole field. Now, fifteen years on and several halflives later, melting into the common slag of street-wise *sf* and necrophiliac horror novels, it is old enough to be a Gollancz Classic if not a Penguin Classic. Will it ever win the Peaceful Atom seal of approval?

BOOK REVIEWS, 2

John Clute

Let us kill three birds with one stone. Let us review a single novel by three massive simultaneous authors. Because we have had the strength to read *The Legacy of Heorot* (Gollancz, £10.95), which is by Larry Niven, and by Jerry Pournelle, and by Steven Barnes, let us therefore sip from the fount of wisdom of that squad. Let us travel with them to humanity's first colony beyond the solar system, which has been established on an island called Avalon in the middle of an

ocean on the fourth planet of Tau Ceti. While the human colonists (almost all of them Americans) continue to jerry-build their appalling quonset slums, and to finish laying out "a square kilometer of plastic-coated solar cells" upon the virgin land in a foredoomed attempt at sating their triumphalist energy-lust, and to plunge headlong into the factory farming regimes that worked so well on Earth and should tame Avalon pretty damn quick, things seem reasonably blissful to most of the cast. What's more, the private organization behind the colony (with exquisite Yankee sagacity our three-some conceive that The National Geographic Society will have financed humanity's first interstellar trip – presumably on the grounds that all Earth governments, having been feminized by an infestation of Comsymp liberals, will have shirked the man's task of funding space travel) shows every sign of being well pleased with the snapshots everyone is taking for the magazine.

But not everyone is fooled by this seemingly blissful infestation of yet another world. Enter (one might be forgiven for thinking) tough-minded Cook Jerry. Clearly, of the squad, Jerry Pournelle is best qualified to undertake the task of creating a stern stiff-necked bromide-choked military man with doubts about matters of security. And who but Jerry would muddy his share of the broth by giving his dreadful ex-colonel a name like Cadmann Weyland? And in case anyone misses the sentimentalizing bathos of this reference to Poul Anderson country, Caedmon Wayland actually has a limp. He also sings. He is also despised of men, until he pounds the shit out of them.

Enough jollity. Having noted several weird gaps in the island's ecosystem, the Singing Smith fights shy of assuming that there are no autochthones straying about the New America, in need of extermination. Nor would there be any story to tell if Avalon were truly benign. If this seems not only likely but desperately obvious, and if *The Legacy of Heorot* begins to remind readers of old Idiot Plots he/she might have thought obsolete about the time *Planet Stories* bit the dust, it may be reassuring to learn that the entire cast suffers from brain damage through a phenomenon of interstellar travel called Hibernation Instability, and that not one person in the entire novel is actually very bright. It is good to know this.

But now it's Cook Larry's turn (probably). It's time to create a monster whose continued presence on Avalon will first threaten the colonists, then drive them into a feeding frenzy (for they're only human). And there's no doubt that the ravening hot-wire ruthless brand of beast Niven gives us, like

