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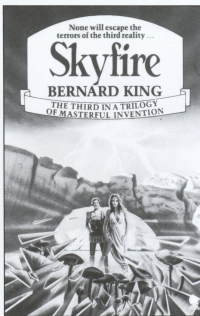
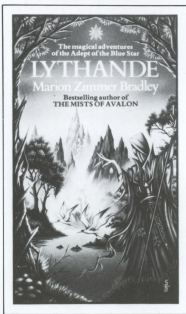
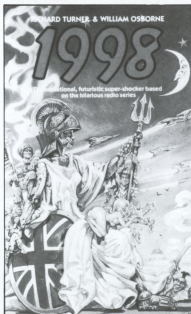
SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

**New stories by Brian Stableford, Phillip Mann
Karen Joy Fowler and Eric Brown**

**Thomas M. Disch interview
Charles Platt on the state of Britain**



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interzone

No 24 Summer 1988

EDITORIAL

This seems to be a good time, perhaps the best in a decade or two, to be a new writer of science fiction and fantasy. For a long time, *Interzone* has been just about the only paying market for short stories in this country. Now we have some competition in the shape of Unwin Hyman's annual *New Edens* anthology and several one-off collections. Other publishers seem increasingly eager to add original anthologies to their lists, so perhaps there are more to come.

We're not losing any sleep over this. It's a situation that's good for sf and fantasy in this country and what's good for that is good for IZ. Simon & Schuster (UK) have already offered to publish two further IZ anthologies and the magazine itself is looking healthier all the time. In the last two years, we've doubled our subscriptions and from next issue we'll be going bi-monthly. At the moment, we have a backlog of stories to publish, but our new schedule should soon get those into print and leave us eager for more good material. What's so encouraging, and what has prompted our change to a bi-monthly schedule, is that an increasing amount of good material is there to be found. And much of it is coming from new writers.

Susan Beeston, Johnny Black, Keith Brooke, Andrew Ferguson, Nicola Griffith, Lyle Hopwood, Marianne Puxley, William King... these are just some of the new British writers we'll be introducing to you over the next year, joining recent newcomers like Eric Brown and Charles Stross in our pages. Maybe it's a bit early to talk about a new wave of British writers but it's good that so many new names, perhaps inspired by the presence of IZ as a potential market over the past six years, perhaps by the recent growth in markets or by some other, less obvious, aspect of contemporary Britain, are coming up with the goods.

We believe that IZ has a vital role to play in giving opportunities to these writers. Or, to put it more grandly, in nurturing the fiction of the twenty-first century.

As John Clute observed in last issue's book-review section, genre distinctions are becoming blurred. Many mainstream writers are producing work which is really sf — Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a celebrated example — while "magic realism," in which fantasy is permitted access in the form of surrealistic overtones to the real world, has become a feature of much mainstream fiction. None of this is really surprising when we can turn on a news broadcast, right here in everyday life, and discover that minor offenders may henceforth be imprisoned in their own homes by means of electronic bracelets, or that genetic engineering has progressed so far that the government has thought it necessary to make cloning illegal. Perhaps, after all, genre labelling will eventually disappear, not because of the desire of sf and fantasy writers to break out of the ghetto or because of some new-fangled marketing ploy, but because the world will have changed so radically — progressed so far into our image of the future — that such labels will be rendered meaningless.

For the moment, for all the blurred edges, the labels remain, and IZ wears its "science fiction and fantasy" subtitle proudly. It puts us at the forefront of the search for writing which will show us where the human race is heading, focusing the attention of our writers and readers on those forces upon our existence which seem most fantastic, most likely to reshape our society and our worldview. For it is these forces which may shape our lives — and our literature — in the century to come.

Simon Ounsley

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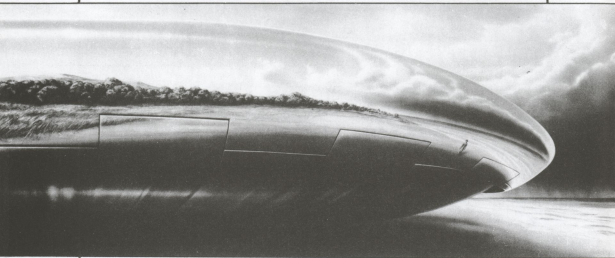
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Brian Stableford

The Growth of the House of Usher

It was a dull, dark and soundless day on which I approached by motor-boat the house which my friend Rowland Usher had built in the loneliest spot he could find, in the southern region of the Orinoco delta. There are plenty of lonely spots to be found there nowadays, after a century and a half of changing sea levels due to the greenhouse effect.

The edifice which Rowland was raising from the silt of that great stagnant swamp was like nothing I had ever seen before, and I am morally certain that it was the strangest dwelling ever planned in the imagination of man. It loomed out of the swamp like a black mountain, without an angle anywhere, and with no windows (though that is the fashion in modern times). Near its crown there were soft crenellations, mere suggestions of battlements, and a number of projections that might have been balconies, but the whole seemed to me languidly shapeless.

Exactly to what extent he had been inspired by the coincidence of nomenclature that linked him with the famous story by Edgar Allan Poe I do not know, but there is surely some sense in which one of the true architects of that remarkable tower was a long-dead nineteenth-century fantasist, even though the other was a twenty-second century civil engineer. Rowland had always wanted to erect a House of Usher that could not and would not fall into ruin.

I was not sure, either, of the extent to which the letter summoning me here – which gave every evidence of nervous agitation and spoke of “mental disorder” – might be construed as a kind of satire on Poe. I had never thought of Rowland as a joker, but I could not entirely believe that his protestations were serious. I obeyed his summons, of course, but I was uncertain what to expect.

I had first met Rowland Usher at college, where we studied civil engineering together. We were partners in practical classes, and we became adept together in the deployment of the Gantz bacteria which are used

in modern cementation processes. These engineered bacteria, which can be adapted to almost any kind of raw materials, had already wrought their first revolution, and were helping to transform whole vast areas of land where it had been impossible to build in the past: deserts, steppes and bare mountains alike. While the ecological engineers were transforming the world's environments, Gantz-inspired structural engineers were building entire new cities for people whose ancestors had never known adequate shelter: thanks to Leon Gantz, there need be no more mud huts – great palaces could be raised from any kind of dirt, whether mud, or sand, or shale.

Rowland and I had been fired with a similar sense of mission, determined to use the tools which our education provided to their very best purpose, to play our part in a Utopian remaking of the world, which would save it from its multiple crisis. We had shared a sense of vision and an ambition which many of our fellows lacked, and this brought us closer together. We both became increasingly interested in the techniques of genetic engineering involved in the manufacture of Gantz bacteria, and dreamed of imparting new powers to these living instruments, which would equip them to perform more astounding miracles.

Pioneers in our field were even then experimenting with living systems integrated into the walls of Gantz-ized structures, so that houses could put down tap roots into the ground on which they stood, to secure their own water-supplies. Living systems for the disposal of human wastes had been in use for some time, and ingenious engineers were trying to adapt these systems to the production of useful materials. These were the kinds of projects which had seized our imaginations, and we often collaborated on the design of imaginary living dwellings which would serve every human purpose.

As I approached the remarkable house which Rowland had built for himself, I could not help but recall these flights of fancy, and I wondered how much progress his genius had made. The castles in the air which I had built had been without exception edifices of considerable beauty and profound charm. No one could say that about the thing which Rowland had elevated from the silt of this great swamp, which retained the blackness of that silt and possessed an outward form that reminded me of nothing so much as one of the great termite mounds I had seen in southern Africa, where I had been working in recent years. The walls seemed slightly less than solid, as though capable of a certain sluggish protoplasmic flow, and this appearance gave me an uneasy feeling as I came to the threshold, recalling to my mind the story of Jonah who was swallowed by a whale.

Rowland met me at the open door and greeted me with enthusiasm. He conducted me through black, smooth-walled corridors which curved eccentrically into the bowels of the house, to a study where he obviously spent much of his time – there were three telescreens, a well-stocked disc library of miscellaneous publications, an integrated sound system and two well-worn sofas. The chamber was lighted by artificial bioluminescence, which was oddly ruddy and subdued.

A pot of China tea was waiting for me, timed to perfection, and we sat together drinking from small cups, exchanging platitudes. I had not seen Rowland for more than seven years, thanks to the reclusive habits which kept him apart from human society. I had expected to find him changed, but in spite of his letter I was surprised by the difference in him. He was very thin and pale, and his hair was quite white. His voice was uncertain, sometimes stumbling over simple sentences, and he gave the impression of slight intoxication, though there was no wine to be seen in the room.

I asked him if he was ill, and he confirmed that he was. Even the most modern diagnostic computers had failed to identify the biochemistry of its cause, despite the most comprehensive sampling and analysis of his bodily fluids. He was continually in touch, electronically, with the medical research foundation at Harvard.

"You need have no fear for yourself," he assured me. "This is no virus, or other infection; the fault is integral. This is the same malady which destroyed my father, and my sister Magdalen; somehow, it is in our genes. It seems strange that in this age when we have won such command over the formative powers of DNA, that the cunning double helix should still harbour mysteries, but it does. We have not entirely conquered those inner blights and pestilences which rot the very core of our being."

I inferred from this rather florid speech that Rowland was suffering from some exotic form of cancer, associated with a heritable chromosomal abnormality.

"Your sister died of this same illness?" I remarked.

He favoured me, as he answered, with a peculiar smile. "Oh yes," he said. "Many years ago, before I knew you at college. She was seventeen years old – she was born a year before me. The disease afflicts

females more severely than males; my father lived to be forty, and I am now forty-seven. My grandfather's sister – the last female sufferer I have been able to identify – died at nineteen. You will readily understand why the disease is inherited through the male line. It is an Usher complaint, like the one which afflicted my famous namesake. Did I not know he were a fiction, I would suspect a line of actual descent."

I think I might have been alarmed if Rowland had told me that his sister were still alive, and had I seen her flitting ethereally through the apartment just then. This would have been one parallel too many for my tired mind to bear. As it was, though, I laughed politely.

"With Harvard on your side," I said, "there must be hope of a cure."

"No," he replied. "I do not hope for a cure, but merely an understanding. Modern medicine has helped me to ameliorate the symptoms of my condition, but having failed precisely to identify its biochemical nature, there is no hope of permanent remission. Its origin is in the brain, which is the least understood of all the organs – perhaps the last great mystery, in this our new Age of Enlightenment. You will have noticed that my speech is affected, and my sight too – which is why, I fear, the lighting here will seem a little eerie to your eyes. The mental disorder of which I spoke in my letter is increasingly perceptible, and I know that my working days are almost over. That is why I asked you to come to me – I want to explain to you what it is that I have been doing all these years, in my solitude, while you have been helping the poor in Africa.

"I want you to get to know my house, to understand what I have achieved here. I want you, in brief, to be the executor of my will. My personal possessions are worthless, but my additions to the sum of human knowledge and creativity are not. I leave everything to mankind in general, for the joy and benefit of all future generations – and you, my old friend, must convey my legacy to those heirs. There are full records of my data here, of course, but you know as well as I that the world is laden down beyond endurance with stored data, and that knowledge needs human champions if it is to be properly disseminated and developed."

I told him that I understood (though in truth I was not entirely sure that I did) and gave him my most earnest promise that I would try to do as he wished. He was delighted by this response, but his enthusiasm seemed suddenly to weaken him, and when we dined he ate almost nothing. Soon afterwards he begged leave to desert me, and after showing me to my bedroom he left me alone, begging me to make full use of the facilities of the house and apologizing profusely for not being able to give me a more thorough introduction to them.

Because the room had no window I could not ascertain whether the threatened storm had begun, but when I lay silently in my bed I thought that I could perceive a vibration in the dull, warm walls that might have been an echo of lashing rain and howling wind – or which might, instead, have been some mysterious internal process at work within the living fabric of the fabulous structure. After a time I found it strangely comforting, as if it were a subliminal lullaby, and I

was carried off by it into peaceful sleep.

When I awoke the next day Rowland seemed better, and we breakfasted together. He told me, though, that he did not feel well enough to guide me about the house. He promised that he would show me its wonders at a later date, and offered instead to tell me something of the researches which had led to its construction, and which formed the substance of his intellectual legacy.

"You may recall from discussions we had nearly a quarter of a century ago," he said, "that I was always impatient with the traditional Gantz techniques which were in common use in our youth, and which we were expected to learn in a more-or-less slavish fashion in the course of our education in civil engineering.

"One of my chief interests – which we shared, I think – was the possibility of integrating better artificial living systems into the structure of buildings. It will not be long now, I am sure, before biotechnologists develop methods of artificial photosynthesis, and truly sophisticated living dwellings will not come into being until then. Houses will one day be living machines harvesting the energy of the sun as plants do. My house simulates, by necessity, a more primitive kind of organism: a lowly scavenger which draws its energy from the organic detritus of the silt out of which it is constructed. It is no more sophisticated than many sedentary creatures which live in shallow seas, filtering food from the murky waters which overflow them. Its closest analogues, if you wish to think in such terms, are coral polyps, barnacles and tubeworms. Nevertheless, however primitive it is, it lives and it grows. The Orinoco feeds it with all manner of decayed vegetable matter via the network of filters which extend from the foundations.

"You will probably remember another of my fascinations, which is similarly embodied in this house. Ordinary Gantz processes involve the use of inert moulds – the cementing organisms simply bind the material brought to them, and the architect controls the shape of what they produce by crude mechanical means. I was always impressed, though, by the way that living organisms adapt themselves to the construction of complicated edifices: the nests of wasps and termites, of bower-birds and ovenbirds; the supporting structures of corals; the astonishing forms of flowering plants and trees. I designed this house, therefore, by programming into the genes of its micro-organic creators the kind of structure it should be.

"Its main structure is, of course, built primarily from non-living tissue, like the xylem of a tree or the shell of a mollusc, but that structure retains its connections with living cells, and is formed more-or-less precisely by the pattern of their activity."

"The house, then, is really a gargantuan living organism," I observed.

"Not strictly speaking," he corrected me. "Its builders are micro-organisms, which associate and collaborate like the members of a beehive or the individual cells in a slime-mould. If it is to be seen as a single entity, then it is a colony – a colony of trillions of quasi-bacterial cells. In adapting it for habitation, though, I do have cause to use other engineered organisms, which might be regarded as symbiotes of



Illustrations by Duncan Fegredo

the elementary cells. The structure is naturally honeycombed by tunnels and chambers, but the precise design of the corridors and the rooms – not to mention the various connecting conduits which carry water, electricity and optical fibres – requires supplementary work."

Such work in ordinary Gantzed structures tends to be carried out by de-cementing bacteria whose work is precisely the opposite of the cementers, but from Rowland's reference to "other engineered organisms" I inferred that he was using "worms" more akin to the artificial organisms used to pulverize rocks like granite and basalt. Most such organisms are, though vermiform, not really worms – most are the larvae of insects, akin to "woodworm", these frequently being equipped with jaws and rasps powerful enough to cope with stone and metal.

