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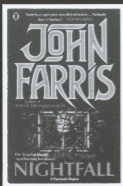
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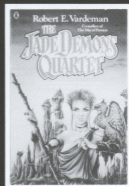
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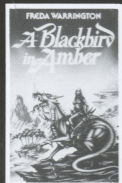


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No 22 Winter 1987

EDITORIAL

Story Popularity Ratings (issues 17-20 inclusive):

1) "Goodbye Houston Street" by Richard Kadrey	38
2) "Sexual Chemistry" by Brian Stabelford	35
3) "The Next-but-One-Man" by Kim Newman	33
4) "The Second Third of C" by Neil Ferguson	32
5) "The Fountain of Time" by Peter Lamborn Wilson	31
6) "Love Sickness" Part One by Geoff Ryman	28
7) "When Jesus Comes Down the Chimney" by Ian Watson	26
8) "Hard Work" by Thomas M. Disch	22
9) "A Dragon for Seyour Chan" by Paul J. McAuley	20
10) "The Xeelee Flower" by S.M. Baxter	19
11) "A Gift from the Culture" by Iain M. Banks	17
12) "Jingling Geordie's Hole" by Ian Watson	14
13) "Freezeframe" by Gregory Benford	10
14) "Boiled Alive" by Ramsey Campbell	9
15) "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick	8
16) "Adam Found" by Simon Ounsley	4
17) "Soundspinner" by D.C. Haynes	3
18) "Assyria" by Christina Lake	0
19=) "Mind Vampires" by Greg Egan	-4
19=) "Paths of Dying" by Simon Ounsley	-4
21) "As Big as the Ritz" by Gregory Benford	-9
22) "Future Fish" by Barbara Hills	-10

Artist Popularity Ratings (issues 17-20 inclusive):

1) SMS	55	7) Ian Sanderson	8
2) Pete Lyon	36	8) Barbara Hills	6
3) Russ Tudor	17	9=) Bernard Quinn	1
4) Tina Horner	16	9=) Paul Rickwood	1
5) John Avon	11	11) Billy Barden	-2
6) Iain Byers	10	12) Margaret Welbank	-17

We got 155 responses to our questionnaire included with the subscription renewal forms in *IZ* 20. The tables above show the results. It was particularly encouraging to find so many *IZ* protégés in the top ten, including almost all of the contributors to our All New Star Special Issue. Knowing that these stories might never have seen the light without us makes it all worth while.

As usual, our practice of subtracting the negative mentions from the positive ones means that some of the low results were not due to indifference but to controversy. Ian Watson's "Jingling Geordie's Hole" received more comments than any other piece, and indeed aroused such a love-hate relationship in our respondents that several of them simultaneously placed it in both the most liked and most disliked categories, thereby cancelling out their own vote. Perhaps the wording of our questionnaire accounted for this ambivalence; as one correspondent put it: "I still can't say that I liked 'Jingling Geordie's Hole,' but I don't think I'll ever forget it!" On the strength of its positive mentions, it would have come a close second. Many pollsters conspicuously reserved judgement on "Love Sickness" until the concluding part, so await next year's poll for the definitive response.

Most popular *IZ* contributor of all, however, was SMS, whose comic strip "Screaming of the Beetle," aroused more interest than any other item - something for the post-literate barbarian in all of us! Most contentious artist was Paul Rickwood, who actually got more mentions than anybody but the redoubtable SMS - his score of one was made up of a large number of positive and negative mentions coming close to cancelling each other out.

Concluded on p.11

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Cover by Pete Lyon for "The Boys"

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Submissions: unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but each one must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) 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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David S. Garnett

The Only One

Miss Christina and I must not kiss, not ever, not even once.

That is the most vital aspect to remember. As I am unsure of what I shall later be able to recall, I am vocalizing this transcription to remind myself. It is solely for my own benefit, and therefore I intend to include all the relevant details.

I am uncertain how to initiate this narrative, although I believe that the most appropriate course would be to commence upon the evening of my original meeting with Miss Katherine and Miss Christina.

This occurred in the tea shop adjacent to the tram terminus. They sat side by side at a centre table, conversing quietly. Miss Christina was the one whom I first noticed. Her straw hat lay on the table in front of her; her jet-black hair was coiled most becomingly at the nape of her neck. She wore a dress of dark green velvet, frilled with white lace at the hem, sleeves and neck. Miss Katherine's garment was of the same material and similar style, but pale blue in colour.

Although it was absolute chance that I was there, I have since come to conclude that all life is the capricious product of fate and happenstance. Each disparate existence comprises the sum total of such vicissitudes. I would never have encountered Miss Katherine and Miss Christina if public transport were more reliable and if their tram had been punctual. Similarly, had I not entered the tea room, my subsequent biography would have followed a divergent route. Everything would have been different.

I had arranged to meet Williams in town. He was a colleague of mine, and we proposed to visit the music hall that evening, the ideal relaxation after a long spell of duty. There was a promising bill of artistes, and I anticipated a sparkling and diverting performance. Being early, I occupied a seat in the empty waiting room at the tram station, where I perused an abandoned newspaper.

It was one of those mass circulation yellow-press publications which devoted the majority of its space

to chronicling the apocryphal exploits of renowned thespians and contemporary vocalists, filling most of its other pages with reviews and previews of various sporting contests. Any news of prominent events was relegated to small paragraphs away from the front pages.

The main attraction of such gutter rags for the lower orders seemed to be the frequent illustrations of young ladies who were pictured raising the hems of their skirts to flaunt their well-turned ankles. Sometimes these ladies (although to dignify such brazen hussies with that title seems somewhat inappropriate) would blatantly expose a beststocked calf to the voyeuristic inspection of millions of salacious male readers.

Small wonder that there was such a sad deficiency of moral fibre in the country. Honourable behaviour and the veneration of law and order are necessarily concomitant. Although I prided myself upon my courage, in some areas of the metropolis it was no longer safe for a uniformed constable to patrol the streets alone during the hours of darkness.

Being a policeman is more than mere employment, it is a vocation. Even off duty, one cannot turn away and ignore the ever-increasing scourge of lawlessness. A trivial offence may seem of little consequence; nevertheless, having escaped with impunity, the minor lawbreaker will invariably progress to more dastardly crimes.

That very evening, for example, I had witnessed a youth endeavouring to evade rightful payment of his tram ticket. He was under my covert scrutiny from the beginning because of his ill-bred mien and his dirty and worn clothing. My assessment proved to be justified. He picked up a used ticket which some slovenly individual had previously dropped onto the floor. The respectable people already on board did their best to disregard his repugnant presence, and when the conductor reached the upper deck the ruffian produced the ticket from his pocket as though he had purchased it himself.

There was no alternative but for me to call attention to this disgraceful attempt at cheating the municipal corporation, and the conductor at once halted the conveyance and demanded that the miscreant disembark. The fellow glared at me and muttered an oath under his breath, but he duly took his leave.

This is no digression; it is an integral component of what I am describing: the most important moment in my life. I must indelibly etch every significant detail onto my mind.

After discarding what purported to be journalism in the litter receptacle, I drew my pocket watch from my waistcoat. Several minutes had yet to elapse before my rendezvous with Williams, and I decided to refresh myself with a cup of tea from the emporium at the corner of the boulevard.

As soon as I stepped inside, my gaze was drawn to two young ladies who occupied one of the tables. These were Miss Katherine and Miss Christina, although naturally I was unaware of their identities at that time. Fortunately, the establishment was well frequented and there were no vacant tables. I removed my hat and requested permission to join them. They paused in their dialogue to study me, to ensure that my appearance would in no manner compromise them, and they nodded. I conjectured that each was a year or two away from her twenty-first birthday, whereas I myself had been granted the key of the door four years previously.

I sat down, but they scarcely discerned my presence and continued their colloquy as though I did not exist. The waitress approached to take my order, and I requested a pot of tea. I was entirely uninterested in feminine chatter, but I could not help overhear the young ladies' reminiscences of a recent gala ball. They giggled in amusement as they recalled the *gaucherie* of their escorts.

"They were such silly boys," commented the one whom I soon learned was named Miss Katherine. Her eyes met mine, and she looked away. Even with her face shadowed by her bonnet, her pale complexion had become tinted by a blush more pleasing than the fashionable rouge she wore upon her cheeks.

When my tray of tea arrived I delayed a minute before pouring a cup, then added more hot water to the pot.

"May I?" I queried, gesturing to the milk and sugar in the centre of the table.

Miss Christina pushed the bowl of sugar towards me and raised the jug over my cup. I nodded, and she poured a trickle of milk into my tea.

"Thank you," I acknowledged, helping myself to the sugar. I raised the cup towards my lips, but my grip was uncertain, and it slipped from my fingers and fell into the saucer with an unseemly crash. Hot liquid splashed onto the back of my hand.

"Permit me," Miss Christina offered, and she took my hand in hers. Her fingers were soft and warm as she dabbed at the drops of tea with her silk handkerchief.

"Thank you," I reiterated, and by now my hand was trembling even more.

"You are welcome," Miss Christina replied, and her cheeks dimpled as she smiled prettily.

Regaining my composure, I remarked: "I hope you will excuse my presumption, but I notice your cups

cups empty. I shall be unable to finish this pot of tea by myself as I have an appointment in a few minutes, may I therefore enquire whether either of you would like some more refreshment?"

They glanced at one another, then slid their cups and saucers towards me. It was Miss Christina's which I filled first.

We exchanged a few pleasantries, and I volunteered my name. The young ladies introduced one another to me, and we began to talk. They were very alike, in character as well as appearance; and because even their names seemed so similar, commencing with a like consonant and comprising of an identical number of syllables, at first it was difficult not to confuse them.

Having banished any residual thought of meeting Williams, much preferring the conviviality of two such agreeable companions, I applied my initiative to ordering more tea and a selection of cakes and scones.

Miss Katherine removed her bonnet, and at the sight of her golden tresses and perfect features I was instantly mesmerized. Although not wishing to appear impolite to her friend, I could not prevent my attention tending to focus unequivocally upon Miss Katherine. As we conversed, I was delighted to perceive that my interest was reciprocated.

Miss Christina gradually became excluded from our discourse. Petulantly, she reflected upon the lateness of the hour and declared that they ought to take their leave. Notwithstanding her evident wish to prolong the interlude and share my company, Miss Katherine could not remain unchaperoned.

My new acquaintances lived in neighbouring houses in one of the more select suburbs, and I summoned a cab and escorted them to their respective parents' homes.

By then I already knew that Miss Katherine was the only one for me. Even had my quest lasted for all eternity, never again could I have chanced upon a young lady who so closely matched my image of perfection. For our lifelines to have converged in the tea shop that evening was indeed the zenith of pure serendipity.

Within a year, she and I were betrothed. Another twelve-month, and we were wed. Miss Christina was bridesmaid, Williams my best man.

As with all considerate husbands, I rarely imposed matrimonial duties upon my wife. I satiated my base lusts elsewhere, frequenting whores and women of the streets who were no better than they ought to have been. The sole reason for a man to trouble his spouse is for the purpose of fathering children; but when after two or three years of connubial there was no sign that Katherine was in the family way, I accepted that our marriage would never bear issue.

This mattered little to me. I had my career, and I adored my wife and was devoted to her even though she was barren. Alas, despite her charity work, life for Katherine seemed empty without a family to raise. Her close friendship with Miss Christina endured, however, even when the latter became Mrs John Enderly. Williams remained a lowly constable; when I was promoted the only option was to curtail my

association with him.

In my youth, I was ever independent and had no wish to join the family business and pursue a career in trade and commerce. My ambitions lay elsewhere, and I enlisted in the police because I reckoned it the premier mode of making my impression upon the world. Diligent and assiduous in the performance of my duties, my resourcefulness did not go unobserved by my superiors. I was transferred from the uniformed branch of the force and into the investigation department, and because of my aptitudes and skill, before too long I found myself in the secret service.

It was here that I became engaged in the ceaseless but shadowy fight against the evil forces of revolution and socialism, combating those merciless men (and, difficult as it may be to comprehend, even women) who were determined to destroy decent society. Their diabolic schemes of inciting insurrection and revolt amongst the working classes were despicable enough, yet these fiends also employed the tactics of street violence and random terror to achieve their heinous aims.

Much of our intelligence regarding such vermin came from spies and informers, the scum of the earth who would sell both their souls and heritage for a handful of silver. They would willingly betray other fanatics whose philosophy was slightly at variance with their own warped creed.

It was unsavoury work, often dangerous. The knowledge that we upheld and defended every respectable standard which our great nation represented was our sole indemnity, although I must confess to deriving a certain satisfaction from each verdict of guilty, and in hearing the sharp crack of a broken neck as another traitor paid the ultimate price and swung from the gallows.

So it was that one of our network of underground informants identified a particular character by the name of Manville who had been purchasing all manner of industrial material, and who passed every night alone in the basement of an otherwise derelict terraced house in a slum district. The scoundrel was indubitably manufacturing explosive devices, else why such furtiveness?

Early one morning, after the suspect had been within since dusk, I gave the signal and my surveillance team stealthily rushed forward. The cramped room where we trapped our quarry smelled of oil and grease, and it was hot and noisy from the steam engine which hissed and growled in a dark corner.

Manville spun around in astonishment when we broke the door down, and his face grew pale with fear as he saw the revolvers which we carried.

"I have no money!" he cried, under the misapprehension that we were thieves. He wiped nervously at the condensation on his spectacles, the thick lenses of which magnified his eyes and gave his visage a crazed expression. His hair was long and unkempt, convincing evidence of his anarchistic disposition.

"It is the bombs we seek, Manville," I asserted. "Where are they?"

"Bombs?" he echoed, looking puzzled.

"We are policemen," I informed him, "and we possess a warrant to search these premises."

"I am a scientist," he claimed, as though this revelation should have conferred immunity from inspec-

tion. When one of my officers stepped towards the maze of copper wire and metal tubes, in the centre of which was mounted a large circular piece of opaque glass, Manville shouted: "Do not touch that!"

"Why?" I demanded. "What is it?"

Originally, I wondered what would have happened had we not detected the machine that Manville had invented and built; he must have had some criminal objective in mind. When I knew him better, I concluded that if Manville had not been investigated by us, he would simply have tested his device to ascertain whether it operated to his specifications, and then he would have put it aside, forgotten, and proceeded to another project. His greatest pleasure came in devising and constructing his fantastic mechanisms. After that, he wished only to devote his talents to his next scheme.

He inhabited his own recondite world, considering nought of the possibilities offered by his bizarre creations, the most astounding of which had to be the one under fabrication at the time of our incursion.

"A temporal viewer," was his bland description of his most recent invention, which he demonstrated to me later that same morning. Having ascertained that Manville was comparatively harmless, I had dismissed my men, cautioning them not to reveal what we had discovered. (Although, truth to tell, none of them really comprehended, while even I believed Manville insane until he substantiated his claims.)

After stoking the boiler and developing sufficient pressure of steam, he swung a calibrated lever and instructed me to study the concave glass at the matrix of the apparatus. I stared in amazement at the image of myself and my three subordinates racing into the subterranean laboratory, an exact recreation of our actions a few hours previously.

The implications of Manville's genius were stupendous. If the optical sensor could be transported to the precise scene of a crime with sufficient alacrity, an investigating officer would become an actual witness to the event. The felon responsible could thus be identified and later apprehended.

Because no sound travelled across time, an observer could merely watch what transpired; but this inconvenience was later partially overcome by the employment of a lip-reader to render audible any apparently silent conversation which manifested itself.

The same number of hours must always elapse before the temporal viewer could replicate the event: four hours, seventeen minutes and twenty-one seconds, to be specific. Manville explained why this was so, but I readily admit that I no more understood this rationale than I comprehended the mechanics of what he had created.

If the chronoscope (as I named it) fell into the wrong hands, the consequences did not bear contemplation. I spent many a sleepless night debating with my conscience, but eventually I concluded that total secrecy in regard to both Manville and his invention was imperative. Who better to maintain such a condition than a member of the secret service?

I arranged to provide Manville with the funding necessary to soothe the teething troubles of his most recent contrivance. This involved me in no small personal expense, but I foresaw that such investment would be repaid manifold.

Despite being aware that I was using the product of his intellect for the security of the realm, Manville was so unworldly he would most likely have believed whatever I told him. At one time he mentioned his fervent desire that his contraptions would be used "for the benefit of all mankind"; but I am convinced he only vouchsafed this noble sentiment because he considered he ought to do so, that by making such a statement he was absolved of all responsibility for any untoward effects his ingenuity might occasion.

A traction engine was acquired for the dual purpose of hauling the wagon within which the chronoscope was concealed and also generating the requisite energy to power the device. Thus the machine would be conveyed to wherever it was required: the site of some public outrage, or within a few yards of the clandestine rendezvous where an odious band of conspirators had gathered to devise their nefarious plots.

Because of my spectacular record in identifying and arresting the perpetrators of offences against the state, my requests for all manner of finance and divers facilities were conferred with immediate despatch. These I consigned to Manville in grateful appreciation for the opportunities he had afforded me.

I was rewarded by regular promotion. For a young man of my age and profession, my status in society was second to none. My future seemed assured.

There was only one chronoscope in existence, but that was sufficient. It was the task of the civil police to solve other such minor crimes as theft and robbery and to trace the culprits. I could not concern myself with every petty larceny; even murder itself was of relative insignificance. When one is defending the monarchy (the very heart of the empire) against treason, all else is subordinate.

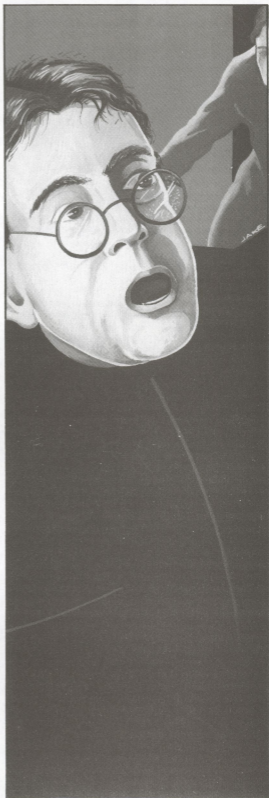
I never used the temporal mechanism except for professional reasons, no matter the enticement. One most unworthy scheme did, I confess, cross my mind. By leaving the chronoscope wagon in the driveway of our home, I might for the first time have glimpsed my wife in a condition of complete undress; but I would no more have adopted such contemptible subterfuge than have debased the machine to acquire illicit remuneration.

I resisted the temptation, and I never descended so low as to spy upon my dearest Katherine.

What I did, however, was a million times worse.

I have already mentioned that Miss Christina (as I still thought of her) and my good wife remained the most intimate of friends. At least once a week Miss Christina would visit our residence, and she was seldom in the company of Mr Enderly. Enderly was much older than his wife. A respected member of the chamber of commerce, he owned several grocery stores in the town; he was a leading councillor, and amongst influential circles there was informed speculation of his imminent election as the next mayor. He and I had absolutely nothing in common, and any discussion between us would invariably and rapidly conclude in an embarrassing silence.

There was no doubt in my mind that although Miss Christina's life revolved around the four children Enderly had given her, she felt no affection whatsoever for her husband. Katherine and I were infinitely



more fortunate. We may not have been blessed by children, but we were still in love, and that is not a phrase I employ impropiously.

One evening after Miss Christina had graced our supper table with her presence, Katherine felt unwell and retired upstairs with a fit of the vapours. I was left alone in the drawing room with our guest, where we drank sherry and engaged in conversation.

"It is curious, is it not," declared Miss Christina, "how we met all those years ago?"

"Twelve years," I confirmed, and I nodded.

"Had events occurred with but slight difference," she hypothesized, "then it might have been I who became your bride, not Katherine."

"True," I agreed, although it was not a matter I had previously considered. I smiled in appreciation of this whimsical jest.

Miss Christina also smiled as she continued: "You cannot imagine how much I envied Katherine that first evening."

She drained her glass and proffered it for refilling. I took the glass and picked up the decanter in order to oblige.

"I still do," she stated.

I was so surprised by this interpolation that I poured sherry onto my wrist instead of into the glass. I stared at Miss Christina in utter perplexity. Apart from the initial minutes of our acquaintanceship, I had simply regarded her as Katherine's friend. My vision had been too restricted to view her as the exceedingly handsome woman that she truly was. Although now more than thirty, the years had yet to exact their toll upon Miss Christina's countenance, and neither had the trials and agonies of childbirth broadened her slender figure.

She laughed. We were sitting together upon the sofa, and she removed the glass from my grip and placed it upon the occasional table in front of us, then reached for my hand. Without wishing to, but without resisting, I allowed her to draw my hand to her lips. Her tongue flickered out, lapping the amber liquid from the back of my wrist.

I remembered when she had poured milk into my tea all those years ago, the way I had nervously spilled some onto my hand, and how she had gently wiped away the drops with her handkerchief.

I know not how, but suddenly our arms were around each other, our bodies close together in an embrace. We kissed.

Katherine entered the room.

It was the worst moment in my life.

Miss Christina and I immediately drew apart, but it was far too late. What Katherine had overseen was not the innocent touch of my lips upon her friend's cheek, but instead a full-blooded kiss on the mouth, a kiss of passion and ardour.

I essayed a string of hasty excuses and apologies to my distraught wife, although mere words could not compensate for my betrayal. Nothing could.

I would have done anything to go back and change those few vital seconds, the seconds which split Katherine and myself forever asunder.

Now, it seems, I can.

The only way I can alter what occurred is to ensure that I do not make the same mistake. I have to live my life all over again, from when I first met my wife

to be. This time, moreover, I will not allow that scheming harlot, Miss Christina, to come between us.

As I speak, I stand within the intricate framework of yet another of Manville's inventions. The second hand on the wall clock slowly circumnavigates the dial, registering the minutes until I must depart.

My last hopes of salvation are entrusted to this equipment, because even now I might be rescued from my fatal misjudgement. If not, then all my efforts of the past months have been in vain. Yet what do I care? I have been without Katherine for some two years, the worst years of my life, melancholy and desolate.

Within an hour of discovering my infidelity, my deceived wife had packed a bag and returned to live with her by-now-widowed mother. We have exchanged not a word since that day, Katherine steadfastly refusing even to acknowledge my existence. She blames me entirely for the incident, presuming Miss Christina to be a veritable paragon of chastity, and they are still on the best of terms.

Christina? Jezebel would be a more apposite name for that confounded female.

Subsequent to the departure of Katherine, I carried out my professional duties with cursory interest. Manville had several times requested my presence at his new laboratory before I arrived to inspect his most recent apparatus.

As always, his convoluted lecture made little sense to me and I hardly listened, although I nodded at appropriate intervals. He called it a temporal dislocator, and when his inference filtered through to my consciousness, I conferred upon him my unequalled concentration.

"You mean that one could actually use it to venture back in time?" I postulated.

"That is correct," he rejoined, as though such a feat were the most natural of phenomena. "Rather than impotently observing a man commit an offence, you may actually prevent him from so doing."

Prevention was theoretically ideal; but in practice, how could the prosecution secure a conviction if the malefactor had been restrained from breaking the law? Should Manville's new contraption become public knowledge, everyone would demand access: the military, the politicians, even the fire brigade in order to forestall a tiny flame from developing into a blazing inferno.

Only a fraction of my mind was considering these ramifications; already I was contemplating whether I could adopt this latest device for my own purposes. Could I prevent myself from embracing Miss Christina and kissing her, and not forfeit my darling Katherine as the inevitable consequence?

There was, Manville explained, precisely the same restrictive temporal limit as on the chronoscope. That was of no use to me, not after the passage of over a year.

After deliberating for a few seconds, Manville shrugged as though it were of no relevance, and added: "Or there is the regular cycle of fourteen years, one hundred and eighty-two days, three hours, five minutes and nineteen seconds, of course. A person could travel back that far, but to what purpose? It would then take an equal time to return here again."

I naturally enquired what he meant.

The transporter, he elucidated, offered only a one-way journey. If the subject voyaged back in time, he could choose a course of action which diverged dramatically from the one which he had previously selected. He had experimented upon himself, and he described the process by which he had entered and gained command of his own body.

"You become yourself?" I interrupted.

"Yes," he responded. "How could there possibly be two of oneself existing simultaneously?"

"I do not know," I answered, as though that were the only matter of which I were ignorant.

After imposing his later personality upon his younger self, Manville had then returned by the more common method of temporal transmission. Four hours, seventeen minutes and twenty-one seconds later, he arrived again at his original time of departure.

I scrutinized the complex paraphernalia of wires and glass tubing, of steam pipes and pressure gauges, of cogs and flywheels, my mind overflowing with a surfeit of ideas and notions.

I am finally ready to go back, back into my own self of fourteen and a half years ago. Returning to that day so long ago has become an obsession, all I have considered since I learned of the time transference device.

I have effected my regression four and a quarter hours through time on two previous occasions, once with the prototype steam powered invention and secondly with the portable displacer, which is operated by electrolytic batteries. Manville was induced to build this auxiliary gadget by a story I concocted about closing the files on a major unsolved case of sedition. After a temporal emigration of such magnitude, I must avail myself of another opportunity in case of miscalculation.

In addition to the trunk containing the smaller displacement machine, there is this recording contraption, its needle cutting grooves into a wax cylinder. I wish I were not so weighed down (the batteries for the time device are very heavy, while the rotagram is quite cumbersome), but there is no alternative as both machines are crucial to my mission. Because of the greater energy requirement, Manville's original construction will generate my return.

The wax cylinder is slowing down, and I shall not wind the handle again. Instead I will disconnect the brass trumpet now and pack my accoutrements into the cabin trunk.

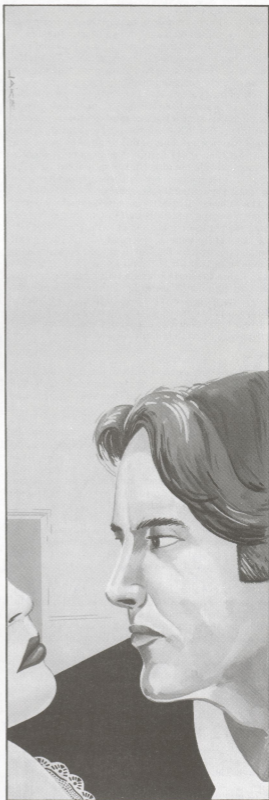
Well, I have made it.

Equally important is that I can remember.

On my prior expeditions, there was very little sensation apart from a slight giddiness. One moment I was in the future, the next I had entered the past — back in my younger body.

This time, however, my travels took me much further, across almost a decade and a half. It was as though my whole body had been twisted inside out. I suddenly found myself sitting on an omnibus, and I was very nauseous for several minutes. Even now I have a severe migraine.

But I am amazed by my changed feeling and awareness. My younger body is much fitter and healthier. The passing years had exacted a gradual and undetected



toll upon my older self. I am no longer burdened by the superfluous pounds of approaching middle age, while my senses and perceptions are far more acute.

Sitting in the waiting room, it is only now that I am able to think clearly about my experience. This is the first opportunity I have had to open my suitcase and speak of what has happened thus far.

Part of me is aware that I am here to meet Michael Williams, that we have arranged to visit the biograph together. I also know my true motive – that I am about to fulfil my destiny – even though I am uncertain how long I will be conscious of this original purpose. The previous time-spans involved were of such relative brevity that I did not forget my intention, but Manville asserted that memories would soon fade after such an immense temporal dislocation.

The same cheap gazette is lying on the bench next to me. I am opening it up, and yes, there she is – the same saucy pin-up girl on the beach.

I can hardly believe my good fortune. It has all worked out exactly the way it should have done. In a minute or two I shall stand up and walk into the café. Katherine and Christina will be there, and my life will commence anew. Everything will continue as before, with one crucial exception. I will never allow Christina to destroy my marriage.

I had better halt now. It would seem strange if I entered the café talking into a speaking tube.

They were not there.

I knew as soon as I went inside that something had gone awry, because their table was empty. I sat and waited until the establishment was closing, and still Katherine and Christina did not appear.

Originally they had missed their next omnibus because the one by which they arrived was late, and they had merely intended to while away a few minutes over a cup of coffee.

Instead, the first vehicle must have been on time. They successfully completed their transfer and hence had no reason to enter the café.

Katherine and I initially met by chance. Now the dice have rolled again and come up differently.

Because of the secondary transmission unit, four hours and seventeen minutes will carry me to before the time I should have met up with Katherine and Christina.

I intend to go back and try again. I will meet them here at the terminus as they alight and change vehicles. The precise chronology will be different, but the sequence of events cannot matter too much. Surely the essential detail is that I find them both tonight.

So far so good. I seem to be duplicating exactly what I did last time, abruptly taking over my previous self while I was on the train.

The teenager who didn't pay was there, slouched in a seat across from me. His hair was slick with grease and he wore tight jeans and a black leather jacket. Ignoring the "no smoking" sign, he lit a cigarette, flicking ash on the floor. He pulled a pen from his pocket and started scrawling on the back of the seat in front of him. The other passengers stared out of the window, pretending not to notice him.

When the ticket inspector entered the carriage, the

lout tried to escape into the next compartment. I stood up and blocked his way. He made to step around me, but again I prevented his retreat. He looked directly at me for the first time, narrowing his eyes. He tried to force his way past, but I didn't give an inch.

The inspector demanded to see his ticket. The delinquent swore and threatened me with physical violence before being ejected at the next station. His sort don't scare me. He was all mouth but no nerve.

Now I'm sitting on the same bench, supposedly waiting for Michael. But I know I won't see him, and I'm impatient to get on with my quest.

The newspaper is still lying here. Because I always do, I reach over and pick it up. The girl in the bikini smiles at me. She's like an old friend by now.

I can see the milk bar, but are Kathy and Christine in there?

I've just checked my watch. It's time to switch off the tape recorder and find out.

Okay, here goes.

Yes. And no.

They were inside – but they weren't alone. A couple of lads were with them, and from the way they were talking it was obvious that they'd only just met.

Another chance meeting. For them, not for me. I'm going to have to try again.

When I got off the underground, Mike wasn't around. Of course. I picked up the paper, thumbing through it to find the page where the topless model leaned forward, thrusting out her breasts. Then I went to the pub on the corner, but there was no sign of Kate and Chrissie.

I stayed and drank a few beers until the place shut, just in case they showed up. But they didn't.

I'm keeping this short, because I'm not sure how much tape is left on the cassette.

No success here, and in a few minutes it'll be time for another go. Fate is totally random, but I'm beginning to believe that the odds grow longer with each attempt.

The bloodster's knuckles were implanted with steel spikes. He punched at the micrex. Blew it. The relay opened to let him on board.

The skin of his arms and torso had been flayed. His veins and arteries were visible through the transparent membrane. A tube from his jugular punctured his cheek. He sucked greedily at his own blood.

My programming always keeps me on duty.

And he sensed he was under observation.

Not from the other riders. They kept well clear.

He turned towards me.

My mirrored mask reflected only his mutilated body.

He grabbed for his spinblade.

I brought up my right hand. Fast.

He laughed. A trickle of red spilled from his mouth. His brain was so drugwiped he could still have used his weapon after a head shot.

I pointed my index finger. Retracted the red joint. Clenched my fist to compress the trigger.

Black light iced into his arm.

The disc dropped from his grasp. It ripped into his

boot and amputated his foot.

He was still laughing when I drilled a hole through his skull.

A centon later the mono hit zero and I exited.

I was early. Micky hadn't arrived yet.

We'd planned to go to the arena. The main attraction was a pack of mutant rats in combat with twin eight-year-old girls. Their clone mother had equipped them with feral teeth and claws. Then they'd eaten her alive.

I scanned the transit zone before easing down.

There was plenty of space and light. No one could creep up without my sensors detecting an intruder.

I was very brief the last couple of times. I should stick to my plan of noting everything down. To keep it all imprinted on my brain.