an updated Coeurl from the earlier pages of A.E. van Vogt, does generate an agreeable frisson or two; and because the colonists are desperately thick the Coeurl updates do almost manage to eat everyone up. In its immature form, the beast is a fish-like animal called a samlon (because it tastes something like a salmon, and because this is the kind of joke that pleases the kind of people who need keepers); in its mature form, it is terribly strong and swift and female, and is therefore called a grendel (hence Heorot). These grendels attack in three waves. The second wave is similar to the first, though there are several of the beasts this time, and Caedmon the Lame soon manages to organize an extermination campaign. Unfortunately, not one of the highly trained colonists has given a thought (not too many to spare, perhaps) to problems of ecology, and no one asks any pertinent questions about the grendel's weird biology or about the relationship of grendels to the yummy samlon (humans eat grendel children with relish). So they fail to realize that their destruction of the parents will create a population explosion in the children – as grendels eat samlon whenever there are too many of them – and the last part of the novel sees a great wave of samlon metamorphose into small ravaging grendels. The grendel is (by the way) an amphibian creature, with a brain as large as a dolphin's, and in the water is capable of registering the traces of potential prey with extraordinary sensitivity. This pregnant depiction (by Cook Larry) of the grendel as ferociously intelligent and sensitive to water-borne spoor cuts little ice, however, with Cook Jerry, who has arranged for his beloved ex-colonel to build himself a fortress away from town, where he settles down like some Roman exile. Through the middle of the living room of his abode he arranges for a brook to run. He is immensely proud of this. The brook feeds downstream into a river that, as the novel nears its climax, is full of famished autochthones who have already munched up most of the island, tartare. The surviving members of the cast, having been driven out of their homes, now take refuge with the bleak Songster. *When they say, what a long day! I need a bath!* They then bathe in the stream, and the final wave of grendels, nostril flaring in disbelief at the good luck they've whiffed, soon charges upstream and eats them. *What happen?* says Cook Jerry's mouthpiece a little later to the few who didn't wash. This is one of the reasons it is just as well we have been told about Hibernation Instability.

In the meantime, there have been a few pages of human interest to keep the broth lumpy; they were probably assigned to Mr Barnes (scullery

GOLLANZ SUMMER SF AND FANTASY HIGHLIGHTS



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by Mary Gentle

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by Gene Wolfe

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September, 320 pages, £10.95

WIZARDRY AND WILD ROMANCE

by Michael Moorcock

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And don't miss

THE DAY OF CREATION

by J.G. Ballard

His first novel since *Empire of the Sun*
September, 256 pages, £10.95

AEGYPT

by John Crowley

A new novel from the author of *Little, Big*
September, 400 pages, £11.95

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person). In these human interest pages, everyone (except for Weyland and a paralyzed sub-plot adversary in the camp) square dances cute, and grabs ass cute, and fucks cute, and jollifies cute about fucking cute. Like cheerleaders, or scouts, or youth counselors, they hug each other a lot while grinning at the camera, or into mirrors. They think they are loveable, but they are not even likeable. They do not think they are philistine bullies, but they are precisely moral majority enforcers. The trio who created Avalon may think they crafted a paradise whose only blemish – a few dolphin-brained native beasts who almost avoid being exterminated – ultimately dissolves in a final solution, all clap hands. What they have in fact created is a prison camp. A few xenobiological flights may occasionally perk *The Legacy of Heorot* up for a page or two, and lighten the doldrums of this sour dystopian broth, but the taste remains. It is the taste bosses leave, the taste of bosses and owners. A boot taste.

FANTASY, ETC

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (Heinemann, £9.95) is the first thing I've read from Douglas Adams that has nothing whatever to do with *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The rather loose plot concerns a wealthy young programmer who is accused of murdering his boss and turns to a college acquaintance, "Dirk Gently," for help. Their investigation uncovers a number of absurd events that are apparently unconnected, involving ghosts, time-travel, alien robots and an awful lot of confusion. It shares with the *Guide* the habit of telling the reader that something is unlikely or impossible, putting it on stage for us to marvel at, then claiming that it's all coincidence. This gives both works a theistic feeling – someone must be directing the play. As in the *Guide*, the far-fetched events are considered as proof of the existence of God. I suppose we must count it as proof of the existence of the Author. Much of the action takes place in a traditional Cambridge college, giving the novel a rather late-19th-century feeling; the almost entirely male cast spend their time in enjoyable speculation on the Nature of Things whilst their women-folk mainly exist as a reason to feel guilty when you get home late. I found it fun but rather shallow. Mostly harmless.

Time Out of Mind by John R. Maxin (Century Hutchinson, £10.95) is about a 1980s New Yorker who is haunted by images and memories from a century ago. With the help of his analyst, a private detective and his girlfriend,

he pieces together a terrible history of murder and revenge. Best when it sticks to US society of the 1880s and 90s: robber barons, Tammany Hall, country club scandals and college athletes. I suspect that if I knew more about that background I might have followed it better; like many recent novels, it's far too long for its material. Although there is a lot of theorizing about inherited memories, and a few deathbed curses flying about, I wonder if the author is entirely happy with it being marketed under an sf/fantasy imprint.