"I have always been interested in insect larvae," he explained, when I asked him to elaborate. "They have in them so much potential – the phenomenon of metamorphosis has always fascinated me."

This was an interesting sideline to the discussion, and I pursued it. "None of the larvae which are conventionally used to tunnel through rock are capable of metamorphosis," I said. "They are of such a size that the insects which would emerge from their pupae would be inviable giants – incapable of breathing or of locomotion."

"That is because Gantzian engineers have not been interested in the genes which the larvae will only switch on during and after metamorphosis," Rowland told me. "They have made only feeble efforts to modify such genes, and the giant insects they have managed to produce are mere grotesques. No one has tried to explore fully the real metamorphic potential of these larvae. Crudely utilitarian research into rock-breaking organisms can do no more than scratch the surface."

"But you have gone further?"

"I have... taken an interest. The humble servants which help to hollow out my rooms have been my only companions for many years, and I have used them in certain unorthodox experiments quite unconnected with their more obvious purpose."

I could see that this was a point upon which Rowland was, as yet, unwilling to elaborate. He seemed very tired and strained.

"Would it not be a good idea," I asked, "if we were to return together, however briefly, to the United States? I know you are in touch with medical researchers there, and can transmit information gleaned from analysis of your blood and other fluids, but if you are suffering from a tumour in the brain, you surely need a sophisticated scan, which must be beyond the capacity of your own facilities."

"Although my illness has its origins in the brain," he told me, "it is not a localized tumour. It is some kind of genetic defect which is capable of affecting all the cells, and will eventually affect enough of them to kill me, as it killed my sister. The researchers at Harvard have quite enough samples of my cells – and, for that matter, my sister's cells – in their freezers to allow them to continue examining the chromosomes for many years. Eventually, I feel sure, they will map and identify the anomaly, though by then the knowledge may be redundant as the last known sufferer

will be dead – I shall leave no children of my own.

"I hope that the work done on my cells after I am dead will serve to pave the way for their successful treatment and cure. I have been doing my own research, too, using the apparatus that permits me to engineer my bacteria and my worms, to do what I can to study my own chromosomes. I have my own cryonic chambers, and my own tissue-cultures – my father made the first contribution to my stocks before he died."

"I wonder that you have not devoted your life to that research," I said, "instead of spending so much time on your other project."

"Ah!" he said. "My other project will assure me something worth far more than an extended lifespan – it will provide a kind of immortality. Even had I succeeded in curing myself I would have died after seventy or eighty years, but this house will live for centuries, perhaps for millennia. The Usher family will die out with me, but the House of Usher will continue to grow for many generations, and will be one of the wonders of this world when your descendants have built new worlds around distant stars. You see, my friend, that I have lost none of that Romantic imagination which drew you to me all those years ago!"

Indeed he had not, and as we talked further he waxed rhapsodic on the subject of the futures that were already nascent in the genetic technologies of the present day, his inventiveness vaulting across the centuries with talk of the miracles that godlike genetic engineers of the far future would work.

"It is not for you and I to see such things," he told me, after some while, "but your grandchildren will come into a world that will discover how to offer them immortality, and they will see the world transformed in ways we can hardly imagine. I will have my monument then, as Khufu has his – one of the last and greatest achievements of mortal mankind. We are members of one of the last generations to need tombs, my friend, and I intend that my sister and I shall have one of the very finest!"

His speech was becoming slurred and his tone was feverishly excited. I knew that his illness was taking hold of him, and I made every effort to calm him. In the afternoon, though, he had to leave me again, and I dined that evening alone.

The hours before I retired to my bed I spent in reading, but I was not tempted to begin the work of making my way through the discs which contained the long record of Rowland Usher's experiments. Instead, I sought solace in more familiar works – in the poetry of Blake and Byron, and (how could I avoid it?) Edgar Allan Poe. I say solace, but I really mean distraction, because the more time I spent in my tiny apartment deep in the heart of that utterly strange house, the more uneasy I began to feel about my virtual captivity. I did not like to be so cut off from the world outside and the sound of the everpresent murmur in the smooth, warm walls that surrounded me no longer seemed quite so comforting.

When I finally went to my bed I had a turbulent night, full of vague nightmares in which the imagery of Poe's poems mingled with the dreams and achievements of Rowland Usher. Conqueror worms continually triumphed in an uncertain tragedy, from whose

toils I could not escape until I woke in a cold sweat, many hours before morning.

My nightmare had had such a profound effect on me that I did not like to close my eyes again for fear of its return. I reached out to activate the bioluminescent strips that would light my room, threw back the quilt and rose unsteadily to my feet. I went to the sink on the far side of the chamber, and obtained a cup of water.

No sooner had I taken a sip than my attention was caught by a sound in the corridor outside. Though there was nothing sinister in the sound itself, I had not yet escaped the effects of my evil dream, and it drew from me a gasp of pure terror.

I knew, at the level of reason, that I ought not to be afraid, and I forced myself to go to the door and open it. Such was my state of mind, though, that it was only by the merest crack that I pulled it ajar, and as I peeped out into the corridor my heart was pounding in my breast.

The corridor was not quite dark, though its bioluminescence was considerably toned down, so that what remained was a faint bluish radiance. Because the corridor curved I could see only a few metres in either direction, and could see only one other door – that of Rowland Usher's bedroom.

That door too seemed to be ajar, but there was darkness within. Moving away from the door, though – just disappearing from sight around the gentle angle of the tunnel – was a human figure. I caught no more of the merest glimpse of it, but I had the distinct impression that it was a young female, perhaps fourteen or fifteen years of age. She was quite naked.

The idea that this was Rowland's sister Magdalen, somehow risen from the dead, sprang into my mind, provoked by my dream even though I knew full well that it could not be. The power of the thought, even as I fought to dispel it, was sufficient to make me close my door again, and I found to my disgust that I was actually trembling. I – a scientist of the twenty-second century – was infected by the morbidity of the Gothic Imagination! I cursed Rowland Usher and his absurd terminology of a house, and resolved to demand an explanation in the morning.

When morning came, though, the matter seemed far less urgent to me. I had slept again, more restfully, and when I awoke at the proper time my experience in the corridor seemed rather to belong to the realm of my nightmare than to the realm of reality. I honestly could not tell whether or not it had been part of my dream, and even though the cup from which I drank was still on the side of the sink, I could not take seriously what I thought I had seen. Perhaps I simply did not want to.

In any case, I asked no questions of Rowland over breakfast regarding the possibility of his being haunted by the ghost of his sister.

That day, Rowland felt well enough to conduct me on a tour of his abode, and so we set forth into its amazing winding corridors. He showed me several other guest-rooms – none of which showed the slightest sign of ever having been inhabited – and several storerooms, some of them crammed with collections of objects which he had obviously inherited

from past generations, as well as hoards of his own.

There were many antique books, some with acid-rotten pages that should have decayed a century ago, some even dating back to the nineteenth century. There was a collection of minerals, one of medical specimens, one of ancient navigational instruments, and a particularly quaint assembly of display screens and keyboards from the early days of information technology. I asked if these devices were in working order, but Rowland simply shrugged his shoulders; he did not know.

When we descended into the lower strata of the house I found things much more coherently organized, and there were clearly many rooms in active use. First he showed me the laboratories where he conducted his experiments in genetic analysis and his transformations of Gantzing bacteria. His equipment was reasonably modern, though no private individual, however rich, can possibly keep up with the larger research institutions.

His fermenters, where his bacterial cultures grew, were built into the fabric of the house, and it was not until he told me their cubic capacity that I realized how much of the house was hidden, circled by the spiralling corridors. Clearly, that space was not wasted.

I marvelled that any one man could possibly make use of the extensive laboratory facilities, but he assured me that the high level of automation made it reasonably easy. He had relatively few household robots, regarding the motile varieties as inherently unreliable examples of the mechanician's art, but some routine activities were contracted out to service personnel who operated machines by remote control.

At a lower level still, he showed me other holding tanks, where he kept his many species of burrowing worms. Most species needed special containers of some substance which they could not break up or digest. There were observation-windows which let us look in upon the creatures, though sometimes we could see little enough within because of the difficulties of providing lighting systems immune from their ravages.

Rowland allowed a few species of these worms to live free in the structure of the house, almost as parasites, because they could not damage its structure and performed useful waste-disposal functions as they foraged for food. At first it was disconcerting to come across these creatures at irregular intervals, but I soon got used to it.

"How do you direct the burrowing of the more voracious species?" I asked him. "Surely, any kind of escape would be desperately dangerous – the worms could devour the entire fabric of the house."

"Elementary cyborgization," he told me. "These creatures have little or no brain, and are guided through life by simple behavioural drives. It is a relatively easy matter to fit them with electronic devices which deliver the appropriate commands by electrical or biochemical stimulation. I handle them with great care. They cannot live, of course, on the materials they are designed to tunnel through, and their diets are deliberately exotic. I feed them what they need in order to execute a particular task, and no more. They cannot escape, and could not live wild if they did."

Watching these curious creatures, roaming loose or in their tanks, made me slightly nauseous, though I had often seen their like before. Most were like blowfly maggots – big and soft and white, their body walls so transparent that one could see the organs inside them. Rowland's were the biggest I had ever encountered, a metre and a half in length and at least eighty centimetres in girth. Their internal organs were not themselves coloured, but were wrapped in a webwork of blue and pink. I asked Rowland to explain this, and he told me that he had equipped their circulatory systems with haemoglobin in order to serve the oxygen-needs of their organs; like us these creatures had deoxygenated blue blood in their veins and oxygenated red blood in their arteries.

Some others looked more like elongated centipedes than maggots, being bright yellow in colour and equipped with hundreds of pairs of limbs along the length of their plated bodies. These too were the largest of their kind I had ever encountered, being at least four metres long, though only as thick as a man's wrist. A few of these living machines were, on the other hand, surprisingly small: there were black, hard-skinned creatures that were only a few centimetres from head to tail, though they had vast heads that were almost all jaw. Rowland informed me that these were very difficult to rear because of the enormous amounts of food they had to consume in order to work those massive jaws. In their holding tank, they were virtually submerged in high-protein fluid.

These marvels impressed me tremendously, and we spent many hours in these lower regions. He showed me something of the "roots" which the house extended into the substrate of the swamp, and the apparatus for gathering in organic materials from the silt. He also showed me the biological batteries which produced the house's electricity – which had a potential output, Rowland boasted, equivalent to thirty billion electric eels. Most of this, however, remained inevitably hidden; what could be seen of the house's systems was far less, in metaphorical terms, than the tip of an iceberg. Rowland assured me that there was much more to be seen than could be taken in during a single day. He reeled off statistics in an impressively casual manner, telling me that the biomass of the house was greater than ten thousand elephants, and that it had been a single organism then it would have been the vastest that had ever existed on Earth.

By the time afternoon came, though, he was becoming increasingly tired, and his graphic descriptions began again to diversify into flights of fantasy, in which houses such as this one would gradually replace the plants and animals making up the world's ecosystems, so that in a thousand years the entire ecosphere might consist of nothing but organic artifacts – not merely houses but entire cities – all locked into a carefully symbiotic relationship controlled by men.

In such a world, he hypothesized, sexual reproduction would be the sole prerogative of mankind, everything else in the organic realm being capable only of vegetative growth or of being cloned and transformed by human genetic engineers.

I confess that I did not find this a wholly attractive prophecy (or speculation, for Rowland was talking

of opportunity rather than destiny), but there was something very attractive in the sheer grandiosity of Rowland's ecstatic voyages of the imagination, and the magic of his ideas took a firm grip on me, encouraging my own mind to the contemplation of vistas of future history extending toward infinite horizons.

I joined in, for a while, with his game, and became so carried away that I did not notice for some time that Rowland's condition was becoming desperate, and that he was on the brink of losing his powers of motor co-ordination. He demanded that he should be allowed to show me the upper parts of the house, above our apartments, and uttered dark hints about there being more in the basements than I was yet prepared to imagine, but I had to forbid any further wandering, and in the end I had to support him as we made our way back up to the dining room.

For once, though, dinner seemed to revive Rowland's spirits, and he ate a good meal. After he had rested for a while he was restored sufficiently to conduct a longer conversation than had been possible on the evenings of my first two days as his guest.

He set out to tell me more about the history of his researches, but soon went on to personal matters, including secrets which he had hesitated to share with me when we were intimates in our younger days. In particular, he spoke of Magdalen, and I listened in fascination as he gradually peeled away the layers of inhibition which had hitherto concealed the inner mainsprings of his motivation. He granted me then such an insight into his character as he would surely never have conceded if he had not been certain that he was very close to death.

Alas, he was closer than he knew!

“Magdalen lived always under the shadowy threat of death,” said Rowland, his voice weakening almost to a whisper as the process of recall carried him into a trance-like reverie. “My parents treated her with extraordinary indulgence; she was never sent to school because there seemed little point in trying to secure the kind of education that would be useful only as preparation for a later life which would not be her privilege. Instead, my father educated her himself, after his own theory, trying to equip her to obtain the greatest enjoyment from the years she actually would have. She was a beautiful child, who won the admiration of everyone, and of my father's eccentric tutelage I can say only that it seemed to work magnificently, for she was the happiest being I have ever met.

“Although I was allowed a more conventional schooling, I was also much involved in her life. My father sought to provide her with what he considered to be an ideal companionship; I too was a part of his scheme, though at first I did not know it. As he sought to mould her, so he sought to mould me, to build between the two of us such a bond of affection and community as to make us the lights of one another's lives. Such a uniquely close companionship he considered to be the greatest treasure which any human life is capable of discovering. I have not had cause to disagree with him in the decades through which I have lived since I lost that perfect relationship.

“I am a little sceptical now of my father's motivations. I wonder why, knowing that he was the victim

of a heritable disease, he chose to have children at all. At the time, I thought the way that he took such careful and absolute control over our nurture was a measure of his heroic desperation in trying to save us from a misfortune of fate. Now I suspect that he had children precisely in order to carry out this remarkable experiment, and that we were his guinea-pigs. Nevertheless, I do know that he loved us very dearly indeed, and that the grief which he felt when Magdalen died robbed his life, as it robbed mine, of almost all meaning.

"You see around you the extraordinary lengths to which I have been driven in my attempts to find a meaningful project in which to absorb myself. He never did find another; he lived and died a sad man, save for those years when Magdalen gave him a reason to exercise his unusual powers of creativity. You and I work with the elements of physical heredity, and cannot fully understand the difficulties which attended his work in delicately manipulating the psyche and the environment, but I think you can appreciate what a triumph was his when I say that I wholeheartedly believe that Magdalen's was the most joyful, the most compassionate, the most complete life that I think a human being might live, in spite of – or perhaps because of – its brevity.