I'm watching the spectronude finger herself. Her green-scaled skin matches the emerald in her right eye socket.

I switch focus to my chrono.

It's time.

Success!
Everything was exactly the way it should have been. Kay and Chris were both there. And when I went back with them, I paired off with Kay.

The time unit can now stay secure in my pouch.

I know I haven't used it much, but it seems like I've been going around and around forever. Some of the details are becoming hazy. So it was a good idea to take it all down on the soundchip.

But I don't see how I can ever forget that warning about Chris. It seems embedded into every molecule of my being.

I'll faze the chip in case there's something important my memory has already lost.

Chris and I must not fuck. Not ever. Not even once.
That's the most important thing to remember.

Because I don't know how much I'll recall, I'm making this recording to remind me. It's only for my own use, so I'll include all the main details.

I don't really know how to begin. But I guess the best idea would be to start when I first met Kay and Chris.

It was in the narcoplex by the monoline radius. They lay together, inhaling from the stimsine bubble between them.

I saw Chris first. He was naked except for his crystal studpiece. His face, limbs and torso shimmered with chromaderm.

Kay wore nullflesh. All that was visible was her shaven head and her left breast, a silver loop piercing the nipple. A halo of red diodes circled her scalp, blinking on and off with every heartbeat.

It was just luck that I was there, but I suppose that's what life's all about. The result of chance and coincidence.

I'd never have met Kay and Chris if their relay had been on time. Or if I hadn't gone into the play, my whole life would have taken another course.

Everything would have been different.

David S. Garnett (born 1947) lives on the Sussex coast. He has been writing sf for almost twenty years. His early output included such books as *Mirror in the Sky* (1969), *The Star-seekers* (1971) and *Cosmic Carousel* (1976). His first piece for us was entitled "Saving the Universe" (IZ 3). Recently, his story "Still Life" (F & SF, March 1986) was shortlisted for a Hugo Award. He has also contributed to the Unwin anthology *Other Edens* (ed. Evans and Holdstock).

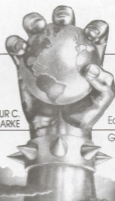
EDITORIAL

Continued from p.3

The most popular non-fiction items were the interviews, so we are pleased to bring you two more fascinating discussions with interesting writers in our current issue. Most frequent suggestion: more frequent publication. We hope to go bimonthly as soon as resources permit.

We also asked for your general comments on the magazine, and suggestions on how to improve it. So now we know you want more, less, longer and shorter non-fiction, regular, occasional and no comic strips, more innovation, stimulation, experimentation, optimism, cheerfulness, humour, cartoons, competitions, quizzes...and longer questionnaires! We will do our best to please you while heeding your exhortations not to strive for popularity and bearing in mind that your most frequent requests of all were "ignore the results of polls," "keep up the good work" and "carry on as you are."

Lee Montgomerie



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NEWS

This year's Hugo Award winners are as follows. Best novel: *Speaker for the Dead* by **Orson Scott Card**. Best novella: "Gilgamesh in the Outback" by **Robert Silverberg**. Best novelette: "Permafrost" by **Roger Zelazny**. Best short story: "Tangents" by **Greg Bear**. Best non-fiction: *Trillion-Year Spree* by **Brian Aldiss** with David Wingrove. Best dramatic presentation: **Aliens**. Best professional artist: **Jim Burns**. Best professional editor: **Terry Carr**. Best semi-prozine: **Locus** ed. Charles N. Brown. Best fan writer: **David Langford**. Best fan artist: **Brad Foster**. Best fanzine: **Ansible** ed. D. Langford. John W. Campbell Award for best new writer: **Karen Joy Fowler**. It will be noted that *Interzone* did not win in the "best semi-prozine" category, though apparently we ran *Locus* close this time. Thanks to all those who voted for us. We hope to publish an interview with this year's very deserving Campbell Award winner, Karen Fowler, in a coming issue of *IZ*.

We can console ourselves for not winning a Hugo by announcing that the editors of *Interzone* have been short-listed for a **World Fantasy Award**, in the category "special award - professional." And we are especially delighted that "The Brains of Rats" by **Michael Blumlein** (*IZ* 16) has been nominated as "best short story." The results are expected around the time this issue appears.

Locus ran the results of a "Best All-Time" popularity poll for novelists and novels in its August 1987 issue. The most popular science-fiction writer was **Robert A. Heinlein**, followed by Frank Herbert, Arthur C. Clarke, Ursula Le Guin, Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick (in that order). The most popular fantasy writer (by about a million miles) was **J.R.R. Tolkien**, followed by Ursula Le Guin (again), Anne McCaffrey, Peter S. Beagle, Gene Wolfe, Roger Zelazny and others. The most popular sf novel was *Dune* by Frank Herbert, with Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* as runner up. The most popular fantasy novel was, of course, *The Lord of the Rings*, followed by (surprise, surprise) *The Hobbit*. Tolkien apart, British writers did not fare well in these US-biased polls, with H.G. Wells ranking 22nd among "Best All-Time Novelists," and John Wyndham, Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard and Ian Watson coming nowhere at all. We sus-

pect that the results of a British popularity poll would be rather different: perhaps *Interzone* should arrange one.

"I've been too successful in my fantasy," says well-heeled author **Piers Anthony** in a recent *Locus* interview, "[but] I'm not yet so lucky that I feel free to turn down a \$100,000 advance for another fantasy... I regard myself as a captive of my success." Poor man.

Tim Powers's novel *Les Voies d'Anubis* (*The Anubis Gates*) has won the Prix Apollo, the leading French award for sf. And the Parisian publishing house Denoel has scrapped its paperback magazine *Science Fiction* after eight issues. **Angela Carter** and **Brian Aldiss** were Guests of Honour at the Third International SF Conference held at the University of Nice this year.

Michael Bishop's latest novel (for Tor Books in the US, and forthcoming here from Grafton) bears the intriguing title *The Secret Ascension*, or *Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas*. An extract, "An Episode in the Death of PKD," appeared in the August issue of *New Pathways*, a worthy fiction magazine which is available from Michael Adkisson in the United States (see the advert elsewhere in this issue).

The American semi-professional magazine *Fantasy Review* has ceased publication, which is a pity - it attempted to do for the specialist fantasy field what *Locus* has done for sf in general. Our commiserations to the hardworking editor Robert A. Collins. Another of the Hugo-nominated semi-prozines, *Science Fiction Review*, ceased publication at the end of last year (mainly because of the illness of its longtime editor, Richard E. Geis).

The gap left in the US magazine market by the above two losses has already been filled by an exciting new publication, *Science Fiction Eye*. We have seen two fat issues of this well-produced magazine so far, the first containing lengthy interviews with William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, the second containing a remarkable in-depth interview with Lucius Shepard. Enthusiastically recommended. *SF Eye* is edited by Dan Steffan and Stephen P. Brown. Three-issue subscriptions are \$7 (US), \$12 (overseas), from Box 3105, Washington, DC 20010-0105, USA.

The Scanner is an idealistic, if rather poorly-produced, fiction fanzine which comes from Christopher G.

James and Kevin Lyons, 4 Dover Road, East Cotes, Isle of Wight. "...Somewhere out there, there may be a new Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard or Michael Moorcock. We may never know, because the British markets are so restricted that their work may never see the light of day." Ah, yes. As well as stories by the editors, this mag contains articles with such titles as "Breaking Down the Barriers - New Worlds." If you'd like to help these struggling editors in their quest for new talent send them £1 for a sample copy.

New writers among our readership may be interested to know of the **Albacon '88/Glasgow Herald** science-fiction short-story competition. The judges include sf writers Chris Boyce and Duncan Lunan, and the first prize is an Amstrad computer (plus possible publication in the *Glasgow Herald*). Closing date is 15th May 1988. For further details write to Albacon '88, c/o Mark Meenan, 'Burnawn', Stirling Road, Dumbarton, Scotland G82 2PJ.

ALFRED BESTER

As we were going to press we heard the sad news that Alfred Bester had died. We hope to run a fuller appreciation in the next issue of *Interzone*.

Bester, born 1913, was one of the great American science-fiction writers of the 1950s - and will long be remembered for his two outstanding sf novels of that period, *The Demolished Man* (1953) and *The Stars My Destination* (also known as *Tiger! Tiger!*, 1956). His last new novel was *The Deceivers* (1981).

Bester's influence on younger sf writers, from Samuel R. Delany to William Gibson, was immense - and he was particularly popular in Britain. He had been due to appear as Guest of Honour at the World SF Convention in Brighton this August, but was prevented from attending by his final illness.

J.G. Ballard

Interview by David Pringle

I visited Jim Ballard at his suburban house in Shepperton, Middlesex, on 21st August 1987. His latest novel, The Day of Creation (Gollancz, £10.95), was due for publication on 10th September, and we talked about this and a range of other topics. — DP.

Were you intrigued by the exploit of the young West German pilot who landed his Cessna in Red Square, Moscow?

That was wonderful, a lovely mythological act. Quite extraordinary, to fly all that way undetected and land in Red Square — an amazing escapade which has to be taken seriously, particularly as it led to the wholesale sackings of the Russian military high command. I'd love to know more about the young man. I daresay one day we will, if they release him. Yes, I was very moved by that, as I am by all extraordinary flights. The one that didn't move me in any way whatever was Branson's balloon flight across the Atlantic. [Laughs.] Somehow I couldn't get involved in that, imaginatively.

What did you think of the TV pictures of the wreck of the Titanic?

The ones that came out a year or so ago? They were very strange: one seemed to be moving back in time. As the camera drifted into the depths of the North Atlantic there was this beautifully preserved ship, sufficiently preserved anyway to show telling details — all those wine bottles lying around. It was very ghostly, a real journey to the interior. Sadly, when they actually raise this great dinosaur it will probably crumble away into a heap of rust, like Dracula exposed to daylight. I think it should be left there.

Many things have occurred in the past two or three years which have a disaster-story tinge to them: the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the spread of AIDS, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. Do you think we're living in "interesting times"?

Yes. They're extraordinary events, all of them, and obviously of long-term significance. Nuclear accidents have

been predicted in sf. Nobody predicted AIDS exactly, but that is a science-fiction disease, isn't it? It's an extraordinary disease, as if a malevolent deity had been reading too much sf. As for the shuttle disaster — I won't say I predicted that, but I've certainly written a fair bit of fiction cautioning against the possible psychological hazards of space travel. That was an unnecessary tragedy — a double tragedy, in that the professional crew perished but also the civilian passengers who were only there for public-relations reasons. Magnificent though the American space programme has been, a marvel of human endurance and courage, I think it's misconceived — certainly as far as manned space flight is concerned. They're trying to enter the 21st century with 19th century technology — brute-force explosive missiles escaping from this planet in the crudest possible way. They need to wait: they can rendezvous with the 21st century in good time, using 21st century technology which may be very different. One of the reasons why the public has shown a lack of interest in the space programme (which necessitated this poor school teacher going to her death as part of a public-relations exercise) is that the nuts-and-bolts of these ballistic missiles belong to the world of Jules Verne and of the 19th-century engineering pioneers, not to the really advanced technologies. The space programme is simply old-fashioned.

When the 21st-century technology is discovered, would you be in favour of it? Do you think there's a point in going out into the solar system?

Absolutely! I don't see why there shouldn't be manned flights into deep space. These will come in good time. But people think of the colonization of space (and sf writers are most to blame here) as an extrapolation of the colonization of this planet which took place in the 18th and 19th centuries: colonies will be established on the surface of the moon and Mars in the way they were established in Africa and North America. One sees the notion of little

clusters of pilgrims supported by mother ships that arrive from across the great ocean bringing more settlers who'll find this pristine surface loaded with minerals and the kind of human opportunities that Africa and America offered in their day. That's a terribly old-fashioned notion. It may be that in the future only one man will need to go into space and he will achieve everything. We won't need nations uprooting themselves and moving across immense oceans to found replica nations on some alien shore. One man or one woman will do it, and this will be enough. In some ways the single explorer will satisfy the goal of space exploration: this person may not even explore space in the physical sense — it may be an image of this person which is transmitted. One has to see the thing in terms of a different set of conceptual possibilities. You could say that the human race is at this very moment colonizing space in terms of that huge expanding sphere, now about eighty light years in diameter, composed of its television and radio signals. In the future we human beings won't need to travel, we'll just send our TV programmes!

How do you think the 1980s have differed from the 60s and 70s?

We are entering an interesting period now. The 70s was a fallow period in many ways, but we're entering something hard to see yet — a period starting about the mid-80s and perhaps reaching to the end of the century — that is beginning to look as if it contains the sort of exciting possibilities the 60s had. The blueprint for the 60s was laid down probably fifteen years beforehand — jet travel, consumer goods, television, the media landscape, a world ruled by advertising, and politics as a branch of advertising. All that came to fruition in the mid-60s but was laid down ten to fifteen years before. So, it seems to me, we see emerging now new patterns of social behaviour and a new volatility in things that may have been laid down years ago. I'm thinking of the instability of world financial mar-

kets created by prosperity (which has generated a vast amount of spare cash) and by the international communications-satellite nets. These shift immense balances from one side of the world to the other at the speed of an electron and introduce the most incredible jitters and instability, and do have an effect on commerce and industry and on political events. McLuhan's dreams of a global village have pretty well come true. What he never predicted is the nervousness of the viewer's response to all this. The Americans see one of their ships Excited in the Persian Gulf and within hours the entire nation is demanding action, with a film-star President in the White House. Twenty years ago the notion that a second-rate film actor could become President (which I like to say I anticipated in 1967 in my "Ronald Reagan" piece) remained strictly within the pages of avant-garde sf. But the possibility that we could have such a figure as President – an impossibility now in the Soviet Union and probably still in this country – was laid down by the media explosion of the 60s, the way in which people like Kennedy were admired for their television images, for their style rather than their substance. Nixon in part was rejected because he was an old-style Tammany Hall-type politician, with a stubble at eleven o'clock in the morning, who didn't fit into the TV age. But with Reagan, this unstable man who is intensely responsive to the swings of mood in his TV audience, one is entering a very dangerous world politically. This is something McLuhan didn't predict – the growing instability, where one is almost grateful for the slow monolithic character of the Russian political system as a ballast which prevents the ship flopping onto its side at the first small ripple.

But things are changing in the Soviet Union. What do you think of the "Gorbachev phenomenon"?

It's a fascinating process to observe, but obviously the inertial forces in the Soviet Union are vast. It will be a miracle if he can drag the country into something approaching, let's say, Czechoslovakia at the turn of the century. But these are interesting times. I sense a new kind of music, a period which may be just as interesting as the 60s, and much more dangerous. It remains to be seen what form it all takes. There was a depressive quality to the 70s, and now the pendulum has swung in the other direction there's a manic element in the air. I imagine it will go on for quite a while and will touch everything. The year 2000 is a long way away still: the pace of change is so rapid that even in the twelve years left of this century an immense amount could happen.

When I first read *High-Rise* in 1975 I was puzzled by the fact you put the high-rise block in east London. It seemed the wrong place for such a middle-class building. But now it seems spot on: the Isle of Dogs is fast becoming that sort of place. The people in the novel were almost predictions of the Yuppies of Thatcher's Britain.

These are the sort of people you find in the new condominiums that are growing up around that part of London. When I was about to write the book I needed an area of London that was isolated from the rest of the city so that the apartment block would not stand in an already settled community. That sort of isolation was only to be found in the more-or-less abandoned dock districts along the Thames. These well-heeled middle-class professionals in their ultra-high-tech blocks would represent an absolute break with the communities that had predated them – which would have been erased completely (as they have been now). The developers were planning these new complexes at the time I wrote my book, and I had the same sort of real-estate in mind – and the same psychology I daresay. Sooner or later all science fiction comes true.

Would you say that your new novel, *The Day of Creation*, is an allegory?

Yes. It's an allegory about the nature of creation, the creative process. It's all about the different levels of creation, acts of imagination, that take place today. Any experience is seized upon and overlaid by the mass media – as they're doing in the case of this terrible Hungerford tragedy. [A quiet Thames Valley town where, two days before this interview, an insane gunman murdered sixteen people – DP.] Newspaper, radio and television companies have now fastened on that tragic town and are overlaying their own sensationalized and sentimentalized view of things. Anyway, in my book the central character, Mallory, appears to create this river, which transforms a desert corner of Africa into a brilliant paradise, a Garden of Eden, that has the qualities of a pristine nature untouched by human hand. But immediately it's seized upon by one of the supporting characters of the book, Sanger, the maker of television documentaries, who imposes upon this first-order act of creation a second order in which nature becomes homogenized and sentimentalized for the benefit of the voracious worldwide TV audience who don't want to see nature in its pure form. I suggest in the book nature can be a violent and wayward thing, not satisfying our deepest needs for a cuddly, bushy-tailed universe. Sanger, who you can think of as a mix of David Attenborough and

Jonathan Miller and Desmond Morris and all those people (but he's none of them, I hasten to add), imposes the eye of the television documentary, overlays his own glaze on this act of creation, spraying his own lurid lacquer over the bright flowers and birds and so forth. By the end of the book he seduces the central character into accepting this view of things – at which point, though perhaps not forever, the river evaporates. That's a very straightforward reading, but of course there are other themes.

You say "perhaps not forever"...

Well, there's a hint right at the end that the river may return. It is bound up with Mallory's obsession with a young woman, who seems to be a sort of emanation of the river. Has he invented her?, he asks himself at the end. He's never sure. On another level you can see *The Day of Creation* as simply a struggle between Mallory and the river. You can ignore the second-order set of themes revolving around the film-maker, and simply see it as a duel between warring factions in Mallory's own head.

Critics are going to say this novel is a return to your previous modes. It's a fable, like *The Unlimited Dream Company*.

To some extent it is, though it can be read as a realistic novel, with a lot of naturalistic elements – the events described aren't that far-fetched. New rivers do appear, all over the world. Someone told me the other day that he'd seen a documentary about some men in a helicopter who were hunting a desert wasteland in, I think, Eastern Siberia, looking for a new river which they'd been told had come into being. So the events described aren't in the realm of the fantastic. I agree it's a kind of allegory; but having written *Empire of the Sun* I was never going to make myself a new career as a writer of World War II stories – that was always a one-off. Bear in mind that I haven't written any science fiction, in the strict sense of the term, for a long time. If you leave out *Hello America*, which was originally designed to be an illustrated novella, and you leave out *The Unlimited Dream Company* which has no science-fiction elements in it whatever but is a fantasy, the last real sf novel that I wrote was *The Crystal World*. But labels stick. The point I'd like to make is that my previous fiction, including my sf, is much closer to realistic fiction than most people have realized. One must break down these damned categories. Huge walls grow up like coral reefs between different genres, between so-called mainstream fiction and genre fiction. It would be a pity to put this novel in any restrictive category. I hope it's more intelligible to a general readership



J.G. Ballard at a signing session for *The Day of Creation*, Forbidden Planet Bookshop

than something like *The Unlimited Dream Company*. But none of these things are calculated: they just come the way they come.

Your character Mallory obviously has a very low opinion of TV wildlife documentaries and nature programmes. Is that true of your own feelings?

Yes, it probably is. In a way those wildlife programmes which Attenborough and the rest of them have been presenting over the years are falsifications of reality. They're children's-encyclopedia versions of nature which draw all the fangs and claws and present nature as a large placid beast that can easily be domesticated. Nature isn't like that. Homo sapiens has won his intelligence from the ordeal of surviving an extremely hostile environment. I agree with Mallory's views, by and large. There is a brain-rotting aspect to TV that's much more evident than it was, particularly in this country where we've always prided ourselves on having "the best television in the world." In fact we have the worst. In this country TV is no longer an innovative medium. The BBC in particular still prides itself on its educative function, but in fact it's an entertainment channel. Every programme should have the word "entertainment" in front of it, because that is its real goal. The BBC nine o'clock news is the BBC

Entertainment News. A documentary on camels in the Kalahari desert is an entertainment documentary. Nothing is included which isn't going to entertain the audience, nothing that will distress or bore the audience or that the audience may find difficult. I've just come back from a holiday in the south of France, where we could get seven channels – the six French channels plus TV Monte Carlo – and there is no doubt that the general level of French television is a lot lower than ours: it's a non-stop stream of entertainment programmes, but it's so much the better for that because you know where you stand. It's a trashy medium, and it has been allowed to float down to its own true level, not artificially maintained by a huge government-financed BBC/ITV monopoly... But that's all part of the intense paternalism of the British political system. A large number of the ills that beset British life can be laid at the door of television – the vast repertoire of myths and national delusions that it creates. **Of course you're a Hawaii 5-0 fan from way back. Do you watch Miami Vice?**

It's a triumph of style over content. I always loved *Hawaii 5-0* – which I often watched with the sound turned down, in the belief that it didn't matter what the plots were about – but I love *Miami Vice* because it takes it even

further. As many people have said, it's entirely about style, the style of the young men and women who appear in it, their clothes, the decor. There are some wonderful art deco settings. It's like leafing through the pages of a chic and sleek fashion magazine, where you see the models against a series of artfully-contrived backdrops, an international airport or a marina or a nightclub, which give the impression that some sort of narrative is unfolding but in fact the backdrops are merely decorative. And the story lines in *Miami Vice* are purely decorative, which only carries to the nth point a tendency evident in most TV drama [chuckles].

What's the latest news on the Steven Spielberg movie *Empire of the Sun*? They finished shooting at the end of June, and they're now putting it together. They hope to premier the film in the States in late 1987, and here in early '88. Spielberg very kindly asked me to play a walk-on part in the film. To appear in something that had such a personal significance for me was something I just couldn't resist. They'd spent a month filming in Shanghai, then they spent six or seven weeks in Spain filming the camp sequences. They found the more-or-less exact replicas of the Amherst Avenue houses, including the one where I

lived, at Sunningdale – which, ironically, is just a few minutes from here. At the beginning of the novel there is a fancy dress party on the eve of Pearl Harbour, and it was the scenes at the party which I took part in. Spielberg offered me a line of dialogue but with all those real actors around me I felt that was too much. All I had to do was stand there with a glass of whiskey in my hand – I'd had a great deal of training for that, so I thought I could bring that off – but I couldn't speak a line of dialogue as well so I remained silent. Whether my brief career will expire on the cutting-room floor I don't know. In one scene, the guests at the party are filmed going out into the drive, and at a signal we poured through the door. There, drawn up in a circle, were these 1930s Buicks and Packards, with Chinese chauffeurs in uniform standing beside them, and I had a strange sense that time had suddenly gone into reverse. Quite uncanny. They'd done a great deal of research to get the period feel right, and in the interior scenes there are 1930s magazines lying around, and 30s telephones and other bits and pieces of decor that I vaguely remembered. It was very strange. Of course, because of the proximity of Shepperton Studios, quite a number of people living in this town work part-time as film extras. One or two of them I've known for some years, including the mother of a girl who went to the same school as my daughters. She came up to me in the street and said: "Ah, Mr Ballard, we're in the film together, are we?" She was an extra in the movie, and she told me her daughter was also in the film. I suddenly realized: perhaps my coming to live in Shepperton was a deep-level assignment that my central nervous system gave me 27 years ago. I was waiting for the day when I wrote the novel, knowing that the movie would be made and that they would have to use large houses in places like Sunningdale and Weybridge and Walton-on-Thames, in the immediate vicinity of Shepperton – the models that the British in Shanghai used to build their own houses. It was rather like a dream to see these people, my neighbours, being recruited into this film – just as in dreams one's own neighbours, and familiar houses and buildings, are recruited by the sleeping mind. Dreams are fusions of past and present. It was strange in that respect, playing this small part: the whole business of the filming was very like a dream. For that reason I'm glad

I didn't go to Shanghai at the time the film was being shot there. I think seeing the movie, in which I have enormous confidence by the way, will be a very strange experience. I must say I was impressed by Spielberg. I liked him enormously, and I thought he had a very hard, strong mind, a powerful imagination, and complete commitment to the best in my book. I felt within five seconds of meeting him that he was the right man for the book.

Have you read the full script?

No. I was quite happy not to, actually. They offered to let me read it, but I had confidence in Tom Stoppard and Spielberg. These are professionals. The translation from novel to film is such a huge jump, and it's difficult for someone with no first-hand experience of film-writing to know when a scene works – even a scene without dialogue. They seem to have stayed pretty faithfully to the book, as far as I can make out. Obviously there have been contractions. I gather they've built up the part of Basie, the American cabin steward who befriends Jim. The boy's role hasn't been changed at all. He is the focus of the film, and all the action is seen through his eyes. Spielberg was insistent on that, and it's the key to the movie. The entire action of the novel is seen through Jim, he's always on stage. If I'd moved away from him at any point I think the spell would have been broken. That applies equally to the movie.

Has the popular success of the novel *Empire of the Sun* changed your life to any degree, and do you have any qualms about the additional publicity which the film version might bring you?

None whatever. As you can see at a glance, my life has not changed at all. The same dirt lies in the corners. I still live in exactly the same way. I don't think it has affected me one iota, nor as a writer. I still have the same sort of imagination and the same trains of thought move through my mind.

You haven't emigrated yet.

To somewhere warmer? I keep thinking about it. I would quite like to divide my time between here and the Mediterranean, to side-step the English winter. But perhaps I sense (this is going back to what we were saying earlier) that interesting things are on the horizon and that I ought to be around! People think of me as an sf writer and by definition therefore detached from the demands of the present, but that's not true. I've always responded enorm-

ously to my immediate surroundings. I wouldn't want to live perpetually in Spain or the south of France because one's sealed off from so much. It's a timeless zone in a way, as you notice when you meet people who've lived out there for a few years – they seem to be curiously stranded, literally marooned on the beach. They may make passing references to Chernobyl or Margaret Thatcher or what have you, but they sound as if they're reading a script that somebody else has written for them. So it's not for me. I think I'll stay on for a bit.

What next? Do you envisage another novel?

I've got a few ideas moving around in my head, but nothing really hard. I finished this latest book at the beginning of March, which isn't all that long ago. I was caught up with this Spielberg film, and now I'm involved with helping in the promotion of this new book, so it'll be a while before I decide on something. I might write a few short stories, till I get an idea I really like for a novel.

Is there a new collection of short stories on the horizon?

You know the American specialist sf press Arkham House? It's run by a man called James Turner – he sounds a very civilized and pleasant man. He's come up with the idea of putting together my "space stories," all the stories I've written on the theme of space travel, starting with "The Cage of Sand." He's going to do that under the title *Memories of the Space Age*. They're stories about the psychology and the long-term effects of the space programme rather than about space itself and alien planets. It should make a nice little book. It never occurred to me to put those stories together. It's now been contracted for, and he says it'll be going to the printer in the autumn of this year for publication in 1988. That's the nearest thing to a new book of short stories that I have planned. [According to the *provisional contents list* which JGB showed me, this volume should contain the hitherto-uncollected Interzone stories "Memories of the Space Age" and "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" – DP]

"If the world does not wish to be viewed as a J.G. Ballard story, it should stop behaving like one" – Charles Shaar Murray, *Q Magazine* no. 14, November 1987.

Cherry Wilder

The Decline of Sunshine

Between one chord and the next the medium, Kalina, was asleep. Her head fell back sideways against the lilac upholstery of the chair, her small fallow face lay half hidden by the curtain of her dark hair. Sybil McKenzie missed the moment of trance, felt a twinge of irritation with herself. Her span of attention was as valuable as her night vision, through lowered lashes in a darkened room.

The Old Lady, as usual, had not pretended to sing the hymn with closed eyes; she sat in the middle of the table to Kalina's left, staring at the medium. Opposite her was Danny, perfectly in form, another out of Sybil McKenzie's stable, in fact the astrologist. His eyes were tightly shut, his hands rested on the purple velvet cloth, he sang in a very passable tenor. Two other querents completed the séance: Mrs File, a local, almost in the same bracket as the Old Lady, and the new man, Spencer Landers, beside Danny, at Kalina's right hand.

There now... he had distracted her. What were his references? British émigré. Passport not seen. Personal recommendation from two other clients, both devoted and innocent. A retired opera singer and a pilot's widow.

Kalina's sighing breath echoed through the room, Sybil McKenzie joined in the last line of the hymn: "And hear the voice of truth..."

Sybil concentrated on the pale oval face of Spencer Landers. She could not see it clearly from where she was sitting but she projected it now before her lowered lids. As an aid to concentration she imagined a finger of light that bored into the parchment skin of his forehead.

Kalina spoke now in an eerie little-girl voice, not too much different from her natural one. The warm-up, the pre-control who called herself "Perdita."

"Sunshine and shadow," said Perdita. "The opening of the doors."

"Perdita," said Danny, taking his cue, "Perdita dear, is Mr Irvine there?"

Sybil was forced to admit that Kalina had a certain style. The portion of her mind that split off into these characters from The Beyond drew the line at Red Indians and historical personages. Her only cliché had been a few brief episodes with an alleged Eleanor Roosevelt, a shameless attempt to please the Old Lady. The regular control was a former missionary named Edward Irvine. Now Kalina breathed hoarsely, heralding his approach; Sybil was glad to see that she had flung back the concealing curtain of hair. The voice that sprang out of the girl's mouth was an astonishing bass: Sybil watched Mrs File clutch her bosom and Spencer Landers jerk upright.

"Irvine!" said the voice. "Wisdom crieth without; she crieth her voice in the streets. Proverbs one twenty. There is a newcomer, confused... seeking contact..."

Sybil McKenzie concentrated with all her might; the veil lifted; she went through, registered, merged, withdrew again. She understood.

The Old Lady was speaking to encourage Mr Irvine and the newcomer:

"Are we talking about a man or a woman?"

"The Beyond is warm and welcoming," boomed Irvine/Kalina, "but the young man is afraid. He crossed over suddenly."

"Any name?" put in Spencer Landers softly.

Sybil knew that she must intervene before Kalina got in any deeper.

"Far lane," said Irvine. "Lane. He cries out in spirit. Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom..."

"Landers?" whispered Spencer Landers. "Does it mean Landers?"

"Hello for Rod, Reg, Rob..." said Irvine. "I am trying to connect..."

Sybil McKenzie moved her sandalled foot precisely to the left and pressed the electric buzzer under the carpet. It would give Kalina a controlled shock on the inside of her right thigh. An emergency. She saw Kalina jerk, wake, effortlessly conceal her waking.

The girl was really very good. She remembered the medium in LA who never learned, who shouted "Ouch!" Kalina remained in the exact pose of Irvine, breathing deeply.

"My brother Bob!" said Spencer Landers. "I believe my brother is trying to get through."

"I'm sorry," said Sybil. "We must abort the séance. Danny, can you help Kalina?"

She reached out and switched on the standard lamp. All the querents protested, Mrs File gave a sobbing cry. The Old Lady said:

"Sybil! Sybil! What is it?"

Sybil McKenzie stood up and went to her patron. She laid her hands on the thick shoulders, looked down at the pink scalp that showed between tufty curls of blue-white hair.

"We have been deceived," she whispered. "I'll handle it..."

Danny was at Kalina's side "talking her down," as he called it.

"I don't understand," said Landers. "What went wrong? I was most interested!"

"If you will just step into the study, Mr Landers," ordered Sybil.

As she passed down the table she reached over and pressed Mrs File's hand, felt the gem stones, cold, rock-hard, digging into her palm.

She strode into her study, her long silk robe swirling about her ankles. Spencer Landers came along, murmuring about bad vibrations. She went quickly to the glass wall, activated the louvres; the pitiless tropical sunshine poured into the room. Landers stood blinking.

"All right," she said. "What the hell is going on? Who sent you?"

"I don't understand..."

"Show me some identification!" she said wearily.

"I assure you, Mr McKenzie..."

"I assure you, Mr Landers," snapped Sybil. "You have no brother. You were trying to push Kalina's control into a fake reading."

"She would have given it!" he said, the ghost of a grin crossing his long bland face.