Has anyone else noticed that you can't pick up a fantasy these days without having to guess which character is Odin? If I include Paul Hazel's odd but original *Finnbranch* trilogy (reviewed in *IZ* 20), I've read eight Odin novels in three months. The most blatant of the latest handful is **Groa's Other Eye** by Dennis Schmidt (Futura, £2.50), volume two of *The Twilight of the Gods*. A young man called Voden the Wayfarer is lost in a world in which the Aesir are a bunch of wood-chopping barbarians, the Vanir a rather unpleasant matriarchy and the Alfur ancient Egyptians (with a bit of Sumerian thrown in). A good book for playing Spot the Quote: the author borrows freely from the Chinese classics – there's some comic relief from Lao Tze – and Babylonian myths, as well as the obvious Norse sagas.

The Wizard and the Warlord by Elizabeth H. Boyer (Corgi, £2.50), "the fourth of *The World of the Alfur* novels," is nearer the Shire than Asgard. Wizards who drink tea and wear slippers get mixed up with young Sigurd's quest to find his origins. It's set in yet another imaginary world with places named Altheim, Svartalfheim and so on. And these Alfur get everywhere.

The Forge in the Forest by Michael Scott Rohan (Macdonald, £10.95), volume two of *The Winter of the World*, is a more substantial work. At least the map at the front doesn't have a place called Jotunheim on it. The setting looks rather like a glaciated North America whose inhabitants have unaccountably take to speaking a mixture of Old English and Breton. However, by page 13 the hero is re-forging a broken sword when a tall, old man with a long beard, a stout staff, and a floppy hat obscuring one eye turns up to play a riddle game... yes it's our old friend the Lord of the Slain again. And those bloody Alfur. The book is competent enough, although some scenes are lifted straight from Wagner, but it's far too long and I wasn't in a mood to appreciate it after four other Odin novels in a week.

The Ice King by "Michael Scot" (Michael Scott Rohan and Allan Scott)

(NEL, £2.50) is a reworking of the standard horror plot: various archaeologists are picked off one at a time by Something they have Unwittingly Awakened. There's some good over-the-top pseudo-scholarship connecting the unpleasant events via maypoles and expert systems, with Erik Bloodaxe and, inevitably, Odin. There are even a few Alfur. I enjoyed it more than I expected, partly because it's an easier read than Rohan's solo effort, but also because it's more honest than the other novels: the folklore detective work points the reader towards the veins of Story it is exploiting.

I know the Elder Edda has been out of copyright for a few years now, but it would be a nice gesture if some of these authors put in a bibliography, as Alan Garner used to do. Well, I suppose they must sell. If there are any publishers reading this, I've got this sure-fire idea for a bestseller myself – Asgard is an L5 colony, Odin a businessman, Loki a computer hacker, and the Alfur can be punks. I've got a few chapters roughed out already, all offers of five-figure advances respectfully considered...

At least there's one good read in this batch: **My Heart Leaps Up (1920-1928)** by R.A. Lafferty (Drum Booklet no. 24, \$3.50) is the first two chapters of *In A Green Tree*, a fictionalized group biography of Lafferty's classmates and contemporaries in Tulsa, Oklahoma, describing the group's first term at school, aged about six. A bit like the *Miss Read* stories as ghosted by G.K. Chesterton. It's only 40 pages or so, but Lafferty could make the instructions on a payphone entertaining. Chris Drumm intends to publish the complete work, in something like 20 parts. I'd love to read it all, but I doubt I shall be able to afford it until it comes out as a book. In the meantime, Drumm booklets are available from Chris Drumm, P.O. Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA.