"He taught her only those things that might stimulate her sense of beauty and her sense of wonder, to give her the fullest measure of delight in the world where her mayfly existence was to be lived. He controlled all that she saw, and heard, and felt. When I became old enough to understand what was happening, he made me his collaborator instead of his instrument, and toward the end I conspired with him in planning her last few months. We were determined that there should be no joyful aspect of human experience denied to her and we discussed carefully the question of whether it should be he or I that would introduce her to sexual love. Despite the value of his experience in such matters, the responsibility was given to me – old taboos against father/daughter incest still have some power, while brother/sister intercourse is widely accepted, and we were scrupulously respectful of prevailing social attitudes even though we had established for Magdalen a private society in which the world at large could not interfere.

"There is a sense, I think, in which the climax of my life had already passed when you first met me. You found in me a man who felt that he had already finished one life, attempting the impossible in trying to make another. All I can say is that I have done my best, and that I am proud of what I have achieved. I do not regret having become a recluse, separating myself as far as it has been practicable from the society of other men. My memories of Magdalen are far more precious to me than any other relationship with a woman or a man could ever have been.

"I realize that you are bound to think this unusual, but if you are to be the interpreter of my achievement, who must explain to the world the measure of my genius and its productions, then you must try to understand."

Indeed, I did try to understand. He was correct in saying that in our enlightened times we are no longer so fearful of the taboos which preyed upon the consciences of our ancestors. We are no longer horrified by

the idea of incest, so I was not particularly shocked to find out that Rowland had been his sister's lover. Nevertheless, the tale he told was so singular that I did have to struggle imaginatively to accommodate it. How odd and unparalleled the life of Magdalen Usher must have been!

Franksly, I doubted Rowland's assurances about the perfection of his sister's existence. I could not believe that this experiment in eupsychian engineering could possibly have been as successful as he claimed. No human being can be kept so utterly insulated from the darker side of life – from the ominous aspects of her own inner nature – as to be held inviolate from all dread, all sorrow, all splenic impulse. Nevertheless, I did not doubt that he believed it, and that in his mind his sister's image must have a significance of purity greater than that of any saint or other idol.

I remembered the apparition of the previous night, of which I still feared to speak. I could not help but touch upon the subject, but felt compelled to do so *elliptically*, without directly saying what I had seen.

"She must be very much in your thoughts now," I said. "You must feel her nearness very acutely."

"I do," he said, dreamily. He seemed now to have been overcome by a tremendous tiredness, which carried him off into a kind of euphoric altered consciousness. Despite the fact that he had resolved to tell me his secrets, I do not believe that he would have told me any more at that time had he been in full possession of his faculties. He had surely planned a more gradual process of revelation. He was in the grip of his disease, though, and in a state of mind that few humans can ever have attained.

"At first," he said, "I dreamed of re-creating her. So many of her cells, including oocytes from her womb, were taken from her even before death, to make the tissue-cultures that would be used for the study of our freakish disease. I wanted to clone her, to bring her back from the dead, to make her anew. I soon realized, though, that it would be a dreadful thing to do. All the best efforts of my father and myself had gone into giving her a perfect existence within its prescribed limits. To create another of her would be to spoil our design, as if we were to take a great painting and daub over it an inferior copy. She could never be re-created, and to make another individual out of her genes would be an appalling travesty of all that my father and I had done.

"When I went to college, therefore, I deliberately elected to stay away from medicine, from human engineering. I went into the kind of work that would help me to transform the human environment rather than the human body. I wanted to build houses, not people – places for people to live, where they could live well, in privacy. I soon realized that it would not be enough to build the kind of houses that are now being built – I wanted to create something much more ambitious. But I could not entirely forget Magdalen, and there remained a sense in which my house... my private world... must in some way contain her. That was when I conceived the notion of working with larvae.

"We are so proud these days of our own biotechnic miracles that we tend to forget nature's, and we tend

to forget what a colossal bounty was made available to our early genetic engineers, in terms of the raw materials with which they began to work. I have always been fascinated by metamorphosis, by the fact that a maggot or a caterpillar can carry within it genes which code for an entirely different creature, so that when the time comes it builds itself a temporary tomb from which it will one day emerge anew.

"It struck me as a terrible waste that structural engineers should breed hundreds or thousands of new kinds of larvae to work for us, without sparing a thought for the fact that their eventual pupation would now be the end of their story. No one cared, it seemed, about the fact that these modified larvae could no longer advance to a final stage in their development, because the imagos programmed into their altered genes were hopelessly inviable.

"Thus, when I began engineering larvae for work within my house, I also began engineering them so that they would be able to pupate and metamorphose successfully. I knew that they could not produce giant insects, with wings and exoskeletons, so I set about reprogramming them to produce creatures that are viable at that size. The creatures which I showed you today, which resemble blowfly maggots, have approximately the same biomass as a human being; they lose much of that in pupation, but can still produce something the size of a young adolescent. Mindless creatures, of course, but beautiful, in their way. They do not live long, at present, but I have laid the foundations for work which has limitless scope. In time, the engineers of the future might produce another human race.

"I have tried hard to gain sufficiently refined control over the features of these individuals, and I regret to say that I have not succeeded in producing one which bears more than a passing resemblance to my beloved Magdalen, despite using her own genetic material, but my quest has always been a hopeful one and I have derived much comfort from it. I needed something of her, you understand, to sustain me in my solitude... and they have given me that. Something, albeit so little..."

Rowland began suddenly to cough, and the cough developed into a kind of seizure.

Anxiously, I went to his side, and tried to calm him, but blood spattered my hand, and I suddenly realized that his condition was critical. His face had a ghastly pallor, and he struggled to whisper.

"So soon... Magdalen!"

It was as though the words themselves choked him. I tried to clear the blockage from his throat, to administer artificial respiration, but I could not start his heart beating again.

Within minutes, he was dead.

I checked Rowland's body for signs of life, and finding none I called Harvard, and asked to be put in touch with someone familiar with the details of his case. Then I went to another screen, and began to interrogate the data stores within the integral system. Within minutes I had a series of printed schematics which would serve as a map of the house. I located a wheeled stretcher in a nearby storeroom, and took him down to the room which housed his diagnostic computer and its ancillary apparatus. There

I took the return call from Harvard. When I had manoeuvred the body into the cradle of the apparatus, the surgeon took over the remote controls, and began to check again for signs of life before continuing with the post-mortem.

This I could not bear to watch, and so I made my way back to the study where Rowland had told me his remarkable story. There, obsessed with the necessity of being reasonable, I set about the task which he had set for me. I began to inspect the discs on which he had carefully kept the records of all his experiments and all his projects.

In time, I could carry all the information away to more congenial surroundings, but I knew that if I were to do the job properly, then I would have to work in the house for at least a fortnight, in order to know exactly what ought to be taken away or transmitted electronically to my own home.

I took three further calls from Harvard, but I was not required to do anything further – the doctors there, working in association with the house's automatic systems, completed their examination, took their samples, issued a death certificate and wrapped the body in preparation for interment. By this time I had located Rowland's actual last will and testament, and I set in motion the legal machinery needed to put it through probate. The will provided for the burial of the body beneath the house, and I knew that this was a task that I would have to carry out myself, but it was one that could safely be left for another day.

It was late when I finally dimmed the lights and returned to my own room. Midnight had long gone, but insulated as I was from any knowledge of the setting and rising of the sun my sense of time was confused, and I did not feel tired until I actually took the decision to stop and rest. Then, fatigue suddenly swept over me like a wave.

With darkness and fatigue, though, came an inevitable relaxation of reason, and when I slept, my self-control – so carefully maintained by the iron grip of consciousness – was banished. I dreamt more nightmarishly than I had done the previous night, and my dreams were pure Poe.

I dreamt that I buried Rowland not in his own house but in that other – that haunted purgatory of fantasy. Our journey to the grave was through rotting passages weeping with cold slime, lit only by smoky torches whose flames were angry red. I dragged the coffin behind me, supporting only one end, and I think that Rowland somehow spoke to me from dead lips as we went, mocking my slowness.

This was bad enough, but after I had immured him in a vault behind a great metal door I remained anchored to the spot, listening for an eternity, waiting for the sound that I knew would come – the sound of the body risen from its rest, its fingers tapping and scratching at the door.

Inevitably (probably there was no real lapse of time, but simply an aching false consciousness of time passed) the sound began, and taunted my soul with echoes of dread and anguish which reverberated in my being until I felt myself literally driven insane, and howled at myself in the fury of my hallucination: "Madman! Madman! Madman!"

Then I woke in a cold sweat, thirsting.

And I heard, outside the door of my chamber, a faint



tapping and scratching.

For a moment, I convinced myself that I was still asleep, and struggled manfully to wake. Then I could deny my senses no longer, and knew that the sound was real.

I dragged myself from my bed, feeling very heavy, my body requiring an agony of effort to move at all. I stumbled to the door, and opened it, at first by the merest crack and then – in consequence of what I saw – much wider.

There in the faintly-lit corridor, prostrate at my feet, one hand still groping for the door, was what seemed to be a teenage girl.

I knew, of course, that it was not. How many human genes were in it – Magdalen Usher's genes – I could not guess, but I knew that it was but a sham, a phantasm, no more human than the maggots which would soon consume Rowland Usher's body – and one day, no doubt, my own. But still, it was a pitiful creature, and in such a form it could not help but attract my sympathies. I remembered what Rowland had said about their not living long.

Some insect "adults" are born without digestive systems, unable to feed; they exist only to exchange genes in the physiological ritual of sexual intercourse. These creatures of Rowland's had not even reproductive organs inside them. They existed neither to eat nor to breed, being equipped only with the very minimum of a behavioural repertoire in order to serve

their maker's purpose.

They existed to cling and caress, to soothe and be soothed, and that was the entirety of their existence. Like mayflies they were born and they died, innocent and ignorant of time, space and the world at large. Their universe was the House of Usher, and one can only hope that they passed their brief existence in a kind of bliss.

I was awake again now, and though startled and a little appalled, I found no alternative but to pick up the poor creature and carry her to my bed, where I stroked her gently and calmed her (I could no longer think in terms of "it" once I had touched her).

She died before morning.

Later, I visited the caverns deep underground (but still within the living walls of the growing manse) where the free-living maggots pupated, and saw rank upon rank of grey pupae, shaped like the sarcophagi in which the Egyptians entombed their mummified dead. I watched the hatching of the humanoid ephemerae, and studied them through their brief life-cycle – a mere handful of days. They did not, left to themselves, find their way into the upper parts of the house, though when I led one of them – as Rowland Usher often must have done – to my own bedroom, she knew both the way back to the deepest cellars and the way to return to the room, unescorted.

They did not really need me, I found, for it was rare that they hatched out alone. Usually, there were half a dozen alive at any one time, and they could obey their inner drives in fondling one another, achieving their fulfilment easily, comfortably, and by their own standards naturally.

When the time eventually came for me to leave Rowland's house, to convey his legacy to the greater world so that his methods and techniques might be employed for the betterment of mankind, I was sorry to leave these ephemerae, because I had grown fond of them, in my fashion. It was in their chamber that I buried Rowland Usher, for it was there that I found the grave of his beloved Magdalen, and I knew that brother and sister would have wished to rest side by side. I left him lightly coffined, as I knew that he would have left her, so that in time his decaying flesh might be absorbed, with hers, by the scavenging cells of the house, to become a part of its extending body, dissipated within it, united in substance if not in spirit.

When I finally did come out of the house again, and found myself in the full glare of the tropic sun, I had to wrinkle my nose against the stench of the swamp, for I had become used to breathing clean and sterile air. The sky seemed very blue, its light wild and abandoned, and my eyes ached for the gentle roseate light of bioluminescence.

As the motor-boat sped away toward the main stream of the Orinoco I looked back at the astonishing edifice, and saw that in this light its ebon walls gleamed and sparkled like jet, and that its softened shape resembled a Daliesque hand reaching up as though to touch the sun with molten fingers.

It was not ugly at all, but perfectly lovely.

The first House of Usher – that shameful allegory of the disturbed psyche – was burst asunder and swallowed by dark waters. In stark contrast, Rowland's house still stands, soaring proudly above the tattered canopy of the twisted trees. It is still growing, and

though it stands today in a noisome swamp there will come a time, I know, when it has purified the lakes and the islands, absorbing their stagnancy into its own vitality.

I was afraid, for a time, that the mysterious canker which was implicit in Rowland Usher's being might in some curious fashion be replicated in his house – perhaps by infection as the house absorbed his mortal remains. I am glad to say, though, that in the ten years since I quit that house it has shown no outward sign of any malady, and I become more confident with every year that passes that it will truly stand the test of time.

In one of the notes which he appended to his data discs Rowland contrasts his own house with Poe's imaginary one, damning the fictitious original as a typical product of the nineteenth century imagination and its myriad demonic afflictions. His own house, he claims, belongs not just to the twenty-second century but to the *third millennium*, and hazards the speculation that its life might not even be confined by a thousand years, but might go on forever, into that far-off Golden Age when the entire ecosphere of this planet (and who knows how many more) will be subject to the dominion of the mind of man.

We can only hope that his faith will be justified.

Brian Stableford is co-author with David Langford of *The Third Millennium: A History of the World, AD 2000-3000* (1985), which has recently been reissued in paperback by Grafton Books. The above story, in common with other pieces he has written for us, is set against the background of the "future history" adumbrated there. Brian has recently completed a major new novel, provisionally entitled *The Empire of Fear*, which deals with an alternative history of Europe from the Middle Ages to the present.

NEWS

The winner of the 1988 Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best SF novel published in Britain during the preceding year is *The Sea and Summer* by **George Turner** (Faber, £10.95). The result was

announced at the British Easter SF Convention, held in Liverpool. Like the previous year's winner, the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, Mr Turner is not a resident of the UK. He is an Australian, born in Melbourne in 1916. Following military service during the Second World War, he first became a novelist in the 1950s but did not turn to science fiction until the 70s. *The Sea and Summer* is his fourth SF novel, and certainly his best to date. It deals movingly with the collapse of civilization, as experienced by various characters in 21st-century Australia. The causes of this collapse are manifold: the Greenhouse Effect, overpopulation, unemployment and financial breakdown.

Among the nominees for this year's Nebula Awards (winners to be declared in May) are Interzone contributors **Pat Murphy** (for her novel *The Falling Woman* and her story "Rachel in Love"), **David Brin** (for *The Uplift War*), **Gene Wolfe** (for *Soldier of the Mist*), **Geoff Ryman** (for his novella "The Unconquered Country", first published in the US in 1987 although familiar to IZ readers since 1984), **Keith Roberts** (for "The Tiger Sweater"), **Bruce Sterling** (for "Flowers of Edo") and **Karen Joy Fowler** (for "The Faithful Companion at Forty"). Our best wishes to them all.

Deaths recently announced: **Randall Garrett**, aged 60, best known for his "Lord Darcy" series of SF/fantasy

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Karen Joy Fowler

Heartland

My grandfather says Willina's death is just one small symptom of a bigger problem. He never knew Willina which is why he can refer to her permanent absence as a symptom. What he knows about Willina is what he read in the paper and this amounts only to sexual history in its sparest, coldest, most merciless form. So he goes further and describes the symptom as small. He means a lot by the word since it's one of theirs. We're going to be seeing more and more of this stuff, my grandfather says. Women can be so stupid.