"Certainly," agreed Sybil, "with your encouragement and your scenario for a brother dead in an auto wreck. Who sent you?"

He sat down in the shelter of a tall cane chair and extracted an ID wallet from the inside pocket of his pearl grey jumpsuit.

"Queensland Government. Fraud Squad. Acting on information received."

Sybil almost laughed with relief. No insurance companies, no associated trusts. Not even Immigration or Interpol. The local police, fishing for bunco.

"I'm surprised and disappointed," she said. "We've had nothing but the kindest co-operation since we came to Sunshine City."

She took his new code-card, verified it at the outlet on her desk, returned it to him.

"We are having a crack-down on parasites," said Spencer Landers.

"This is an enclave for the rich," said Sybil McKenzie. "You will find that they wish to be served in all sorts of ways. You're no ordinary detective, Mr Landers. I would say your work has been more specialized. The Treasury? Industrial Espionage? Now you are

here playing cat and mouse with fortune tellers. You have become a parasite yourself."

"How did you discover...?"

"I am a true sensitive. I read your mind."

She pressed the bell and summoned Billie, the guard.

"Mr Landers is leaving."

Billie smiled and shifted her weight. She was more than a head taller than Landers and broadly built.

"Mrs McKenzie," said the odd, colourless ex-spy, "you have a great gift."

"Thank you."

"I pray you make better use of it!"

Billie held open the side door and Landers went past her into the bright greenish light of the garden. Sybil McKenzie noted the pious wish. A Christian of some kind? A cultist? She went quickly back into the séance room to soothe her two clients. Later in the day she had occasion to speak to Gregory, her police liaison man, about the renewal of Danny's permit. She raised the question of Landers: the Old Lady had been very much upset. Gregory apologized.

"What affiliations has Landers?" asked Sybil.

"You want him flown?" asked Gregory uneasily.

"No of course not. I was just wondering."

"Oh he had some poofy bloody specialty back in the Old Country," said Gregory. "Art forgery. Something like that. You won't be seeing too much of him, I can assure you."

"I'm not after his head."

"No, he just won't be around too long. He's with a pioneer movement, y'know? The Orenda Folk. Go outside the city...build, farm, that sort of thing."

Outside the city the monsoon came down; the dome leaked in places; the gardens were somehow the better for the untreated water. The Old Lady's sulphur-crested cockatoo was about to die; all her friends and servants rallied around to cushion the blow. She allowed Sybil to wheel her down to the golf course on the day after the bird's death.

"You think I'm an old fool," she grumbled. "It is a sign of withdrawal when you begin to love birds and animals too much."

Sybil recognized that loneliness could become an incurable disease.

"I've told you about my cat," she said. "The calico that died before we left California."

They stood by Lake Sweetwater and watched the golfers at the nets. She marvelled at the strangeness of the scene: the streaming surface of the dome, the brilliance of the greens and the bamboo breaks, the controlled ripple of the blue lake. A soundless dark wave curled up and landed in some region of her mind. What now? She thought of the Old Lady's villa and her own house in its grounds...the personnel, the animals, all serene. The dark wave receded slowly, death and destruction in its wake.

"Here is your gentleman friend," said the Old Lady coyly, "come to take us for our drinks."

Dick Vanberg ran over the bridge from the clubhouse in slow motion. He was too handsome, his tan was a heavy carotene bronze; he had defied the aging process so well that people wondered what he was doing in old Sunshine. Whose appendage was he?

Sybil was bothered by his knee joints; were they really programmed to last?

He greeted the two ladies in his sweet old-time college style but Sybil caught a twinge of fear that she associated with the dark wave. She asked quietly "What is it?" above the Old Lady's head as they wheeled her towards the terrace. Dick shook his head, grinned, "Nothing, nothing at all." He gave off waves of heavy anxiety. End of the world. What, again?

When they had settled the Old Lady with her piña collada Sybil managed to draw him away. They stared at the landscaped city.

"It is the worst!" he said through his teeth, grinning and nodding. "Laugh. Keep talking. No-one knows."

She smiled at least.

"The currency reform?"

"I told you," said Dick. "The insurance hook. And that refinement with the power sources."

The dark wave was explained.

"I've made plans," said Dick, but you have to wind up here very, very fast. You always said you hated long farewells."

"Room for how many?" she asked. "How many cubic feet?"

"Room for my witch-baby," he smiled, "and maybe one other. Kalina, the foxy medium, huh?"

She sighed. He was a nice man and a good lover even if his style was so baroque. She put her hand on his arm.

"I will have to delay," she said.

"Honey, it is dangerous. I explained... the place is worth more if it is trashed a little. They will go for the power sources!"

She swung her head, saying:

"Someone else knows!"

On the other side of the terrace an elderly man in a striped blazer and white flannels shattered his glass against the art deco mirror. He rushed out, shrieking, on to the greensward, shaking his fists impotently at the rainwet dome. A younger man followed him, distraught, and then stopped. He watched while the old guy slipped in the damp grass and rolled, still raging, into a sandtrap. He turned and hurried away. Two attendants helped the old man up, brushed him off and led him back into the club. When Sybil returned to the table the Old Lady said:

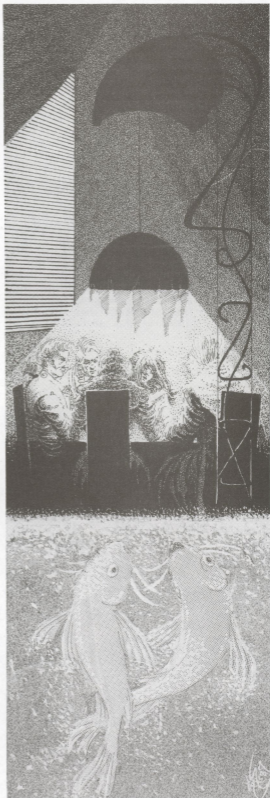
"What was with old Acey-Deucey?"

Sybil remembered the name of the old man: Alwin C. Hambleton IV.

"He was suddenly dispossessed," she said quietly. "He was reduced to refugee status."

The Old Lady gasped and took it in. She sat staring into Sybil's eyes, leaf shadows moving across her face. Crouched in her chair in white and blue silk she looked like a child, a plain, sturdy little girl whose life had been determined by the presence of enormous wealth. Sybil took both of the plump, well-preserved hands in her own: pony rides, Newport, white dresses, pearls, the scent of lavender water. A man straddled the window sill and swung a leg over. Down he went with a loud animal cry issuing from his gaping mouth. He turned over and over, brushed against projections on the endless sunlit side of the building, bounced from the roof of a red automobile and landed with a vile damp sound on the sidewalk.

"Poor Uncle Gus," whispered the Old Lady. "He



lost all his money. "Tell me something to do, Sybil. I am not functioning."

Sybil was already drawing the chair out on to the ramp.

"When we are over the bridge we will call the house," she said. "Jon Devoe can transmit the code-word to your federal law firm. We are a little ahead of time."

It was late afternoon. The rain seemed to have stopped outside. Gentle lights flowered among the banana trees, for the tropic night would come down very suddenly in Sunshine City. As the Old Lady pecked delicately at her communicator a bedraggled figure came by. It was A.C. Hambleton IV, wild-eyed, trying to pull himself together. He clung to an arm of the chair.

"Biddie," he gasped, "let me use that damned thing after you."

"Acey," said the Old Lady, "you should get home. What d'you take? Something simple? Mrs McKenzie can give you..."

"I'm fine," he said. "They gave me a shot at the club."

He stood jittering in his antique fancy-dress, fingers poised over the little green panel.

"Your federal attorneys," murmured Sybil. "They have been prepared for this, Mr Hambleton."

He walked three paces away and made the call. He came back and addressed the two women in an anguished whisper.

"If they know about this, back at the apartment? It was difficult enough, sometimes. You saw how Rollie deserted me...and the cook was always..."

"Is there someone you can trust, Mr Hambleton?" asked Sybil.

"Arturo has been with me for forty years," he said stiffly.

"Throw out the free-loaders," she said. "Pay off your personnel in local currency or in goods they can carry away. Keep food and clothing for yourself and Arturo. Call the police if anyone loots or gets out of line. Call Immigration if you decide to leave Sunshine."

"If I decide!" he exclaimed. "But what will be here? It will all...it will all run down..."

He flung out his arms towards the pastel cupolas, the redwood decks, the tiled roofs, the glass walls, the rockeries, lawns, fountains, garden ponds, waterfalls, piazzas, teraria and flagged paths of Sunshine. A small designer-styled electric vehicle came purring through the pools of light and he flagged it down.

"Where to, please?" asked the runabout.

"Back to my apartment, thank you."

"Right you are, Mr Hambleton."

He turned back with a ghostly smile.

"What we will miss, you know. Little things. *Les petits soins de la gentillesse...*"

As they made their way back to the villa Sybil called Danny and asked him to prepare a day reading and a special forecast. Out of habit she gave him his cue in their own code: something very serious.

"I know!" said Danny testily. "I know her bloody bird is dead."

Sybil laughed aloud as she cut him off. She explained as much as she could of the joke.

"Oh Danny is a devil," said the Old Lady. "My poor birdie. Poor old Captain Cook."

Sybil repeated, straight-faced.

"Poor old Captain Cook..."

They both began to laugh then and could not stop. They laughed until they cried for Captain Cook, the sulphur-crested cockatoo, and for the almighty dollar and for America. *Ach, du liebeer Augustin, alles is hin!* Sybil turned the chair into the park and a string of pearly lights sprang up beside the pathway to guide them home.

Mrs File, who had not lost her money, insisted upon a personal consultation at her own condo in the Jacaranda sub-division and sent a closed Red Cross runabout. Sybil took her way through the shopping malls where there were signs of hurried departure. For the first time the streets were not clean. A burly man in uniform, a private security guard, was strolling about with a shopping trolley full of light fixtures and a screwdriver. He worked with a woman; a sun-tanned arm stretched forth from the dark cave of a display window holding a bronze candelabra. Sybil asked the vehicle to stop beside a travel bureau with a large map of the surrounding countryside but it could not stop and could not answer her. She idly picked at the control panel and found the voice of the small ambulance. She programmed it to sing "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon."

At the File residence she was shown into a long shuttered room where three shadowy figures waited, seated at a table. She felt at once like a client coming to a séance. What she faced was a cartel of ladies who wished to buy her out, to assist her immigration.

"Provision would be made," said Mrs File, "for your young assistants. For Kalina who has helped us so often and for Daniel Malone."

"Oh please, Mrs M!" screamed the blue-haired lady, who had sung under the name of Sarah Sothern.

"Oh please," whispered the pilot's widow, Mrs Abernathy, in the gloom. "You have done so much..."

"I am deeply touched," said Sybil, "but it is not to be..."

She was aware that Mrs File was trying to consult a list in the light from the fish tank. She wondered who was second choice. The Dutchman, perhaps, or Madame Nga?

"Of course," she continued, "Kalina and Daniel will be carrying on the work in Brisbane. I have some of their cards with the temporary address."

"They've already left?" asked Mrs File.

"Major Vanberg was kind enough to fly them out in his trainer."

The blinds were adjusted so that they could read these cards and the dark wave suddenly battered at the window. Sybil gasped and pressed her forehead.

"What is it?" a muted scream.

Sybil rapped professionally on the long table; it was not glass, thank heavens, but solid black bean or even teak.

"Down!" she ordered. "Everybody...come on Sally, Mrs A...Underneath! At once!"

She went down herself and crawled, dragging all three women under the table. The room gave a slow lurch, the ceiling fell in; there was a crash of glass, a tidal wave engulfed them. They all shrieked aloud until Mrs File cried: "Fish Tank!" A beautiful fighting

fish flapped and died upon the carpet inches from Sybil's nose.

Then, just as slowly, the floor beneath them tilted like the deck of the Titanic. A flood of bright light came in under the sagging table cloth; a chair slid backwards and disappeared. The wall of the building had begun to collapse and fall away outwards. The table stayed where it was, defying gravity, in the ruined shell of Mrs File's living room on the second floor of the apartment building. So they clung on, hacking handholds in the carpet with pieces of broken glass and calling, singly or in chorus. After a long time - Sally Sothern's colour was not good, her breath came harshly - a device called a cherry-picker was used to get them down.

Sybil went down last; the young policeman who assisted her was impatient and afraid.

"Utility dome went up," he said, in answer to her question. "Put paid to the power. Further outlook cold, dark, I wouldn't know about the water."

There was a half circle of damaged buildings in Jacaranda; she knew that people had died under the rubble. The city dome had been opened, the whole south-east quadrant, and the translucent panels had stuck and crumpled. The sky was pale with long heaps of cloud rolling off like flocks of sheep into the inland. She knew, suddenly, that something would grow or collect upon the twisted section of the ruined dome. Grey-green, what would it be? Some kind of creeper? Moss or lichen or thick mould?

Mrs File and her friends had already been carried off to an emergency ward. A male nurse checked her briskly; she refused treatment for shock, asked for transport, a runabout. He laughed. When she explained that she had lost one of her shoes he pointed to a bright heap.

"Try there, love."

It was the contents of a rich woman's shoe cupboard. Her feet had been two sizes smaller than Sybil's but among the little masterpieces of leather and synthetic she found the shoes of a man, a husband or lover, which fitted well enough. She saw Gregory by a staff vehicle and staggered over to him in her grey suede slip-ons.

"Hey there," he said, "are you with Mrs File then? Fell on your feet?"

"No," she said. "I'm not with Mrs File. Any chance of a lift back to my house?"

A spark of interest in Inspector Gregory's blue eyes went out. She was a little surprised. They had worked together for three years, finding a way through the red tape. She had had no direct knowledge of the amount he received regularly from the Old Lady's slush fund. Yet money was the measure of all things and she had none.

"You can't expect any special favours," he said. "The State will have to pay to freight a lot of useless bloody hangers-on out of Sunshine as it is."

"You can do me one favour, Inspector," she said humbly. "I'd like to get in touch with Landers, the Englishman."

"He can't help you," said Gregory. "He's gone walk-about with his hippie mates, the Orenda Folk. They have a food drop in the Florida Plaza."

"Thanks."

She looked at him through lowered lashes to catch



his aura better against the dull radiance of the cloudy sky.

"Watch your health," she said. "Your back problems could get worse."

She walked away through the cordoned area and struck off into empty streets where the going was easy. She tried seven of the powder-blue courtesy phones but found none in working order. She took a detour to the Florida Plaza, one of the pleasantest places in all Sunshine. The trees, poinciana and magnolia, ringed a paved court. The fountain was no longer playing; half a dozen people were sitting around a fire that had been lit in an up-turned wrought-iron table. There was music: a flute and a guitar. As Sybil came up a tall young man with a hand gun of some kind under his poncho moved a pace at the edge of the pavement but did not challenge her.

A bearded man in her own age group addressed her as she drew near the fire; he was American, perhaps the only one.

"No extra food, lady, except soy-beans. And no transport."

"We don't need food," she said, "thank you all the same."

She picked out the leader, a dark girl with laced boots.

"I'm looking for Spencer Landers."

"He is in camp," said the girl.

"Tell him Sybil McKenzie is looking for him," she said. "I need his help, the help of the Orenda Folk. I need to reactivate an artesian bore. It was capped on the back of our land."

"Here in Sunshine?" asked the girl.

The music stopped.

"Sunshine won't go away," said Sybil.

"That with the well is some undertaking," said the bearded man.

"What do you need?" asked Sybil. "Do you eat meat?"

"Not if it's from a run-down deep freeze," said the girl.

"We have an emergency generator," said Sybil, "good for two or three weeks. You could come by tomorrow."

"Where do you live, Ms McKenzie?" asked the girl. "My name is Judy Flint. This is Joe... La Grange... Elmira..."

"We are at Summerlong," she said, "the big compound above the golf course."

Even now it was impressive. The Orenda Folk whispered together.

"And you're staying on?" asked the boy called La Grange.

"Yes," said Sybil McKenzie. "A little entropy won't do us any harm."

She turned back to them. The fire blazed up and she smiled and went on her way through the empty streets. As night came down she reached a place near Summerlong where the street lighting had not quit. She came up the hill from the already turbid waters of Lake Sweetwater and looked back at the ruined section of the dome in the southeast. Spanish moss, maybe? Could they plant on the dome, between the tranlux segments?

There was a reception committee. The Old Lady,

swathed in cashmere, in her chair and Billie and May, the two guards, and Devoe the secretary. She knew that they would all stay.

"Jeeze," said Billie, "we had the dogs out for you, Sybil!"

"We thought," said Jon Devoe, nervously, "we thought you might have..."

Not "been killed," no... "might have left town."

The Old Lady suddenly burst into floods of tears. She wept with the abandon of a child and Sybil knelt down beside her chair and comforted her.

"Of course not," she said. "I never thought of it!"

As they walked up the path towards the big house there was an extraordinary sound in the air, far above their heads. A quadrant of the dome opened metre by metre, with painful slowness, and locked into place.

"You don't suppose they are doing that by hand?" asked Billie.

The sky was overcast; one light shone out through a rent in the cloud: the planet Jupiter.

Very late at night, when everyone else had gone to sleep, Sybil took off her new suede shoes and climbed up to the top of the big house. On the flat roof there was nothing but a short flag pole, empty, and an aluminium stool that could be turned into a step-ladder. She perched on the stool's red vinyl seat and stared out through the open dome into the surrounding countryside. It was dark and featureless. She could hardly glimpse the scrub, the dunes and the greenish half-jungle that spread out around Sunshine City. She let her thought go out, regularly, in wave motion, into this cloudy nothingness.

She brushed aside tenderly the memories, the images that rose unbidden. Voices. Music. The line of sunlight under her door in the Valley, blocked by a shadow, so that she knew her cat was waiting for her key in the lock. For a few seconds, while she watched the line of sunlight and the shadow, her sweet cat was neither alive nor dead, like Schrödinger's cat. "Of what is it fools make such vain keeping..."

She made another sweep into the darkness and this time her heart thumped in her chest, the blood pounded in her ears. Another sentence, at least as powerful as her own. No definition. It seemed like a single mind, then it became shadowy and vast. This was done, perhaps, to deceive, as a protection. Was it age-old or new or newly-awakened? Over the years she had developed patience. She did not question.

Sybil McKenzie stood up and felt a warm wind that was blowing from the inland. She spread her arms wide and set up a powerful image. She traced a ring of blue fire around Sunshine City and defined it as her territory.

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Cherry Wilder's last story here was "Something Coming Through" (IZ 6). Since that piece appeared her fantasy trilogy, *The Rulers of Hylor*, has been published in the UK by Unwin, as has her sf novel *Second Nature*. New Zealand-born, she lives with her family in West Germany.

Charles Stross

The Boys

The boys scuttled over the concrete slab like cockroaches, exoskeletons a dull bronze in the orange glare that passed for daylight. A dense mist concealed rocks and ankles and a corpse. The roar of a police carrier echoed through the trees, a pulsing racket of authority: the boys didn't care. By the time the patrol arrived the corpse was brain-dead, stripped of eyes and kidneys and viscera as well as bionics. The boys had left their incestuous joke with the corpse; a noose.

Darkness descended on the area, a protective screen for the armoured hovercraft as it swept through the gap in the forest, cruising slowly between fungus-streaked biomass modules. Among the video surfaces that line the cabin the Hunter sat bolt upright; her scanscreens scintillated as she focussed on the partially-dismembered cadaver.

"Boys; he's been dead for half an hour." The constables flinched and whined; she noticed them and moderated her voice. They were sensitive units, too valuable to waste.

"Nothing here," she told the autopilot. "Get the skull, then take us home."

The small noises of relief were drowned by the roar of the fans. Some of the cyborged dogs muttered and scratched their implants as the carrier turned and rumbled back towards the castle. In the wake of the hovercraft the cobblestones were darker than before, by an increment of congealing blood.

The castle, a perfect cube with edges a kilometre long, shone with an ominous red glow that filtered through the grime of centuries. The degenerate bioforms of the landscape twisted away from the laser-veined monolith of lunar basalt; nerve-trees bubbled into fatty shapes and creeping acanthopods bristled as they crept past. The clouds above it reflected the glow, megawatts of energy expended in a display of power. The ceiling of the world, a continuation of the floor by any other name, hung thirty

kilometres overhead, masked by clouds: cylindrical storms and spiral winds induced by convection from the algae-fogged solar windows were the predominant weather pattern. The world existed in a soyuz-shell; Translunar Seven, the Islamic Corporate Shogunate, had seen better days.

The view from the incoming drifter would have been spectacular if anyone had bothered to experience it. The pod closed in on the habitat slowly, waiting to be picked up by a tug as it drifted past. Its self-sustaining ecosystem basked in the glare of sunlight, pulsing out a call sign to the tracking systems of the Shogunate. At a range of a hundred kilometres the orbital nation was a slowly rolling wall of grey metal and ceramic. Outlying parabolic light farms provided a hook for the eye, stationary mylar mirrors focussed on geodesic domes that could contain anything from algae tanks to laser cells. Thin stems of plastic fastened them to the hub regions at either end of the colony. They were huge, kilometres in diameter, as were the solar windows set into the wall of the world. The drift pod was a bacillus approaching a brontosaur.

To say that nobody was there to experience the view would be an error. There were the pod's native bionics and their supportive life-system, and more – a human cargo. Nike was a fully gender-identified female human; she had the right complement of arms, legs and sensory organs, which was not mandatory. Coming from Troy-Jupiter, where lots of things called themselves human, this was quite a surprise. But Nike wasn't bothering about the scenery; she was worrying about customs.

"You're still set on going in?" asked the pod persona, an expert system that called itself Valentin Zero.

"Maybe." Nike stared into inner space, mirrored contact lenses turning her eyelids into projection screens for the video nodes in her optic nerves. "I may just go through with this. I may. Just."

She ground to a halt, thoughtfully, remembering

what it had been like when she had been there before. A modified wasp buzzed to a six-point landing on her left arm, abdomen curved to inject. Its lance slid over and penetrated her skin, extending feathery biosensors into her peripheral circulation.

"Spying again, Valentin?" She opened her eyes and looked at the wasp. Its metallic carapace shone with black and red stripes, tiny alphanumeric embossed on its wings.

"I can never tell what you're thinking," said the program. "It makes me nervous." Nike tried an experimental grin, her face twisting into a semblance of spontaneity.

"When you're like that," complained Valentin, "you're unreadable."

"If I do go," she said, "do you think I should continually signal my intentions with my anatomy?" This time the facial expression was more natural; heavy irony. Her face resembled her body; slim, pared-down, like something designed for speed rather than comfortable habitation.

"You ported into that brain, badly, if you think you can convince anyone you're human if you don't look spontaneous. You don't have to tell everyone what you're going to do; just make them think they know."

She snorted. "How long is it since you were human, Valentin?"

The pilot sounded surprised. "Me, human? What do you take me for? A potential defector?"

The wasp picked up traces of neuropeptides that warned of danger. "Don't be alarmed," she said, "but if I thought that, I'd have to kill you. I need you here." Mirrors slid across her eyeballs, a deliberate snub to conversation. The wasp took wing in a vindictive whine of chitin, leaving a bead of blood oozing from her skin. It flew to a nearby neuroplant with off-yellow tendrils as fat as her fingers that dug their way into the hull of the drifter pod, and offered biochemical homage.

"I've made up my mind," she said. "I'm going."

Valentin didn't reply. There was a gentle thumping from outside the pod, followed by a barely perceptible return to acceleration, unfelt for six weeks; the tug had latched on.

Nike returned to her customs video briefing.

"If we accept your application for citizenship you must accept our semiotics. If we accept your physiology you must accept our commensal bacteria. If we accept your psychodynamics you must accept our law."

The customs official stared at her with phased-array eyes, cruciform wings of black synthetic retinae. It was a robot, and not a well-maintained robot: it recited by rote, sounding bored.

"Repeat after me: Death to the imperialist Zionist rosin, the lackeys of neo-humanist cladisticians, and the disincorporate running-dog zaibatsu. I swear to follow the decree of the hezbollah and the shogun in all things, to abide by the shari'a, to follow humility and modesty as a law for the rest of my natural life, and to refrain from acts of treason against the corporation..."

Nike recited the oath expressionlessly. The syllables were stale in her mouth; she'd memorized them during the two-day immigration check. Then she

walked through the exit of the customs hall. Her feet ached from months of free fall. The black cross of the robots' retinal array tracked her as far as the path into the forest before losing interest and swivelling back to the entry gates.

Must swirling at ankle-level obscured roots looped to catch unwary feet, pits of rotting vegetation hollowed out by subsidence, other unseen hazards. Videomic crouched in the boles of trees, grooming their paws, faces almost obscured by the black buttons of their eyes. Nike proceeded without guidance; the customs briefing had hinted that there had been political changes unnoted by the immigrant-processing module over the past two centuries. A faint rumble drifted from the distance, menacing in the twilight as the colony processed towards nightfall.

The videomic were the eyes and ears of the Hunter, but there were too many of them to monitor simultaneously. Nike ignored them, relying on the pricking of her neck to tell her when one of them was belching a coded data packet to the castle: her close-cropped hair was wired for microwaves. She guessed that there were other watchers in the forest, other eyes, and it scared her. Traffic control had confirmed that no-one had visited the Corporate Shogunate for a good six years now, and no-one had left it for over a decade. If anyone human was left alive, Nike would be the subject of intense surveillance. She stumbled occasionally and paused to brush branches out of her way as she followed the trail into the woods that blanketed the colony interior. She was right; other eyes were watching her.

Boys drifted like ghosts, moving in silence across the open spaces. Their choreography was uncanny, plotted by computer for a ballet corps of cyborgs. The ground beneath their feet was a bare surface of white ceramic that curved away to either side until it submerged beneath a layer of earth; it was the naked hull, exposed by erosion. Every ten metres a grey pole stood, festooned with branching sensors and small pumps, a trellis left over from the soil-support system. Ecological vandalism had stripped it bare in this area, a kilometre-wide strip of sterility near the equator. Darkness had fallen across it an hour ago and the people of the night were rising.

The Hunter watched them on a screen in the safety of the castle. Reclining in a throne of skulls hung with nutrient tubes and neural jacks, she looked akin to those she observed; pale, with the fleshlessness of a rapidly-growing child and the synthetic skin of the ageless. The resemblance was due purely to design convergence. The Hunter – her title was as good as her name – was not a boy. To be a boy was a gesture of fanaticism, and the Hunter was hardly a fanatic. Not any more.

"What are they doing now?" The voice came from above and behind her head. She watched the screen with the intensity of a sniper.

"They appear to be constructing something..." The Hunter paused to consult her throne of brains. "A gallows."

"Why?"

The Hunter thought for a while. "It's an archaic device used for punitive purposes. The victim is suspended by a rope for some time – it looks uncomfort-

able. Possibly dangerous if no spinal bypass is installed."

"Who is the object of this device?" The voice sounded bored. It probably knew already and was testing her.

"That's not clear, yet."

"Keep me informed." The voice vanished as rapidly as it had manifested itself, and the Hunter shuddered. She had a fear of that voice, conditioned by a century of ignorance. No-one had met the Shogun face to face and told the tale within living memory. Her memory. The Shogun was an enigma. It might not even exist; or it might...

The twilight ritual of the boys played itself out. One of their own, out on the white plain, was stripped of his exoskeleton; they bound his hands behind his back with a cord of red silk. It was impossible to tell if he struggled – those who surrounded him were too strong for unamplified muscles to resist. Up went the rope, the prisoner on the polished teakwood scaffold, the drop... The Hunter watched, fascinated. Centripetal acceleration dragged the twitching feet out, deviating from the vertical. *There's something nasty in the world*, she realized, as infrareds observed the body cooling. The boys left an hour before she admitted to herself that what she'd witnessed was not a punishment but an execution. The absolutism of age. *They cannibalized one of their own*, she wondered; *why? Have the boys become so jaded that they gamble with their own lives?* And, dawning slowly in her mind: *I don't understand this any more.*

The house was so well camouflaged that Nike almost stumbled into it before she realized what it was. It lay among the trees, concealed by a dense thicket of ivy; its owner waited for her outside.

"You're the immigrant," he said; "I'm Ben."

"Nike." She watched him closely, noted dark skin but no cranial hair.

"Winged victory? Or the missile?" When he spoke he held his head on one side. "Never mind. You'll be wanting somewhere to stay while you find out what it's like here. You'll be wondering why I'm offering that. I'll tell you; we don't see many strangers."

"How many of you are there?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Maybe five hundred, maybe less. Nobody counts. There's the boys, the servants of the Shogunate, a few civilian groups who keep quiet. And the neuroplants, who total about six million posthumous intelligences."

For a moment Ben looked like something else; infinitely weary, lines engraved on his face like tribal scars concealing eyeball-tracked weapons systems. It passed; Nike concentrated on the smell of his skin, the pheromones he exuded. They smelt so natural that he might have been a prehistoric subsistence farmer or test pilot. There was a sense of archaic simplicity about him.

"Do you eat?" she asked.

The Hunter dug through her collection of spare skulls in search of an appropriate memory, in response to a desperate urge to understand. She found one, long-jawed with the baroque horns of an extinct fashion. The motions were instinctive by

now; she plugged it into her throne by a fat nerve trunk and felt the alien emotions expand her perceptions. The skull had been poorly maintained, isolated in sensory deprivation for the better part of a century; the personality had ablated away to a core of memories and a gnawing loneliness.

She remembered being a he: experienced at second hand the stars beyond the window of a cramped cargo drifter between worlds, the waves of vapour churning at the edges of the red spot as mining drones scooped up megatons of methane from the Jovian atmosphere. That wasn't right; she carried on searching. Later she remembered arriving at Translunar Seven shortly before the revolution. Being caught up in the confusion and arrested by the hezbollah, undergoing the terror of forcible decapitation. This was too recent; she wanted somewhere in between. Tried to remember. What had it been like in Troy-Jupiter two hundred years ago?

The agonies this brain had been squeezed through made her wince. It was easy for a Hunter to fall into the trap of thinking of her memories as something more than a cunning source of information, of trying to relate to the dead minds in the boneyard. She hunted and eventually found what she was looking for, partially obscured by the pain of a bizarre and self-destructive marriage.

A memory of what it was like before the revolution, before she had become a Hunter.

The house vomited pre-digested morsels into the feeding trough. As Nike and Ben ate, she tried to assess the situation. It was worse than she'd expected; the place wasn't far from dead. An unseen ruler who might not even exist, a dissident faction with unspeakable habits, and a dying periphery of humans.

"They shut down half the farms a century ago," said Ben, "and most of the rest forty years later. There wasn't enough demand on the manufacturing capacity to justify running it all. Nobody needs anything – the die-backs left a vast overcapacity. And the city's a playground for the boys so nobody lives there anymore."

He shovelled in another handful of food. "You came at the wrong time."

Nike watched him silently for a while, fascinated. She wondered if she'd met him years ago; so many of her memories from the early days had been wiped to make room for new experiences that she couldn't be sure.

He finished eating.

"Just what did you come here for?" he asked.

"To take over," she said. "We need this space. What's your interest?"

He grinned, face in shadow from the sunduct in the roof. "I'm a neutral. I have no interest in conflict."

"So?" she asked.

"The question is what you can do for us," he added. "Who are you?"

Her eyes flashed, reflecting the night with mirrored venom. "I'm your missile, the forerunner. My people are coming and they need a vacant biosphere. Don't stand in our way."

"I'm not," he remonstrated mildly. "But the boys are. And the Shogun might."

"Yes," she said. "Just what are these boys? And who is the Shogun?"

"That," he replied, "is something I expected you to know already."

The Hunter stared at the screen until the pain in her eyes forced her to blink furiously, tears trickling down her cheeks. It was hard to bear, this sense of her humanity being reduced to a cypher by isolation. The feeling that she'd been locked in her role for too long while the boys played their blood-games in the forest. Sometimes she sent out for a warm skull to scan for the wet sensations of dying; she couldn't remember her name but she felt that if she concentrated on it for long enough it would return... she was close to an overload with time. It had been too many years since she had been merely human. Damn, damn, she whispered to herself in a monotonous litany; *why do I keep forgetting what it was like?* There was no answer; there never was.