The late Terry Carr, perhaps best known to *Interzone* readers as an editor, was also an influential fan. **Fandom Harvest** is a hardcover selection of his fan writing from 1949 to 1983, introduced by Bob Silverberg, illustrations by Grant Canfield, afterword by John-Henri Holmberg. If you aren't a fan there's no point in me trying to tell you what it's all about and you are very unlikely to send £12.50 plus £1.50 p&p (cheques payable to J.H. Holmberg) to Laissez Faire Produktion AP, Råsundavägen 129, S-171 30 Solna, Stockholm, Sweden, which is the only way you'll get your hands on a copy. The book was published before Carr's recent death as an affectionate tribute to a writer who seemed to be in the middle of his career.

(Ken Brown)

Guardians of the West by David Eddings (Bantam Press, £9.95)

Anyone who enjoyed the first five volumes of "The Belgariad" will not be disappointed with this first volume of the "The Mallorean," in which Eddings provides more of the same. All the favourite characters are here. Garion is gradually maturing as a king and as a husband, when the "final" battle against evil proves to have been not quite so final. Newcomers will find a complex alternative world, a well thought out cosmology and (rare in heroic fantasy) a great deal of humour. Eddings's style is perhaps too "modern," but this is often the source of the humour. His characters, if not fully rounded, are vividly coloured.

(Phyllis McDonald)

The Ballad of Halo Jones, Bks 1, 2 and 3 by Alan Moore and Ian Gibson (Titan Books, 1 and 2 @ £4.50, 3 @ £4.95). Three handsome compilations of the installments to date of this popular 2000 AD series. Moore says in his introduction that Halo Jones was a self-conscious attempt to get away from the staple three G's of British boys' comics - guns, guys and gore - without falling backwards into the equally appalling clichés of British girls' comics (ballerinas, midnight feasts and the like). What was aimed at instead was to chronicle the adventures of "an ordinary woman, such as you might find standing in front of you at the checkout of Tesco's," only this woman would live in an artificial prison for the unemployed anchored off Manhattan in the year 4949 and speak a future patois so cunningly opaque that 2000 AD readers would complain they couldn't understand it. The first two books thus offer nothing very unusual in plot - Halo and friends fight through perils to 50th-century version of Marks and Spencers, Halo is attacked by enamoured psychotic robot dog - but give Moore and Gibson good opportunity to show off their imaginatively detailed satirical future of increased-leisure citizens (aka the jobless), designer weapons and philosophy nasties ("Wittgenstein Has Risen From His Grave"), spiced with unobtrusive in-jokes (eg, a soap opera called "John Cage: Atonal Avenger"). But in Book 3, Halo Jones turns into sterner stuff. Halo goes to war, for no better reason than any current enlister - boredom and lack of prospects - and finds herself embroiled in a harrowingly illustrated forever war fought with 99% female armies (an effective ploy designed to shock those blasé to the carnage of male troops). The tone of this third book is notably deeper, allowing the creators room to deal with such un-2000 AD-like issues as the sexual attractiveness of evil; and, all in all, it's a more careful and moving

consideration of war than you'll usually find in current written sf.

(Lilian Edwards)

ALSO RECEIVED

Recommended:

The Jaguar Hunter by Lucius Shepard (Arkham House, \$21.95). Marvellous 400-page collection by one of the best new sf/fantasy writers of this decade. Contains the agonizing Central American war stories "Salvador" and "R & R" (the latter now a deserving Nebula winner and a strong contender for the Hugo), among others. Foreword by Michael Bishop, illustrations by Jeffrey Potter.

Men Like Gods by H.G. Wells and **The Wanderer** by Fritz Leiber (Penguin, £3.95 each). Sixth and seventh volumes in what is shaping up to be a very fine "Classic SF" series.

Rogue Moon by Algis Budrys and **Man Plus** by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz, £2.95 and £3.50). Eleventh and twelfth volumes in Gollancz's large-format paperback "Classic SF" series - more emphasis on recent fiction than in the Penguin series.