The whole goddamn country is small now, my grandfather says. Small country. Small people.

It's harder for me to see the big picture. I knew Willina pretty well and I don't remember the old days. Wasn't like this when I was a boy, my grandfather says, but when I was a boy, things were pretty much the same as now. Used to be an apple tree here, my grandfather says while we're walking me to work. Planted more than a hundred years ago. How does he know? We only came last winter. Little myth of his, maybe, like the little myth that he walks me to work. He heads on to the bar after saying good-bye to me. Anyway, if there ever was an apple tree, it's a t-shirt shop now. You can get anything you want on a t-shirt. Absolutely anything. A rainbow which ends at the tit. Fuck you, asshole, with a picture. My grandfather says he would never have learned to read if he'd known how disheartening it was going to be.

He was real disheartened when I went to work for the new burger place. He wanted me on a farm. What was I supposed to do? What a fantasy. The old family farm is under several feet of cement. Nothing germinating there. We moved to the capital where the money is green. But I don't think it was real to him until I came home in my burger-frying uniform. The uniform fit, which surprised my grandfather, I guess. I didn't have to roll the legs up or anything. And it was blue, in deference to local custom. I think it was the concessions that upset my grandfather most of all.

They were *accommodating*. They were here to stay.

I guess there was a real problem when the first burger place opened. How can we eat meat, my grandfather says. We're meat. I don't eat it, actually. I just cook it. I suppose this is a pretty fine distinction, but we're all accommodating in one way or another. Even my grandfather. Does he or doesn't he spend my paycheck? You bet he does.

I met Willina because she worked one of the registers. Nobody will believe me now, but the first thing you noticed about Willina in those days was how cheerful she was. She smiled all the time. And she wasn't stupid at all. Willina was real smart. What's so great about farm work, she wanted to know. Those good old days, they were pretty limited when you stop to think about it. Now we know there's a wide world out there. Things we've never seen. Things we can't even imagine. There was no reason to think I would be flipping burgers all my life. Still isn't, I suppose. But it's harder now without Willina to see that.

Willina was pretty, too. And funny. The MacMunch's, she called us. The MacMunch Bunch. Me and her and Nick and Polly. Polly's sort of everybody's mother. She's quite a bit older than the rest of us. Runs the kitchen and is in love with the man who delivers the patties. Nick was pretty soft on Willina and I guess I would have been, too, but I didn't know how to be soft on a girl. I just hung around her a lot. She talked to me. Which wasn't really a good sign, Nick said. Made me sort of a brother. Nick was trying to make out Willina really cared for him, because she hardly talked to him. But I was happy to be anything in Willina's life. I didn't know any better. I just thought Willina was full of dreams and they were pretty to listen to. Took me a long time to realize what was going on.

There was this man who came by a lot. He always went to Willina's register, even if there was a line.

I'm here for some home cooking, he'd say. See, he was one of them. Willina looked so sweet and little next to him. Give me a smile and a burger, Willina, he'd ask. The burger's worth nothing, but I'll pay for that smile. And Willina would already be smiling. Willina would have lit up like a sunny day the minute he walked in.

You watch out, girl, I heard Polly tell her finally. You stay away from those people. You hand them burgers and then you take back your hands. No matter what anyone promises you, you remember. They got nothing for us.

Which isn't really true, of course. When you take your hand back, there's money in it. They always have money. We didn't used to need money, my grandfather says. I find this hard to believe. We sure as hell need it now.

He's not like that, Willina said. He's nice. But what she was really saying was, I'm not like that. No one would do that to me. She had a lot of confidence, Willina did. She knew she was smart. She just couldn't think of herself as small.

I don't think even Polly knew she was seeing him nights. I know she'd been seeing him for a long time before I found out about it. My grandfather had sent me out to get him some whiskey. The bottle emptied ahead of schedule. It couldn't have waited till morning. He couldn't have gotten through the night. I was a familiar face in the liquor store.

So I was on my way home, past the bar and the restaurant with the floor show and the specialty book shop, and I saw Willina with the man. You're very special to me, he was saying to her. He was bent way over and she was staring up at him and didn't notice me at all. You're all I think about, and she said, do you love me? Yes, he said. Yes, I love you, and then I was past and didn't hear any more. I went home and poured myself a whiskey and drank it even before I poured one for my grandfather. I didn't really understand why I was so upset.

Willina came in the next day singing. I have a secret, she said to me. I'm going to tell you. I'm going to tell only you. But she didn't tell me right away, because a bunch of them came in wanting sandwiches of eggs and sausage on muffins and coffee, lots of coffee. I knew what the secret was anyway. I could put off hearing it.

Our break was at the same time so we went out back and had a cigarette. She made jokes about how smoking would stunt our growth. I'm in love, she said. I am absolutely, hopelessly, deliriously in love.

I don't imagine it's Nick, I answered. I didn't say, I don't imagine it's me.

She didn't even hear. I'm leaving, she said. I'm going with him. I'm going to see the biggest cities in the world. I'm going to wake up every morning with his arms around me and I'll be in Paris or Tokyo or Los Angeles. I love him. *I love him.* Are you happy for me?

I was pretty miserable and I figured out why. It wasn't because I thought Willina was going to get hurt or was being a fool. I figured he loved her. Who wouldn't? And it wasn't even that I was jealous and loved her myself. I never expected her to want to be with me.

It was that it really hadn't occurred to me before that they would want our women. I don't know why. They wanted everything else. The things we made. The things we ate off. The things we wore. But only the best. The best of everything. They took it all home with them and we never saw it again.

I was going to have to compete with them my whole life and I had only just realized it. How could I? They had all the money. They had travelled. I was flipping burgers and watching my grandfather drink my paycheck. No contest.

I'll miss you, I told Willina.

I'll miss you, too, she said. She looked at my face. She said she wasn't going right away. He wasn't done here quite. He still had a few odds and ends to take care of. She was going to stay on and earn all the money she could before they went. Don't tell Polly, she said to me. I'm not going to say anything until I'm really leaving. She doesn't like him and she doesn't even know him.

But Polly could see how happy Willina was and it made her unhappy. You be careful, girl, she said. A lot of things are far too easy to say. I love you, being the easiest of them. There ought to be a way to make it more difficult. Some condition that has to be met before your mouth can make those words. You ought to have to earn them. But that's not the way it is. Anyone can say I love you. You be careful.

Willina had a couple more weeks of happiness. Suddenly he was gone. Gone home, they said at his hotel. Took some nice pieces of local art with him. Had to get a whole new suitcase. Left Willina behind.

I told Willina not to believe in him, Polly said, getting it wrong again. Willina had believed in herself. That was why she couldn't get over it.

Willina worked her register and tried to figure it out. She thought maybe he would write and send for her. Then she thought maybe he would write and explain. Then she thought she'd never really thought either of those two things. My head always knew better, she said. This is all my heart's fault. I'm never going to listen to my heart again.

One night she put a noose around her neck and severed the connection between her heart and her head. Polly found her next morning, hanging from the shelf where we stacked the buns. Her shoes had fallen off her feet and lay on the floor, heels touching together, toes pointed out. There was a picture of her shoes in the paper. She got a lot of print, actually. It was a big story here.

I wonder if he even knows about it. I picture him sometimes, showing friends the slides from his vacation. Here's the Emerald Palace, he's saying. Tourists, everywhere.

Here's the yellow road. You follow it and you can still find some spots which are pretty unspoiled. You've got to go a ways, though. Most people don't bother.

Here's some local talent. The small ones dress in blue.

Here's the Emerald Arches. I knew a little girl who worked there.

Karen Joy Fowler was winner of last year's John W. Campbell Award for the best new sf writer. An interview with her appeared in *IZ* 23.

Thomas M. Disch

Interview by Gregory Feeley

Since the appearance of 334 fifteen years ago, Thomas M. Disch has published only one science fiction novel, the baroque yet Romantic *On Wings of Song* (1979). Nevertheless, Disch has remained active in that fantastic tradition of which *sf* and *genre fantasy* are merely subsets. His two novels of nineteenth century England, *Clara Reeve* and *Neighbouring Lives* (the latter written with Charles Naylor) and his contemporary fantasy *The Businessman: A Tale of Terror* have perhaps more admirers inside the science fiction field than in the highlands beyond, where they won critical praise but (except for *Clara Reeve*) have not yet successfully been brought to a large public.

Disch's other works during the 1980s include opera libretti for *Frankenstein* and "*The Fall of the House of Usher*," several volumes of poetry (one of them, *Here I Am, There You Are, Where Were We?*, was a Poetry Book Society Choice in 1984), numerous short stories in publications as various as *Playboy*, *Omni*, *Interzone*, and *The Minnesota Review*, two forthcoming novels, and a host of other projects, some of which he discusses below.

Since the publication of your last novel in 1984, you seem to be concentrating on ventures other than prose fiction. You have written an interactive computer novel, *Amnesia*; a script for *Miami Vice* which was recently broadcast; a children's book in verse; drama criticism for *The Nation*; and you recently published an investigative essay on Whitley Strieber's big UFO book.

Also a film script for *Amnesia*, which was half-completed before the project was shelved.

The ontological status of that work is interesting: in its ideal form, is it a game, a novel, or just a dramatic situation that can be presented in any form?

Its ideal or Platonic version is the one that exists on two floppy disks, which is neither a novel nor a game. It is, God

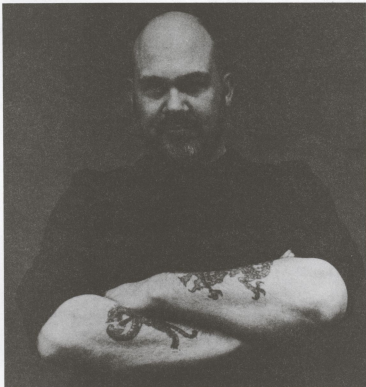


Photo by Jamie Spracher

help us, a new art form, although an embryonic specimen. In the future, interactive fictions may well not take the form of text adventures. However, I can't help but think that the basic premise is pregnant with possibility: branching stories that are controlled by the choices of the viewer/participant/reader. Because the technology is there, art will rush in.

What has been its reception in the literary and computer magazines?

The critical reception has been good, indeed universally approving. Some reviews in the computer press hoped for even more than they could get in terms of abundance and infinite branching possibilities. But *Amnesia* in fact fills up its disks — the game's designers invented one language in order to condense the language to one

degree, and then they invented some other technique for squeezing it still further. At this point each word in the text is probably only a molecule long.

Sales would seem to have had about the same history as my books. Though I haven't seen a royalty statement, I don't think it has done well, and I don't think that interactive fiction, or entertainment software in general, has fulfilled its financial promise. I don't expect to see any more money from *Amnesia*, and consider it to have been, financially, a great mistake. But aesthetically, I suppose I don't regret it, if only because I am now a pioneer of that art form.

Lucus reported that you had reserved novelization rights. Have you given thought to writing *Amnesia: The Novel*?

When I first undertook the project, I had in mind the computer-interactive game, the screenplay, and also a book version, so that a successful solution of the riddles would really earn the prize money. All of this came in the wake of *A Troll of Surewold Forest*; the pleasure of creating and integrating into that story a set of brain teasers was carried over into *Amnesia*. I think my impulse for that kind of game-playing with the story-telling has abated. We didn't sell anyone on the idea of a novel with a prize. And really, I'd rather not novelize *Amnesia*, because I love the idea of insisting that the only way to learn the story is through the peculiar art for which it was created. This way, the story has an indissoluble link to its form.

Your teleyplay for *Miami Vice*, "Missing Hours," seemed to me—especially given the show's traditional storylines—a peculiarly enigmatic work. You're not alone. (Laughs) I have to explain that it is the nature of the business that the story—in both its treatment and especially the form in which it was broadcast—was, though I bear the sole writing credit, the work of many hands. It went through four treatments, each with a different protagonist and set of events... the UFO was what they wanted from the start, it was simply a question of how it would manifest itself dramatically. How much you were supposed to be taken in by "alternate explanations" other than alienness, they always wanted to keep that line blurred. I guess it was blurred, since some people who've seen it thought the story was all a government plot. I can't imagine coming away with that reading: it was just an ordinary story about Aliens Among Us, with Crockett and Tubbs in the cast. I would be hard-pressed to think of any element in the final product that makes a personal statement I'd sign my name to.

You would classify it then with *Cassandra Knye's* works, as less than canonical? ["Cassandra Knye" was a very early pseudonym which Tom Disch shared with John Sladek—Eds.] Well, half of the dialogue as finally spoken has been changed. They were really hot to use the script—only a month passed between my delivering it and its going into production—and since I was not on the set, they used their house authors for revisions. These revisions simply carried the story farther in the direction they wanted; I would not regard them as having altered any vision of mine. As

for the final result, I can't imagine anyone who would enjoy it. Canonical? In the way perhaps that my bookstore jobs were. It was a significant and interesting part of my life, but... I don't

think anyone could meaningfully relate anything in that script to my "work."

There is certainly a connection with your long piece on Whitley Strieber's *Communion*.

Oh yes, that was wonderful! The producers asked me to do the script quite fortuitously, after I had written the Strieber piece. So I had a head full of UFOs at that point, and was delighted to turn them to my financial advantage. I mean it was galling to write what I consider the definitive wasting of the pretensions of million-dollar winner Whitley Strieber, and to do so for peanuts. And to have no attention paid to it! Part of the testimony of that book's success is to the sheer power of money to silence criticism. The kid-glove treatment his lies have received from the media, the reverence given to the money...! A liar in another enterprise would at least have people calling him a liar publicly. But I have been almost alone in criticizing him. When he is criticized, it has always been on the terms he has set: that "I am having some profound spiritual experience, even if it's not contact with real aliens." Nobody has paid scrupulous attention to the logic of the text, and found an alternate and simpler explanation, which is simply that he is hoaxing the world.

I'll tell you what I'd like to write next. It's an essay on the UFO fad going on right now and its relationship to the historical question of religious faith. I think Christianity originated in much the same way: in an invitation extended to say "I saw something impossible." I saw Christ rise from the dead, which is just as unprovable after the fact. So the motive of the first Christian witness would be similar to the kind of bad faith that exists in UFO abductees. I can't imagine anyone publishing this, because it offends not simply the foolish people going through the abductee ritual, but all Christians. Because basically what I'm saying is: All faith is bad faith. [Disch reports he has since written the essay, which is called "On Liars and Their Lies"—GF]

I knew a fellow in Rome who had the most marvellous theory which he was researching at the Vatican Library, a theory he shared with someone in England. They were both afraid to publish it, because if it received sufficient attention, they would be assassinated. Mohammed is generally acknowledged to be the one world religious figure who is supposed without doubt to have existed in historical time. Well, my friend's theory was that the entire story of Mohammed was a fabrication, created a century afterward, and that the Koran and pre-Islamic literatures were a literary invention of the most incredible ingenuity. The religion had been invented after the spread of

Arabic militarism throughout the Mediterranean. It was a perfect alternate explanation, and he had all kinds of odd facts that would seem to support this. The whole question of "what can we know about the past?" has never been stood more thoroughly on its head. My friend has since arranged his life so that he will never publish his theory, but it was intellectually dazzling. I remain dazzled.