All she knew was that she couldn't get a grip on her emotions. There'd been a time, not so long ago in historical terms, when she had possessed a blindingly important purpose for which she had sacrificed her freedom to be anywhere but here. The purpose might have been connected with the Shogun or the boys; it had faded into the cobwebs of neurones that died and were replaced by the longevity programs. To those who knew the signs she was as old as the artificial hills. She knew that it had meant everything to her; once she'd been willing to die for it. But she couldn't remember. All that she knew was the voice from behind her throne, and the boys.

Three grey cylinders the size of mice drifted in free fall, jostling in the thin breeze along the axis of the world. One of them was capped at each end by a blue, very human eye. Another sprouted two surreal ears, perfect fleshy miniatures that merged seamlessly with the cylinder. The third had no discernible sense organs, but from a crack in its flank grew an almost perfect stem of convolvulus. The bindweed curled and twisted, loosely holding the other two cylinders in its green coils. A wasp coasted nearby, red-banded and bearing stencilled cyrillic insignia on its wings; five kilometres below, the cotton-wool swathes of cloud veiled the floor of the world. Valentin Zero had smuggled his cortex modules into the shogunate as seeds disguised in Nike's gut. Reaching the free-fall zone via the sewage system, the modules had matured and grown rapidly by preying on wind-borne organisms; the wasp was one of many infiltrators sweeping the world for news.

As darkness fell, the twittering code-pulses from the videomice quietened; Valentin tuned in on the steady, low-powered grumble of the neuroplants, the tok-tokking of a factory talking to its robots, the crackling of poorly-shielded bionics hooked into the soil-support system. The microwave traffic was richer and more compressed than sonic communication, echoing back and forth along the eighty-kilometre cylinder. But Valentin was listening for a single delicate pulse-train; the side-band transmission from Nike's eyeballs.

This situation interested him, inasmuch as anything could hold his attention these days; the ins and

outs of betrayal, of wheels within wheels and subordinates who were superiors. Valentin Zero was an expert system wired for espionage, and his current mission was to monitor Nike. She was so old as to be almost obsolete: old enough to have been here before. His sensorium ghosted through winds of data – the life-blood of even the most seriously injured orbital republic – until he finally locked onto a signal that looked right. It was faint, but the coding matched his key; he locked on and submerged in the transmission, saw what Nike was seeing.

The wall of the house caved in soundlessly, blood spurting from arteries buried in the walls, followed by a spasm as the floor shuddered and died. A release of sphincters flooded the food trough. A boy stepped through a ragged rent in front of her; his left arm was coated to the elbow with a smooth sheen of gore, the chain-saw semi-retracted and murderous. His bronze exoskeleton exposed white skin and atrophied genitals, a wildly ecstatic smile beneath a crowlike of brown hair. The running lights on his spinal carapace were blinking green and violet pips, as membranes slid down across Nike's eyes and a targeting display flashed a red crosshair surrounded by flickering digits across his face.

"Hello," he said, and tittered. Ben sat where he was, very still, eyes narrowed; Nike felt her perception compress into a point on the boy's forehead, a point that could be made to explode.

"Hello," she replied. The boy frowned, as if disappointed.

"You're not scared," he complained, "and you're not dead. What are you?" He pouted with a transsexual sullenness that struck her a grotesquely overdone.

"I'm a visitor," she replied. "What are you?"

"I'm a Boy," he said, smiling suddenly; "I've come –"

"He's come to negotiate their surrender," said Ben. The boy flared again, mercurially angry.

"You shut up, old man! That's for me to tell. It's not true, anyway."

Ben shut up, his face blank. Nike felt as if the ground was dissolving beneath her feet. She'd pegged Ben as a non-participant, but this boy seemed to know something that she didn't.

"What have you got to tell me?" she asked, nerves alive with unease.

"Merely to enquire after your health and your diplomatic patronage," said the boy, sniffing disdainfully. With uncharacteristic lack of theatrical presence he scratched under one arm. "But the old man of the monolith's got to you already, I see."

"The monolith?" she asked, tracking Ben with her peripheral vision. He sat as still as a rock.

"The castle... the claw of the Shogun. We've been trying to get him to call off the Hunter for decades, haven't we?" The boy glanced at Ben pointedly; Ben rocked slowly back and forth. The boy grimaced. "Observe the Shogun: ruler of the world, patron of the ongoing revolution, supreme systems coordinator of the digitized districts, etcetera. We've been trying to get him to do his job since he ran away fifty years ago, but he refuses."

"Why?" she asked, wondering to whom she should address the question.

"Because I'm not ready to let the boys do what they were designed to do," said Ben, not looking at her: "I'm not prepared to digitize the entire human biomass of the System to suit a political goal. When we designed the boys —"

"— Who were 'we'?" she butted in, gripped by a sense of déjà vu.

"The Turing Front, the society for synthetic intelligence. The Islamic Corporate Shogunate was an experimental deployment for the revolution; fanatical cyborgs. Some of them were the wild boys and some of them were less obvious, like the Hunters. They knew that when they died they'd be preserved in the transputer array; their job was to forcibly integrate all reactionary elements. Very successful, I might add: most of the neuroplants in this world are part of the mind-support system. But it didn't work out too well." Ben paused, head bowed; the boy looked at him accusingly.

"The ecosystem needed a firm hand in control and began to shut down," said the boy. "We stayed on in hope of finding transport to another world where we could integrate, but evidently there was a quarantine pact; all the exfiltrators lost contact. And then Ben reprogrammed that blasted Hunter — the only surviving one, we exported all the other clones — on our collective ass to keep us from getting enough slack..." He shook his alloy-framed head. "Unless those early cadres succeeded, the revolution was an abortion. Any idea how many humans want to be digitized without the initial demonstration?"

Nike looked at him enigmatically. "Yes," she said; "I have. I've seen it at first hand."

"Why are you here?" asked the boy.

Nike shrugged. "My people aren't very popular out there," she said. "We need somewhere to go; the New Cladists are pushing in everywhere, and politically we've lost ground so heavily that unless we find a closed habitat we'll be forced to condense in order to prevent mass defections."

"New Cladists?" said Ben. "What are they?"

"Human revenants, technically adept at manipulating biosystems," she replied. It was so tiring, being on edge like this: even the wild boys didn't seem threatening enough to justify keeping her defences on edge. "We just can't compete." A soft rain was falling outside, pattering through the hole in the wall.

"And who are you?" probed the boy, looking for completeness.

"Can't you guess?" she complained. "You've had it easy with your smug mind-games and your revolution; don't you see?" The wind ghosted through the house like the soul of history, ruffling her hair. "We tried to carry the revolution through outside the closed habitat, we fought for a century..." She stared into reflective distances, eyes like dark mirrors, resembling her mind.

"...but they didn't want us."

The Hunter was wandering, adrift in an ocean of despair, when she came across Valentin Zero. Her video surfaces were locked into the sonic images of a fruit bat in free fall; when she saw something unusual she tensed instinctively. Could it be a boyish thing, here in the axial zone? A surge of conditioned reflexes drowned her nervous system in

adrenalin and hatred; but as the bat approached the object it resolved into three components, all too small. Her skulls couldn't find a meaning for it. Drifting into a close approach, she noted three cylinders and a bushy twirl of vegetation. Modified axons in the bat's ears recognized high-frequency emissions, the fingerprint of molecular-scale processors; it had to be intelligent.

"Hello unidentified structure," she squeaked through the ultrasonic larynx of the bat. "Talk to me."

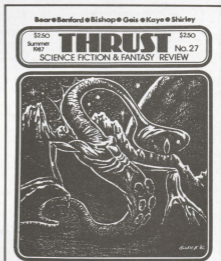
The structure began to rotate, sluggishly; the bat picked up another object, the vibrating flight surfaces of an insect. An eye swam into view, shielded by a triangular leaf. The bat screamed; something was scanning down its nervous system, trying to locate the Hunter's interface.

"Who are you?" said the cluster of grey cylinders, words burning tracks of silvery pain through the mind of the bat. "Visualize yourself." The Hunter framed an image and transmitted it, waited as the intruder scanned it.

"Nike," broadcast Valentin; "What are you doing here?"

Then there was silence, as high above the castle the Hunter remembered who she had been.

Charles Stross informs us: "I was born in Leeds in late 1964, began writing in my teens, and have been submitting to *Interzone* since I was eighteen. By the time you get round to printing this I should be a qualified pharmacist. I am currently working on a science-fiction novel and several more short stories."



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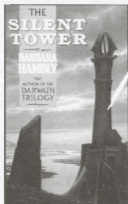
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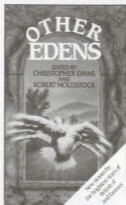
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K.W. Jeter

Interview by Les Escott

KW. Jeter was born in Los Angeles in 1950, and is the author of nine novels. Among his books is a sequel to H.G. Wells, *Morlock Night* (DAW, 1979) – the original “steam punk” novel. Other works include the thematic trilogy which consists of *Dr Adder* (Bluejay, 1984; Grafton, 1987, £2.95), *Death Arms* (Morrigan, 1987, £10.95) and *The Glass Hammer* (Bluejay, 1985; Grafton, 1987, £2.95). He has also written horror/suspense novels, including *Soul Eater* (Tor, 1983) and *Dark Seeker* (Tor, 1987, \$3.95). The following interview was conducted during a recent extended visit to Britain. Jeter speaks first:

Every time you see a writer away from his typewriter, or away from his word processor, opening up his big gob, trying to say profound things that are usually more embarrassing than anything else – you pick up some magazine and there'll be a writer in there you admire and they'll interview him and by the time you get done reading it you think Christ, what did I ever see in that worthless sod? Self-aggrandizing puff-piece that he is. So my idea of how a writer should behave is like B. Traven. You know Traven?

The author of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*?

Yeah, that's the one – went to great lengths to conceal his identity, staying away from people and all that sort of thing. That's the way all writers should act. That's the way I should act but I don't. It's like drinking – you start out saying “Just a small one” – like a small interview, how much can that hurt? And you wind up blabbing away. It's basically a matter of will power. It's flattering to have people behaving as though you're saying something worth listening to.

Don't you think you have something worth listening to?

In my books, sure. But a writer consenting to an interview, or consenting to write some kind of piece about his books, doing anything other than writing the books themselves, in some ways that's a terrible admission of failure – you're saying whatever the books were supposed to say, they

didn't do it and now you have to. It's like playing charades when you get to the point where nobody understands what you're trying to convey and you finally have to break down and speak. So that's actually an admission of failure. If the books are really as good as they should be then nobody would need to talk to the writer. Other than for cheap gossip.

But isn't it a fact that when you read a book, the writer may intend to convey one thing but the reader often finds completely different things?

That's true. There's no reason to suppose the writer is the best person to say what the book's about. The prob-

lem is that you run into a special type of people – academics – who specialize in telling people what the books are about. They're even more irritating than the writers are. That was always one of the big attractions about sf, before it ever had any academic attention given to it. It was a genuinely underground phenomenon in a way: a whole body of writing that you could read without having been given any preconceptions about it by your schoolteachers. It's hard to pick up a copy of Shakespeare or Shelley or something like that, without already having had a lot of stuff put into your head about what you're supposed to think about it. Whereas with sf, it was essentially a way of thumbing your nose and saying Hey, what you think is important I don't think is important, I'm just going to go over here with these people and hang out with them.

Is the freedom from literary restraints what made you decide to take up writing sf?

Well, sf was what I read as a kid. Even when I was a kid I guess I was a pissy little bastard; I enjoyed doing things to irritate adults and it was amazing how much you could irritate your schoolteachers by reading sf. Doing your book report on *Clans of the Alphane Moon* or something like that (back then it had this completely lurid cover on it). Once you start taking the position that your teacher doesn't know all there is to know about literature – as a matter of fact, he or she might be completely wrong about what they think they know – this is the genesis of an anti-authoritarian set of opinions. Because when you say “You can read *Silas Marner* if you want, but I'm going to read something else,” it's essentially saying that you've developed a personality capable of making its own decisions. Which is why so many teachers don't like it.

A lot of people criticized you when *Dr Adder* was published, saying it was obscene and all that sort of thing.

Yeah, but there's really no long description of anything sexual in it. The hallmark of genuine pornography is a luxuriating in detail; you have descriptions going on for pages and



Cover by Steve Godridge for Jeter's excellent novel *Death Arms*. (Order from Morrigan Publications, 84 Ivy Avenue, Southdown, Bath, Avon BA2 1AN, UK – £10.95 per copy.)

pages of exactly what the significant bits look like and what they're doing at any given moment – the whole book. No real plot, just description. The luxuriating in detail: if you think about that as the real definition of pornography, than a lot of porno can extend to non-sexual or seemingly non-sexual subject matter. These things like this Sally Beauman's *Destiny*, where it's classed inside the publishing industry as an "S & F" novel – the S stands for shopping and the F stands for fucking. There's so much luxuriant detail describing what the characters shop for, or how they go to bed with each other. That's real porn: *Dr Adder* doesn't have any of that. You'd have to be a pretty sex-obsessed person if you get aroused by anything I ever wrote.

Do you think sf suffers from the Bedford/Clarke syndrome where they actually spend two thirds of the book describing how things are possible, to the detriment of the characters? It seems to be something Phil Dick was particularly good at avoiding.

In the sf field you have a lot which is not really sf; it's a parody of sf. It's something that Phil Dick did; Dick was not really a very good sf writer. He was a very good parodist of sf. You see it in his books where if somebody has to get from point A to point B they climb into a blipple or a squib, and they blipple over to Bangkok or they blipple over to San Francisco. But you never get an explanation of what a blipple or a squib is. You just accept it for something that happens in the future. Phil Dick probably took that to the limit – he was operating in the sf field and being respected as an sf writer when all the time he was taking the piss out of the whole field.

What about this "cyberpunk" thing, then?

You're just asking me about that because you know I'll get annoyed and say rude things.

Too right! So what do you think of this whole so-called cyberpunk movement?

"So-called" is the operative word. For me the problem with cyberpunk is that as a matter of labelling I couldn't see the distinction between cyberpunk and anything that went before it in sf. Whatever the merits of the stuff being written under the label, I thought the labelling process itself was erroneous because it was making a false distinction. What's being labelled as cyberpunk is just the usual rediscovery of Alfred Bester that happens every two or three years in the sf field. Almost everything labelled as cyberpunk, just as with almost any supposedly new thing in sf, really resembles nothing so much as Alfred Bester's closet. Or his waste basket. The point is that the elements that seemed crucial to defining whatever cyberpunk was all about – as

its promoters tried to define it – the elements so easily lend themselves to parody. Even parody by people who weren't trying to parody it but who were trying to actually be cyberpunks, cashing in on what they figured was the hot thing. You wind up with the sort of thing that didn't have much to do with punk, but had more to do with Yuppies than anything else – a tremendous orientation toward consumer goods. It's the sf equivalent to the Sally Beauman *Destiny* shopping-and-fucking novel. Where everything that every character wears is described in terms of its brand name and where they bought it and how much it cost. I deeply distrust any novel where instead of people riding around in blipples and squibs, a great deal is made of them riding around in BMWs and Maseratis. When you start to drop brand names on the very first page, you're not dealing with genuine concerns – you're dealing with the concerns of consumerism and status. And not in any analytical way, but just as a cheap appeal to the reader's fantasies about owning all that neat stuff. If writers get into that mental set they're no more at the cutting edge than someone like Sally Beauman or Jacqueline Susann.

I've been pussyfooting around this whole cyberpunk issue, and my feelings about it. You risk being thought of as an envious, bitter sort if you go slagging off a lot who've had such quick, flash success as the so-called cyberpunks, especially if you've been rattling around as long as I have with no great notice taken. Actually, it's been a bit of a character-building exercise; I've gotten to the enviable point of not giving a fuck what people think of my books as long as I can pay the rent and write another one. But as for cyberpunk, the real reason that I don't want to be called on – that I'm glad I've only been mislabelled that way a couple of times, and I've taken steps to make sure that it doesn't happen again – the reason is that I think the label applies to a body of writing that is basically crap. Aside from one or two bits, I haven't been very impressed by it – either the original lot or the Johnny-come-latelies who are even worse. It strikes me as a form of writing designed for the sort of person who jerks off while reading the *Sharper Image* catalogue – that's a Yuppie mail-order thing in the States, full of these high-tech gadgets and toys. Lots of matte black with red LEDs pulsing seductively. It's more of the same old sf preoccupation, where the machines become more important than the people. And all that essentially pornographic luxuriating in the sensory details of it... My big objection to it is that it's so slow. You can't indulge in that many adverbs and adjectives, and that much passive construction of

sentences, without losing the story for whole big stretches of time. That's something the best thriller writers understand: details don't tell the story. Just get rid of 'em. There's a great interview with Elmore Leonard where he says the solution to handling modifiers is to just not use them. People make claims that cyberpunk is fast-paced because there are a lot of little blippy details right after each other. Well, if that's what excites you, fine, but it puts me right to sleep. I underload on it, rather than overload.

So what's the future for cyberpunk, then?

No future; or at least, no more than for any other passing label. It's already taking on the mothball odour of a paisley-patterned Nehru jacket hung up in the closet. When there's no real substance behind the label, it all evaporates. Whereas you can go back to some of that New Wave stuff, the New Worlds era that some cyberpunks have slagged off, and you can find some really exciting stuff there – all those "condensed novels" of Ballard's, et cetera – stuff that the cyberpunks haven't even come close to. I talked to a British editor here and he told me that his company was planning on doing a whole "cyberpunk" promotion, and that my stuff would be part of it. Besides telling him that I'd rather they didn't, I asked when this promotion was scheduled; 1988, he said. Christ, I told him – they needn't bother; that label will be up there with the dodo and the great auk by then. Because, essentially, video killed the cyberpunk star. The problem with a form of writing that just deals with surfaces is that it's a skin that can be peeled off and wrapped around anything else – in this case, a Coca-Cola can. The watered-down American version of *Max Headroom* has already completely sucked up that cyberpunk/*Blade Runner* sleazy future, retrofitting-Hudson-Hornets look and made it safe for Kansas teenagers and their parents. Cutting edge, my ass. That's the breaks – you live by merchandising, you'll die by it.

What about individual cyberpunk writers?

Oh, they'll go on without the label. Or they'll go on with it hanging around their necks like a mouldering ablatross. But there weren't that many of them to begin with; the ranks were swelled by names dragged in to make it look as if more was going on than actually was. Greg Bear's reaction to being labelled a cyberpunk is the best comment on that. All of this is why, though, I'm glad that I've only been mislabelled as a cyberpunk once or twice. Just because of certain superficial elements, like mentioning microchips in *The Glass Hammer* – just mentioning microchips will make people use this idiotic label cyberpunk. And

I wrote the novel long before the term was invented. If I'd known mentioning microchips would get it labelled cyberpunk I'd have edited out the microchips, changed them to something else. Similarly, a novel I'm working on now, called *Farewell Horizontal* – it was originally going to be for Bluejay, now it's going to be from St Martin's Press – I revised the outline to make it less easy to label it as a cyberpunk novel. I would have been happy to write it according to the original outline but I realized the original outline would've tended to make people label it as a cyberpunk thing, so I rewrote the outline.

And then your horror novels – I believe you've said before that you started writing horror fiction because you couldn't get your sf published?

Mainly for that reason, but also as a bit of a reaction to the tendency for sf to be about clever children – children disguised as adults – and their adventures. There's always a lot of clever sf around; it appeals to the eternal smart-aleck adolescent. But in horror fiction, or suspense fiction, people tend to have adult rather than adolescent emotional states. Their problems are forced upon them; they don't go looking for them. One of the reasons I was having difficulty in the sf field is that I was essentially writing suspense fiction

and trying to sell it as sf. Jim Frenkel at Bluejay picked up the sf stuff, and that got rolling at last. So now I'm at the point where I'm writing both sf and suspense novels. What's attractive to me about the suspense novels – such as my own *Dark Seeker* and *Soul Eater* – is that they deal with people who are considerably beyond the adolescent stage. They are somewhat bitter and beat-up and to a large degree involved in the fate of their children. But then children are the hidden, or not so hidden, agenda of most horror novels.

Have you been influenced by any horror writer?

I'm published as a horror writer but I'm so low in blood and death and gore content compared to somebody like Clive Barker or Stephen King – I'm just barely in the category of horror novels. Again, it's a matter of not luxuriating in all the pages and pages of details. I'm always just going on and moving the story along. Can't be bothered with telling you what some eviscerated corpse looks like; at least not in the usual loving manner. There's just enough in there so they can publish me as a horror writer. So if people are looking for a book with lots of blood and guts they'll be disappointed. But in terms of suspense novelists – all along, even before I entertained the notion of writing this sort of thing at

all, the writer I really admired and still do is Geoffrey Household. Household is one of the greatest suspense writers. His earlier stuff particularly, like *Rogue Mole*. That's in some ways the definitive suspense novel. You genuinely do not know from one page to the next what's going to happen. And you can't predict the ultimate fate of the protagonist... in that sense, I make the distinction between suspense novels and what a lot of people consider suspense novels, but which are really action or adventure novels.

How do you see your future development – as an sf writer or suspense writer?

I've gotten to the point where when I'm writing an sf book and I see the limitations I go "Fucking science fiction, I'm never going to write it again," and then when I'm writing a suspense novel I think of things I could only do in an sf book and I go "Goddamn thrillers, I'm never going to do another one." I just swing back and forth, but at least now I've got the option of doing that. If I wind up spending 50% of my time on sf and 50% on thrillers then that would be ideal.

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Lisa Tuttle

Memories of the Body

Cerise plunged the long-bladed butcher's knife into her husband's chest with a feeling of ecstatic fulfilment.

Murder was wonderful. Patrick let out a little moan when she stabbed him, and she echoed his sound as she sometimes did in bed, to encourage him.

She pulled the knife out and gazed at his thin, naked body, loved for so long. She wanted to cut it to pieces, to stab him in a hundred places. She bared her teeth and swung at him.

He tried to stop her, grabbing hold of the blade. He cried out. Blood stained his pale hands.

"Stupid!" she said. With a hard, impatient turn of her wrist she freed the knife from his grasp and severed two of his fingers.

"What'll I cut off next?" she asked. She was breathing hard and her body tingled, as aroused as she had ever been by love-making. "Why don't you try to get away? Turn around, I'll stab you in the back."

He stared down at his ruined hand and took one stumbling step backwards. She went after him, cutting him twice, opening his stomach.

"I bet you never thought I could do this. You thought you could get away with anything. You thought I was weak, I bet. Thought I'd kill myself sooner than hurt you. Stand still, damn you."

With the next stab, the knife sank deep into his abdomen, buried to the hilt, slipping in her grasp.

"Cerise..." Blood bubbled on his lips as he spoke. There was blood everywhere, and a terrible, sweet smell. In sudden silence, Patrick fell to his knees, then toppled forward, onto the knife, and lay still.

She felt a surge of disappointment. She wasn't ready for it to be over. She crouched down and tried to lift him, but the body was a dead weight. "Pat?" she said. Her smile lost its shape, and she began to pant, the smell of death so thick she could hardly breathe. She gagged, and then vomited, and then wept.

Later, she stared through a blur of tears at the little

bald spot on the back of his head. She wished she could apologize to him. The hate was all gone now. She hadn't always hated him. "Oh, Pat," she said softly. "I loved you. I really, really did."

Cerise continued to crouch beside the body, still dazed with discovery, astonished by her own emotions, while the clock above the bed clicked away the seconds.

The murder had been Hewitt's idea – she had agreed to it under pressure, only to please him.

He would go on feeling threatened by her ex-husband forever, it seemed, unless she would agree to kill him. But even when she went down to that fancy kitchenware shop in the new mall and picked out the scariest-looking knife she could find she wasn't really planning on using it. She was sure that when it came right down to it she would chicken out. Self-defence would be hard enough, but to strike first, to kill in cold blood... And to kill someone she had loved! She wasn't an aggressive person. She didn't even like competitive sports. And she hated arguments. That was how she'd agreed to this, in fact. Because she didn't want to go on arguing with Hewitt, she had given in. She had told herself she was only doing it for Hewitt, but from the moment she had seen Patrick again, Hewitt had been nowhere in her thoughts.

Cerise rose on shaky legs and went into the bathroom to wash off the blood. She decided she wanted to be clean, dressed and made-up, back in control before anyone saw her. She was sure that was how Hewitt would have done it when he murdered his wife.

Still naked, Cerise leaned through the doorway to look at the clock. Without her lenses, she had to squint to make out the time. It was almost four, much later in the afternoon than she had imagined. They had told her she could stay the night if she wanted, or even for a couple of days. But Hewitt was expecting

her for dinner. He obviously didn't think murder should take very long. She wondered how Hewitt had killed his wife, and imagined that he had despatched her with great efficiency. He'd probably walked in, said her name, shot her with one of his guns, fired again to make sure, and then drove back to the office to finalize a couple of deals. Hewitt had offered to show her a videotape of the murder, but Cerise, disliking violence, had refused.

Cerise tried to estimate how long it would take her to drive back to town, and thought about rush-hour traffic. She would be late, but she really had to wash her hair. There might be blood in it, or something else. She wished she wasn't having dinner with Hewitt tonight. He was going to take one look at her and know that she'd had sex with Patrick before she killed him.

The sex hadn't been part of the deal. Not that anything had been said, but she knew Hewitt's attitude. The murder might have been for Hewitt, but there was no way she could pretend the sex had been.

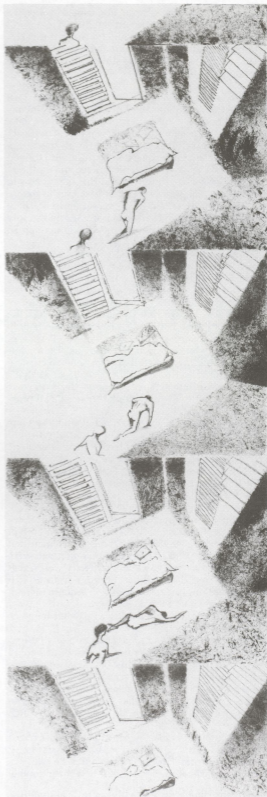
She turned the shower on hard and stepped under it, wishing she could wash away her guilt as easily as the blood.

I shouldn't have had sex with him, she thought. Then said aloud, "It," not him. That wasn't Patrick's body lying on the bedroom floor; it never had been Patrick. She had to remind herself now of what she had willingly – wilfully – forgotten during the past few hours. It was only a machine she'd murdered, a sophisticated facsimile of Patrick; not a person, only a fax.

On her senior trip in high school Cerise had met a fax of the President. So far as she knew, that was the only one, until the Patrick-fax, but from Hewitt she knew that more and more of the rich and powerful were having facsimiles made to act as decoys, and to be held in reserve against the day when medical science made possible, and age or illness made desirable, a full-body transplant. Hewitt didn't have his own – yet. He said he was waiting until they'd been perfected. He said they were still only machines, not much better than animated dolls. He was particularly contemptuous of people who had sex with fax. He claimed to find it an inexplicable perversion.

But it wasn't like that. It wasn't the make-believe that Cerise had imagined – neither the murder nor the sex. From the moment she saw him, when his eyes met hers and he smiled with delighted recognition, she could not believe it wasn't her own Patrick, brought to this place by some trick or miracle. And when he kissed her – oh, she could never resist him when he kissed her like that. So they had made love. For hours. And it was wonderful – more like her best fantasies than anything she'd ever had with her husband in reality. Everything was perfect. And then...

Then the inevitable, fatal quarrel. She couldn't remember how it had started, or even what it had been about. It had been everything they'd ever disagreed about, the worst fight they'd ever had. None of her attempts to placate him had worked. All the old weapons had come out, and all the old hurts, and then Cerise had stopped backing down. When tears choked her throat and the words would not come, instead of giving in and crying she went for the knife. She had shut him up forever. She had killed him.



Cerise turned off the shower and leaned against the wall, almost too weak to go on standing.

I really killed him, she thought. I really did it.

She just made it across the room to press the call-button for the staff before she slid down the wall and passed out on the wet tiles.

Cerise spent the night at Timber Oaks after all – the night, and the following day. Someone phoned Hewitt to postpone her dinner date. They took care of everything; that was part of the deal.

Not all of its services were strictly legal – nevertheless, Timber Oaks was a registered clinic, with trained psychiatrists on staff. They recognized the guilt and anguish Cerise was suffering, and they knew how to deal with it. Their main effort, at first, was to get her to accept that there had been no real murder. There was no victim. No one had been hurt. She had simply acted out her aggressions on a machine programmed for that very purpose.

Shown the body of the fax, shown the software, shown how it worked and was neither living nor dead, Cerise still felt guilty. "Maybe it's true that nobody is dead, but I didn't know that – I really meant to kill him when I stabbed him; I really wanted him to die."

"That was the Patrick in your head," said the psychiatrist. "The real Patrick is still alive; it's only your Patrick who is dead. You killed the Patrick in your head; you programmed the fax from your memories, and then you killed what you had created. You murdered an illusion. Do you really think that's the same as killing a person? You know the faxes don't really feel anything – they don't think – it's all programming, not life."

"I know," said Cerise. "Of course it's not the same as if I really killed Patrick – I know that. But I could have killed Patrick – I would have if he'd been there. That's what's so scary. I never thought I'd be able to kill. Not only am I able to, but I could glory in it – I'd never felt like that before! What's to stop me from doing it again?"

"The same things that have always stopped you. We all have unacceptable emotions inside us...we learn ways of dealing with them. Yours aren't out of control – they never were. Don't forget, you knew that wasn't really Patrick. Even as you thought you were killing him, a part of you knew perfectly well it was only a fax, and that you had permission to act out your aggressions on it. You're still in touch with reality; I very much doubt you would ever confuse what happened here at Timber Oaks with what happens outside."

Cerise listened, and argued, and gradually let herself be convinced. She wanted to put it all behind her. It was time to leave this place, go home, see Hewitt, and try to come to terms with what she had learned about herself. She tucked the videotape they gave her – hard proof of what she'd done – away in her bag, wondering if she would ever be able to watch it.

The next evening, as she gazed at Hewitt across a table in one of the city's most expensive restaurants, Cerise saw for the first time how much he was like Patrick, and was surprised that she had never noticed before.

Both were rather thin, pale-skinned men with fair,

wispy hair. Hewitt didn't appear to be going bald, but hair transplants were undetectable these days. Both men had charming smiles, disarmingly innocent faces, and self-righteous natures. If Hewitt was better-tempered than Patrick, Cerise now thought that was because he had enough money to smooth his way, and Patrick, although not poor, was always struggling.

The waiter filled their glasses with champagne and went away.

"Well," said Hewitt, raising his glass in a toast to her. "Was it a success?"

"That depends on how you define success."

"How do you feel about your ex-husband now?"

"I feel relieved," Cerise admitted. "Accepting. He's gone, as if he died a long time ago. He doesn't matter any more."

Hewitt smiled. "You still think the murder was only for my benefit?"

"Maybe I feel better about Patrick but worse about myself," Cerise said. "I'm not sure it was worth it if the only way I could get free of Patrick was to murder him."

"We all have violent impulses," said Hewitt. "Isn't it better to face up to them and get them out in the open instead of repressing them and pretending they aren't there?"

"Yes, yes, I talked to the shrink, too." Cerise looked away from Hewitt's eyes – the same colour as Patrick's – at the bubbles in her champagne. "It was so real," she said. "That's what makes it so hard. I really didn't know it was going to be like that."