Radio Free Albemuth by Philip K. Dick (Grafton, £2.95). First British appearance of Dick's only posthumous sf novel. It's an earlier version of VALIS - cranky but fascinating.

The Pastel City by M. John Harrison (Unwin, £2.50). Exquisitely written fantasy about a city called Viriconium (first published 1971).

Hegira by Greg Bear (Gollancz/VGSF, £2.95). First British edition of this author's debut novel, revised from its original appearance (Dell, 1979).

Night Walk by Bob Shaw (VGSF, £2.50). Another reissued first novel (from 1967).

Mission of Gravity by Hal Clement (VGSF, £2.50). The hard sf classic, slightly creaky nowadays but still ingenious.

The Drowned World by J.G. Ballard (Carroll and Graf, \$3.95). Another classic - the first American edition in a long time.

Dinner at Deviant's Palace by Tim Powers (Grafton, £2.95). Reviewed by Alex Stewart in IZ 16.

Tales of Wonder by Jane Yolen (Futura, £2.95). Attractive modern fairy stories.

Tom O'Bedlam by Robert Silverberg (Futura, £2.95). Colourful post-disaster scenario.

Others:

Master of His Fate by J. Maclaren Cobban (Greenhill, £8.95). Reprint of an 1890 scientific romance. It's a medical mystery thriller about the "life force."

The Blind Spot by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint (Greenhill, £8.95). Terrible old sf novel from 1921. Of historical interest, but "not without a certain silliness," as Brian Stableford says in his afterword.

The Hounds of God by Judith Tarr (Bantam Press, £9.95). Historical fantasy, sequel to *The Golden Horn*, which in turn was a sequel to *The Isle of Glass* (reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in IZ 18).

All Judgement Fled by James White (Futura, £2.50). Not a come-on title, but one of this author's better sf novels.

The Other Side of the Sky by Arthur C. Clarke (VGSF, £2.95). Story collection from 1958, with a new preface. Contains the original, brief version of "The Songs of Distant Earth."

Master of the Sidhe by Kenneth C. Flint (Bantam, £2.50). Fourth volume in a fantasy series based on Irish myth.

The Unlikely Ones by Mary Brown (Arrow, £3.50). Reviewed by Peter Garratt in IZ 17.

The Amtrak Wars Book 3: Iron Master by Patrick Tilley (Sphere, £3.50). 400-page futuristic battle saga.

Black Star Rising by Frederik Pohl (Futura, £2.95). Reviewed by Lee Montgomerie in IZ 18.

Arrows of Desire by Geoffrey Household (Penguin, £1.95). Slim satire of a future Britain, by this 85-year-old author.

The Twilight of the Serpent by Peter Valentine Timlett (Futura, £2.50). "Occult fantasy," sequel to *The Seedbearers* and *The Power of the Serpent*.

The Masks of Time by Robert Silverberg (VGSF, £2.95). Middling-good Silverberg novel from 1968 (also known as *Vornan-19*).

The Master by Louise Cooper (Unwin, £2.95). Conclusion of the "Time Master" fantasy trilogy.

The Faceless Man by Jack Vance (VGSF, £2.50). "Book One of the fabulous Durdane trilogy" (also known as *The Anome*, 1971).

Angel with the Sword by C.J. Cherryh (VGSF, £2.95). More efficient adventure sf from the very prolific Ms Cherryh.

Islands Out of Time by William Irwin Thompson (Grafton, £2.95). Philosophical "metafiction" about ancient Atlantis.

Contact: A Novel by Carl Sagan (Arrow, £3.50). Sagan's two-million-dollar blockbuster which fictionalizes his obsession with the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. Excellent hard science, but overlong.

The Seven Altars of Dusarra by Lawrence Watt-Evans (Grafton, £2.95). Second of a fantasy series about a hero called Garth (presumably no relation to the *Daily Mirror* character).