The December 1987 issue of *Omni* has a cover article on "Missing Time" and UFO abductees. For a supposedly hi-tech and high-minded publication, they too treat the subject as intellectually respectable.

I could say a lot more about corruption in the mundane world of publishing than is prudent, even given the degree of personal dislike in which I am held by much of it. I have for years been accumulating notes for a novel called *Average Corruption*, which would deal with this...

I don't understand how there can be unacceptable truths. I do remember Orson Scott Card writing that if he thought the world was as I portrayed it in "Concepts" he would kill himself, to which my answer has always been: It's just like that. I have a hard time believing he's honest in his expressions of critical judgment, because they are simply too... what is the communal word for self-serving? Clubby. And his own work shows that he's someone brighter than the critic in him would have us believe. So I think he's just a hypocrite, and I respect him for it.

An advance notice of *Neighbouring Lives* announced that the novel's action would run from 1834 to 1916. Why did you truncate it?

We thought we had not only quite a large enough novel as it stood, but one in which there was more nearly a sense of closure with the death of Jane Carlyle. The nature of the beast is that it's a *roman fleuve* if ever there was one: it starts and stops on the River Thames, and the book might easily, in an ideal or parallel world, continue on to 1916 or beyond.

We did have additional sequences plotted out. The widower of George Eliot—she only had about six weeks in Chelsea, but her husband lived on there—gets a visit of condolence from Henry James, which leads to a nice *Aspern Papers*-style squabble over the lady's letters to her passionate lesbian lover. James gets involved between the Reverend Cross and the ex-lover in the suppression of the true history of George Eliot. And that was such a neat story, the one I most regret having left unwritten. I hope someday it will get done.

Anthony Burgess certainly liked the book, though he seemed bemused at the prospect of a serious novel being

produced collectively.

Yes, he had serious theoretical objections to the possibility. I have the same objections to Catholics writing good novels, yet both have happened.

Your most recent book was a children's story in verse, *The Tale of Dan De Lion*, and you are about to publish your first-ever sequel, *The Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars*. The attraction children's literature holds for you must be different than for Beatrix Potter.

I've done a couple of others, actually. I have written another one called *The Snake in the Manger*, a Christmas tale. It's a wonderful story about how all the barnyard animals saw the Star of Bethlehem and followed it to the manger, where they see the Magi presenting their gifts and decide to offer their own. And the snake in the manger, watching them, is filled with envy and wants to give the Baby Jesus an even nicer present. The story is about the present the snake brings. It's written in little quatrains of a mock-naive character, and has been very hard to publish as a children's book, I don't know why.

What are the attractions in writing for children? I think that in chortling as I told the story I answered your question. Because it's fun. There's a certain

kind of delicious tale that is a children's book. They are fun to write in a way that only *A Troll of Surewold Forest* would similarly be fun, pure and simple. So that's the reason: it's a kick.

You have noted elsewhere that *A Troll of Surewold Forest*, after some difficulties finding a publisher, has been sold to Doubleday in a multi-book deal that also includes an omnibus volume of poems and your new novel, *The M.D.* When may these appear?

The M.D.: A Horror Story is set in the same meta-Minneapolis as *The Businessman* and shares some of its minor characters, although it could not be considered a sequel. I am also contemplating a third novel, *The Priest: A Tale of Minneapolis in the Twelfth Century*. As for *A Troll of Surewold Forest*, it is waiting, like the poetry volume, for Doubleday to bring out *The M.D.* That book is now 700 typed pages, and awaits some revisions.

Are there any other works in progress?

I'm hoping to become a playwright. I've written one little play, which I would say represents not even a toe in the water, more a damp rag on the forehead. It is called *Koch on Broadway*, a Play in Verse, and will appear in *Grand Street*. In the course of

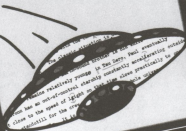
reviewing I must be receiving some kind of information overload as to the possibilities the form seems to offer, and that stimulates ambition. I don't think I would undertake serious playwrighting until I relinquished the pleasures of reviewing, but I can't continue to see so many plays without feeling a hunger to produce something of my own.

The hunger to work in another form isn't simply acquisitiveness, the urge to add yet another feather to my cap. To see what theatre can do, that's what draws one to an art, the sense of possibilities that have not yet been fulfilled. When I first wrote sf novels, I was writing sf novels of the sort that seemed to me not to exist, but which science fiction, as a genre, needed. That's a self-serving way of looking at one's own work, but I think that sincerely ambitious people, who are not ambitious for money or gain, but to produce something wonderful that hasn't yet existed – ambitious for laurels and not feathers – will proceed from that sense: that there is something important that hasn't yet been done.

(Note: We hope to reprint Tom Disch's essay on Whitley Strieber's *Communion* in the next issue of *Interzone* – Eds.)

WRITING SCIENCE FICTION

Christopher Evans



WRITING SCIENCE FICTION Christopher Evans

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A & C Black £4.95 May



Eric Brown

The Time-Lapsed Man

Thorn was not immediately aware of the silence. As he lay in the tank and watched the crystal cover lift above him, he was still trying to regain some measure of the unification he had attained during the three months in flux. For that long – though it had seemed a timeless period to Thorn – he had mind-pushed his boat between the stars: for that long he had been one with the vastness of the *nada*-continuum.

As always when emerging from flux, Thorn sensed the elusive residuum of the union somewhere within him. As always, he tried to regain it and failed; it diminished like a haunting echo in his mind. Only in three months, on his next shift, would he be able to renew his courtship with the infinite. Until then his conscious life would comprise a series of unfulfilled events; a succession of set-pieces featuring an actor whose thoughts were elsewhere. Occasionally he would be allowed intimations of rapture in his dreams, only to have them snatched away upon awakening.

Some Enginemen he knew, in fact the majority of those from the East, subscribed to the belief that in flux they were granted a foretaste of Nirvana. Thorn's Western pragmatism denied him this explanation. He favoured a more psychological rationale – though in the immediate period following flux he found it difficult to define exactly a materialistic basis for the ecstasy he had experienced.

He eased himself up and crossed the chamber. It was then that he noticed the absence of sound. He should have been able to hear the dull drone of the auxiliary burners; likewise his footsteps, and his laboured breathing after so long without exercise. He rapped on the bulkhead. He stepped into the shower and turned on the water-jet. He made a sound of pleasure as the hot water needled his tired skin. Yet he heard nothing. The silence was more absolute than any he had experienced before.

He told himself that it was no doubt some side-

effect of the flux. After more than fifty shifts, a lifetime among the stars, this was his first rehabilitation problem, and he was not unduly worried. He would go for a check-up if his hearing did not return.

He stepped under the blo-drier, donned his uniform and left the chamber. Through the lounge viewscreen he could see the lights of the spaceport. He felt a jarring shudder as the stasis-grid grabbed the ship and brought it down. He missed the familiar diminuendo of the afterburn, the squeal of a hundred tyres on tarmac. The terminal ziggurat hove into sight. The ship eased to a halt. Above the viewscreen a strip-light pulsed red, sanctioning disembarkation. It should have been accompanied by a voice welcoming ship personnel back to Earth, but Thorn heard nothing.

As always he was the first to leave the ship. He passed through check-out, offering his card to a succession of bored 'port officials. Normally he might have waited for the others and gone for a drink; there was always a bar open somewhere, even in the early hours. He preferred to spend his free time with other Enginemen, and pilots and mechanics, as if the company of his colleagues might bring him closer to that which he missed most. This time, though, he left the 'port and caught a flyer to the city. He would seek the medical aid he needed in his own time, not at the behest of solicitous colleagues.

He told the driver his destination; unable to hear his own voice, he moved his lips again. The driver nodded, accelerated. The flyer banked between towerpiles, lights flickering by in a mesmerizing rush.

They came down in the forecourt of his stack. Thorn climbed out and took the upchute to his penthouse suite. This was the first time he had arrived home sober in years. Alcohol helped to ease the pain of loss; sober, he was horribly aware of his material possessions, mocking his mortality and his dependence upon them. His suite might have been described as luxurious, but the blatant utility of the furnishings filled him with nausea.

He poured himself a scotch and paused by the piano. He fingered the opening notes of Beethoven's *Symphatique*, then sat down in his recliner by the wall-window and stared out. In the comforting darkness of the room, with the lights of the city arrayed below him, he could make-believe he was back aboard his ship, coming in for landing.

Of course, if his hearing never returned...

He realized he was sweating at the thought of never being able to flux again. He wondered if he would be able to bluff his way through the next shift...

He was on his second drink, twenty minutes later, when a sound startled him. He smiled to himself, raised his glass in a toast to his reflection in the window. He spoke...but he could not hear his words.

He heard another sound and his stomach lurched with sickening confusion. He called out...in silence. Yet he could hear something.

He heard footsteps, and breathing, and then a resounding clang. Then he heard the high-pressure hiss of the hot water and an exclamation of pleasure. His own exclamation...He heard the roar of the blodrier, then the rasp of material against his skin; the quick whirr of the sliding door and the diminishing note of the afterburners, cutting out.

Thorn forced himself to say something; to comment and somehow bring an end to this madness. But his voice made no sound. He threw his glass against the wall and it shattered in silence.

Then he was listening to footsteps again; his own footsteps. They passed down the connecting tube from the ship to the terminal building; he heard tired acknowledgments from the 'port officials, then the hubbub of the crowded foyer.

He sat rigid with fright, listening to that which by rights he should have heard one hour ago.

He heard the driver's question, then his own voice; he stated his destination in a drunken slur, then repeated himself. He heard the whine of turbos, and later the hatch opening, then more footsteps, the grind of the upchute...

There was a silence then. He thought back one hour and realized he had paused for a time on the threshold, looking into the room he called home and feeling sickened. He could just make out the sound of his own breathing, the distant hum of the city.

Then the gentle notes of Beethoven's *Symphatique*.

The rattle of glass on glass.

He remained in the recliner, unable to move, listening to the sound of his time-lapsed breathing, his drinking when he wasn't drinking...

Later he heard his delayed exclamation, the explosion of his glass against the wall.

He pushed himself from the recliner and staggered over to the vidscreen. He hesitated, his hand poised above the keyboard. He intended to contact the company medic, but, almost against his will, he found himself tapping out the code he had used so often in the past.

She was a long time answering. He looked at his watch. It was still early, not yet seven. He was about to give up when the screen flared into life. Then he was looking at Caroline Da Silva, older by five years but just as attractive as he remembered. She stared at



Illustrations by Tina Horner

him in disbelief, pulling a gown to her throat.

Then her lips moved in obvious anger, but Thorn heard nothing – or, rather, he heard the sound of himself chugging scotch one hour ago.

He feared she might cut the connection. He leaned forward and mouthed what he hoped were the words: *I need you, Carrie. I'm ill. I can't hear, that is –*

He broke off, unsure how to continue.

Her expression of hostility altered; she still looked guarded, but there was an air of concern about her now as well. Her lips moved, then she remembered herself and used the deaf-facility. She typed: *Is your hearing delayed, Max?*

He nodded.

She typed: *Be at my surgery in one hour.*

They stared at each other for a long moment, as if to see who might prove the stronger and switch off first.

Thorn shouted: *What the hell's wrong with me, Carrie? Is it something serious?*

She replied, forgetting to type. Her lips moved, answering his question with silent words.

In panic Thorn yelled: *What the hell do you mean?*

But Caroline had cut the connection.

Thorn returned to his recliner. He reflected that there was a certain justice in the way she had cut him off. Five years ago their final communication had been by vidscreen. Then it had been Thorn who had severed the connection, effectively cutting her out of his life, implying without exactly saying so that she was no match for what he had found in flux.

Caroline's question about the time-lapse suggested that she knew something about his condition. He wondered – presuming his illness was a side-effect of the flux – if she was aware of the irony of his appeal for help.

An hour later Thorn boarded a flyer. Drunk and unable to hear his own words, he had taken the precaution of writing the address of the hospital on a card. He passed this to the driver, and as the flyer took off Thorn sank back in his seat.

He closed his eyes.

Aurally, he was in the past now, experiencing the sounds of his life that were already one hour old. He heard himself leave the recliner, cross the room and type the code on the keyboard. After a while he heard the crackle of the screen and Caroline's, "Doctor Da Silve..." followed by an indrawn breath of surprise.

"I need you, Carrie. I'm ill. I can't hear. That is –" Thorn felt ashamed at how pathetic he had sounded.

Then he heard Caroline's spoken reply, more to herself, before she bethought herself to use the keyboard and ask him if his hearing was delayed. "Black's Syndrome," she had said.

Now, in the flyer, Thorn's stomach lurched. He had no idea what Black's Syndrome was, but the sound of it scared him.

Then he heard his one-hour-past-self say, "What the hell's wrong with me, Carrie? Is it something serious?" The words came out slurred, but Caroline had understood.

She answered with words of her own. "I'm afraid it is serious, Max. Get yourself here in one hour, okay?"

And she had cut the connection.

Caroline Da Silva's surgery was part of a large hospital complex overlooking the bay. Thorn left the flyer in the landing lot and made his way unsteadily to the west wing. The sound of the city, as heard from his apartment, played in his ears.

He moved carefully down interminable corridors. Had he been less apprehensive about what might be wrong with him, and about meeting Caroline again after so long, he might have enjoyed the strange sensation of seeing one thing and hearing another. It was like watching a film with the wrong sound-track.

He found the door marked "Dr Da Silva," knocked and stepped inside. Caroline was the first person he saw in the room. For a second he wondered how the flux had managed to lure him away from her, but only for a second. She was very attractive, with the calm elliptical face of a ballerina, the same graceful poise; she was caring and intelligent, too – but the very fact of her physicality told Thorn of the manifest impermanence of all things physical. The flux promised, and delivered, periods of blissful disembodiment.

Only then did Thorn notice the other occupants of the room. He recognized the two men behind the desk. One was his medic at the Line, and the other his commanding officer. Their presence here suggested that all was not well. The way they regarded him, with direct stares devoid of emotion, confirmed this.

A combination of drink, shock and fear eased Thorn into unconsciousness.

He awoke in bed in a white room. To his right a glass door gave onto a balcony, and all he could see beyond was the bright blue sky. On the opposite wall was a rectangular screen, opaque to him but transparent to observers in the next room.

Electrodes covered his head and chest.

He could hear the drone of the flyer's turbos as it carried him towards the hospital. He sat up and called out what he hoped was: *Caroline!...Carrie!*

He sank back frustrated. He watched an hour tick by on the wall-clock, listening to the flyer descend and his own footsteps as the Thorn-of-one-hour-ago approached the hospital. He wondered if he was being watched through the one-way window. He felt caged.