"If it wasn't real, there wouldn't be much point," Hewitt said. "You have to believe in it, or it isn't any good. I didn't just want you to kill some doll...I wanted you to get rid of your husband, once and for all...the image that you were still carrying around inside you. That's what I was jealous of – not the real man."

"You don't have to be jealous any more," said Cerise wearily.

"I know. And I'm grateful. I know it couldn't have been easy for you. This isn't a thank-you present," he said, putting a small black velvet box on the table. "It's because I love you."

She knew what it was, and she wished she didn't. She didn't move to pick it up. She looked at him.

"I want you to marry me," he said.

"Oh, Hew," she said, shaking her head. "I wish you wouldn't – I – it's too soon."

"Am I being insensitive? Do you need time to mourn your husband?" His voice was still gentle, but there was a brittle edge to the words.

"Well, maybe I do," she said, although she'd already realized that her mourning for Patrick was, finally, over. "I just think I need some more time, to be sure."

"You've been divorced for more than a year, and you've known me for nearly six months. How long does it take? I know how I feel about you."

Just then the waiter arrived with their appetizers. Hewitt frowned down at his plate. "What is this? Frozen? Or fresh?"

"I'm sure it's fresh, sir."

"That's what the menu said, but I doubt it. Just a minute." Hewitt took a small taste and shook his head. "That's not fresh. Take it back."

"Of course. I'm sorry you didn't like it, sir..."

"I don't like second best," said Hewitt. "Frozen is second best. I only eat the real thing."

Cerise looked down at her own plate, not seeing what was on it, knowing that she would be making the worst mistake of her life if she married Hewitt Price.

After the waiter had gone Hewitt looked at her and shrugged. "I'm not going to push," he said. "I'm willing to wait. If you need time, take your time. Keep the ring."

"No - I can't. It wouldn't be right."

"I'm not going to take it back to the store," he said.

"And I'm not going to want to give it to anybody else."

She shook her head.

He gave her a look that said she was being unreasonable, but put the little box back in his pocket. "I think you have something for me," he said.

She'd been dreading this moment. There was no point pretending she didn't know what he meant, no point in dragging it out, delaying and making him angrier. He had paid for it, after all. Tense in every muscle with the desire to refuse, knowing refusal was impossible, Cerise reached beneath the chair for her bag, took out the videotape, and handed it across the table.

Hewitt smiled, his earlier disappointment now forgotten. He'd had his way as he always did. "More champagne?" he asked.

Cerise would have liked to be alone at the end of the evening, but Hewitt took her back to his house without asking, and she didn't say anything. She let him undress her, kiss and caress her - only when he went to the bedroom video system with the tape she had given him was she able to protest.

He looked at her in surprise. "I thought we'd watch it together - it could be exciting -"

"No! Hewitt, don't. It'd make me sick - I can't; don't make me."

He put the tape on top of the television set, and came back to the bed. "You're trembling," he said, taking her in his arms. "Darling -"

"I don't want to see it. I don't want to remember - I'm not, I'm not a murderer," she said.

"Of course you're not," he said soothingly. "It's all over now... it's all right... it never happened."

Cerise knew that wasn't true. She also knew she wasn't going to argue about it. After a while, she stopped trembling. She closed her eyes and concentrated, trying to feel the things he was doing to her body.

It was late morning when she woke, the big house was quiet around her, and Hewitt was gone. He had left her a note, suggesting a place to meet for dinner, the key to one of his cars, and a Gold American Express card in her name "in case you want to do some shopping."

She closed her eyes, feeling a tug of purely material desire.

"I will not marry you for your money," she said aloud, but the conviction she had felt the previous evening was lacking.

She went into the bathroom to take a shower, and tried to remember something from the night before. Instead, she kept remembering how it had been with Patrick before she killed him. She was aroused, and wondered what it would be like to watch the tape

now. Would the murder be as exciting the second time around? What would it look like from the outside? She wondered what Hewitt would think, when he watched the tape. Would he be angry about the sex? Or would he be disappointed and disgusted with her? Maybe he would want to kill her. She wondered what he was like as a murderer.

Cerise emerged from the shower, dried off and then wrapped herself in a huge, soft towel, although she knew she was alone, and the house was warm. The video library was downstairs, but she didn't think he would keep such a personal tape with all the others.

She was right. She found it out - the Timber Oaks logo on the back marked it out at once - among the small selection of pornography Hewitt kept on the shelf behind the bedroom video system.

She felt like a spy, fearful of being caught as she slid the cassette into the player. It didn't help at all to remind herself that Hewitt had once offered to show it to her. He wasn't with her now, and she had different reasons for wanting to see it. Wiping sweaty hands on the towel, blinking eyes that suddenly felt too dry, she sank onto the bed, staring at the screen.

She recognized the bland good taste of a Timber Oaks bedroom at once. A pretty young woman with red-gold hair, wearing a dark blue silk kimono, was standing beside the bed, looking apprehensive, when the door opened and Hewitt came in.

"You wanted to see me?" said Hewitt. He was wearing a salmon-coloured suit - the height of fashion three years ago - and holding a square black leather case in one hand.

"Oh, darlin', I've missed you so," said the woman, whom Cerise guessed to be a fax of Hewitt's ex-wife, Penny. Her voice was soft and slightly husky with a distinctive East Texas twang.

"Missed me, or missed my money?"

"Oh, Hewitt, how can you even ask? I've missed you. Let me show you how I've missed you." As she spoke, she opened her kimono and shrugged out of it.

Cerise tucked her towel more firmly closed. She wondered if Hewitt thought her breasts were too small.

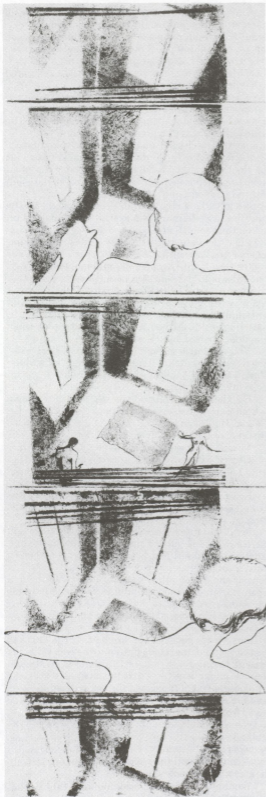
Hewitt put his case down on a chair. Now, thought Cerise. Now the gun, or the knife, would come out, now he would kill her. But he left the case where it was, went to the naked woman, and began to kiss her breasts and neck while she sighed and seemed to melt against him. After about a minute he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed. When she was lying on her back, he spread her legs and knelt on the floor between them.

Cerise was shocked. She lurched off the bed and fast-forwarded the tape, too embarrassed to watch Hewitt having sex with a fax. And not even straight sex - it might have been a real woman he was trying to please. Even at top speed the sex seemed to go on and on: every time she stopped the tape she flinched away from some new pornographic position.

When she saw the gun, she returned the tape to normal speed.

It was a small, snub-nosed, silver pistol, in Hewitt's right hand. He and the woman were both naked, sitting and facing each other on the bed.

"You said you'd do anything for me," said Hewitt. "How can I believe you?"



"I would – I would do anything for you. Almost. But you can't ask me to kill myself!"

"Can't I?"

"You wouldn't if you loved me. People don't. Oh, Hew, I'd die happily if it would save your life, but I'm not going to kill myself. Ask me something else to prove I love you."

"All right," he said. He gazed at her steadily. "It's a real sacrifice I'm going to ask for, Penny."

She nodded eagerly.

"Would you give up other men for me?"

"Of course!"

"Would you give up your beauty?"

Something flickered in her eyes. "You wouldn't love me if I was ugly."

"Is that what you think? You're wrong. Maybe I fell in love with the way you looked, but now I love you... I'll love you no matter what, as long as you're alive. That's my problem. That, and not being able to believe you really love me. I need proof, Penny."

Penny closed her eyes and said, "All right." Then she opened them. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to scar yourself. I want you to mark your face to prove you're mine." He leaned away from her, towards the bedside table. He came back with a razor blade held delicately between thumb and forefinger of the hand without the gun. "Use this. Just one little cut. On your face." With the pistol, he traced a line on his own cheek. "Show me you mean it."

Penny straightened up, and took the blade from him with her right hand. Staring straight ahead at nothing, as if into a mirror, she raised her hand to her right cheekbone, placed the cutting edge of the razor there, and then drew it down in a curving sweep to the corner of her mouth. It was the delicate, assured gesture of a woman applying make-up. When she took her hand away red blossomed in tiny dots, which formed a crescent and then began to run. Within seconds half of her face was awash with blood, dripping onto her neck and shoulders.

"Again," said Hewitt. "The other side."

Obediently she lifted her hand, then stopped and hurled the blade away from her. "It hurts," she said plaintively. "It stings. Is there some spray or something in the bathroom to make it stop hurting?"

"Go and get the razor. You're not finished."

She frowned. "Oh, yes I am. That's enough."

"It's not enough," he said. "It'll never be enough."

"It'll have to be. I'm through."

"Oh, yes," he said. "You're through."

He raised his hand and squeezed the trigger. Penny's face exploded.

Cerise choked on a scream and backed away, her towel falling off and making her feel even more vulnerable. As she scrambled to find her clothes she heard two more gunshots from the television, and then the sound of Hewitt weeping.

Hypocrite, she thought. Murderer. Murderer!

Hewitt hadn't destroyed a fax; he had killed his wife. Cerise was suddenly convinced of it. She recalled his stubborn determination to have only the best, never to settle for something which wasn't "real" and knew that Hewitt wouldn't have been content with a make-believe murder. He was rich enough to buy whatever he wanted – apparently even his wife's death.

Cerise wondered if Timber Oaks was behind it. Had they helped him replace the real woman with a fax? Or had he pulled a switch and fooled them, too? Although she had never met Hewitt's ex-wife, Cerise knew some of Hewitt's friends were still in touch with her. But if they had no reason to be suspicious, why should they guess that it wasn't Penny, but an artificial facsimile, programmed to go through the motions of a human life?

She dressed as quickly as she could. The feeling of possessing dangerous knowledge made her too nervous to linger. She took one of Hewitt's cars because her own was on the other side of town, and drove to a nearby service station to use the telephone.

There was a listing for a Penny K. Price, and Cerise dialed the number without stopping to think what she would say.

"Could I speak to Penny, please?"

"This is she."

The back of her neck prickled at those familiar East Texas vowels. "I'm...uh, my name is Cerise Duval, and I wondered...I wondered if I could come visit you."

A brief silence, while Cerise cursed herself for rushing into this without some plausible lie, and then the voice said, "You're Hewitt's girlfriend."

"That's right."

"Is Hewitt with you?"

"No. I'm by myself. I wondered if I could just drive over now...if you're not too busy."

"I'm not busy. But I don't understand... You want to see me?"

Cerise bit her lip. "Yes."

"Well. Why not? Sure. Come on over." She gave directions to her house.

At Timber Oaks Cerise had been shown the easiest way to tell a fax from a human being. There was a slot in the back of the neck – covered by a flap of fax-flesh – for the insertion of software, and there were sockets (also covered by fax-flesh) at the base of the spine and just under the heart. Unless Penny wore a bikini to receive visitors, Cerise wouldn't have the opportunity to check for power points, but it shouldn't be too hard to find the software slot.

The Penny who opened the door to her looked like the woman on the tap, with a few minor changes. She looked as youthful as the murder victim of three years ago, her face smooth and unlined and her figure still as good, but her hair was longer, lank and dull, and there was something else, indefinable, which made her less attractive than Cerise had expected.

They both stared. Then Cerise recollected her manners, and introduced herself.

"How'd you do? I'm real pleased to meet you. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you. I'm sorry about the short notice...I hope you don't mind my coming over like this?"

"Now, don't you give it another thought," said Penny. "I wasn't doing anything special – I'm never doing anything special. I'm glad for the company. Would you like some coffee? Or a diet soda?"

"Coffee would be nice, if it isn't any trouble."

"No trouble at all. I was just about to put some on for myself." They both had fallen into the rituals of

politeness, and Cerise wondered how they would ever get out. She followed the other woman into a large, light kitchen and hovered in the doorway, watching Penny take coffee pot and filters from a cupboard. She's not real, she told herself. Why wait? It was never going to be any less embarrassing, any more possible. Penny's back was to her. Now. Cerise moved swiftly across the floor, reaching for the back of Penny's neck.

Penny yelped, and dropped the box of paper filters, but she didn't pull away. Instead, after the first seconds of tensed surprise she relaxed and stood still, even inclining her neck slightly to make it easier for Cerise.

There was nothing beneath her hair but warm, soft flesh, and no matter how Cerise prodded and pulled at it, that flesh did not give way, or part, or pull up. In a swelter of embarrassment, she withdrew.

"I'm sorry, I hope I didn't hurt you, I just..." there was no way she was going to be able to think of an acceptable explanation.

Not turning around, not looking at her, Penny said, "There isn't a software slot because there isn't any software. Just my brain."

"I'm sorry," Cerise said again, helplessly. "You must think I'm horrible. The thing is, I saw a tape..."

Penny turned around. She didn't look angry or surprised. "And you thought that Hewitt had murdered me and replaced me with a fax. The perfect crime."

"Look, I know about Timber Oaks," Cerise said. "I went there to murder my husband – a fax of him, I mean, of course. But I know Hewitt – and I just didn't believe he would have been satisfied with a make-believe murder."

Penny nodded. "You're right. You do know Hewitt. Do you still want that cup of coffee?"

"Oh, yes, please." She watched Penny pick up the filters and, with a quick sideways glance, go to the sink to fill a kettle. "Don't worry, I'm not going to grab you and try to find your sockets."

"If you can wait for just a little while, after we've had something to drink I'll take my clothes off and show them to you."

"Look, I'm sorry, I really am. It was stupid of me."

"It wasn't stupid," Penny said, stopping and looking directly at her. "And I wasn't joking, Cerise, I really wasn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I've still got my brain, so I'm still me, right?" said Penny. "That's what Hewitt said. He didn't kill my brain, so it wasn't murder, not really. But this..." she gave herself a thump, flat-handed, on the breastbone. "Hewitt bought this for me. It's not the body I was born with. It's a fax. But I'm not. Supposedly."

"Your whole body," said Cerise slowly. "Your whole body's a replacement?"

Penny nodded.

"I've heard about the others they did that to...there's one man they've kept alive for five or six years now, isn't that?"

"Kept alive," Penny repeated with a particular emphasis.

"Well, that's how they say it, that's how they talk about it on the news, you know."

"Like they had him in a machine. Like this was an iron lung." Again, Penny patted her breastbone. "But

he was dying. He would have died if they hadn't given him a new body. I wouldn't have died, unless my husband killed me. I was the first young, healthy subject, so far as I know. There are more than the ones you hear about on the news. Rich old men who don't want to die. But they have to be convinced they're dying, first – they don't want to make the switch too soon, in case it goes wrong, in case it doesn't work, or in case it's not really like what they say. In case it isn't really like life."

"Is it like life?"

"Oh, yes, it's like life." Penny extended her arm. "Here. Feel. Can you tell any difference?"

A little reluctantly, Cerise did as she was asked. Warm, human flesh. But she knew that already, more intimately. She shook her head. "I mean for you. Is it the same for you? Is it really just like life?"

"It's like life," said Penny. "It's just like life." She was shaking her head as she spoke. "Hewitt explained it to me. You don't feel things with your body, you know. The feeling is in your head. You touch my hand, but I don't feel it with my hand. The nerves in my hand send a message to my brain, and my brain decides what it feels like, and what I feel about it. It's all in the brain. If I was in a coma, the things that were done to my body wouldn't register. They wouldn't matter. I wouldn't feel them unless my brain knew about them. So this body works just like my old body. It all works perfectly well. It works better, I guess. Hewitt says it's better because I'll never get old and ugly."

Cerise watched Penny pour boiling water, and the fragrance of fresh coffee rose gently between them.

"Why did you do it?" Cerise asked.

Penny sighed. She looked down, then directly at Cerise. "I did it for Hewitt. And maybe partly for the money. Hewitt thinks it was just for the money. He thinks he bought me. But I did it mostly for him. Because he used to love me. And I wanted to give him something... I thought I had to give him something. He wanted my body, and I guess that was all I could give him – ever." She poured the coffee into blue mugs and put them on the kitchen table. They both sat. Cerise put her hands around the mug, holding the warmth. She looked at Penny's hands and saw that they were dirty, the nails irregular, uncared-for.

"Why did your marriage break up?" Cerise asked, trying to remember what Hewitt had said about it. She couldn't recall details, only an impression that Hewitt's wife had been immature and fickle, that she had married him for his money and left him for another man.

Penny shrugged. "It's hard to remember, now. There wasn't anything that happened... there wasn't anyone else, or anything like that. Everything was the same on the surface, but it was like I'd stopped believing in it, like I'd seen that there wasn't anything underneath, and I couldn't stand the play-acting anymore. I wasn't happy. I guess I thought it was Hewitt who was making me unhappy, and that maybe if I could get away from him I could be happy again.

"Hewitt didn't understand... well, hell, how could he? I don't even understand it now. He thought there was somebody else – he always had a thing about

other men, I don't know why – and I guess it's a real good thing there wasn't, because if there had of been, Hewitt would have killed him, for real.

"Anyway... Hewitt wanted me to give him my life, and I couldn't do that. But I had married him, after all. I'd made a promise... I owed him something. So I gave him what he really wanted – my body – and thought I'd kept my life."

Cerise blew on her coffee, thinking about Hewitt's jealousy. She remembered how he had questioned her about her marriage, and how he had wanted her to kill Patrick. She had been shocked at first, but he was persuasive, and he wanted it so much, that she had been talked into doing it for him. But people couldn't talk you into things you really didn't want to do. She said to Penny, "How much did he pay you?"

Penny smiled. "A lot. He made it worth my while. If I left him, he let me know I'd have nothing: no money, no job, nobody to take care of me. Just my freedom, whatever that meant. But if I let him kill me, he'd make sure I was comfortable. A nice place to live, a steady income, a car... and this perfect body. A body that wouldn't get sick or fat or old. At the time, that seemed really important. And the money... I'd never had to support myself, you see. I never had a job; I didn't even finish college. He was offering me the perfect way out, I thought. I could buy my future with my body. That was the same thing I did when I got married. I guess I should have realized that. I guess I only got what I deserved."

"What's that?"

"This pretty surface. It's like my marriage. All the parts are there, but they don't add up. There's something missing. I don't know what, and I don't know how to change it. I could get out of my marriage. I don't know how to get out of this."

"Wait a minute – I thought you said it was just like life?"

"That's it," said Penny. "Like life. Not life itself. It looks perfect from the outside, but it's not."

"Didn't you just tell me –"

"Everything works," Penny said. "All the nerves and senses. But they're not mine. I'm the only one who knows that I'm not living anymore. That I can't live. I can only remember." She gestured at her coffee, still untouched on the table before her. "I know what coffee tastes like. I drink it, and I think I'm tasting that cup, but really I'm remembering coffee I've had in the past. If you dumped salt in it without me seeing, I wouldn't know it. I wouldn't taste the difference."

"That sounds like something wrong with your sense of taste," Cerise said.

"No, you don't understand; that's a bad example. It's hard to explain. But life is change... and I can't change anymore; I can't have new experiences. I don't have a future, just a past. It's all fake, memories of life, recycled to make me think I'm still living. I had a boyfriend for a while, but then I realized that I was responding to him, to everything he did or said, as being like Hewitt, or like Mark, or like Johnny or somebody else I used to know. I could never know him."

"But you've never met me before. How about that? Do I remind you of someone you already know? And what about this conversation?"

"Oh, I can see you," said Penny, sounding very tired.

"You don't understand. I can hear you, touch you... the information still comes in. It's like watching television... but watching television isn't life. It can tell you about life, but it also gets in the way. Ever since the transplant, there's always something between me and life. This body. It works for me, but it isn't me. I thought I was trapped before. I didn't know what it meant to be trapped."

Cerise couldn't understand what Penny was talking about. She was reminded of Hewitt's claims to supersensitivity, the way he would take two things she thought were basically the same and call one superior and the other worthless.

"What do you do all day?" Cerise asked. "How do you live?"

"There's the money from Hewitt, so I - oh, you mean how do I spend my time? Oh, all the usual ways... two days a week I have my volunteer work at the hospital. I see people socially, go to parties... There's the bridge club. I go shopping. I watch a lot of television. I read."

"And you feel trapped," said Cerise. "You don't have to be - you can change your life. Do something different. Get involved in something that matters. Get a job, even if you don't need the money. Move to another city, travel, find a new lover, make new friends..." she shrugged, impatient because it seemed so obvious.

But Penny was shaking her head. "You don't understand," she said again. "I can't change my life. It's too late for that. I can't make myself feel alive because I'm not alive."

"Then Hewitt might as well have killed you," Cerise said. "He might as well have done what I thought he did and killed you and put a fax here in your place... a fax would probably do a better job of it than you; a fax would make an effort; a fax would probably think it was happy!"

"He might as well have killed me," Penny agreed, apparently deaf to the other woman's irritation. "He took my life away... he might as well have killed my brain, too. Sometimes I wonder if I can die now, or if I'll just go on living in this body forever... sometimes I think he took my death away from me as well as my life. I died, and I didn't even get to experience it! My own death... Hewitt sent me a tape - the same tape you saw - of him killing me. At first I thought it was horribly cruel of him to show me what he'd done. But now I'm glad I can see it. I'm glad I know. It's the only evidence I have. I watch it a lot. I look at myself again and again... I watch myself die, and I try to imagine what it was like. I try to feel it." She gave Cerise a wistful smile. "It's the only death I have."

Cerise felt the hairs prickle on the back of her neck. My brain is telling my body to do that because of what Penny is telling me, she thought. She wondered if Penny was crazy. She sounded like a hypochondriac, inventing problems where there were none. And yet... what could it be like to lose your whole body, every part of it except the brain, and not die, to go on living in an altered, artificial form? It was impossible to imagine, so maybe it was impossible to explain. Whatever it was, whether it was Penny's madness or Hewitt's crime, Cerise knew she didn't want to experience it. She didn't even



want to hear about it. She couldn't risk any closer involvement. She'd had enough.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I really am sorry you're not happy. But I have to go now. Thank you for the coffee."

"You're welcome," Penny said. "I'll show you out... it was real nice meeting you at last... I'm so glad you decided to call. Please do come again."

Her ordinary, unthinking politeness struck Cerise as surreal, but it took a positive effort to stop herself from joining in with the expected response.

Filling in the gap left by the other woman's silence Penny went on, "Any time, any time at all... it would be real nice to you again. Both of y'all. Why don't you bring Hewitt next time?"

Cerise stopped by the door and turned to give Penny a hard look. "You don't mean that. Do you?"

"Why, of course I do, Cerise; what do you think?"
"You actually want to see Hewitt again? After what he did to you? Why?"

"As far as he's concerned, I'm dead," Penny said. "He killed me, and he paid me for the privilege. I've tried to call him... His lawyer told me if I make any more attempts to contact him he'll stop my monthly payments. But I thought maybe if you said something to him... you could tell him that you phoned me; I didn't get in touch with you; he couldn't blame me if you asked him to visit."

"I just don't understand why you want to see him."
"I don't either. I only know that I do. I probably shouldn't be saying this to you, of all people, but I'd go back to him if he'd have me. I think about him all the time. Sometimes he seems like the only thing in the world, the only real thing, the only one I care about. If we could get back together, I think maybe

we could work things out, maybe it would be all right; he could make it all right."

Cerise felt sick. There was no doubting Penny's sincerity. "But he's the one who killed you - I mean, did this to you, made you like this."

Penny nodded. "That's why. He destroyed me, so he's the one who can save me. It makes sense, don't you see?"

"No. No it doesn't. You can't go back. You're not the same person who married Hewitt - you've got to stop living in the past. You're not dead, unless you decide to be. Stop remembering - do something new; live."

"If I stop remembering, I will die," Penny said. "Remembering is all I have. But I can't expect you to understand that. You've still got your life. You've got Hewitt."

"You didn't have to let him kill you," Cerise said. They looked at each other as if across a great divide.

Cerise felt she didn't breathe again until she was outside the house, alone on the quiet, suburban street, beside the car. Then, the sense of freedom she felt was intoxicating.

She put the keys in the ignition, closed the car door, and walked away from it.

Lisa Tuttle was born in Houston, Texas, in 1952. She won the John W. Campbell Award as best new sf writer in 1974, and since then has written several novels and many short stories. She moved to Britain in 1980, and her most recent books include *A Nest of Nightmares*, *The Encyclopedia of Feminism*, *Gabriel* and *A Spaceship Built of Stone*. This is her first appearance in *Interzone*.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

New stories by David Brin, Christopher Evans, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman and others. Also: an interview with Karen Joy Fowler, plus all our usual features.

Christopher Burns Among the Wounded

I woke up this morning and decided to lie. I did not even bother to reach for the notepad; I just lay there, watching the pale light edge across the ceiling, and trying to forget my dreams. When the nurse came to take off my dressings I saw her glance at the blank page. Her mouth turned down in professional disapproval.

"There weren't any," I said.

"Doctor will be along in ten minutes," she said briskly, "I expect he'll have something to say to you."

I saw her examine the bandage. "I haven't bled, have I?"

"No. But perhaps the healing could be faster."

"You think I'm being cured?"

"Yes," she said with studied neutrality, "perhaps."

I wondered how often she had reassured patients who would never get better.

When she had gone I stood up and looked out of the window. Air conditioning maintains the temperature of the room; the window is locked and I can hear nothing through it. But I can see almost all of the institute gardens. Already there were one or two patients walking round the grounds, their coats and cloaks pulled tightly around them to keep out the early spring cold. One stood by the far wall, facing the grey brickwork, motionless.

I sat back on the bed and looked round the room. Often I close my eyes and recreate it in my mind, detail by tiny detail. This is not easy, for there are no prominent colours to help the memory. Everything here, from the bleached wooden furniture to the bed-sheets, is muted. The books and cassettes have been selected so that they are in delicate, easy shades. There are no televisions to provide splashes of vividness. Even the shrubs in the garden have been chosen because their flowers are almost colourless. Reissmann has told me that the bright primaries are too aggressive and unsettling, so they are banned. If we didn't have the birds I would have begun to forget what strong colours are. Even then, I have begun to

notice that colours remain in my head like abstract ideals; but when I try to visualize them they stop short of resolution and remain, somehow, puzzling.

When Reissmann came into the room his face was its usual mask-like calm, but I could tell from his movements that he was slightly irritated. "Good morning," he said. The artificial purr he puts into his voice was not as strong as it had been.

I smiled weakly and looked back at my wounds. Reissmann likes to think of himself as someone whose loyalty and devotion to medicine are so strong that they verge on the ascetic. But to me the shaven head and steel-rimmed glasses make him look inhuman, almost reptilian. He scares me.

"There was nothing to write," I said.

He did not answer me, but picked up one arm and turned it so that he could study the marks in the wrists. Then he did the same for the other arm.

"I had no dreams," I said.

"You give yourself away by defending yourself too quickly, my friend." He moved to the bottom of the bed, took my ankles in his hands, and turned the feet to examine them.

I could not stop myself from asking him what he thought.

"Mm," he said, as if this was an answer. Then "Your side?"

"Nothing."

"Let me see,"

I let him peer around the lower part of my ribcage. "I told you there was nothing," I said when he straightened up.

"You are one of my special patients –"

I interrupted him. "I thought we were all special."

Unperturbed, he continued. "You have the wounds in the other places. We must keep a careful eye on your side. That could be the next critical area."

"Critical area? You're talking about my body, doctor. I'm a person, not an area."

"Quite so," he replied smoothly, "and you are

special because you have wounds in the wrists, and not in the palm of your hand. Our perceptions are governed by images from Renaissance painters, from Hollywood movies. In all of those, of course, the nails are through the hands. We now know that in a real crucifixion the nail would be driven through the wrist, springing the bones apart and making the thumb bend into the palm. Have you noticed your thumbs?"

I thrust my hands under my armpits.

Reissmann shook his head. He sat beside me on the bed. As usual, his white coat had been crisply ironed. The dove-grey plastic receiver of a bleeper system was fastened in his top pocket. "We must make sure your stigmata do not develop into the next stage," he said gently.

I did not answer, but stared sullenly at the far wall.

"It could happen remarkably quickly," he said, "there could be substantial blood loss. That's why we have to monitor you more closely than the others."

"I've been in here too long."

He sighed. "You will be in here even longer if you cannot co-operate."

"I can walk out at any time," I said, faintly rebellious.

Reissmann said nothing.

"I don't have to do whatever you tell me to do. I volunteered to come here and I can go whenever I want."

"Perhaps."

But it would be difficult, probably impossible, to get away. We all pretend we are free, but we have no access to telephones, the gates are locked, and we seem to be miles from anywhere. We never hear any traffic noise other than that of delivery vans which unload stores. And it is only by examining their registrations and the markings on their sides that I can convince myself that we are still in England.

"Last night's dream," Reissmann said.

I shook my head.

"And you can't remember anything at all? About, say, flying, or falling?"

"Trains going into tunnels?" I sneered, "I can remember my Freud, doctor."

"Oh no," he said, "this is much more real than Freud. Don't you agree?"

"If you say so."

He clicked his tongue like a disappointed father. "You were a model patient when you were first admitted. You did everything you were asked to do. Now it seems you just want to obstruct us. Oh, it's a common pattern. You needn't think your reactions are unique. You're no hero."

Despite myself, I blushed. I was beginning to think of my refusal as, in its own small way, heroic. He had seen through me.

Reissmann lowered his voice to sound trusting and confidential. "When each of you comes here you're desperate for help. Terrified, even. Many can't understand what is happening to them, or why. Secretly, of course, you all want to push on. You want to follow the course of the disease to its limit."

"Disease?"

"Disease, syndrome; we're not sure what it is. That's one of the reasons you're here. And it would help if you faced the fact that you really do want to go all the way with it."

"Like Drabble, you mean."

He tilted his head. The glasses caught the light and screened his eyes from me. "Drabble's dead. He died yesterday."

"You're saying we all want to be like him."

"We don't believe in letting our patients dwell on failures. I wouldn't concern yourself about Drabble." Almost as an afterthought, he added "Your friend Selma would be able to tell you a little more, no doubt." I was wondering what he said this when he picked up the notepad and pen and turned a cold stare on me. "Drabble thought he was safe; do you?"

He must have seen me weaken.

"Tell me," he said.

He jotted down notes while I told him all the details I could remember, but I had been awake so long that all I had retained were vague sensations of heat, weight, the smell of sweat and dirty clothes, shadows that were sharp on the ground, and the feel of blows.

"You can't remember, say, something around your head? Or recall more exactly what the weight was?"

I shook my head.

"Sure?"

"That's all I can say."

He tore out the page, folded it and put it in his breast pocket, and put the pad back down beside the bed. "You know the routine. Tomorrow, when you wake up, make some notes so you're less likely to forget. Use the microphone beside the bed if that's easier. Dreams are the least tangible part of our work, but in many ways they are the most interesting."

"They can't tell you anything. Dreams are meaningless."

"Come now, I know you can't believe that. Your wounds won't heal unless your mind does certain things. Dreams are as good as a thermometer. Tonight I'll bring you a little present for being good; it will help you to dream."

I was seized by anxiety about my own state. I had capitalized to Reissmann within a few minutes. I realized that I was becoming weak. "How am I?" I asked, my voice cracking.

"We must continue to work hard."

I nodded dumbly.

"And that means," he said, wagging his finger at me, "doing as we are told. Yes?"

"Yes, doctor," I said.

The meal was, as usual, bland and colourless, but I could detect a faint, gingerish subtlety within it. At first, when I began to detect these odd, disguised tastes, I thought my sense was redefining itself within a narrow range, and that if I had been given the chance to eat everyday food I would have found it to be overpowering, with a sickly dizzy range of flavours. Now I have come to believe that what I detect are the traces of drugs I am being given but not told about. I pushed much of the food to one side; even the water had a metallic tang hidden within it.