Silverglass by J.F. Rivkin (Futura, £2.50). About a sword-swinging heroine.

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

Wendy Metcalfe (Letters, IZ 19) is desirous of should explore the psyche and the emotions, as well as the physical world and the cosmos within which it is situated, but the soft sciences have often been explored and there are already in existence a great number of works with detailed and realistic characterization, as well as plot.

Christopher Priest's work is stunning in its exploration of the psyche and his characters are utterly believable. His novel, *A Dream of Wessex* and the collection, *An Infinite Summer* are among my most treasured possessions. Recently, the Women's Press has had a hit-or-miss affair with science fiction. *Native Tongue*, by Suzette Hadin-Elgin and the anthology, *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind*, being among the hits. *Interzone*, itself, has printed many stories with the psyche and character development at their cores, including "Finn," by Sue Thomason, in IZ 14, and in IZ 19, Christina Lake's "Assyria," which is one of the subtlest feminist stories I've read: they are both new writers with tremendous promise.

Unfortunately sf, like any other fiction, is full of trash. Furthermore, sf isn't a genre in the same sense as the western and crime/thriller are, because its field is so wide and diversified. So it's harder to find that particular type of sf you enjoy reading, but it is there, and it's growing. Other types of sf shouldn't be condemned for what they are, but for how badly they may sometimes be written. It is important that the various types of sf cross-breed, to avoid stagnation.

Terry Browne
Lincoln

Dear Editors:

Interzone is described as a magazine of science fiction and fantasy. This is fine, but it is well to preserve the integrity of both categories. Richard Kadrey's story (IZ 19) belongs in neither. It's written in the manner of hard sf with elements of satire, but violates the form in a number of ways, viz:

To obtain the effect described reactor-grade uranium will not do. You need bomb-grade plutonium or U235. There ought to be a plot mechanism to explain why this expensive material is being used in such an inefficient way. Even with bomb-grade material, you would never get enough into a gutted domestic thermos flask, even of the largest size. Chunks cut off with a Swiss army knife wouldn't do either. They would have to be cast to the right

shape and machined almost as close as Jo blocks. Parnell is not described as doing this, or having the facilities to do it. A couple of blasting caps (mercury fulminate?) wouldn't do either. It needs a shaped charge.

Now, the point of this letter is that Kadrey writes with sufficient literacy to suggest he is in a position to know these things. If he's too lazy to do basic library research, surely it's your job as editor to point out to him where he's gone wrong, rather than print the shoddy result. Even more to the point, there has been an extraordinary amount of twaddle written about nuclear power in the wake of Chernobyl. This story looks like a contribution to the debate in the form of a moral tale – "One maniac with a grudge could wipe out a city." If anti-nuclear propaganda of such transparent technical ineptitude is allowed to see the light, it is certain the nuclear lobby will win by default – if it has not already done so.

C.N. Gilmore
Bedford

Richard Kadrey responds: "Houston Street" is about nuclear power like Moby Dick is about animal rights. This letter is significant, however, in pointing up the problems with writing and reading genre fiction. The essence of Gilmore's argument seems to be that I have written a "hard science" story, and Gilmore finds himself frustrated when the story "violates the form." As that happens, I like violating forms, but that's beside the point. My story is not "hard science," it is a farce, with a big "F" and silent "Q". It has a hell of a lot more to do with Buster Keaton and guys who wear big shoes and get pies in the face than it does with Larry Niven and Niels Bohr. I set out to write a story about what was in equal measures brutal and funny and I believe that is why the editors of IZ chose to print it. If I threw Gilmore's words and readers by using certain sf buzzwords and conventions it is only because we, as sf writers and readers, are so used to taking the easy way out, so ready to make each new thing we read or write into something that we've written or read before, that we cannot approach any new work without heaping it with so many expectations that the work itself is rendered all but meaningless. Besides, why get so bent out of shape worrying about shaped charges and weapons-grade plutonium when, in the real world, Parnell would never have gotten away with stealing the uranium in the first place and he would be severely dead and handless from touching it in the second?