He looked through the door into the sky. In the distance he could see a big starship climb on a steep gradient. He heard himself open the surgery door, and Caroline's voice. "Ah...Max."

Then – unexpectedly, though he should have been aware of its coming – silence. This was the period during which he was unconscious. He glanced back at the sky, but the starship had phased out and was no longer visible.

Thorn tried not to think about his future.

Caroline arrived thirty minutes later. She carried a sketch pad and a stylus. She sat on a plastic chair beside the bed, the pad on her lap. She tried to cover her concern with smiles, but Thorn was aware of tears recently shed, the evidence of smudged make-up. He had seen it many times before.

How long will I be in here? he asked.

Caroline chewed her lower lip, avoiding his eyes. She began to speak, then stopped herself. Instead, she wrote on the sketch pad and held up the finished product:

A week or two, Max. We want to run a few tests.

Thorn smiled to himself. What exactly is this Black's Syndrome? he asked, with what he hoped was the right degree of malicious sarcasm.

He was pleased with Caroline's shocked expression.

How do you know that? she scribbled.

Know what?

About Black's Syndrome.

You mentioned it over the vidscreen, Thorn told her. I didn't hear it until I was coming here... Well, what is it, Carrie?

She paused, then began writing. Thorn read the words upside-down: Black – an Engineman on the Taurus line out of Varanasi. After fifty shifts he developed acute sensory time-lapse. It's a one-in-a-thousand malady, Max. We don't know exactly what causes it, but we suspect it's a malfunction in the tank leads that retards interneuron activity.

She paused, then held up the message.

Thorn nodded. I've read it. So...?

She turned to a blank page, stylus poised.

How long did he last? Thorn asked, bitterly. When did the poor bastard die?

Quickly she wrote: He's still alive, Max.

Thorn was surprised, relieved. If the present condition was the extent of Black's Syndrome, then what was to prevent him fluxing again?

He wondered at Caroline's tears. If his disease was only this minor, why all the upset?

Then he thought he understood.

When can I leave, Carrie? When can I get back to the flux?

He was watching the pad, waiting for a reply. When he looked up he saw that she was crying, openly this time.

He laughed. You thought you had me, didn't you? Discharged from the Line, your own little invalid to look after and pamper. You can't stand the thought that I'll recover and flux again, can you?

Despite her tears she was scribbling, covering page after page with rapid, oversized scrawl.

When she came to the end she stabbed a vicious period, ripped the pages out and flung them at him. She ran from the room, skittling her chair on the way. Thorn watched her, a sudden sense of guilt excavating a hollow in his chest.

His gaze dropped to the crumpled pages. He picked them up and read: Acute sensory time-lapse. Not just hearing. Everything. In a few days your taste and smell will go the same way. Then your vision. You'll be left only with the sensation of touch in the "present." Everything else will be lapsed...

It went like this for a few more pages, the handwriting becoming more and more erratic. Most of it reiterated the few known facts and Caroline's observations of Black's decline. On the last page she had simply written: I loved you, Max.

Thorn smoothed the pages across his lap. He called for Caroline again and again, but if she heard she ignored him. He wanted to apologize, ask what might happen to him. He tried to envisage the sensation of having all his senses time-lapsed save for that of touch, but the task was beyond his powers of perception.

He lay back and closed his eyes. Later he was startled by the sound of his voice, his cruel questions. He

heard Caroline's breathless sobs, the squeak of the stylus, a murmured, "I loved you..." to accompany the written assurance. He heard her run crying from the room, the chair tumble, the door slam shut.

Then all he could hear was the sound of his breathing, the muffled, routine noises of the hospital. For the first time in hours the sounds he heard were synchronized with what he could see.

He slept.

On the morning of his third day in hospital, Thorn's senses of taste and smell went the way of his hearing. This further time-lapse dashed any hope he might have had that Caroline's diagnosis had been a mistake.

He had not seen Caroline since her hurried departure on the first day. He had been examined and tested by medical staff who went about their business in silence, as if they were aware of his outburst at Caroline and were censoring him for it. On the third morning in hospital, a black nurse brought him his breakfast.

He began eating, and soon realized that he could neither taste nor smell the bacon and eggs, or the coffee, black and no doubt strong.

He finished his meal. He watched the nurse return and remove the tray, sank back and waited.

Two hours later he heard the sound of the trolley being rolled in, the rattle of knife and fork. Seconds later the taste of bacon, then egg yolk, filled his mouth. He inhaled the aroma of the coffee, tasted it on his tongue. He closed his eyes and savoured the sensation. It was the only pleasurable effect of this strange malaise so far.

Then he sat up as something struck him. Two hours!... The delay between eating the food and tasting it had been two hours! Likewise the sound of the nurse's arrival.

If his hearing, taste and smell became delayed at the rate of two hours every three days – then what would it be like in a week, say, or a month or a year?

And what of his eyesight? How would he cope with seeing something that had occurred hours, days, even weeks ago? He resolved to find out what had happened to Black, how he was coping. He sat up and called for Caroline.

She did not show herself for another three days. Thorn was attended by an efficient platoon of medics. They seemed to rush through their duties around him with a casual indifference as if he ceased to exist, or as if they assumed that his senses had retarded to such an extent that he existed alone in a bubble of isolation. On more than one occasion he had asked whether he could be cured, how much worse it might become, what had happened to Black? But they used the fact that he could not immediately hear them as an excuse to ignore him, avoiding not only his words but his eyes.

On the morning of his sixth day in hospital, he awoke to silence and ate his tasteless breakfast. The sound of his waking, of the hospital coming to life around him, the taste of his breakfast – all these things would come to him later. He wondered if he could time it so that he tasted his breakfast as he ate his lunch?

He waited, and it was four hours later when he tasted toast and marmalade, heard the sounds of his breathing as he awoke.

Later, a nurse removed the electrodes from his head and chest. She opened the door to the balcony and held up a card which read?

Would you like to go out for some air?

Thorn waited until the nurse had left, shrugged into a dressing gown and stepped onto the balcony. He sat down on a chair in the sunlight and stared across the bay, then up into the sky. There was no sign of starship activity today.

He realized that, despite the seriousness of his condition, he still hoped to flux again. Surely the state of his senses would have no detrimental effect on his ability to mind-push? He had already decided that when his condition deteriorated to such an extent that he could no longer function without help, which must surely happen when his sight became affected, he would volunteer for a long-shift. He could push a boat to one of the Rim Worlds, spend a year of ecstasy in flux. It would probably kill him, but the prospect of such rapture and a painless end was preferable to the life he could expect here on Earth.

Caroline appeared on the edge of his vision. She placed a chair next to his and sat down beside him, the sketch pad on her lap. She seemed fresh and composed, the episode of the other day forgotten.

I've been wanting to apologize for what I said, Carrie. I had hoped you'd visit me before now. And he cursed himself for making even his apology sound like an accusation.

Caroline wrote: I've been with Black.

Thorn was suddenly aware of his own heartbeat. How is he?

She wrote: Only his sense of touch is now in the "present." All his other senses are time-lapsed by nearly a day.

How's he coping?

Not very well. He was never very stable. He's showing signs of psychosis. But you're much stronger, Max—

He interrupted: *What happens when his sense of touch retards?*

Caroline shrugged. It hasn't happened yet. It's difficult to say. In a way, if it does occur, it will be easier for him as all his senses will be synchronized in the "past." But he'll be unable to mix with people, socialize. How could he? Their presence would be delayed subjectively by hours, days. There would be no way for him to relate.

He could still flux, Thorn said.

Caroline looked away. For a moment tears burned across her eyes. Then she scribbled something on the pad:

Is the flux all you think about?

It's my life, Carrie. The only reason I exist.

She shook her head, frustrated by this clumsy means of communication. She wrote out two pages of neat script and passed them to him.

I could understand your infatuation with the flux if you thought the experience had religious significance; that you were in touch with the Afterlife. But you don't even believe that! To you it's just a drug, a mental orgasm. You're a flux-junky, Max. When you left me you were running away from something you couldn't handle emotionally because you'd never had

to in the past. For most of your life, Max, the flux has provided you with a substitute for human emotion, both the giving of it and the taking. And look where it's got you!

Thorn sat without speaking. Some part of him—some distant buried, human part—was stunned by the accuracy and truth of her insight.

You just feel sorry for yourself because you didn't get me, he said weakly, trying to defend himself.

Caroline just stared at him. She shook her head. With deliberation she wrote one line. She stood up and tore off the top sheet, handed it to him and left the balcony.

I'm not sorry for myself, Max. I'm sorry for you.

Thorn pushed the meeting with Caroline to the back of his mind. In the days that followed he dwelled on the hope that he might one day be able to flux again. If his sense of touch did retard, then, as Caroline had suggested, all his senses would be synchronized and his condition made considerably easier. He might not be able to socialize, but that would be no great loss. His only desire was to rejoin the Line.

On his ninth morning in hospital, Thorn opened his eyes and saw nothing but darkness. He called for the lights to be switched on, but instead someone spoon-fed him breakfast. He was unable to tell if it was Caroline who fed him; he could neither see, hear, or even smell the person. He asked who it was, but the only response—the only one possible in the circumstances—was a gentle hand on his arm. After his first breakfast in absolute darkness he lay back and waited.

His sensory delay had expanded to six hours now, and it was that long before the darkness lifted and he was able to see the sunlight slanting into the room. He had the disconcerting experience of lying flat on his back while his gaze of six hours before lifted as the Thorn-of-this-morning sat up and prepared for breakfast. In his vision the black nurse positioned his tray and fed him bacon and eggs. Thorn felt that he could reach out and touch the woman. He tried, and of course his hand encountered nothing.

He had no control over the direction of his gaze; his unseeing eyes of that morning had wandered, and he found himself trying to bring his errant vision back to the nurse, when all he saw was the far wall. His vision was interrupted by frequent, fraction-of-a-second blanks, when he had blinked, and longer stretches of total blackness when he had closed his eyes. The only benefit of this visual delay was that now his sight and hearing, taste and smell were synchronized. He saw the nurse lift a forkful of egg to his mouth, heard the sound of his chewing and tasted the food. The only think missing was the egg itself; his mouth was empty.

"There we are," the nurse said, proffering Thorn a last corner of toast. He wanted to tell her to stop treating him like a child, but that was the big disadvantage of his present condition: what he experienced now had happened six hours ago. The pretty Jamaican would be elsewhere in the hospital, the bacon and egg digested, the sounds and aromas dissolved into the ether...

Over the next few days he remained awake into the

early hours, watching the happenings of the previous day. At four in the morning, then six, darkness would descend, and Thorn would settle down to sleep. Around noon he would wake, spend several hours in darkness, then watch the sun rise eight hours late. If the delay between occurrence and perception continued to increase by two hours every three days, as it was doing, then Thorn foresaw a time when he would be spending more time in darkness than in light.

He would be able to cope. There had been many a long period in the past, between shifts, when he had locked himself in his darkened apartment, with drink and fleeting memories of flux.

After almost two weeks in hospital Thorn began to weaken. He passed through periods of physical nausea and mental confusion. He hallucinated once that he was fluxing again, this time without the usual euphoria of the union.

The day following this hallucination he awoke early and felt the warmth of sunlight on his skin. Eight hours later he was aware of the sun coming up over the sea. He would have liked to watch it, but his eyes of eight hours ago were fixed on the foot of his bed. The frequency of his "waking" blinks gave the scene the aspect of an ancient, flickering movie. At least it wasn't silent: he could hear the hospital waking around him, the distant crescendo of a starship's burners.

Later, after someone spoon-fed him a tasteless lunch, he felt a soft hand on his arm. He moved his head, as if by doing so he might see who it was. But all he saw was the same old far wall of eight hours ago; all he heard was his own breathing. He recalled the nurse's touch, but that had been light, platonic, reassuring him like a child that everything was all right. There was nothing platonic about this touch. As he lay there, helpless, whoever it was pulled back the sheets and divested him of hospital garb. He shouted out in silence, tried to fend her off - "her" because his flailing arm caught the softness of a breast. But he could not see the woman and he was unable to prevent the ludicrous rape. He felt a warm, soft weight straddle him, her breasts loose against his chest, and the sensation was what he imagined it might be like to be taken by a succubus.

Caroline? he said. He moved his arms in the clumsy description of an embrace, touched her familiar warm and slender body. He was aroused now despite himself. She found him and he moaned without a sound, ran his fingers through her black invisible hair. He recognized Caroline's brand of love-making from the past, went along with it as though they had never parted, and when climax came it was as he remembered it from many years ago - a brief ecstasy soon gone, like a second in flux but not as satisfying. Even the unusual circumstances of the union, the fact that he could not see Caroline, that the source of his pleasure was as it were disembodied, could only intimate a greater rapture and not fulfil in itself.

The invisible weight of her lay against him now, heavy and sated after orgasm, which Thorn had experienced through the silent contractions of her body. She kissed him, and he felt salt tears fall on his face.



Caroline... Why...?

Her lips moved against his cheek, her breath hot as she formed words. It was like being kissed by a ghost, bestowed silent prophecy.

In the calm aftermath of the act, Thorn began to feel revulsion. The bizarre nature of their love-making sickened him. He felt a return of the old guilt which he thought he had long since banished. It was as if the union was a symbol of their relationship to date; for years Thorn had played at loving someone whose essence was invisible to him, while Caroline for her part had wasted her life chasing someone who was forever elsewhere.

He cried out now and pushed her from the bed. He felt her fall and almost heard her cry of pain. Get out, Caroline! Go away! He faced where he thought she might be, but could not be sure. *I don't want you, for God's sake! All I want -*

She attacked him then. She came at him with painful blows and slaps, and no doubt cries and accusations. Thorn was aware only of the physical violence, the punches that struck from nowhere without warning. And he was aware, too, that he deserved everything he was getting.

He lay on the bed, battered and exhausted. Caroline had ceased her attack. He had no way of knowing whether she was still in the room, but he sensed her continued presence. *I don't know why you came here,* he said. *I don't know what you want from me...*

He half-expected another hail of blows, and flinched in anticipation. But none came.

When he thought he was alone he dragged the bed-sheets around him protectively, lay back and recalled Caroline's tears on his cheeks.

There could only be one explanation for her visit.

Thorn felt himself weaken further during the hours that followed.

He waited with mounting apprehension, his body covered in chill sweat. Visually it was four o'clock in the afternoon, but the real time was around midnight. It seemed a lot longer than the delayed eight hours before Caroline entered his line of sight.

She moved out of it quickly as she came to the side of his bed. She reached out and touched his arm, and Thorn expected to feel her now, but of course her touch had startled him eight hours ago. Then, Thorn had turned his head abruptly, and now he saw Caroline full on. She wore only a white gown and nothing beneath, and she was crying.

He watched as she undressed him, and the sight of her doing this now brought a hot flush of shame and resentment to his cheeks. The sensation of her touch had passed, but as he watched her slip from her gown and climb onto him he experienced a resurgence of the desire that had overwhelmed him eight hours earlier.