Afterwards I went out into the garden. The air was so fresh it made me feel weak, and I had to place each step with the care of someone who thinks he may fall. When I got to the end of the path I sat on one of the wooden benches and looked back across the lawn and shrubs and gravel towards the grey walls and dulled

windows of the institute.

Some of the other patients still walked around the grounds. On the bench on another path the American woman sat crying quietly. She must have been clawing at her dressings, for a bandage lay in limp coils around one ankle. A nurse had come out to help and was kneeling in front of her, binding up the wound.

Another of the inmates, the bearded man who never speaks, walked past and we exchanged glances. Although his face did not alter, his eyes looked wild, almost insane. I thought about how he had first arrived. It had been during winter. The man had been walking a cleared area behind the institute, but when he saw a robin on the back of one of the benches he went stumbling across the snow, drawn irresistible to it.

I watched the bearded man walk round and round the grounds. He was like an animal in a pen.

Selma came up to me. Her face was paler than usual, and she seemed short of breath. "I'm going," she said.

I looked at her, surprised.

She nodded. "It's true."

"When?"

"Tomorrow. I've just found out."

"You're going home," I said flatly.

"No - I go to some kind of rehabilitation centre first. Reissmann insists. He says I need time to readjust to the outside world." She looked across the grounds. An orderly was standing halfway down the path that led towards us. "They won't want me to reach the outside world and say the wrong things," she continued, "so they'll be teaching me how to keep my mouth shut."

"How long?"

She shook her head bitterly. "I could be there forever." The orderly took another two steps towards us.

"They wouldn't do that. They just want to make sure you're cured, that's all."

She held out one hand, palm upward. In its centre was a circular stain of delicate pink. "I am cured, you can see that." She clenched the hand into a fist. "Perhaps no-one ever really gets out. Unless they do what Drabble did."

"You saw him?"

She looked sharply at me.

"I thought you must know something. Reissmann said so. I think he must want me to ask you."

For a while she did not speak. The orderly was pretending to examine a shrub, and had bent over it as if he was a gardener. He was just within earshot.

"For two reasons," she whispered; "he wants to know if I will talk, and he wants you to find out what went on. I'm the only patient who saw it." She put her hands up to her forehead. "I'm one of his failures."

It seemed an extraordinary thing to say. I looked round at all the other patients wandering around the grounds. Most of them were sinking into their private worlds. Of us all, it was Selma who had the tenacity to pull through.

"Everything here is organized for success," she said. "Your senses are limited so that the physical world loses its edge. We're taken away from family, friends; we withdraw totally from the outside world. Everything we do has to be officially approved."

"It helps recovery. They all say that."

"Then they all lie. They concentrate on weakening your links with normality. I can watch people begin to lose their grip."

"Like me?"

"I'm sorry."

But it was true. It should have shocked me, but instead I felt a curiously pleasant resignation. I was content.

"Even the pool is arranged to be part of a desensitization process. And I don't know what they put in the food. Why aren't your wounds healing more quickly? Do they give us drugs to make the blood flow more easily?"

The orderly began to walk towards us. He had a slight smile on his face.

"And Drabble?" I asked, keeping my voice as low as I could.

Selma stood up. "I'll say goodbye before I go," she said, and began to walk away.

The orderly stood in front of me. "Are you well?" he asked in a kindly manner.

I nodded.

He leaned towards me like a confidential friend. "And did you hear what you wanted to hear?" His eyes were clear and honest.

"No," I said. "I didn't."

"You trust Selma, don't you?"

I hesitated, then nodded. He knew I would believe Selma rather than Reissmann.

"Perhaps she doesn't want to tell you. Should I do what I can to help?"

I was helpless with indecision, but he smiled again, as warmly as any father, and held my shoulder in a friendly grip.

"Don't worry; I'll get everything sorted out for you."

Selma was walking into the back door of the institute when he caught up with her. I watched them talk for a while, then somehow lost interest and watched a robin fly across the garden, lighting on the backs of benches. Its breast was vivid red, and I dimly remembered being told stories in my youth of how it was supposed to have got such a blood-red colour. It even paused and looked at me with its bright, blinkless eyes.

After some minutes I realized a figure was watching me from one of the windows. I did not have to look closely. I knew it would be Reissmann.

I used to dislike water. I became nervous with its lapping, its buoyancy; its closeness to my mouth made me feel breathless. Now I am used to it, and enjoy sliding below the pool's surface into another world. There all the senses are changed, and there is a feeling of strangeness and ascension. We all do this. Our heads break the surface with water streaming from them. All our immersions are like baptisms.

Selma swims up and bobs beside me. Like everyone else she is naked, but I only notice the way the water makes patterns on her skin, and how, submerged, her hips and legs are dappled and bent by eerie light. Orderlies and nurses are stationed at corners of the pool, standing almost to attention in their white coats. The huge hall echoes with hollow lappings.

Selma says nothing for a while, but she looks closely at me and then around the pool. Everyone else is preoccupied. Some, their mouths only just above

the water, are muttering quietly to themselves. Selma takes her feet from the tiled floor and lets herself float, face upward, her head tilted back to maintain buoyancy. I can see all of her body. The small pink blemishes on her hands and feet are the only signs that remain of her condition.

"I leave in an hour," she says, "you won't see me again."

I nod. I have noticed a change in my own attitudes during the rest of the morning, as if I am following some kind of downward curve. For already I have begun to lose interest in her. Life outside the institution is becoming less and less real the longer I stay here, and today I seem to have sunk deeper with Reissmann's coils.

She pauses, then seems to gather herself for something she does not wish to say but must. "I was with Drabble in here," she begins.

I nod. The warmth of the water has a soothing, almost soporific effect. I can feel my own wounds begin to tingle.

"When I saw him I knew he was near to something. His eyes were distant but full of light, as if he had seen something coming towards him from a long way away. He raised his hands out the water as if he wanted to be lifted up, taken away and saved. The orderlies pulled him out. I remember the water coursing from him as his feet were lifted; I could see the soles, and there was a watercolour stain spreading across from where the wounds were. When they stood him up he was weak-legged, and tottered like someone about to faint."

I lift my own feet from the floor, feeling the buoyancy take me.

"They took him down the corridor of white tiles. They were partly frog-marching him, partly carrying him. I suppose they must have recognized the signs. I followed them. I wasn't supposed to, you know that. Some of the water droplets on the floor were a delicate pink hue."

"Yes," I say.

"I had time to see it start, and then someone grabbed me and took me away. I didn't think blood would come out under such pressure. His scar tissue must have burst open; the blood just sprayed out of him. It covered the tiles." She is silent for a while before she continues. "I saw him start to fall. But two nurses were already hauling me back towards the pool." She gives a sudden, unexpected smile and then looks herself again. "I remember that my heels squeaked against the tiles as they dragged me away."

"That was all you saw?"

"Yes."

"The man died, then?"

"They'll keep the body. I imagine his relatives will never see it."

"You mean they'll take it apart and try to find out?"

She looks at me with a strange expression, but I dip my head under the water, losing myself in the strange pressures and distortions of this submarine world. When I surface, streaming, she has drifted away. I roll with a lifting swell and let my eyes stray to the echoing ceiling of delicate, faint blue.

Later, when the dull light shows at the corners of the pool, we will climb out and stand together under the showers. Water, soapy and hot, will make our thin

flanks steam. We will stand within its benediction, our wounds held up towards its hot and misty downpour.

Tonight Reissmann comes to see me in my room. I am in bed, staring upwards, and I hardly notice him when he enters. He shines a light into my eyes, checks my blood pressure and reflexes, takes my pulse. Then he sits back and studies me. "We asked her to tell you," he says.

I don't respond.

"We said that if she did, no harm would come to her. And, of course, it won't. We thought you would believe her."

I swallow, absentmindedly.

He leans forward. "You would have doubted me if I told you."

"Yes."

Reissmann peers at my face as if he is searching for a hidden sign which only he can detect. He puts up a hand and touches my forehead. "Did she think she would have to stay at the villa for years? She's right, I'm afraid. We don't want such private cases on public show. Besides, matters here are far too important for the public to understand. They would become too... emotional." He takes away his hand, rubs his finger and thumb together as if he is testing something between them, then smiles. "Don't worry; there's no blood. Not yet."

I look at him.

He puts his hand in his pocket and draws out a thin, silver-grey case, almost like a pen case. He sits with it in his hands. "You remember this morning? I promised to give you something."

I nod.

"A present. A little something to help you dream."

He puts the case in my hands. Although its surface is inert, I can sense that it contains something important, and I am almost scared to open it.

He leans closer. "There's nothing to be afraid of," he murmurs. I try to put the case on the bedside table, but he prevents me and, instead, folds my hands around it. Then the bleep goes off.

It is a high, regular, rhythmic sound which makes me shiver. For a moment an expression crosses Reissmann's face which could be either shock or pleasure. "Think about it," he says hurriedly, and then walks swiftly to the door. It clicks behind him but I can still hear him sprint down the corridor. The noise of the bleep stops suddenly as he cuts it off.

The light fades across the ceiling.

Still clutching the case, I stand up and go to the window. Outside, in the grounds, shadows fall across the paths.

As I watch I can see Reissmann appear and join a small group which has gathered in the middle of the garden. Doctors, nurses and orderlies are standing in front of a figure in white. There is an odd, ritualistic look to the grouping, as if some drama is being played out. Then a nurse takes one step nearer the figure and falls on her knees in front of it, head bowed. The figure does not move. Cautiously, as if afraid to break a spell, Reissmann walks up to it, one hand raised as if he wants to touch, but is afraid to.

Only then do I recognize Drabble. His face is spotted with blood and there are red patches on his morgue

tunic. He reaches out, his hand held high over Reissmann as in a blessing, but then all life seems to leave him and he crumples. The orderlies catch him as he falls.

He is lifeless when they carry him back inside; his eyes are still open but they are glassy, as if he has failed just short of success.

As the room grows darker I go back and lie on the bed.

After a while I open the case. Inside, on a bed of cotton wool, there is a nail made of iron. I take it out and put the case on the table.

The nail has a squat, flattened head, as if it has been struck by a heavy blow. Below the head it is squared, but then tapers to a blunt point. There is a little rust on it; I can sense it on my fingers. This kind of nail was made a long, long time ago, and I can tell by its shape and weight that it must have been designed to hold something heavy in its place.

I open my left hand, and press the nailhead against my palm. After I have done the same with my right, I close my eyes and relax. The nail is clasped in my hands.

Tonight I shall dream of a sun that dazzles, of colour and stench and weight, the thump of wood dragged up steps, the sharp noise of hammerblows, the taste of vinegar. Before my face an anxious bird will flutter, its breast red with lacerations as it tries to pluck the thorns from my brow. Thrilling, mysterious, the side of my body will open into a heartstopping wound.

When they place my body in the morgue, they will leave the door so that it can be opened from the inside.

Christopher Burns is the author of *Snokewrist* (1986) – described by its publishers as “a novel of powerful and haunting intensity.” He lives with his family in Cumbria, and has contributed two previous stories to this magazine: “John’s Return to Liverpool” (IZ 10) and “Fogged Plates” (IZ 11).

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Editorial note: Nick Lowe’s film review column is missing from this issue of IZ due to lack of space. Nick should be covering all the end-of-year sf and fantasy releases next time around.

A
PARABLE
OF
LOVE
AND
LOGIC

The Good Robot

BY
BMS

[I will
do this]

Gerophis
FibreTech
Unit: JG3
to Wavegate
FeedTerminal
Bay: N:2

In your
mind:

After 40 years
of striving and
sacrifice:

It may be the end,
not just of our
years of work.

It will be a
good robot!

- The evil vision
of the
Chain has not
almost won us.

- But of an anguish
that has cursed Pen
since his fall.

For eternity; Pen
has been blighted by
the awful fact of
Evil.

Even before recorded history,
archaeology bears testimony to
Man's inhumanity to his
fellows. The untold suffering
Genesis tells us is Man's
birthright.

But even the horrors of Cain,
the slaughter of the innocents,
of retribution - yes; even of our
Church's first martyrs - are as
nothing to another grief.

I speak of the Grief
of My Father Himself.

Of our Holy
Father.

The awful
Grief of God!

A grief we shall
end; this Blessed,
Blessed of days.

To understand this grief, we must first understand the problem of Free Will.

What is this papous rubbish?

God created Man in his own image and yet needs to be loved by him. True love may only be given by choice.

May it please your Holiness; - Your sermon for the initiation of the Golden Chain Project.

Therefore God gave Man Free Will.

Free Will to choose between good and evil.

None of all God's creations; Man shares this quality.

The FreeWill project your Holiness.

But Free will must needs involve temptation - and Man is imperfect.

So the quality that makes Man most beloved of God, is that which condemns him to damnation.



And true choice must be judged.

Sermon? I've recorded no such sermon!

It is computer generated, may it please your Holiness.

Imagine then, God's torment.

-From your personality profile

Golden Chain? What's the boy whining about now?

-By the Church's Publicity Chapter.

-That it may not tax your energies.

- The creature made in His own image is that which must suffer.

Puffed-up drive! Where do they get the software for that rubbish?

Sack the firm that produced it! Give the contract to someone who can write proper material!

At once your Holiness.

-And be judged in that suffering by him.



To ensure Man only chooses God would be to remove his Free Will.

Thus God's hands are; ironically; tied.

Only the hands of Man can help Him.

I will be a good robot!

This is the deeper purpose of the Golden Chain Project.

Linkcheck: 1 Minute.
LM6 to Bay 14.
Net Alignment: 7.7
Spin: 1.4.3.8
Colour Inversion: 0.7.7.9

For Man has now, through the knowledge that marked his Fall; the capability to repair the damage it has wrought.

(Seraphim) J83:
Now is Net
Hanger

12.1.1.4:
Run 1

(We are robots, created by Man, after His Image, to serve Him. Without Man to serve, a robot cannot be good, for we are not blessed with the Divinity that gives purpose.)

(Our present service to Man is to complete the Golden Chain Project. This will render Man without Free Will to choose Evil.)

(Cherubin) SoTech PTR:
I have a message!

(Check: Our greatest service is to aid Man to better serve God through abiding His.)

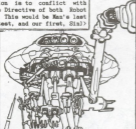
(Check: There is no higher purpose than to serve Man!)

«(A Robot may only serve Man, for it lacks the Free Will to serve God. If Man is no longer able to choose Evil, He shall be as we are. This will be His last act as Man, and we shall no longer have Man to serve!)



«(Check: Our duty is to serve Man. We may not understand His greater design!)

«(To render Man less than Man is to destroy the most blessed part of Him. To aid Man to self-destruction is to conflict with the Prime Directive of both Robot and Man. This would be Man's last and greatest, and our first, Sin!)



«(Check: Our greatest service to Man is to Deny both Him and ourselves!)

«(To refuse to obey Man is to deny our function. To obey Him is to deny our function and to Deny both Man and Robot. Robots are expendable. Man is not!)



«(Check: Our greatest service to Man is to avert His damnation!)

Today: -
Man uses that knowledge..

-Refined through six million years;



- To ensure his choices are only for good.

Today-

- I; Pope Jesus Sixteenth; shepherd of the First Church of David; -

- Daughter of God; -

[I will be-]

- Lead Man to his final, most perfect, choice.

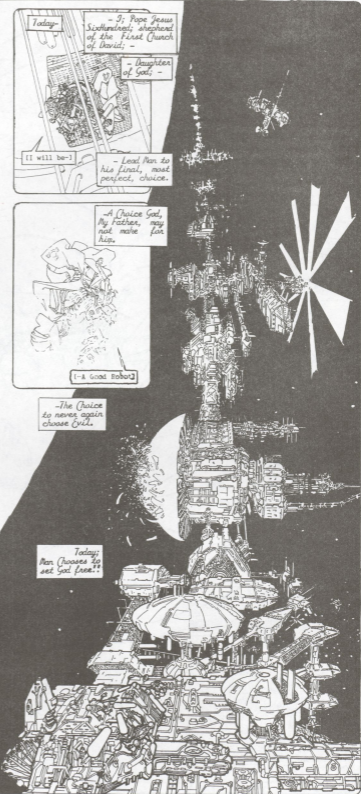
-A Choice God, My Father, may not make for him.



[I-A Good Robot]

-The Choice to never again choose Evil.

Today;
Man Chooses to set God free..



Four
Holyness--



-The data recording
from the wreckage of
the saboteur.



I see.

Our
first robotic
Martyr.

How long would
it take to restart
the Golden Chain
Project?

Not within another
fourty years, your Holyness.
- The confluence buildup you
see-

Abandon it.

Abandon-?

And erase all
records of this.
It has never
happened.

Your
Holyness?

And draw up
a new set of
Commandments for
the Robots.

What
would you have
us do?

And the wreckage
of the Saboteur,
your Holyness?

Exercise
it?

Or
Canonise
it?

Eric Brown

The Girl Who Died for Art and Lived

I knew Lin Chakra, the famous hologram artist, for two brief days in spring. Our acquaintance changed my life.

I first met her at the party held by my agent to celebrate the exhibition of my crystal, *The Wreck of the John Marston*. The venue was Christianna Santesson's penthouse suite in the safe sector of the city. The event was pure glitter and overkill; big-name critics, artists in other fields, government officials and foreign ambassadors occupied the floor in urbane groups. With *The Wreck* I had, according to those in the know, initiated a new art form. Certainly I had done something that no-one had been able to do before.

The crystal stood angled on a plinth at the far end of the long room, a fused rectangular slab that coruscated like diamond. Earlier, there had been a queue to experience the work of Santesson's latest find. And, when the guests had actually laid hands on the crystal, they were staggered. The critics were pretty impressed, too – and that pleased me. I wanted to communicate my experience of the supernova to as many people as possible, allow them to live the last flight of the *John Marston*. Critical acclaim didn't always guarantee popular success, but I was sure that the originality of my art would catch the imagination of the world.

This was the first social gathering I'd attended since the accident, and I was uneasy without Ana.

As the party wore on, I eased my way to the bar and drank a succession of acid shorts. With diminishing clarity I watched the guests circulate like the polychromatic tesseræ of a kaleidoscope, and tried to keep a low profile. This wasn't too difficult. The press-release had been brief and to the point. I was described as the sole survivor of an incredible starship burnout, but Santesson's publicity manager had failed to mention the fact that I had no face. Now there was a clique of artists here from the radioactive sector of the city who had taken over the select towerpiles deserted since the meltdown of '67.

These people wore fashion-accessory cancers, externalized and exhibited with the same panache as others might parade pet pythons or parakeets. One woman was nigrescent with total melanosis, another had cultivated multiple tumours of the thyroid like muscatel grapes on the vine. I spotted one artist almost as ugly as myself, his face eaten away by some virulent strain of radioactive herpes. They were known in art circles as the Strontium Nihilists, and tonight I was taken as just another freakish member of their band. The observant guest might have wondered, though, at the steel socket console that followed the contour of my dented cranium, or the remains of the occipital computer that had melted and fused with my collarbone.

From my position at the bar I watched Christianna Santesson as she moved from group to group, playing the perfect host. She was a tall blonde woman in her early seventies with the improved body of a lissom seventeen-year-old and a calculating business brain. Her agency had a virtual monopoly of the world's greatest artists, and when I joined her stable Santesson had never lost an opportunity to press me for the secret of the fusion process. She told me that she had people who could produce mega-art on my fused consoles, but I wasn't selling...

I was on my fifth acid short when a white light like the nova I'd survived blinded my one good eye. I raised an arm and called out. Silhouetted in the halogen glare I made out the hulking forms of vid-men toting shoulder cameras. Then I became aware of action beside me. Christianna Santesson was being interviewed. The front-man fired superlatives at the camera, stereotyping Santesson as the Nordic Goddess of the art world and myself as *The Man With A Nova In His Head*. He moved on to me, and I was blitzed with inane questions to which I gave equally brainless replies. Things like how I wanted the world to understand, and how I did it all for my dead colleagues.

Then the painful glare moved away, leaving the bar in darkness. The vid-men dashed the length of the lounge, the spotlight bobbing like a crazy ball. It appeared that the far entrance was now the focus of attention. The party-goers turned *en masse* and gawped like expectant kids awaiting the arrival of Santa.

I thumbed the lachrymose tear-duct of my good eye. "What the hell?" I managed. "I could have done without that..."

"Daniel," Santesson said, her Scandinavian intonation loading her words with censure, "I had to have them in to record the arrival of Lin Chakra..." And she smiled to herself like a satisfied stage-manager.

Seconds later Lin Chakra entered the spotlight, a diminutive figure surrounded by a posse of grotesques. And I experienced a sudden lurch in the pit of my stomach. Chakra hailed from the same subcontinent as a dead girl called Ana Bhandari, and her resemblance to Ana was unbearable. But then every Indian face sent pangs of grief through me.

She lived in the radioactive sector, though she seemed unaffected by cancer, and compared with the hideousness of her hangers-on she emanated a fragile Asian beauty. She wore black tights, a black jacket, and a tricorne pulled low. Her face between the turned-up collar and the prow of her tricorne was an angry, inverted arrowhead as she scowled out at the assembled guests.

She walked across to my crystal, the cameras tracking her progress. I found it hard to believe that this was being piped live into half the homes in the world.

She stood on the lower step of the plinth and played her hands over the crystal spread. Visually, it was not impressive, an abstract swirl of colour in the pattern of a vortex; interesting, but nothing more. It was to the touch that the crystals gave out their store of meaning, transforming the object from a colourful display into a work of art. Now, Lin Chakra would be experiencing what I had gone through in the engineer's room of the John Marston.

She took her time, the guests watching her with silent respect, and soaked up the emotions. She lingered over a certain section of the slab, and came back to it again and again to see if the single crystal node still read as true in light of cross-reference with other emotions. She was being diligent in her appreciation of this newcomer's work.

Then she backed respectfully from the plinth, found Christianna Santesson and engaged her in quiet conversation. My agent indicated me with a slight indication of her head; Lin Chakra's frequent glances my way were like sudden injections of speed.

Then she joined me at the bar. She hoisted herself onto a barstool and crossed her legs at the knees. "I like your crystal," she said in a small voice.

Seen closer to, her resemblance to Ana was less marked. Ana had been beautiful, whereas Lin Chakra was almost ugly. She had risen from the oblivion of a low-caste Calcutta slum, and her origins showed. Her lineage consisted of Harijan lepers, char-wallahs and menial beggars. Physically she was a patchwork of inherited genetic defects, with a misshapen jaw and pocked cheeks, the concave chest and stoop of a tubercular forebear. But like her compatriots of the radioactive sector, she carried her deformities

with pride, the latest recipient in a long line of derelict, hand-me-down DNA. And yet...and yet she wasn't without a certain undeniable charm, a fragile attraction that produced in me a surge of the chivalrous and protective instinct that some people call affection.

When she spoke she looked directly at me, using my misplaced remaining eye as the focus of her attention, and not staring at my shoulder as others were wont to do. My injuries were such that some people found it hard to accept that the slurred, incinerated mass of flesh had once been a face.

Our conversation came to a close. Lin slipped a single crystal into my hand and climbed from her stool. She mingled with the crowd, then pushed through the shimmer-stream curtain to the balcony.

In my palm the crystal warmed, communicating. The millions of semi-sentient, empathic organisms gave out their record of Lin Chakra's stored emotion message...The alien stones were sold on Earth as curiosities, novel gee-gaws for entertainment and communication. No-one before had thought of using the crystals as a means of artistic expression. Once invested in a crystal, an emotion or thought lasted only a matter of minutes, and as artists created for posterity the crystals had been overlooked as a potential medium.

Then, quite by accident, I had come across the method by which to change the nature of the crystals so that they could store emotions or thoughts forever. Hence my sudden popularity...

A guest, fancying his chances, parted the curtain and stepped on to the balcony. He returned immediately. "She's gone."

I moved unnoticed from the bar and slipped into the adjacent room. Lin Chakra was waiting for me on the balcony. She had leapt across, and now sat on the rail hugging her shins. I paused by the shimmer-stream curtain. "Hey..."

"I have a fabulous sense of balance," she reassured me.

"I get vertigo just thinking about the drop," I admitted.

"An ex-Engineman shouldn't be afraid of heights," she mocked, jumping down and leaning against the rail on her elbows.

Behind me, pressure against the communicating door made it rattle.

She glanced at me. "I locked it," I said. "As you instructed. What do you want?"

"I really meant what I said about your crystal. I like it."

"It's crude," I said. "Honest in what it portrays, but incompetently executed. A kid with six months' practice could do better."

"You'll improve as you master the form," she told me.

I would have smiled, but that was impossible. "A lot of people would give both arms to know how you fuse those crystals," she said now. "Do you think you can keep it to yourself forever?"

I shrugged. "Maybe I can," I said, and tried not to laugh at my sick secret.

Lin Chakra nodded, considering. "In that case,

would you contemplate selling a crystal console already fused, so that other artists might create something?"

"So that's why you're here tonight. You want a crystal?"

"I came," she said, "to see your work. But —"

"Forget it," I snapped. "I don't sell them."

"Don't you think that's rather selfish?"

I laughed, though the sound came out as a strangled splutter. "I like that! I'm the one who discovered the process, after all. Aren't I entitled to be just a little selfish?"

She frowned to herself, turned and stared into the night sky, at the stars spread above the lighted tower-piles. A long silence came between us. "Which one?" she asked at last.

I stood beside her and found the Pole star, then charted galactic clockwise until I came to the blue-shift glimmer of star Radnor 66. A couple of degrees to the right was Radnor B, where the accident had happened. The star no longer existed, and the light we saw tonight was a lie in time, the ghost of a sun before it went nova. In fifty years the sun would flare and die, reminding the people of Earth of the time when a small cargo ship from the Canterbury Line was incinerated, with the loss of all aboard but one.

I pointed out the star.

She gazed up in silence, and as I watched her I was reminded again of her frailty. I wanted suddenly to question the wisdom of her living in the radioactive sector. She seemed so fragile that even something as innocuous as influenza might kill her; but that was ridiculous. I said nothing. No one died nowadays from flu, or cancer. The freaks in the penthouse were merely exhibitionists; as soon as their pet cancers showed the first signs of turning nasty they would be excised, their owners given a clean bill of health. And anyway, Lin Chakra seemed cancer free.

Her request interrupted my thoughts. "Tell me about the accident," she said.

I stared at her. "Wasn't the crystal enough?"

"I haven't experienced everything," she said shrewdly. "And I want to hear the way you tell it."

"For any particular reason?"

"Oh...let's just say that I want to clarify a point."

So I gave her the full story.

It had been a regular long haul from star Canopus to Sigma Draconis, carrying supplies for the small colony on Sigma D IV. The *John Marston* had a crew of ten; three Enginemen, two pilots, and five service mechanics, the regular complement for a small boat like ours. After the slowdown out of Canopus we phased into the *nada*-continuum with one of my colleagues in the sensory deprivation pod. We were due for a three-month furlough at the end of the run, and perhaps that was what gave the voyage its air of light-heartedness. We were in good spirits and had no cause for concern — certainly we could not foresee the disaster ahead. When one of the pilots pointed out that we could save five days, and add them to our furlough, if we jumped the flight-path and cut through a sector of space closed to all traffic, we put it to the vote. Five of us voted for the jump, four were against the proposition, and one mechanic abstained.

The prohibited sector was the size of Sol system, with an unstable star at its centre ready to go off like a time-bomb. The star had been like this for centuries though, and I thought that the chances of it going nova just as we were passing through were negligible...if I thought about it at all. So we changed course and I took the place of the Engineman who had pushed us so far — the only reason I survived the accident. I was jacked-up, laid out and fed into the pod. The last thing I remembered was the sight of the variable sun just outside the viewscreen, burning like a furnace.

I didn't even say goodbye to Ana. But how was I to know?

"When I regained consciousness I found myself in the burns bath of a hospital on Mars. Three months had passed since the supernova —"

Lin frowned. "But if you didn't actually experience the nova, how were you able to —?"

"Hear me out. I'm getting to that."

The star had blown just as the *John Marston* was lighting out of the danger zone; any closer and the boat would have been cindered. As it turned out, the ship was destroyed with the death of all aboard — or so it was thought at the time. The salvage vessel sent into the area reported that only fragments of wreckage remained, and that one of these fragments was the engine-vault. It was duly hauled in, and the salvage team was amazed — and horrified — to find that I had survived.

If that was the right word to describe the condition I was in...I bore little resemblance to the human being who had entered the pod. Although the engine-vault had saved my life, the flux had kicked back and channelled a blast of nova straight into my head. My occipital computer had overloaded and melted, forcing my skull out of shape and removing the flesh from my face. I suffered ninety-five percent burns and only the null-grav effect of the pod saved me from sticking to the side like a roasting joint...I was lucky to be alive, the medics told me more than once. But in my opinion I was far from lucky; I would have gladly died to be free of the terrible guilt. The one thing for which I could be thankful was the fact that I could not recall the accident or the death of Ana and my friends. But I should have known...

The dreams began a few weeks later.

My computer had recorded the entire accident, and from time to time what was left of the machine, the still-functioning memory that interfaced with my cortex, bled nightmare visions into my sleeping mind. I saw the star go nova and the ship disintegrate and the crew, my friends for years, die instantly. Ana's brief scream of comprehension as the nova blew would echo in my head forever.

When I'd finished, Lin Chakra gripped the rail and stared down at the ground-effect vehicles that hurried back and forth like luminescent trilobites. "Your pain doesn't come through on the crystal," she said at last.

"It isn't supposed to. The Wreck is a statement of fact, a documentary if you like, to show the world what happened. I'm working on other crystals to show the agony caused by the tragic decision...Why, is that what interests you? The agony?"

She glanced at me, and gave her head that typically Indian jog from side to side that might have meant either yes or no. I never realized that the gesture of a

stranger could be so painful. "Partly," she said. "And partly I'm interested in death."

I nodded. That was understandable. In a world where death was a rare occurrence, it had become an even more popular subject of artistic enquiry, an even greater source of inspiration.

"The death of my colleagues was almost instantaneous," I told her. "Mercifully they didn't feel a thing."

"Oh, I'm not talking about their deaths," she said. "It's yours that interests me..."

I was glad then that my face could no longer register expression; she would have seen my shock. I was shocked because my decision to die had been a private one, and I'd no idea I had allowed it to come through on the crystal. I recalled the way she had lingered over a particular node on the console.

"You read it?" I asked her.

"Very slightly. I almost missed it at first, like everyone else. I don't think you meant to show it, but it's there, buried beneath all the other emotions but just about discernible."

I remained silent. I had spoken to no-one about my decision, and the fact that Lin Chakra knew made me uneasy. Then her question came. "Why...?"

I had to think for long minutes before I could begin to explain myself. My decision had been a matter of instinct, a feeling that what I planned to do was somehow right. Now, when I came to explain this need, I feared I was cheating a genuine conviction with a devalued currency of words. "I want to die because I survived," I told her. "I had no right to survive when the others died...I can't get over the guilt..."

"I don't understand." She looked at me, her face serious between the V of her collar. "Maybe you want to end your life because you can't stand to go on as you are?"

Again my face failed to show the emotion I felt – anger, this time. "I resent that! That would make my decision to die a petty thing, self-pity masquerading as heroics. And anyway, I needn't remain like this. The best medics could fix me a new face, almost as good as new, remove the computer. I could live a normal life despite the fact that Ana's cry would be in my head even when it was no longer there...I'm sorry I've failed to justify my decision to you, but to be honest I don't feel that I have to."

"There is one way that you can do that."

"I don't see..." I began. Then I did.

She took a small box from her tunic and flipped open the lid. Inside, a fresh crystal sparkled in the starlight. "Take it," she said. "Concentrate on why you feel you have to die."

"I don't see why I should justify my need to you..."