Dear Editors:
No doubt you've received some flak

concerning the increasing proportion of your fiction cast in the mode of mainstream sf – cries of "sell-out." Although I have only been acquainted with IZ for two years, I think I've seen the magazine evolve over that time. I personally believe that you have hit an admirable balance in terms of content. When you have a solid foundation of intelligent literary yarns to hold the magazine together, you can justifiably explore more radical directions in the remaining pages.

Alastair Reynolds
Mid Glamorgan

Dear Editors:

Perhaps now that a science-fiction magazine has published a comic strip of real quality and imagination, and I am of course referring to "Screaming of the Beetle" by SMS in IZ 18, the more prudent and discerning of cognoscenti will at last appreciate not only that the comic strip genre is coming of age but also that it is an art form functioning according to its own set of principles and is not merely a more elaborate form of illustration. And about time too!

The first time I became aware of this problem was in 1975 when *Science Fiction Monthly* printed a strip entitled "The Size of Things to Come" by Malcolm Pointer and their readers protested at its lack of scientific plausibility and frivolity of story-line. Whilst I thought the strip quite pretty to look at and charming in its way, Malcolm Pointer's published reply to these readers was disappointingly flippant so that one felt at the end of the day that the comic strip had been let down. (Meanwhile, of course, the European public was already celebrating the graphic novels of such Belgian artists as Bilal, Moebius and Druillet.)

By contrast, SMS's "Screaming of the Beetle" had a consistency as science fiction which could be discerned in the integrity of design of the creatures, the doctrinal arguments and the ecostructure of the alien world.

Interzone is to be warmly congratulated on publishing this piece by SMS, so clearly a major new talent. Perhaps you could help us track down any pieces published by SMS elsewhere and let us know when we may next hope to find a strip by SMS in IZ?

Stuart Maskell
Glasgow

Simon Ounsley responds: SMS is currently working on a new strip, "The Good Robot," which will appear in IZ shortly. His work has also appeared in the pages of *Mad Dog*, co-edited and co-published by SMS and others. (See advert in IZ 20).

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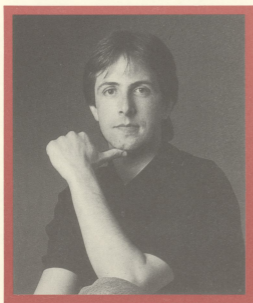
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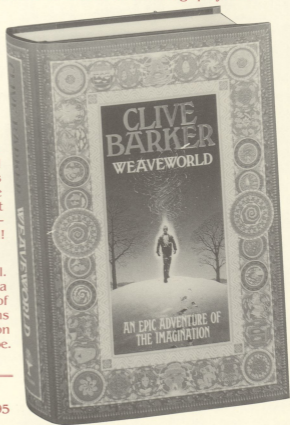


Photograph by
Linda McCartney

CLIVE BARKER

Clive Barker was born in Liverpool in 1952. He is a prodigious and prolific talent, variously described as "the hottest new writer of the decade" (*Omni*), "not merely good, he is great—he's an original" (*Stephen King*) and "l'enfant horrible" (*Sunday Express*).

To date, he has published six volumes of short stories—*The Books of Blood I-VI*; one brilliant bestselling novel—*The Damnation Game*; written and directed several stage plays and



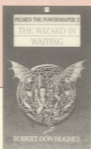
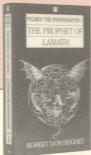
scripted two of his stories for soon to be released movies—*Rawhead Rex* and *Underworld*. He has just completed his directorial debut, *Hellraiser*, which opens in the U.K. in the autumn and is bound to cause great controversy. The film's bye-line is—"There are no limits". You have been warned!

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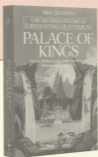
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