The Thorn of now lay still in his bed, like a voyeur in the head of his former self. He was making love to Caroline, but, with his memories of the physical act already eight hours old, he felt as though he was watching a tacky porn-vid. He could see her, frenzied blurs of flesh and hair and tongue; he could smell her, the perfume she used and the sweat of sex that overcame it; and he could hear her small moans of pleasure, her repeated cry of his name as she approached climax.

He heard his slurred question: "Caroline... Why...?"

They had finished their loving-making and she lay in his arms. "Because I loved you, Max," she had said. "Because I still love you."

He knew what happened next. Again he experienced that overwhelming sense of revulsion, brought about by guilt. He watched helplessly as he pushed her from the bed. "Get out, Caroline!" he heard himself cry. "Get away!" He saw her expression of pain, the acceptance of rejection in her eyes, and had it been possible he would have stopped himself saying what he said next... "I don't want you, for God's sake! All I want -"

She came at him and hit him again and again.

The Thorn of now flinched, as if the blows he could see coming might indeed inflict pain upon him; he raised his arms as if to protect himself.

Caroline backed off and yelled at him.

He heard himself say: "I don't know why you came here... I don't know what you want from me..."

Caroline was crying. "I came because I loved you, Max. I came to say goodbye..."

She lowered her gaze and murmured, more to herself than to Thorn: "Black died two days ago..."

Eight hours later Thorn lay quite still.

He deteriorated rapidly over the next few days.

The knowledge of Black's death robbed him of any will he might have had to fight. In his final hours he experienced a gradual diminution of his senses. His hearing left him first - then his taste and smell, though he hardly noticed their absence. Later his vision dimmed and went out, and he was aware of himself only as a small, blind intelligence afloat in an infinite ocean.

Soon even the awareness of his physical self diminished, and then the last sense of all, the cerebral intuition of his own identity, left him too. A familiar euphoria flooded him then, and the man who had been Thorn knew, before he died, that he was being absorbed into the vastness of the cosmos he had known until now as the *nada*-continuum.

Eric Brown has published two previous stories in *Interzone* - "Krash-Bang Joe and the Pinea-Zen Equation" and "The Girl Who Died for Art and Lived," both of which have been well received. A fourth story, "Big Trouble Upstairs," will appear shortly.

BACK ISSUES

Please note that issues 1, 5 and 7 of *Interzone* are now out of print - and some of the other early issues are in short supply. If you wish to order please hurry (prices on page 3).

Alex Stewart

Animator

Until she saw the dinosaurs, Karen Taylor was bored. She shifted in the worn tipup seat, pen tapping idly on her notepad. Acting wooden, she wrote. *Direction comatose. Effects work...*

Then the dinosaurs appeared, pounding towards a screaming starlet haloed with a matte line, and her breath knotted.

"Look at that!" Marcus, her counterpart from a rival listings magazine, nudged her elbow. "Harryhausen, eat your heart out!"

She nodded, unheeded, as his attention was wholly on the screen, and glanced around the tiny auditorium. The other reviewers looked equally stunned in the flickering half light, and even the people from the film company were watching with rapt attention.

The creatures were remarkable, vibrant with the illusion of life. Which is more than you can say for the cast she thought, and jotted it down on the pad.

"How do you reckon they did this?" whispered Marcus. "Even animatronics aren't that flexible."

And far too expensive for Bailey," Karen agreed. "It has to be stop frame."

"It can't be. There's no strobing."

He was right. They moved easily, without a trace of jerkiness, and with none of the unnatural clarity she always associated with stop motion images. Karen shrugged.

"There's probably something in the press pack."

But there wasn't. She'd flicked through it before the lights went down, and the only mention of the effects work in the photocopied sheets was a verbatim echo of the credit on the screen. *Animated sequences by Pentacle Films*. And the stills had prepared her for boredom; frozen by the camera, denied the illusion of life, the monsters were clearly nothing more magical than latex and paint.

When the lights went up she waited with Marcus and the others, comparing notes, while the rest of the audience filed out of the shabby auditorium. The preview theatre was meant for hard use, not the comfort

of a paying audience; the carpet was scuffed, and the tiny screen stained sepia with tobacco smoke.

"Well, it was better than I expected," said someone. "The effects work, anyway."

"Yeah," agreed Marcus, studiously blasé. "Shame about the script."

"And the direction."

"And the acting," added Karen. "But apart from that..."

Everyone grinned dutifully, and the little knot of critics drifted towards the exit.

"Are we going for a curry, or what?" said someone else.

"Might as well stay for the drinks." Karen peeled away towards the trestle table in the foyer, knowing they'd take at least twenty minutes to make up their minds, and scooped up a lukewarm plastic cup of Yugoslav riesling.

"Karen. What a pleasant surprise."

"Hello Carl." She knew who it was without turning. Carl Bailey, producer of the film, and one of her least favourite people. She's interviewed him once, when she first started the movie beat, and left her phone number with his secretary on the way out. She'd only wanted to clear copyright on the old stills they were running, but for some reason he'd taken it as a come-on, pestering her for weeks before finally getting the message.

"Going to say something nice about us, I hope." He grinned, schoolboy awkward, hovering hopefully. Karen shrugged.

"It was up to your usual standard." She sipped at the thick sticky wine, glancing around for her friends. They were still arguing, with no spare attention to come to her rescue. "But the effects were good."

"Weren't they just?" Bailey nodded enthusiastically, his greasy fringe falling into his eyes. "Even we were surprised."

"Who did them?" If she could find that out, at least, the conversation wouldn't be a complete waste of time.

"A new outfit. Just started. We took a chance on them because we like to encourage new talent."

"Of course you do. You're known for it." New talent would always work cheap. Bailey nodded, taking the remark at face value, and Karen forced herself to smile. "I'd like to get in touch with them. It might be worth a story."

She waited a moment, while Bailey connected work with free publicity.

"That's easy enough. He's over there." He turned, beckoning. "Nice guy. You'll like him."

"Hello."

Karen jumped. The voice came from behind her, low and mellifluous, unaugmented by footsteps. A trickle of wine splashed on her fingers. Bailey smiled.

"Toby Darke, our effects man. Karen Taylor, demon critic." His eyes flickered across the room, and his voice changed abruptly. "I'm sure you'll find lots to talk about. S'cuse me." He moved away quickly. A grey-suited figure with a brown manilla envelope was hovering at the door, glancing around before entering.

"Pleased to meet you." Darke smiled, and proffered a hand ingrained with the residue of his work. "I've read your column."

"So you're the one." Karen shook it, looking him over. He grinned infectiously. Age indeterminate, his blond hair and pale skin making him look almost babyish. His eyes were the colour of woodsmoke, wide and ingenuous, as though waiting for her to make a sales pitch for Tower Bridge. His clothes were carefully matched, deceptively casual, and her comfortable old denims suddenly felt very shabby.

"No, really. It's very good." He turned to the table, plucking a paper plate of limp sandwiches from a spreading puddle of wine, and proffered them. "Are you eating?" Karen shook her head.

"No thanks. I'm going for a meal after this." She listened, with mild surprise, as the words slipped unbidden from her lips. "Are you doing anything tonight?"

"This is very kind of you." Darke looked up from across the table, a forkful of tagliatelle hovering halfway to his mouth. Behind him, through the steam-thickened window, the Soho streets were jaundiced in the pale winter lamplight. Shadows flickered, the wind sculpting ephemeral Dali forms from the litter in the gutters. Karen watched her smile widen on the face of the doppelganger floating behind his shoulder.

"That's OK," she lied. "It's all on expenses." Darke chewed thoughtfully, wiping a trickle of pesto sauce from his lower lip with the edge of the fork.

"If you say so," he said. "But I still don't see why you'd want to interview me."

"Don't be so modest. At the very least you're a remarkable new talent."

"Thank you." Darke smiled shyly. "But it's not that remarkable really. Not when you know how it's done."

"And how is it done?" Karen pulled her notebook out, and looked attentive. Darke shook his head.

"That's a trade secret, I'm afraid. Let's just say it's a new form of animation."

"Completely new?"

"So far as I know." He nodded slowly, then grinned

at some private joke. "At least in the film world."

"I see." Karen scribbled briefly in the notebook. "And how did you end up working for Bailey?"

"He saw some test reels I'd done. I wanted to try the technique in a real movie, and he needed someone who came cheap. We suited each other at the time."

"So you only did *Raiders of the Hidden Valley* as a showcase for your methods?"

"Well, you've seen it." Darke waved a dismissive hand. "It's not going to win any Oscars, is it? But it was a break when I needed one."

"I see," she said again. "And what was Bailey like to work with?"

"Well..." Darke hesitated, stirring the remains of his food with the fork. "I mean, you know him..."

"Not that well," she said quickly. "I mean, we're not friends or anything."

"He's all right, I suppose." But the tone of his voice said otherwise. "He got a bit irritating when I wouldn't tell him how the method works."

"I can imagine." She remembered how persistent he could be, like a child whining after sweets. "He had a go at me once."

"Then I don't have to tell you." But he did anyway, enlarging on Bailey's character flaws with surgical wit, just long enough to direct the conversation away from his work for the rest of the evening. It was only after they'd parted, heading for separate platforms at Oxford Street tube, that Karen realized she didn't have anything she could use. And even more surprising, she didn't really care.

The interview never appeared, but Karen kept in touch with him anyway. As spring faded slowly into summer they drifted into an easy friendship, their lives imperceptibly meshing, until Toby Darke became one of the things around her she simply took for granted. She slipped into the habit of dropping by his office on her way out of London, for coffee at first, then as the prelude to an evening or a weekend together.

It was early on Friday evening, and Karen's T shirt was clinging uncomfortably in the thick July heat as she drove through the maze of industrial estates hanging from the skirts of the North Circular Road. Even with the windows open, wafting the acrid smell of chemicals and baking tar into her face, the battered old mini felt like an oven on wheels. She swung round the final bend with a sigh of relief, eager for the shade of the Pentacle office.

She was mildly surprised to see a car outside the building as she coasted into the kerb; Toby didn't drive, and his assistants would have gone home by this time. She pulled in behind it, rolling up the windows while she waited for the cooling engine to tick into silence. The estate was practically empty now, deserted by the weekend lemming-rush, and sounds carried easily on the stillness.

"I won't tell you again." Somehow the voices didn't resolve into words until Karen was out of the car. It was only when she saw him she recognized the speaker as Toby; his voice was flat, charged with an anger she'd never heard before, and all the more frightening for being pitched no louder than a normal conversation. "You have no rights at all in my animation process. If you take it to the courts they'll tell you the same."

He was leaning against the wood and glass door, casually barring the way into the Pentacle unit. Bailey was standing beside him, his face flushed, excess poundage quivering with the effort of trying not to shout.

"Want to bet?" His voice was thick, like boiling sugar. "I put development money into it, remember? If it wasn't for me you'd still be hustling test reels round Wardour Street!"

Karen slammed the car door, the sound echoing like a grenade between the factory units, and both men turned to look at her.

"Hello love." Toby stretched a perfunctory grin over his teeth. "Be with you in a minute. Carl's just leaving."

"Yeah. Carl's leaving." Bailey turned, fumbling the car keys from his pocket. "For the moment." They trembled in his fingers, ringing like windchimes as he opened the door.

"What was all that about?" Karen moved next to Toby, turning her head to follow the car as it roared away. As she slipped her arm around him she could feel the tension in his muscles, his whole body still stiff with anger.

"It looks like his creditors are getting too close. He thinks he can screw a percentage out of my process, that's all."

"And can he?"

"No." Toby shook his head. "It's mine, no doubt about it."

"But if he funded development..."

"He didn't. It was perfected when he hired me." He began to relax again as they walked into the building. "But that doesn't stop someone like Bailey from trying it on."

They climbed the stairs to the offices, perched over the factory space where the sound stage and the model shops were set up. As usual the desks were chaotic, the drawing boards covered with paper, the meticulous, all-pervading clutter of a working studio.

"Where's Willis?" she asked. One of the eighteen-inch dinosaurs from Bailey's film had been adopted as the office mascot, and was usually to be found gazing disdainfully across the room from his perch on the bookcase by the door. Like everyone else connected with Pentacle Karen had grown into the habit of patting him on the head as she walked in.

"I think he's on Mike's desk." Toby's voice filtered in from the kitchen unit, accompanied by the sound of a filling kettle. "Guarding our new project."

"What project?" She glanced across at the drawing board next to the window. Willis was sitting comfortably on a sheaf of papers, his tail curled around him like a cat, anchoring them firmly by the corner.

"Star Rangers." Toby appeared in the doorway, carrying the electric kettle and a couple of dripping mugs. "We're doing the main creature designs. All twenty six episodes."

"May I?"

"Sure." Toby plugged the kettle in, pretending not to watch as she leafed through the main sketches. "What do you think?"

"They're terrific." She let the wad of papers fall, snapping a burst of air across the drawing board. "Really strange."

"We got most of them from the *Necronomicon*." He



Illustration by Emily English

tilted his head towards the bookshelf, dropping a couple of teabags into the mugs. "Toned down a bit, of course. Can't be too weird on prime time."

"Of course not." She took the steaming mug, and wandered over to examine the books. Their eclecticism always fascinated her, musty occult tomes rubbing bindings with technical manuals and garish American comics, a smörgåsbord of surreal images waiting to be tapped. "So what are we doing tonight?"

"You tell me." Toby sat on the desk, elaborately casual, trying to pull a package from the drawer behind him without looking at it. He fumbled it twice before closing his grip. "It's your birthday."

"How the hell did you know?" Karen turned, astonished, to meet the familiar ingenuous grin. "I never tell anyone!"

"Well someone must have told me," he said blandly, and went on deflecting her questions with his strange conversational judo for the rest of the night.

The phone rang suddenly, tearing through the tissue of her dreams. Karen jerked awake on a surge of adrenalin, the warbling tone rasping at her temples for the endless, timeless instant before recognition dawned.

"What the hell?" She waited a second or two, hoping whoever it was would realize their mistake and ring off, but the noise continued.

"All right, all right, damn it!" She rolled out of bed, the carpet itching against the soles of her feet, and groped her way into the living room. The light stabbed her eyes as she flicked it on; squinting, she fumbled her way to the sofa.

"Hello?"

"Karen? It's Carl. Carl Bailey." Even to her sleep-sodden mind his voice sounded strange, as though he'd forgotten how to form the words. "I've found out. You should... Christ. Someone should see it. I never thought..."

"Are you drunk?" Her anger rose swiftly, burning the clouds from her brain.

"I wish I was." His voice echoed flatly.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Late. And darker than you think." He giggled. "Darker. Joke, you see."

He's unbalanced, she thought, with a sudden surge of unease.

"What are you talking about, Carl?"

"I told you. Darke. Your boyfriend. I've found out how he does it. I'm in his office now."

Oh my God.