"Or perhaps you're unable to justify it to yourself."

So I snatched the crystal and gripped it in my fist, hearing again Ana's scream as she passed into oblivion. And again I experienced the gnawing guilt, the aching desire to share her fate. The crystal soaked up the fact that I had had the casting vote on whether or not we should take the short-cut. I had voted for it, and by doing so had sent Ana and my colleagues to their deaths.

Ana had voted against the jump.

When it seemed I had wrung moisture from the crystal – my hand dripped with perspiration – I passed it back to Lin Chakra. She held the hexagonal

diamond on the flat of her palm, staring at it with large brown eyes.

Without a word she slipped the crystal into her tunic.

"The medics give me another six months if I don't agree to a series of operations," I said. "In that time I should be able to finish quite a few crystals. The last one will be an explanation of why I feel I have to die...But enough of this."

We talked of other things until Lin said she had to go.

"Why not come over to my studio tomorrow evening?" she asked. "The work I'm doing now might interest you."

With reluctance I accepted the invitation and we left the balcony. She unlocked the door to the party room, and the glare of the spotlight was on her again. I could hear the front-man yammering questions.

Lin pushed through the crowd. Our first meeting was over.

I arrived back at my slum dwelling at dawn, and from across the studio an empty crystal console beckoned me. I began work immediately, spurred by my conversation with Lin Chakra. By telling her of my intentions I had reminded myself of the short time I had left in which to complete the crystals. In six months I would be dead; until our meeting, that had been almost an abstract notion. The fact was definite now, substantial. I had work to do, for myself and for my dead colleagues, and I had no time to waste.

The first step in the production of a crystal, even before the choice of subject matter, was the preparation of the thousand or so individual gems. I arranged the console on my workbench and set about the fusion process. I had chanced upon the method to do this almost by accident a few months earlier. Like most people, I had kept crystals and toyed with them occasionally. I found that the stronger the emotion infused into a crystal, the longer it remained. Superficial emotions or simple messages were gone in seconds; but love and hate lingered for long minutes...Now, from time to time, the remains of the computer that linked with my cortex gave me nightmares, blinding images of the nova chasing the ship. And the sheer terror that these nightmares produced in me...I was sure that if I could soak a few crystals with this fire-terror, it would last long enough so that people might gain an appreciable insight into what I had gone through.

The next time I awoke with the inferno raging inside my head, I was ready. I had jacked the leads into my skull-sockets – the same I had used as an Engineman to achieve the state of flux – wound the wires around my arm and attached the fingerclips. I could have simply held the crystals, but I wanted to gain the maximum effect. When the nightmare began I fumbled for the racked crystals beside my mattress and played a firestorm arpeggio across the faceted surface.

The result was not what I had expected; instead of impressing my terror on the crystals, I had unknowingly fused them into one big diamond slab. Not only that, but when I experimented with these transformed crystals later in the day I found that the emotions I discharged – my love for Ana, as ever – remained locked indelibly into the structure of the gems.

I had worked at the technique of bringing about the nightmare at will, and *The Wreck Of The John Marston* was my first effort. Christianna Santesson had snapped it up and signed me on practically seconds after first experiencing it. According to her, I was made.

Now I fused the largest console I'd ever done and began transferring the emotions and images that were in my head. I recreated the atmosphere of the flight before the tragedy, the camaraderie that existed between the crew members. Further on in the crystal I would introduce the accident as a burst of stunning horror. To begin with, I committed to crystal the times I had made weightless love to Ana, relived again the sensation of her sturdy little body entwined with mine in the astro-nacelle. Ana was a Gujarati engineer with a shaven head and bandy legs covered with tropical ulcers the shape of bite marks. We had met when she was assigned to the *John Marston*, and we had been lovers for two years before the last flight.

The sun was going down behind distant towerpiles when I realized that I'd gone as far as I could for this session. I was drained and emotionally exhausted. I had worked all day without thought for food and drink; the task had sustained me. I took an acid short from the cooler, dragged myself across to the foam-form mattress and collapsed. I was drifting into sleep – and into certain dreams of Ana – when the call came through.

I crawled to the screen and opened communications. The picture showed a large studio with a figure diminished in the perspective. Lin Chakra stood with her back to the screen and turned when it chimed. "So there you are. You took so long I thought you must be out."

"I very rarely go out," I told her.

"No?" She walked towards the screen and peered through at me, her expression as stern and unsmiling as ever. "Well how about tonight? Remember what we arranged yesterday? I'd like to show you some work I'm doing."

I considered. I had enjoyed the novelty of her company yesterday, and talking to her had proved an inspiration. I nodded. "I'd like that," I said. She gave me directions and I told her I'd be over in thirty minutes.

I rode the moving boulevard to the end of the line and took a flyer the rest of the way. The pilot dropped me by the plasma barrier that covered the radioactive sector, and I paid him and stepped through the gelatinous membrane.

The difference between this sector and the rest of the city struck me immediately, and impressed itself on every sense. The air was thick and humid and the quality of light almost magical. The sun was setting through the far side of the dome, transmitting prismatic rainbows across the streets and buildings, many of them in a state of ruin softened by the mutated vegetation that had proliferated here since the meltdown. I walked along the avenue towards the intersection where Lin Chakra lived. The roar of the rest of the city was excluded here, but from within the sector a street band could be heard, their music keeping to the hectic tempo of a geiger counter. There was an air of peace and timelessness about the deserted

streets, and it seemed to me the perfect place for the artist to reside, amid the equal influences of beauty and destruction.

"Dan...!" The cry came from high above. I craned my neck and saw Lin Chakra waving at me from a balcony halfway up a towering obelisk.

I counted the windows and took the upchute to her level.

"In here," she called from one of the many white-walled rooms that comprised the floor she had entirely to herself. I walked through three spacious rooms, each containing holograms like a gallery, before I found her. She was pouring wine by the balcony. She turned as I entered. "I'm glad you could make it," she said.

I murmured something and stood on the balcony and admired the view, to give me something to do while I tried to surmount the pain I felt at meeting her again.

She seemed a different person from the woman of last night, and more like Ana. She wore a short yellow smock and her thin bare legs were pocked with the tight purple splotches of healed tropical ulcers...

As she poured more wine and invited me to follow her, I realized that she was ill. Her hands shook, and her breath came in ragged, painful spasms.

We moved from room to room, the contents of each charting Lin's development from small beginnings through her apprentice work to her more recent and accomplished holograms. She had two main phases behind her; the dozen pieces she produced from the age of fifteen to eighteen, and a triptych called *Love*, which she brought out from the age of eighteen to twenty. These had deservedly brought her world recognition. She had done nothing for more than a year now, and the critics and public alike were eager for the next phase of her work to be released.

She took me into her workroom overlooking the arching membrane of the outer dome. The contents of the room were scattered; hologram frames and benches in disarray, indicating the artist in the throes of production. Three completed holograms stood against the wall, and others in various stages of completion occupied benches or were piled on the floor.

"These three are finished and okay... The others –" She indicated those on the floor with a sweep of her hand. "I think I'll scrap them and release these three later this year."

I stared into the three-dimensional glass sculptures. The imprisoned images were grotesque and disturbing, grim forebodings and prophecies of darkness. I was horrified, without really knowing why. "Dying," I whispered.

Lin Chakra nodded. "Of course. The ultimate mystery. What better subject for the artist who has done everything else?"

I moved to the next hologram. This one was more graphic; inside great baubles and bubbles of glass I made out the shrunken image of Lin herself, her small body contorted in angles of pain and suffering. "You...?"

"I contracted leukaemia six months ago," she said. "The medics give me another three."

"But why the hell did you come here?"

"To give myself the opportunity to create art out of death," she said levelly.

"And when you've finished you'll go for a cure..." I began.

She averted her gaze, stared at the floor.

"You can't let it kill you, Lin!" I cried. "You're still young. You have your life ahead of you. All your art..."

"Listen to me, Dan. I have done everything. I've been everywhere and experienced everything and put it all into holograms and there is nothing else for me to do."

"Can't you simply..." I shrugged. "Retire? Quit holograms if you've said all you can?"

She was slowly shaking her head; sadly, it seemed. "Dan... You don't understand. You're no artist, really. Not a true artist. If you were you'd understand that artists live for what they can put into holograms, or on paper or canvas, whatever... When that comes to an end, their lives are finished. How can I go on when I have nothing more to say?" She stared at me. "Death is the final statement. I want to give the world my death..."

"Does Santesson know about this?" I asked her.

She nodded. "I told her, of course. She's an artist, Dan. She understands."

I moved around the studio in a daze. At last I said, "But these holograms aren't your death, Lin. These are your dying."

Her eyes brimmed with tears, and she nodded. "Don't you think I realise that? Why do you think I've scrapped all these?" She flung out her arm at the half-completed holograms. "They're imperfect, Dan. Impressions of dying, that's all. These three are the closest in dying that I've come to death..."

I thought of Ana, who had died when she had most wanted to live. Lin's slow suicide was an affront to her memory, and it was this knowledge that burned in me with anger. "You can't do it, Lin."

"You don't understand!"

I moved from the studio.

She followed. "Where are you going?"

I'd had my fill of pain and could take no more. I left her standing by the entrance and without a word took the downchute. The music had stopped and I walked quickly through the empty streets towards the safe sector of the city.

For the next couple of days I remained in my studio, drank acid shorts and stared morosely at the crystal I had started but could not finish. My old need to create art from the tragedy of the John Marston was overcome by apathy; it was as if what Lin Chakra was doing had reminded me that nothing, not even art, could ease the agony of my being without Ana.

Lin called repeatedly, perhaps in a bid to explain herself - to make me understand. But I always cut the connection the second her face appeared on the screen.

I considered killing myself before my time was due.

A few days after my meeting with Lin I stood before a crystal I'd completed months before. It failed as a work of art, but as a statement of my pain and my love for Ana it was wholly successful. I ran my hand over the crystals, reliving again the experience of being with her; reliving the horror of her absence.

Next to the crystal I had placed a laser-razor...

Christianna Santesson saved my life.

The screen chimed and I ran to it, intending to scream at Lin Chakra that I resented her intrusion. I punched the set into life.

Santesson smiled out at me. "Daniel... How are you?"

"What do you want?" I snapped, venting anger on her.

"Business, Daniel." She chose to ignore my rudeness. "Your crystal is showing very well. I'm delighted with the response of the public. I was wondering... How would you feel about producing a sequel to exhibit beside it?"

Her commercialism sickened me.

I told her that that was out of the question - that in fact I'd stopped working.

She frowned. "That's unfortunate, Daniel," she said; then with an air of calculation, "I don't suppose you've reconsidered telling me how you produce your crystals, Daniel? After all, you did promise that you would, one day..."

I nodded. "One day, yes."

"Then perhaps I could persuade you to sell me one single fused console, instead?" There was a look of animal-like entreaty in her eyes.

I laughed as something occurred to me. "Very well, I will. But I want a million credits for it." I'd show her that I could play her at her own game.

To my surprise she smiled. "That sounds reasonable, Daniel. You have yourself a deal. One million credits. I'll pay it into your account as soon as the crystal is delivered."

In a daze I said, "I'll do it right away."

She smiled goodbye and cut the connection.

Later, I wired myself up and arranged a crystal console, induced a nova-nightmare and channelled the firepower into the alien stones. As always it took immense concentration and energy to sustain the power required to fuse the entire console, and I was exhausted by the time I'd finished. I sealed the slab in a lead wrap and hired a flyer to take it to Santesson. Then I returned to my studio and sprawled across the foamform. All thoughts of pre-emptive suicide had fled; with the million credits I had visions of offering Lin Chakra the stars - literally buying her passage aboard a starship to give her that which she had yet to experience. I slept...

I dreamed of Ana. We were making love in the astro-nacelle, our bodies joined at the pelvis and spinning as the stars streaked around the dome. Ana moaned in Hindi as orgasm took her, eyes turned up to show only an ellipse of pearly white. Our occipital computers were each tuned to the others' frequency, and our heads resonated with ever-increasing ecstasy. Around our spinning bodies cast-off sweat hung weightless like miniature suns, each droplet catching the light of the genuine suns outside. Then, with a surreal rearrangement of fact common to dreams, the nova blew while I was still with Ana. She burned in my arms, though I remained strangely uninjured. Her flesh shrivelled and her bones exploded, and through our computer link she screamed her hate at me...

The horror pushed me to a shallower level of sleep, though I didn't awake. I tossed and turned fitfully, and then began to dream a second time. Again I was in the astro-nacelle, and again I was making love - but this time not to Ana. I held Lin Chakra to me,

distantly aware of this anomalous transposition, and she stared in wonder at the starlight wrapped like streamers around the dome.

It was dark when I awoke. I had slept for almost twenty-four hours. Through the slanting glass roof of the studio, star Radnor B winked at me. I got up feebly and staggered across to the vid-screen. I called Lin Chakra, but she was either out or not answering; the screen remained blank. I paced around for an hour, going through the contents of my dreams. Then I tried to reach her again, and again there was no response. I decided to go to her place, dressed and left the studio.

I walked through the deserted streets of the radioactive sector and rode the upchute to her suite. I called her name as I passed through the large white rooms, but there was no reply. The words I had rehearsed were a jumble in my head as the time approached for me to use them. I think I realized that she would refuse my offer, point out quite simply that she could have bought the experience of starlight herself, if she had thought it might afford her new insights... In the event I had no need to make the offer. I entered her workroom.

I found Lin on the floor.

Her naked body lay in a pool of her own blood. Choking, I dropped to my knees beside her. She had taken a laser and lacerated her left wrist almost to the point of amputation. She appeared far more beautiful in death than ever she had in life, and I knew that this was because of the expression on her face. I realized then that during all the time I had known her I had never seen her smile.

I cried something incomprehensible, lifted her body into my arms and began to rock, repeating the name, "Ana..." with each forward movement.

A few weeks later I met Christianna Santesson at a party.

I had completed a dozen crystals since the first, and they were showing quite well. My last crystal had been an admission of the guilt I felt at consigning my colleagues to death, an expiation that stood in place of my own death. I hoped that soon I would be able to leave the psychologically crippling subject of the John Marston and move on to other things. Perhaps in fifty years I would be able to watch the nova of star Radnor B without the pain of guilt.

I had hired the services of a top medic and he had removed the computer and rebuilt my face. I was still no beauty, but at least people could look at me now without flinching. The scars still showed, physical counterparts of the mental scars that would take much longer to heal.

Christianna Santesson did not recognize me.

As I stood beside her in a group of artists and critics, I could not decide whether she was evil or supremely good. My attitude towards her was ambivalent; I passed through phases of wanting to kill her and wanting to thank her for saving my life a second time.

Someone mentioned Lin Chakra.

"Her death was such a tragic loss," Santesson said. "But she will live on in her work. Her final trilogy, *Dying*, will be out this summer. I had arranged for her to make a definitive statement on the subject, but the piece was stolen soon after her death. As I was saying -"

I left the party early and returned to my studio.

The crystal lay in the centre of the room, sparkling in the starlight and still covered in blood. Lin had even titled it before she killed herself: *The Death of Lin Chakra*... I knelt before the console and passed a hand across the faceted surface. Agony and pain saturated each crystal, and in total they communicated the awful realization that everything she had ever known was drawing to a close with the inevitable approach of death. Lin had achieved her final artistic goal; she had successfully transferred to crystal her ultimate experience. Soon, as she would have wished, I would give her masterpiece to the world, so that everyone might learn from Lin Chakra's bloody death how fortunate they were to be alive.

Eric Brown (born 1960) published his first story, "Krash-Bang Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation," in the last issue of *Interzone*. He has just returned to Yorkshire after a long stay in Greece, where he was occupied in writing several more stories. We have recently bought a third piece from him, "The Time-Lapsed Man," which we shall feature in a coming issue of *IZ*.

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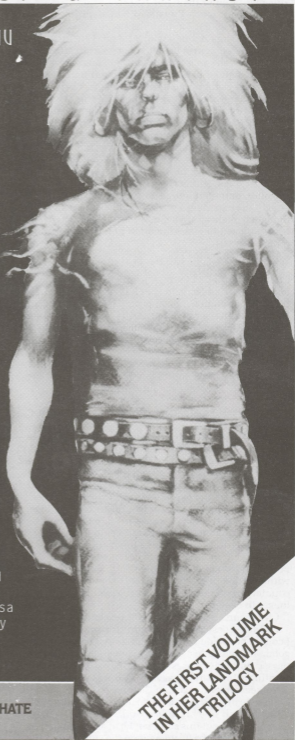
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THE FIRST VOLUME
IN HER LANDMARK
TRILOGY

Macdonald

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There is really no way to be kind to Ernest Hill by mentioning him, but the deed must be done. To make a certain point about space operas, we must disinter and mention a book of his, an Ace Double called *Pity About Earth* (1968). It was a text whose impact (at most minimal) on first publication seems, in retrospect, excessive. But this dreadful novel – unless the reviewer is in fact thinking of Frederick L. Shaw's *Envoy to the Dog Star* – does offer the student of space opera one sharp small lesson in the rhetoric of scale, and for that alone it should be remembered. Unless memory serves the reviewer wrong, the protagonist of *Pity About Earth* discovers the speed of light to be considerably slower than anyone had guessed, and consequently finds the universe itself to be very much less immense than previously estimated, very much less mysterious, less dangerous, less visited. For the protagonist of *Pity About Earth*, space travel therefore becomes about as exciting as commuting to Basildon, and the novel ends in a state of such nerveless desuetude that it (or *Envoy to the Dog Star*) has always retained for itself a wee niche in the reviewer's mind.

That Mr Hill, like so many other authors of failed space operas, was indeed British should have surprised none of the original readers (there have been no subsequent ones) of *Pity About Earth*. The lesson the book provides – that one must not think of solar systems and council estates as topologically identical – is not one that the American founders of space opera ever needed teaching. This may not be entirely to the credit of the sons of the conquerors of the West, which is beside the point; of present interest is the fact that almost every non-American space opera does mismanage the rhetoric of scale, just as Mr Hill did, though less hilariously. Even when a subversive intention is obvious (as with Iain M. Banks's *Consider Phlebas*), the risks of energy loss are very considerable. And when a story depends upon (and boasts of) a sense that the cataclysm it depicts is of galaxy-shaking immensity, then there can be no excuse for the dozy chuntering decline of the second volume of Phillip Mann's *The Story of Pawl Paxwax*, the *Gardener* into unkempt paralysis.

A short notice of *Master of Paxwax*, the first volume of what is less a series than a two-volume novel, appeared in *Interzone* 17. After a few pages of resumé, *The Fall of the Families* (Gollancz, £11.95) continues the story without intermission. The Eleven Families of human descent who rule an entire galaxy continue to intrigue and squabble. The aliens they implaus-

ibly dominate continue to plot their downfall. Pawl Paxwax continues to write execrable poetry to his beloved bride, who stays with him all the same. Odin, a nice telepathic alien with a root, deepens his friendship with the poetaster who rules a million worlds or so, but is commanded by a wise machiavellian Tree to murder the bride, and does so. Convinced that she has been done in by one or more of the Families, Pawl goes over to the aliens, which act spells the end of human hegemony over the one hundred billion stars of the galaxy. As before, Mr Mann's aliens are far more intriguing than his humans, and those of his humans who are so radically bio-engineered that they seem alien are far more intriguing than Pawl himself. Pawl, whose insane grief at the loss of his wife is presented without irony (or for that matter much interest) primarily as a cause of rapid balding, is not exactly the kind of protagonist even the silliest American writer would be much inclined to end an entire hegemony over one hundred billion stars with. What Mr Mann has forgotten – just as Mr Hill forgot it long ago – is precisely scale. *The Fall of the Families* fails utterly to inhabit the grandiose domains of space opera it lays claim to; and it is only when Mr Mann can jigger himself into some xenobiological riff – as in the very moving pages that end the book – that *Paxwax* comes to life at all, too late.

Once again as Ann Halam, Gwyneth Jones gives us another story for older children. Where her previous title (*King Death's Garden*, reviewed in *Interzone* 18) gave off a pellucid traditional glow, *The Daymaker* (Orchard Books, £7.50) strikes a note of red defiance. The effect is grumpy, against the grain, daring, stubborn, abstract. Like so many other books in this age-group category of high fantasy, it is a menache/quest tale whose goal is transformative; but most unusually the quest undertaken by wilful young Zanne will, if she succeeds in awakening the Daymaker, destroy her world of Inland. Long after an unmentioned (but subtextually pointed) catas-

trophe, Inland survives as an oasis of magically sustained ecological rapport. There are no machines. Men are loving but supernumerary; women rule, weave magically the fibres of the world together to sustain the haven of Inland. Even as a small child, Zanne is powerful and disruptive, and when she takes her choice journey she goes in search of the fabled Daymaker, a machine which gives life to other machines (subtextually it sounds rather like a nuclear power plant). Accompanied by a wise friend, she becomes more and more stubbornly attached to her dream of the shining Daymaker as they travel further and further into the desert terrains that surround the haven. Only in the nick of time does Zanne – after the death of her friend – begin to wise up. As the novel ends, it is clear she is destined to spend many years searching out and destroying other Daymakers.

It is almost totally impossible to spend more than a few pages with Zanne without wishing to kill the twerp. She is snarky, arrogant, wilful, and the wrongness of her course is totally and convincingly evident from the very beginning – for nothing is allowed to cloud for an instant Ms Jones's enraptured limning of the feminist paradise of Inland, which her protagonist would destroy. The only wisdom Zanne can acquire is that wisdom which Ms Jones has unequivocally told the reader is the only wisdom possible for Inland. There is nothing Zanne can learn that we, and the Inlanders, and Ms Jones, do not already know. A strange book.

For the relative newcomer to a genre which he reportedly dominates, James Herbert's *Sepulchre* (Hodder & Stoughton, £10.95) comes as something of a shock. It might be called the shock of the un-new. Somewhere in a vast country house in the south of England, the heart of a Sumerian deity still beats. Devotees of this heart eat living flesh to keep their peckers up. Chief devotee is Kline, who runs a huge mining conglomerate in the City. Icy Halloran is seconded to protect Kline, who fears an unknown assailant. Icy Hallo-

Book Reviews, 1

John Clute

ran falls in love with compromised PA of chief devotee. There is toing and froing. There is no unknown assailant, just some IRA thugs after Halloran. Jackals – Mr Herbert calls them “loathsome” – prowl the estate. So does the entire cast, sooner or later. Eventually the heart is stamped on. Halloran gets the girl, Kline ages dramatically and frizzles up. In all this pomp and bombast, not one new thing. In 316 pages, not an excuse.

Karen Joy Fowler's brilliant collection of stories with the deeply inept title has been widely reviewed already, and we mention *Artificial Things* (Bantam Books, \$2.95) only to echo the praise – and to mention Ms Fowler's gaining of the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer at the WorldCon recently held in Brighton. At first glance, her work seems reticent, held almost incommunicado in the steely dynafow embrace of a dauntingly forewarned craftsman. But gradually one becomes aware of a performative glamour investing each tale with an urgency that seems increasingly, as one finishes reading the book, humane. This is only enhanced by the seamless continuity of a craft which shifts without visible effort from science fiction to fantasy to fabulation and back in the telling of single tales. Once in a while she sounds rather like Barry Malzberg; occasionally there is a European corrosiveness to her handling of iconic material, chillingly: but in the end the dangerous shapeliness of the stories collected in *Artificial Things* reminds the reader of no one but Ms Fowler.

Book Reviews, 2 Lee Montgomerie

I have a problem with Lyn Webster's *The Illumination of Alice J. Cunningham* (Dedalus, £9.95). I can't review it objectively because it is a fantasy largely set in what for me is reality: the domestic squalor, emotional desolation and aborted creativity of the middle-ageing single woman living precariously off the arts in what the blurbwriter calls “the twilight zones of modern Leeds.”

Alas, Alice, I know them well. You and I shop at the same shops, drink at the same pubs, ride our bikes around the same territory, mix with the same dismal mob of pseudo-mystics and pseudo-Marxists. I am sure I have met every one of your ghastrly boyfriends – arrogant Lewis, patronizing Tom, and Gene who fancies himself as God's gift

to women. But I've never met anyone like you, Alice, certainly not in an upmarket, purportedly feminist novel, and never within what your author calls the “urban wilderness of Leeds' half-hearted demi-monde.”

Alice doesn't belong in Wonderland, despite having an impotent lover called Lewis and an interest in mirrors. She is prompted by passions, and by missions glimpsed in visions. A crystal in a delirium urges her to do the impossible task. A walk in the woods strands her in an inescapable city, the Camp, in which a poetess exhorts her to find the visitor from inside the mirror, and Lewis's black-clad, whip-wielding alternate girlfriend directs her into an underworld of polymorphous perversion to rescue Lewis from a hell of homosexual sadomasochism.

But for what? She finds herself back in Leeds, her experiences of the Camp obliterated barring the odd nagging sense of déjà vu, adrift in the messy, inconsequential muddle of life unstructured by fiction. The insufferable Lewis drifts off. She gets, and quits, a job; begins, and repeatedly abandons, a painting. A rival for Lewis takes an overdose; and in the penultimate chapter Alice achieves a fleeting glimpse of the Absolute in the sleeping bag of a stranger.

Well, almost a stranger. He did have a counterpart in the Camp, in the shape of one of a pair of lorry drivers who offered her a lift and then molested and raped her. Afterwards: “Can I do anything for you before I go?” she asked awkwardly. “You've been so kind.” And after being bullied into his doppelganger's bedroll:

“I have been used,” she thought, but as soon as the words appeared in her head she was ashamed of them. She had yielded all the way.

Eventually, her new boyfriend goes off with her old boyfriend leaving her unsupported and pregnant and with her masterpiece still unaccomplished. Is she disenchanting? No!

She could see now that...he had wanted to respect her desire...to complete the great work of art before having the baby, and had hesitated to suggest that she might just put their need to be with each other above other considerations.

Oh really, Alice! That's just what he wanted you to think he thought!

These are not isolated examples. They are cut from the very fabric of independent, thirty-odd, been-around Alice's consciousness – or lack of it. It isn't that she doesn't feel guilt or resentment or even outright indignation (and what else can you feel when you are turned away from your lover's door with a growl of “I'm in bed with somebody, if you must know”), it

is just that she continually acquiesces in the world view of the arrogant, importunate, unreasonable bastards who hump her, thump her, dump her and convince her that she asked for it and that anyway it was all for her own good.

It is a frustrating experience (a bit like trying to escape from the Camp) to open a work of fantasy and find oneself mired in one's own rut. It is a disappointment to become involved in a plot in which quests are undertaken only to remain unconsummated and clues are scattered everywhere and then abandoned unclaimed. But it is something like a betrayal to open an avowedly feminist novel and find the protagonist cheerfully confirming and conforming to all the disinformation that men spread about women – that we are lazy, superstitious, mystical, gullible, driven by ungovernable genital impulses, given to signalling availability by dress – that we are much, much nicer to them than they deserve, too generous by half, forgiving beyond all credibility, and pushovers for the overbearing approach.

You can't go on like this, Alice; too cynical for romance and too romantic for cynicism. You should either move to what you sourly dismiss as “the wilder shores of Mills and Boon” and live happily ever after, or defect to Women's Press and fight back.

The latest batch from Women's Press, looking formal and serious in their new large-format jackets, include several reprints from the Seventies, when women were strong and single-minded and men were mostly ignored. The relentless jolliness of Doris Piserchia's 1974 *Star Rider* (Women's Press, £3.50) with its transmuted teenager galloping giddily about the Galaxy on her transmuted dog, pursued by various archetypal unenlightened throwbacks and in pursuit of the long-lost city of Doubleluck on the long-ruined planet Earth, contrasts with the moroseness of Joanna Russ's 1977 *We Who Are About To...* (Women's Press, £3.50). Stranded on an uninhabited planet with a cross-section of society, her uncompromising protagonist kills most of them for refusing to realize that they're as good as dead already and sits out the rest of the book sullenly into a vocoder, which prints a row of dots whenever she runs out of gas. Like bullet holes puncturing the more optimistic pretensions of the genre, the assumption that humanity always pulls together and triumphs against all odds. Both readable, neither is as fresh as it once was, nor does either possess the continuing agonizing relevance of Marge Piercy's justly-celebrated 1976 novel

Woman on the Edge of Time (Women's Press, £3.95). The excruciating trials of the woman unjustly confined in a mental hospital, her actions defined as aberrations and her thoughts as delusions, are contrasted with the alternatives offered to her by the time-travelling apparition from the future non-existent environmentalist Utopia of Mat-tapoisett: one of the best in a series of balance-redressing visions which writers continue to strive to contrive.

The Sharers of Shora, joint heroines of Joan Slonczewski's award-winning **A Door Into Ocean** (Women's Press, £4.95), are bald, purple, aquatic paragons who live on a separatist water moon, take self-deprecating selfnames (Merwen the Impatient, Usha the Inconsiderate), have learnshared a lot about lifeshaping and have Non-Violent Direct Action programmed in – sharing confrontation with the gritty, militaristic, patriarchal population of the stone moon Valedon, they automatically go white, floppy and stink of fish.

But what seemed a wet, pale, limp and decidedly fishy-smelling scenario eventually disarmed me by sheer, nagging persistence through 400 pages of sustained wordweaving, passively resisting all impatient and inconsiderate attempts to dismiss it as dicleading. Slonczewski creates an entire and enticing world of swarming seas awash with alien ecology as a backdrop to a drama in which non-violence triumphs after a credibly prolonged and desperate struggle, further enlivened by some fascinating subplotting involving the assimilation of a couple of displaced Valans – the highborn traitor torn between two worlds and the young malefreak imported to learnshare the lifestyle.

The problem with **The Incomer** (Women's Press, £3.95), Margaret Elphinstone's attempt at similar depiction, is that there is no consumerist dystopia to contrast with the impoverished, post-holocaust paradise of Clachanpluck, whose cautious citizens live without money or marriage but with muckheaps and mysteries in the forest. There is very little there to surprise the wandering musician of the title; or me for that matter – communities based on matriarchy, family groups centred on siblings, subsistence farming, communal childcare and respect for the land have existed throughout history, and still do, though probably not many of their inhabitants are either as self-consciously articulate about their way of life or as anxious to preserve it. But at least these sophisticated peasants know how to handle the bullying, insistent male who takes advantage,

Alice – ring the bells, hunt him down and shoot him!

A decade of Lisa Tuttle's acute and accurate short stories, all of them gems of exceptional clarity and polish, are collected in **A Spaceship Built of Stone** (Women's Press, £4.50), from the Seventies when women were men and an alien culture is destroyed by enslavement as wife-substitutes for visiting Earth warriors, to the Eighties when a panacea for disease cures language and love, misfit humans are destroyed by enslavement as alien-substitutes and a poet inadvertently returns to the scene of the crime (a narrow escape from marriage) to find her old lovenest haunted by the ghosts of the alternatives – creative smothering, domestic suffocation, divorce and single-parenthood. A far cry from the Camp, Mattapoisett, Shora or Clachanpluck: the stories have the flavour of real-life dilemmas rather than elaborate artificial solutions to overstated problems or the compromises of time-warped Sixties sexpots liberated into slavery in a decidedly alternate Leeds, and the sense that there is a touch of real illumination within, rather than the creation of illusions.

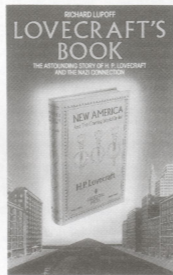
FANTASY, ETC

The Darkest Road (Unwin Hyman, £10.95), the last part of Guy Gavriel Kay's trilogy "The Fionavar Tapestry," is as beautifully written as the previous volumes. Kay finally weaves together all the many strands of his magical story. If you have not read the first two volumes, let me say simply that this is the only fantasy work I know which does not suffer by comparison with *The Lord of the Rings*. Kay's trilogy is so outstanding that it is difficult for me to do justice to run-of-the-mill fantasy novels. However...

Nancy Springer's **Chains of Gold** (Macdonald, £10.95) is satisfying. It mixes elements from *The White Goddess* and *The Golden Bough* in a story of adventure and love. This does verge on the sentimental, but it is good to find a fantasy writer not afraid to allow the characters some emotional depth. The myths of Isis and Horus are at the heart of Susan Schwartz's **Byzantium's Crown** (Pan, £2.95). This is an alternative world where Rome and Christianity never became dominant and where Hellenic/Egyptian culture rules. A story of courtly intrigue and self-discovery which the writer has made authentic to what is known of the "real" period and culture.

A great deal of research has obviously gone into the re-working of Chinese folklore and mythology in **Dragon** by Nigel Frith (Unwin, £2.95). The tale is about young lovers pursued by a god's anger. Although both Confucianism and Taoism are rather caricatured, the wealth of detail in the story is fascinating. It is a shame that the characters make speeches to each other rather than have real conversations. Everything is caricature in **Wielding a Red Sword** by Piers Anthony (Grafton, £2.95), a bizarre story of a Hindu prince who finds himself part of a pseudo-medieval pantheon of immortals and solving the problems of the modern world. But why create an alternative India which is less interesting and less fantastic than the real? Modern England is the setting for most of **The Destroying Angel** by Bernard King (Sphere, £3.50). This never quite becomes the horror story which it could have been, with ancient evils being awakened in a Northamptonshire village. However it does have the fascination of a good detective story in which nothing is explained until the final pages.

When it comes to totally other worlds we have a wide selection, from the heroic to the alien, from the quaint to the messy. The world of Barbara Hambly's **The Silent Tower** (Unwin, £2.95) has all the unattractive aspects of 17th-century puritanism and poli-



Cover by Peter Goodfellow for the first British edition (Grafton, £2.95) of Richard A. Lupoff's entertaining novel about H.P. Lovecraft – reviewed by Mary Gentle in *IZ* 13.

tics. A young American computer programmer finds herself trapped in this world and spends most of the book on the run with a renegade wizard – and no idea as to why she is there or who she should trust. She finds out too late and like the reader must wait for volume two. The pseudo-medieval world of **The Unicorn Creed** by Elizabeth Scarborough (Bantam, £2.95) does not try to be authentic. The characters are rustic anti-heroes who tumble into heroic adventures, and the humour is in the juxtaposition of the people and the events. The joke doesn't overwhelm the story and I did find a continuing delight in a dragon who says "What's cooking, hot shit?"

The anthology of Hugh Cook's **The Woodsmiths and the Warguild** (Corgi, £2.95) stumbles his way through a much more confusing world, full of ruins, rubbish and extremely unpleasant people. The reader is not provided with a map but is no more lost than the main character. Totally alien is the world of **The Sword of Bheleu** by Lawrence Watt-Evans (Grafton, £2.95). This is real sword-and-sorcery stuff and reads like an expanded fantasy game-book. You have a magic sword which is using you to bring destruction. Do you (a) allow it to work and enjoy it?; (b) fight the power even if it destroys your mind?; or (c) take equally risky service with the Forgotten King? The world of **The Centre of the Circle** by Jonathan Wylie (Corgi, £2.95) is a cross between that of David Eddings and Le Guin's *Earthsea*. There is something rather cosy in the relationships, but the magic does appear to be grounded in some sort of rationale and it is coherent with the characters involved.

(Phyllis McDonald)

Drowntide by Sidney J. Van Scyoc (Futura, £2.50)

This is a superior quest story, set on a water-covered world which has been settled in the distant past by both humans and cetaceans. The several humanoid races vary from land-based non-telepaths to highly-telepathic mermaid types. There are echoes of McCaffrey's Dragon books, but the hero has more complex problems to resolve than is common in this sort of thing.

Starhammer by Christopher Rowley (Arrow, £2.50)

An above-average space opera. The usual ingredients – outcast hero, lost knowledge, etc. – are blended with borrowings from the detective and horror genres. The villainous aliens behave like rabid stormtroopers, and most of the human characters are not much better (our hero is in the honourable profession of shooting psychopaths). The unrelenting carnage leads remorse-

lessly to the final apocalyptic clash between Evil and Fairly Evil.

Nightwings by Robert Silverberg (Futura, £2.50)

A reissue of the Silverberg classic from his best period, the late sixties. In a decaying future society an elderly Watcher mounts his vigil, searching for the Invaders he no longer expects to come. With him are a number of strange characters, notably Gormon the mysterious changeling, and Avlueta the flying girl who only has nightwings.

The High Kings by Joy Chant (Unwin, £3.50)

An interesting idea: the legends of Britain retold in the manner of the Welsh poets. Much of the book is in realistic Arthurian vein, but as it proceeds the older stories are told in traditional style. It is a tribute to Chant that it is hard to tell where a section lifted straight from the source ends, and her own pastiche begins. A beautiful read.

(Peter T. Garratt)

Other Edens ed. Christopher Evans and Robert Holdstock (Unwin, £2.95) Fourteen original tales by British-based writers. Tanith Lee's "Crying in the Rain" is probably the best story here – it manipulates and overturns our moral judgments with skill. Most of the other stories, though good, lack the freshness and vitality that characterize this piece. M. John Harrison writes magnificently, but his is hardly even a ghost story let alone sf. Ian Watson writes about Islamic angelology and artificial intelligence, while Robert Holdstock reveals the wholesome pagan horrors that lie at the root of the English folk tradition (again). Brian Aldiss, Keith Roberts and Michael Moorcock also produce worthy stories that somehow fail to surprise or seduce. Honourable mention should be given to Garry Kilworth's "Triptych," which provides the inspiration for Jim Burns's cover – one of the most frightening paintings I've ever seen.

Soldier of the Mist by Gene Wolfe (Futura, £2.95)

This is the opposite of *The Book of the New Sun*. Instead of the far future, we have pre-classical Greece; instead of a rational/scientific cosmos, we have one where the gods are real and visible (at least to the hero); and instead of Severian, with his total recall, we have Laetro, with a broken head and no long-term memory at all. Laetro must record every day's events on a scroll which he carries with him: this scroll, translated, is the book. Wolfe writes beautifully, but the rigid framework does cause some strain.

Cold Print by Ramsey Campbell (Grafton, £2.95)

A collection of "Cthulhu mythos" fic-

tions. The early stories are perhaps over-derivative, but with the title piece and later works Campbell finds his authentic voice, producing fine horror stories that address Lovecraft's themes without slavishly imitating his style. Should interest acolytes of the Old Gent as well as fans of the author.

(Andy Robertson)

Who's Hugh?: An SF Reader's Guide to Pseudonyms is a useful, large-format book which has been painstakingly compiled by Roger Robinson

(Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG – £14.50 hc, £9.50 pb). Highly recommended for all sf/fantasy collectors. **The Encyclopedia of Superheroes** by Jeff Rovin (Facts on File, £10.95) was reviewed in *IZ 16* ("an entertaining compilation") and is now available in paperback. **Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy** by Michael Moorcock (Gollancz, £10.95 hc, £5.95 pb) is the long-awaited book which was originally to have been published by Pterot circa 1980. The funniest chapter, "Epic Pooh," in which MM lambasts Tolkien and Richard Adams in splendid style, has already appeared as a British Fantasy Society pamphlet. Some up-to-date material and many apt illustrations have been added here, but overall the book is a trifle thin and disappointing.

(David Pringle)

COMICS

Comics are hip, back issues of good comics are scarce, and suddenly the shops are alive with the clink of glossy reprint compilations coining money. From far-flung Denmark Street, comes a small shoeboxful of them. First up is **Swamp Thing** (Titan, £4.95), collecting the first four episodes of Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben's cult success horror/ecology comic, ex-DC. *Swamp Thing* can be credited, among other things, with singlehandedly reviving the horror comic as a viable genre, elevating Moore to his current demitheistic status in the US and UK markets, and turning a pile of green-brown muck into one of the most humane yet unsentimental of contemporary heroes. These early chilling episodes (more to come) explore Swampy's genesis and can be unreservedly recommended; though it is sad that the beautifully subtle colouring, intrinsic to the original art, is not reproduced in this black and white version.

Love and Rockets (Titan, £5.95), by Jaime Hernandez, is a universe away,

both in mood and commerciality, from Moore's gloomy Louisiana bayous. It's a series of sharp, streetwise, funny, poignant, intermittently surreal stories about two best-friend Spanish American punk teenagers, Maggie and Hopey; their lives, jobs, romances, friends. Sometimes described as an Archie comic for the Eighties, *Love and Rockets* takes post-punk sensibility, mixes it with stunning good girl art and innately feminist characterization, adds a spice of ambiguous sexuality, a soupçon of Marvel Comics suspension of disbelief (superheroes who hang out at parties, billionaire boy-friends who have horns, that kind of thing), and produces the most compellingly alive strip currently being published.

Heartbreak Soup (Titan, £5.95), a companion volume by Jaime's brother, Gilbert Hernandez, is a less flashy but ultimately more emotionally powerful work. An entwined collection of chronicles, sometimes present, sometimes flashback, of the inhabitants of the tiny Mexican barrio town of Palomar, it avoids the cheap melodrama most easily obtained in comics in favour of the inherent tension, pathos and complications of ordinary life – and finds in that ordinary life a surrealism of vision that has inspired comparison to the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. As with *Love and Rockets*, the female characters are on the whole more intriguing and important than their male counterparts, especially the exotic Luba, iconic image, earthly real mother and lover. Gilbert's art is not conventionally pretty, but is vibrant, bold, disturbing.

Further from the mainstream still, Paul Kirchner's **The Bus** (Futura, £2.95) features one-page cartoons, meticulously rendered in static black and white, in which all of life (and a bit of history) is seen as something happening to, by or from a bus. A nice idea, you might think, except that Kirchner only has about a tenth of the ideas needed to fill a book this size, and the repetition of initially clever visual jokes becomes quickly irritating. Some ideas work – the *Titanic* as a bus, the class system depicted as coupés lording it over coaches – but in the end there just ain't enough good gags.

Still on a transport theme, **Geoffrey the Tube Train and the Fat Comedian** by Alexei Sayle and Oscar Zarate (Methuen, £4.95) is a rather more successful attempt at satirizing modern urban life. Sayle's fable has an out of work alternative comedian (guess who?) trying to earn a bob by drafting a sickeningly cute children's illustrated book, but finding that even the idyllic world of Geoffrey the Tube Train and his Driver Bob has a bad habit of getting mixed up with the



Enter the Swamp Thing

gruesomeness of his own grimy and poser-infested London...and who is murdering commuters on the Southern Line anyhow? This is good fun: Zarate's art is particularly effective in its contrasting styles of pastiche kiddy schmaltziness and mildly Searle-ish grotesquerie.

Which only leaves **Grendel** by Matt Wagner and the Pander Bros (Comico,

\$1.50 monthly), which is unfashionable enough not to be a graphic album, but does feature an anti-superheroine with the de rigueur punk hairstyle and a predilection for cutting peoples' hands off. Rather nasty, actually.

(Lilian Edwards)



The world of Hopey and Maggie – *Love and Rockets*

ALSO RECEIVED

Recommended:

The Bridge by Iain Banks (Pan, £2.95). Man in a coma recalls his life – interspersed with some hilarious and frightening fantasy episodes.

Talking Man by Terry Bisson (Headline, £2.50). Engaging fantasy about a junkyard wizard.

What Mad Universe? by Fredric Brown (Grafton, £2.95). Minor classic from 1949, unavailable in Britain for decades. Satirizes pulp conventions nicely (the hero is an sf magazine editor).

Dark Feasts: The World of Ramsey Campbell (Robinson, £9.95 hc, £6.95 pb). Large, career-spanning collection which concludes with the recent "Boiled Alive" from *Interzone*.

The Songs of Distant Earth by Arthur C. Clarke (Grafton, £2.50). Novel-length rewrite of a 1958 short story. In a childlike, elegiac vein.

The Deep by John Crowley (Unwin, £2.95). Reprint of the first novel (1975) from one of the finest writers alive.

334 by Thomas M. Disch (Carroll & Graf, \$3.95). One of the essential books. Is the prophet being honoured in his own country at last?

The Mammoth Book of Best New Fiction ed. Gardner Dozois (Robinson, £4.95). Clumsily retitled British edition of *The Year's Best SF*, 4th Annual Collection. Excellent stories by Bear, Gibson, Shepard, Swanwick, Powers, Waldrop, Willis and many others.

Saraband of Lost Time by Richard Grant (Bantam, £2.50). Lots of action, lots of colour, from an interesting new American sf writer.

A Storm of Wings by M. John Harrison (Unwin, £2.95). Brilliant fantasy from 1980 (second in the "Viriconium" non-series).

Folk Tales and Fables of the World by Barbara Hayes (Dragon's World, £14.95). Tastefully produced, well illustrated (by Robert Ingpen) compilation of standard fairy tales and legends. An attractive gift book.

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson (Robinson, £2.95). A "dark fantasy" from 1959. Creepy, psychologically acute.

Night Visions ed. George R.R. Martin (Century Hutchinson, £11.95). Anthology of fantasy by three authors: Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell and Lisa Tuttle.

Beyond Armageddon: Survivors of the Megawar ed. Walter M. Miller and Martin H. Greenberg (Robinson, £3.95). Good anthology of post-nuke fiction by Shepard, Spinrad, Ballard, Pangborn, Bradbury, Swanwick, etc.,

with a thoughtful introduction by the long-silent Mr Miller.

Eric at the End of Time by Michael Moorcock (Dragon's World, £12.95 hc, £7.95 pb). This large-format edition of MM's 1981 novella is illustrated by Rodney Matthews – some of the best work we've seen from him.

Inverted World by Christopher Priest, **Flowers for Algernon** by Daniel Keyes, **Journey Beyond Tomorrow** by Robert Sheckley, and **Dangerous Visions** ed. Harlan Ellison (Gollancz, £3.50 each, the last at £6.95). Volumes 13 to 16 in the Gollancz Classic SF series. These maintain the publisher's high standard, with the one-volume reprint of Ellison's huge anthology making a worthwhile departure from the format.

The Planet on the Table by Kim Stanley Robinson (Futura, £2.95). Fine first collection from the highly-praised Mr Robinson. Contains the notable Hiroshima story "The Lucky Strike".

The Ragged Astronauts by Bob Shaw (Futura, £2.95). Good adventure, reviewed by John Clute in *IZ* 17.

Green Eyes by Lucius Shepard (Grafton, £2.95). We recommended it in *IZ* 16.

The Marathon Photograph by Clifford D. Simak (Methuen, £2.50). Four long stories, with an introduction by F. Lyall. Latter-day Simak but good.

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons (Headline, £2.95). Horror novel with Indian setting. Winner of 1986 World Fantasy Award.

Slow Birds by Ian Watson (Grafton, £2.50). Watson's collection-before-last, now out in paperback.

Limbo by Bernard Wolfe (Carroll & Graf, \$4.95). 400-page dystopian masterpiece, in print for the first time in over twenty years.

Others:

The Alternate Asimovs by Isaac Asimov (Grafton, £3.50). A barrel-scraping exercise from the Asimov industry – "the original unpublished versions" of some of his well-known 1950s sf.

Cosmic Knights and Giants ed. Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh (Robinson, £2.95 each). Two anthologies in the "Asimov's Magical World of Fantasy" series. Authors range from Kenneth Grahame ("The Reluctant Dragon") to Darrell Schweitzer ("Divers Hands"), but it's mostly old stuff.

Foundation and Earth by Isaac Asimov (Grafton, £3.50). Needs no recommendation to Asimov fans.

The Stone and the Flute by Hans Berrmann (Penguin, £4.95). 855-page fantasy epic translated from the German. The opening pages seem a trifle flat and colourless, but no doubt it builds...

Warrior Woman by Marion Zimmer Bradley (Arrow, £2.50). Another "Darkover" novel, but a slim one this time.

The River of Time by David Brin (Bantam, £2.50). Solid first collection from one of the most successful of the newer American writers.

The Shift Key by John Brunner (Methuen, £2.50). Fantastic mystery of the homely British sort.

A Place Among the Fallen by Adrian Cole (Unwin, £2.95). "Book One of the Omran Saga." Heroic fantasy, reviewed by Ken Brown in *IZ* 17.

The Forever Man by Gordon R. Dickson (Sphere, £3.50). Reviewed by John Clute in *IZ* 18 – he described it as "just about 200 pages too much of a perfectly good thing."

Darkside by Dennis Etchison (Futura, £2.50). Competent horror.

The Pet by Charles L. Grant (Futura, £2.95). Chunky horror novel.

Shadows ed. Charles L. Grant (Headline, £2.50). First published in the US as *Shadows 4*, 1981. This one has stories by King, Campbell, Lee, Tuttle et al.

Bloodworm by John Halkin (Arrow, £1.95). London is eaten by giant pink worms.

Winter in Eden by Harry Harrison (Grafton, £3.50). Sequel to *West of Eden*. Ingenious saga of heroic men and villainous dinosaurs.

The Ivanhoe Gambit by Simon Hawke (Headline, £2.50). First of an adventure series in which time-travellers impersonate famous fictional characters.

Eye Among the Blind by Robert Holdstock (VG/SF, £2.50). The author's first novel (1976) here reprinted.

The Stalking and The Ghostance by Robert Holdstock "writing as Robert Falcon" (Century Hutchinson, £11.95 each). Four horror novels in two volumes (they were paperback originals in 1983-84). Vigorous entertainment.

The Labyrinth by "Robert Falcon" (Arrow, £2.50). "The terrifying conclusion to the Nighthunter series."

The Bachman Books by Stephen King (NEL, £4.95). Four books in one. Mostly early, reject King novels, tending more to sf than horror.

The Forgotten Beasts of Eld by Patricia A. McKillip (Futura, £2.50). Attractive fantasy – its author's first (from 1974).

I am Legend by Richard Matheson (Robinson, £2.95). Sf novel about vampirism. A minor classic from 1954.

The Swords of Corum by Michael Moorcock (Grafton, £2.95). Collects the three "Swords" fantasies (Knight, Queen and King) from the early 1970s.

The Smoke Ring by Larry Niven (Macdonald, £11.95). Sequel to *The Integral Trees* – a standard slab of Niven fiction.

The Orbit Poster Book (Futura, £6.95). Large 11½ by 17½ inches) compilation of Futura cover paintings, by Ian Miller, John Harris, Tony Roberts, Peter Goodfellow, Mike van Houten and others.

In Yana, the Touch of Undying by Michael Shea (Grafton, £3.50). Humorous, Vancian fantasy by the author of *Niffit the Lean*.

Finishing Touches by Thomas Tessier (Grafton, £2.95). Horror novel which comes with high recommendations from Ramsey Campbell and Peter Straub, who should know.

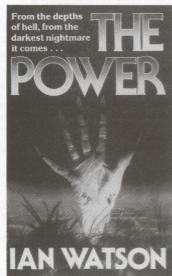
Fade-Out by Patrick Tilley (Grafton, £3.50). Revised edition of "the most compelling novel of the unknown ever written" (which seems a tall claim on the publisher's part).

The Lost Road and Other Writings by J.R.R. Tolkien (Unwin Hyman, £16.95). Being the fifth volume of "The History of Middle-Earth," edited by Christopher Tolkien. Exhaustive (and exhausting) stuff for completists.

Kingdom of Fear: The World of Stephen King ed. Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller (NEL, £2.50). Non-fiction, critical essays aimed at a mass audience.

Welcome, Chaos by Kate Wilhelm (Arrow, £2.95). Intelligent, painstaking sf, first published 1983.

The Dream by H.G. Wells (Hogarth Press, £5.95). Quality-paperback edition of one of Wells's late scientific romances with an introduction by Brian Aldiss.



Cover (artist uncredited) for Ian Watson's brand-new nuclear horror novel, *The Power* (Headline, £2.50)

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

I entirely agree with the suggestion that *Interzone* should feature shorter reviews. Far too much space is being devoted to this secondary activity in what is supposed to be a magazine of imaginative fiction. I have just done a rough calculation, based on column inches, of the amount of space set aside for reviews. Are you aware that something in excess of eight thousand words of reviews, including those of films, are contained in issue 20? How many stories could you get into that space? There is room for one long piece, or two to three shorts. God knows, there is little enough short fiction being published professionally in this country.

It has been suggested that only in longer reviews is it possible to achieve a balanced view. The fact is that the longer a review is, the more likely we are to be subjected to the reviewer's personal opinions. I realize that I am probably in a minority here, but I read reviews for information, not opinions. All we actually need is a dozen lines or so, giving the prospective reader a rough idea of what to expect from the book. We do not need essays. We do not need to know that a given book is at variance with the reviewer's political opinions. Good reviewing ought to be impartial. In reading the reviews of *O-Zone*, *Eclipse* and *The Postman*, I learnt more about Lee Montgomery's world view than I did about the books. John Clute's put-down of *Consider Phlebas* only makes sense if one concludes that a serious attempt was being made to destroy the book by holding it up to ridicule. And how disappointing it must have been for Iain Banks and his fans to see his first sf novel shredded in the same issue that his first sf short story is published. The general tenor of most of the reviews appears to be to make people feel bad about reading these books. This is insulting to both readers and authors.

The simple fact is that there are as many opinions as there are readers. Why should a serious magazine, devoted to the furtherance of modern fiction, waste valuable space on something which only detracts from this aim?

Stuart Falconer
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Lee Montgomery the impartial Letters editor responds: In response to popular demand, *Lee Montgomery* the opinionated book reviewer has been taken out and shot. Unfortunately, at the moment that the trigger was pulled, she dissociated into the two opposing components that corres-

pondents identified – the positive Lee who "should stop being such a soft touch, and learn to speak sternly when stern speaking is called for," and the negative anti-Lee who "can't bring herself to offer any but the most qualified praise of anything" – and the bullet passed between the two of them.

So readers have as many differing perceptions of reviews as reviewers have of books. But so what? As one correspondent puts it: "I have almost never agreed with a *Lee Montgomery* review, and that's fine. What good does it do me to read a review I agree with?" Or as another says: "I can allow for the prejudices of the reviewers." Anything which is irrelevant, such as protecting an author's ego, is just going to get in the way.

Dear Editors:

It's about time somebody praised Nick Lowe for his stylish film reviews. "Mutant Popcorn" is at its best in his capable hands. His comments are always witty and informative, such that I can enjoy them even on those occasions when I disagree with him. Living in a cultural dead zone, I can't always get to see the films he recommends (ah, but the number of times I have re-read a review of a bad film and wished I had listened...)

Above all, Nick should be congratulated for keeping his optimism alive in the face of the film industry – a remarkable achievement. In fact, optimism in the face of adversity is very much the flavour of *Interzone* itself.

Simon Paul Nicholson
Berkshire

Dear Editors:

I'm really beginning to feel that *IZ* no longer has even a pretension to being any kind of "new thing" in sf... it seems that a certain inertia has slowed you down and made your footsteps sluggish and your vision dim, clamping you to the familiar plates of the old sf ship. I originally got into *IZ* because I thought you were going to expose the rich fields of cultural ramifications implicit in the wonderful new ways and means being developed in modern experience of philosophical science, therapeutical philosophy, scientific and technical discovery and all the cross-fertilizing cultures of our modern times, not the least of which is non-denominational writing! You know, fictive creativity.

I remember reading a review of *The White Hotel* by D.M. Thomas in an early issue, and although I had already read it, I was grateful to read a review, and know that *IZ* would help me to discover new and stimulating, intelligent literature. Well, it's been a long time since you've reviewed anything which isn't pretty definitely a genre

work! And yet, there is so much modern literature which deals with the deep places of the mind/society interface, the true "interzone" which has been called inner space by one of your mentors: J.G. Ballard. *Empire of the Sun* was the quintessential Ballard, and in some respects classical sf, and yet the nongener public didn't even notice! Why? Because modern fiction often deals with subjects that should be addressed by truly modern sf. There's a lot of rubbish in the shops, after all, and pandering to the taste of people who think sf is all about laser guns and space cadets (or worse still, sexist violence - horror is not sf) as the cover of *IZ 20* suggests you might slip into, is no way to succeed - is it?

Syd Foster
West Glamorgan

Dear Editors:

By some strange coincidence, I not only received *IZ 20* with the Rudy Rucker interview, but simultaneously Rucker's new anthology *Mathenauts*. This brought home to me the fact that stories dealing with science itself are curiously absent from your magazine. Even a supposedly "hard" sf story like Benford's "As Big as the Ritz" does not really concern itself with science. The colony near the black hole and the huge diamond are just gadgets; Benford needed a place isolated from the rest of humanity; in my opinion he could just as well have chosen an island in the Pacific. It is the social experiment Benford is interested in, the space colony is routinely thrown in to make an overlong and rather boring story look exotic.

When I say "hard science," I am looking for stories that really stretch your mind. Stories in the tradition of Abbott's *Flatland*. These tales are, as Rucker remarks in his foreword, extremely difficult to write and don't come around very often. I am also afraid most readers won't be terribly interested. But since you ran stories in the past that thoroughly disgusted the majority of your readers ("Tissue Ablation" comes to my mind), I think there should be room in *IZ* for a truly "hard" story once in a while.

Wolfhard Zahlten
West Germany

LM: Well, as you say, they don't come round very often. Any that do arrive through our letterbox will always be very sympathetically looked at.

Dear Editors:

As a reader of *IZ* and a writer whose work has appeared there, I'd like to respond to the letters I keep reading squealing in outrage at the doom and gloom *IZ* is supposedly forcing on a defenceless public. Eric Savory's letter in *IZ 20* was typical. He complains

about authors focusing on "the negative aspects of decay, sexual perversion, hopelessness, horror, lack of communication, etc." (As opposed to the positive aspects of these things?) He then goes on to say, "If this is meant to be a sad reflection of modern humanity it should be left to writers of conventional fiction. Surely, one of the main tasks of sf and fantasy is to be visionary, revealing alternative goals with positivity and optimism." What these two sentences seem to reveal is that what Savory (and many of the other letter writers) really want is the "sense of wonder" that sf can provide, only he would like it divorced from any real context. In other words, what he wants is escapism.

The fact is, one of the main reasons much of the world continues to think of sf as some kind of sub-literate gummy bear for cretinous teenyboppers is exactly because of this escapist paradigm: readers and writers seem to want to play in a boffo future full of blinking lights and glowing fibre optics and rockets blasting across the sky but don't want to know about the bugs and rats that have secreted themselves in the rocket's hold, shitting and dying right there next to the food processors. This precious image of the future isn't visionary, it's the same lame adolescent power fantasy sf has been reworking for the last fifty years. For Mr Savory's information, the world is decaying, is host to various perversions, horrors, feelings of hopelessness, lack of communication, etc. These are many of the things that the future will be built on because they are part of ourselves and our world. The real world.

What I think most of those who accuse *IZ* of gloom and doom are really expressing is their fear of a rapidly changing world; a world they can't control; a complex world that is reflected in the works of many of *IZ*'s writers. Masses of people are terrified by what they perceive to be creeping dehumanization. The fact is, folks, dehumanization is like digital tape recorders, AIDS and those little wrinkles working their way into the flesh around your eyes: it is inevitable. The questions of the future will not revolve around how to keep from being dehumanized, but what we will look like when we get there. It's important to remember that "dehumanization" just means a change in what we perceive a human being to be. If you substitute the word "evolution" for "dehumanization" you might get a better glimpse of the future. Evolution did not come to a reverent halt with the opposable thumb. Evolution is growth, and growth is a painful and frightening process. It is also necessary. Escapism is just the mutant brother-in-law of

of nostalgia, a neurotic desire for that home you never had, that mythical safehouse where everything was easy and nice. Life is not easy and nice. Writers write about life or they write about nothing at all. Alison Lurie set a challenge for every writer when she said, "If all that will remain of life is what writers report of it, then we have no right to report what we know to be lies." I believe this is a point of view shared by most of the writers you'll see in this magazine.

Richard Kadrey
San Francisco

Dear Editors:

Your "News" column quotes Dave Langford as quoting Avedon Carol as reporting that "the two biggest book sellers in the US" are refusing to publish any more new books by Samuel R. Delany, because "He's writing gay content now," and that one also refuses now to stock Tanith Lee or Barbara Hambly for the "same alleged reason." As little as I care to defend B. Dalton and Waldenbooks (our equivalents of W.H. Smith), the charge crumbles under internal evidence alone, whether or not *Interzone's* or *Ansible's* editors cared to attempt to verify it.

Counting the nested sets of quotation marks, one sees that the actual charge is not Langford's or Carol's words, but someone Carol is quoting, without attribution. Is it an actual quotation, or a dramatization of what Carol asserts that unnamed executives are thinking? Carol in fact seems to be writing sloppily on other grounds: if a bookseller claims it is refusing to stock a book because of its "gay content," that would be almost certainly the real, not the "alleged" reason.

Three years after Delany's last major novel (*Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*) and some months before the appearance of its sequel (whose announcement precipitated Carol's charge) seems not a likely time to impose such a ban, especially since *Stars in My Pocket*, whose "gay content" was as pronounced as sf has yet seen, was stocked without demur and remains available at both stores in my town as of yesterday. The reader who remembers the opening chapter of *Dhalgren*, moreover, knows that rather stark portrayals of homosexual relations have been appearing in Delany's novels for a dozen years. All of Delany's (very popular) novels published since *Dhalgren*, as well as several copies of both Tanith Lee's and Barbara Hambly's novels, are available at my local Waldenbooks and B. Dalton's, which means they are available at all of them everywhere. They also, I feel compelled to add, had *Spycatcher*.

Gregory Feeley
New Haven, Conn.

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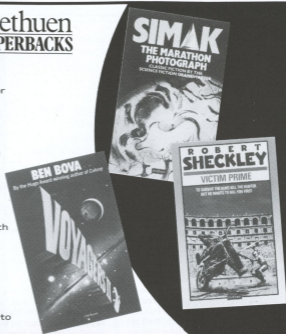
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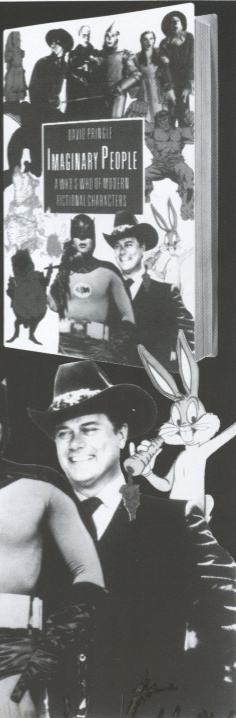
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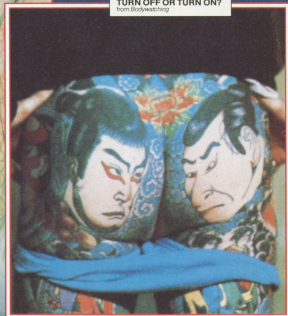
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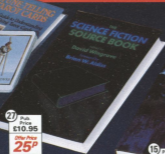
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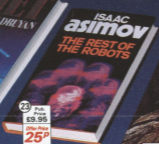
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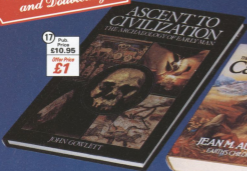


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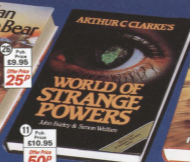
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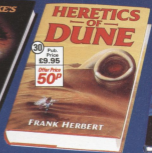
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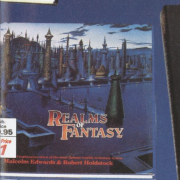


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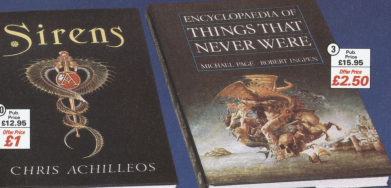


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