"And why are you phoning me, Carl?"

"I have to tell. Someone." His voice was cracking now. "Christ, you should see..." He trailed off, and the line hissed for a moment. "Oh my God!" His voice rose, sharp with the edge of hysteria. "I should have known!" There was a faint crash, and the line went dead.

"Carl? Carl!" Karen rattled the cradle for a moment, and reached for the keypad.

BrrrrUp. Click!

"This is Toby Darke. I'm afraid I'm out at the moment. If you'd like to leave a message..."

"Damn!" She condensed the story for the answering machine, then paused for a moment. "I haven't called

the cops yet, 'cause I think that's up to you. But I'm going over there to see if he's all right. Join me as soon as you can."

Bailey's car was still outside the unit when she arrived, gilded by the sticky yellow light of the sodium lamps. Her stomach sank as she coasted in behind it, going through the same motions she had at the start of the weekend. It was only now, with time to think, she realized how hard she'd been hoping that Bailey had already left. Or Toby arrived ahead of her...

This is insane, she thought. If he's really gone off the deep end he could be dangerous. But if he's hurt himself...

The estate was completely deserted as she climbed out of the car, the chill wind ruffling her hair. She hesitated for a moment, then rummaged under the seat for the wheelbrace. It felt comfortably solid in her hand as she straightened up.

Bailey's car was unlocked, as she knew it would be, the keys still hanging from the ignition. She turned and faced the building, her mouth dry, trying to convince herself her tingling scalp was only the fault of the wind.

"Carl!" she called. "It's me, Karen. Where are you?"

Silence, save for the distant hum of traffic, the never-ending pulse in the veins of the city.

"Carl!" she called again. There were no lights on in the Pentacle unit, but that didn't mean much. He could be anywhere. "Carl, where are you?"

She walked towards the building, her footsteps ringing flatly in the chill night air. She reached out a tentative hand, brushing the door with her fingertips. It swung open as she touched it, the lock hanging from the frame like a rotten tooth. Nerves tingling, fist closing tightly round the makeshift club, she ventured into the narrow hallway.

"Hello?" She froze, listening, the echoes of her voice trapped between the walls. A faint, directionless scuffling tickled her eardrum, seeming to come from the blackened air around her. Then her groping fingers found the light switch, and snapped her back to the world she knew.

The door to the work area was standing ajar, a narrow band of blackness around the jamb. Karen reached out for the handle, then hesitated. The phones were upstairs in the office; Bailey must have called her from there. She listened, straining her ears.

The faint, intermittent scrabbling was louder now, audible even over the pounding of her heart, and definitely coming from somewhere above her. She inhaled deeply, the palms of her hands tingling, and hefted the wheelbrace. Slowly, with infinite caution, she started to climb the stairs.

Everything on the landing seemed as it should be; then she realized the office door was slightly ajar, leaking darkness. Karen hesitated for a moment, then pushed it open with her foot. Something seemed to move inside the room, scuttling away from the widening shaft of light.

It's nothing. Just shadows and nerves...

"Carl. Are you all right?" She took a cautious step into the darkness, her eyes adjusting slowly to the gloom. Something bumped against her foot, rolling away as she entered. She turned to look at it in the

light from the open door.

It was a torch, the lens broken, the barrel dented and scratched. She stepped sideways, reaching for the light switch.

The carpet felt strange underfoot, soggy, adhering to the soles of her shoes. As she moved further into the room she noticed the smell, a thick, cloying odour, obscenely sweet, and somehow vaguely familiar.

Snap! She flicked the lights on, jumping at the sudden noise, so ludicrously loud in the stillness. Then she turned to survey the room.

Revelation hit her like a physical blow, twisting her stomach, throwing her back against the bookcase. The carpet was sodden with blood, beginning to form a thick brown crust across the pile.

Karen breathed deeply, swallowed hard, and forced herself to open her eyes. She shivered, her whole body cold from the shock.

Bailey was sprawled beside the desk, the shattered phone beside him. Most of the blood had come from

where his throat used to be, but his clothes were so sodden, and so badly ripped, it was hard to tell if there were any other injuries.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" She crossed herself, for the first time in years, and tried to think calmly. What else was out of place? Some of the papers had been disturbed. Willis was missing from the bookcase... No, Willis was on the drawing board...

But he wasn't. The board had been tilted, the sketches scattered, and Willis was down on the floor, next to the body.

Willis was feeding.

Alex Stewart was *Interzone's* first discovery: his debut story, "Seasons Out of Time," appeared in our second issue, Summer 1982. Since then we have published two more pieces by him, in issues 4 and 10. Alex has recently edited an original anthology of stories about futuristic sex.

News, continued from p.14

stories, which included the novel *Too Many Magicians* (1967); **Catherine L. Moore**, aged 76, one of the first American women of sf writers, author of such classic stories as "No Woman Born" (1944) and "Vintage Season" (1946), and the widow of writer Henry Kuttner (who died in 1958); **Lin Carter**, aged 57, prolific fantasy and adventure-story writer, an influential critic and editor, and author of such non-fiction works as *Imaginary Worlds* (1973); and **Marghanita Laski**, aged 72, erstwhile chairman of the Arts Council's Literature Panel (hence a benefactress of this magazine) and author of the quasi-sf and fantasy novels *Love on the Super-Tax* (1944), *Tory Heaven* (1948) and *The Victorian Chaise Longue* (1953).

American writers **Bruce Sterling** and **William Gibson** have forsaken cyberpunk for steam-punk in their new collaborative novel *The Difference Engine* (just sold to Gollancz in the UK for a very high advance). Set in an alternative 19th-century England, it features Lord Byron as Prime Minister, with his daughter Ada Lovelace and her friend Charles Babbage in positions of power. Steam-driven computers and even steam television have transformed society, leading the way to a Victorian age of information technology...

Brighton-based author **Gwyneth Jones** has a new sf novel, *Kairoi*, due from Unwin Hyman – and is also working on another of her "Ann Hallam" juveniles. That well-known Scotsman **Iain M. Banks** (who lives in Kent, of all places) has a second sf novel, *The Player of Games*, coming from Macmillan. Englishman **John Brunner** has sold another sf book, *Children of the Thunder*, to Del Rey in the States. And the formidable **Ian Watson** has about a dozen new titles due – well, three at any rate: *The Fire Worm* (Gollancz),

Whores of Babylon (Grafton – "about the rebuilding of ancient Babylon in the Arizona desert") and *Meat* (Headline – "a horror novel about animal liberation").

The **Philip K. Dick Society** is still going strong. The 16th issue of its newsletter (January 1988) contains Dick's original outline for *The Zap Gun* (which bears no resemblance to the novel eventually published under that title; such is the casual profligacy of genius), an article by Roger Zelazny, and scuds of news about the Dick Estate's publishing activities. Forthcoming from Gollancz is a Philip Dick juveniles sf novel, *Nick and the Glimmung* (apparently written and shelved in 1966), and due out from Arbor House in the US is *The Broken Bubble*, a previously unpublished non-sf novel from 1956. Negotiations are also underway for Xanadu Publications to issue a huge book of miscellanea by Dick, edited by Paul Williams. The PKDS's address is Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. British readers may join via Valerie Buckle, 47 Park Avenue, Barking, Essex IG11 8QU (£4 for four issues of the newsletter; or £7 air mail).

Nothing succeeds like success: **Stephen King's** novel *It* now exists in three million paperback copies in the United States, while his latest sf blockbuster, *The Tommyknockers*, already has 1.4 million hardcover copies in print. Now a new edition of King's 1978 novel *The Stand*, with "several hundred pages of manuscript" restored, is due from Doubleday. (These facts are courtesy of Andy Porter's *SF Chronicle*, the alternative to *Locus*, available in the UK from Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ.) Will the Stephen King boom never bust? Or is he set fair

to become one of those transcendent pop-culture artists who will be remembered as long as there are records of the 20th century? Will he be up there in the empyrean with Charlie Chaplin, Mickey Mouse, Fred Astaire, Agatha Christie, Superman, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe and the Beatles?

And talking of success stories, one of our home-grown bestsellers, **Terry Pratchett**, is poised to become famous in the US. New American Library have bought six of his humorous fantasies for publication over there. According to a recent profile in the *Bookseller*, Pratchett has just been signed by Gollancz, in "its largest ever single deal with an author," for several new novels beginning with *Wyrd Sisters* in autumn 1988. He has at last given up his job as a press officer with the Central Electricity Generating Board, and *Interzone* hopes to run an interview with him in the near future. Sigh. I recall reading Terry's moody short story "Night Dweller" in *New Worlds* in November 1965 – "Space is an ocean. I remember that now as I watch the armada of blue Nisphers sailing down against the solar wind. They are heading for the sun, to bask safely in the golden shallows..." He was 16 at the time, and I was 15. I was tremendously impressed.

One last nipper: *IZ* subscriber C.N. Gilmore says that he is writing a new sf/fantasy review column for *ITZAT*, a free magazine with a print-run of 30,000 to be distributed in the Bedfordshire area. Material for review should be sent to his address: 19B St Michael's Rd., Bedford MK40 2LY.

(David Pringle)

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

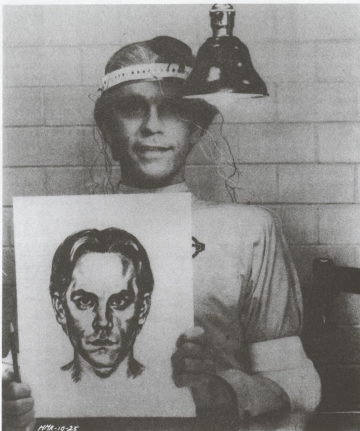
Es since *Desperately Seeking Susan* proved to a bemused industry that a woman director could make the crossover from budgetless independent quirks to blockbusting studio box-office and still have the critics blowing kisses. For her keenly-expected followup she's shot a debut script by a pair of unknown writers, a romantic comedy on the timeless theme of what women, men, and androids really want. In *Making Mr Right* jerk scientist John Malkovich creates an experimental humanoid in his own image for deep-space exploration, and when funding looks shaky his company hires image consultant Ann Magnuson to sell the public on his prototype. As Magnuson's forte is chat shows, women's magazines, and Enquirer-type junk tabloids, she duly sets herself to schooling Ulysses (also played by Malkovich) in the necessary social graces to win the hearts of the nation's women. Unfortunately he also wins hers, on the rebound from a marvelously creepy Congressional candidate ("It takes a man this sensitive to know your needs"), as well as her sister's, similarly rebounding from a ghostly daytime soap stud. Sis puts Ulysses through the most conclusive and intimate of Turing tests, and the contest is on to remake Ulysses as a man women can love, instead of the projection of asshole Dr Malkovich's emotionally crippled masculinity.

One problem with *Making Mr Right* is that it's awfully reminiscent of a lot of other recent films from *The Bride* through to *Short Circuit*, and the cybernetic-Pygmalion theme is getting a little too familiar to survive another indifferent twist. I can't accept that this lightweight fantasy has anything useful to say about sexual politics, and the final moral made my stomach twist. (Be warned: "We can create the most ambitious space programmes, but we still can't learn to love and care for one another...") Though the men in the movie are all suitably horrendous, it's hard to find much more sympathy for the women. One of the most baffling things about New Yorkers to citizens

of the real world is the way they insist on the interestingness of terms like "Mr Right" and "the meaning of life," as if the attainability of perfect fantasies were merely a matter of effort. Everyone in this world is rich, successful, pampered, and obsessively self-occupied, and though Malkovich's scientist is set up as the fall guy it's hard not to agree at times with his tirades against all this soppy emotional self-indulgence. Otherwise, Seidelman gets most of what can be got from the rather flimsy script, with a characteristic attention to style jokes and a nice

ensemble feel to the performances, but the already-sloppy plot and glumly predictable end twist aren't helped by her obvious uninterest in either science, scientists, or sf. The script's view of current AI work is laughable, the tiresome old myth about all scientists being socially retarded males is wheeled out one more time into the daylight, and the careless plot logic begs far more questions than the uneven comedy can ever hope to disarm.

Below: John Malkovich in *Making Mr Right* (Orion Pictures)



The versatile Malkovich is much better used as Basie in *Empire of the Sun*, a film on which the verdict was in long before its release over here. Judged too long, too languid, too British, and too disconcertingly oblique in the emotional uses it often makes of its potent material, it's won critical respect but little wild enthusiasm, and if it's done Spielberg's adult reputation no harm it hasn't exactly swept the board in statuettes either. This seems a shame, because for all the film's subtle failings and longueurs it remains an amazingly creditable attempt at bringing an impossible vision to the merciless screen. If it fails at times to translate the elusive essence of its novel, it's still faithful and sensitive to Ballard's material beyond anyone's right to expect.

The problem, predictably, lies in the very uniqueness of Ballard's voice. Here's a passage picked literally at random from the novel:

Jim listened to the drunken shouts from the guardhouse, and the volley of rifle shots as Price fired over the heads of the Chinese at the gates. With his dungeon pallor and bandaged hands, this albino figure frightened Jim, the first of the dead to rise from the grave, eager to start the next world war.

The first sentence is filmable, at least in principle, but it's the extraordinary second that gives the paragraph its inimitable frisson of meaning. All else apart, how do you make a model in light of Ballard's use of the demonstrative pronoun? *Empire of the Sun* is loyal to Ballard's text in objective details, often taking its dialogue straight from the novel; but to see the events of the book on screen stripped bare of their narrative voice is a strangely diluted experience. An early moment in the film shows this up only too well, when Jamie and his father play by the family swimming-pool at the house in Amherst Avenue, and you realize with a barely-controllable thrill of anticipation that you're actually going to see a *drained swimming-pool* on screen. But come the occupation and Jamie's return to the house, what we see is just, well, a drained swimming-pool, with none of the resonance that image in words has held for the Ballard reader since "The Voices of Time."

This isn't just an esoteric quibble; I seriously wonder if the viewers of this film will understand what the novel's about. The fault, I think, lies more with Stoppard than with Spielberg here, in drastically pruning the final section of the narrative that deals with Jim's complex adventures after the exodus from Lunghua. As I read it, the novel is less about the atrocities of the Japanese war, let alone war in general, than about the birth of the postwar world,



John Malkovich and Christian Bale in *Empire of the Sun* (Warner)

as the torpid remains of elderly British colonialism find themselves enforced spectators of the clash between the two virile new empires of America and Japan. Stoppard's script, though catching some of Jim's elegiac ambivalence over the death of imperial Japan, bottles out, perhaps understandably enough, from endorsing the novel's most wilfully mischievous suggestion: that there is no perceptible moral difference between the wily American scavengers with their impossible magazine dreams and the grimly disciplined ritual of the warrior Japanese. For Jim in the novel, the Nagasaki bomb whose flare he sees from the Olympic stadium at Nantao becomes for him the signal that World War III has already begun. For Stoppard's Jim, it's Miranda Richardson's soul ascending to heaven. The conceit jars, the scene misses its impact, and something is lost from the sense.

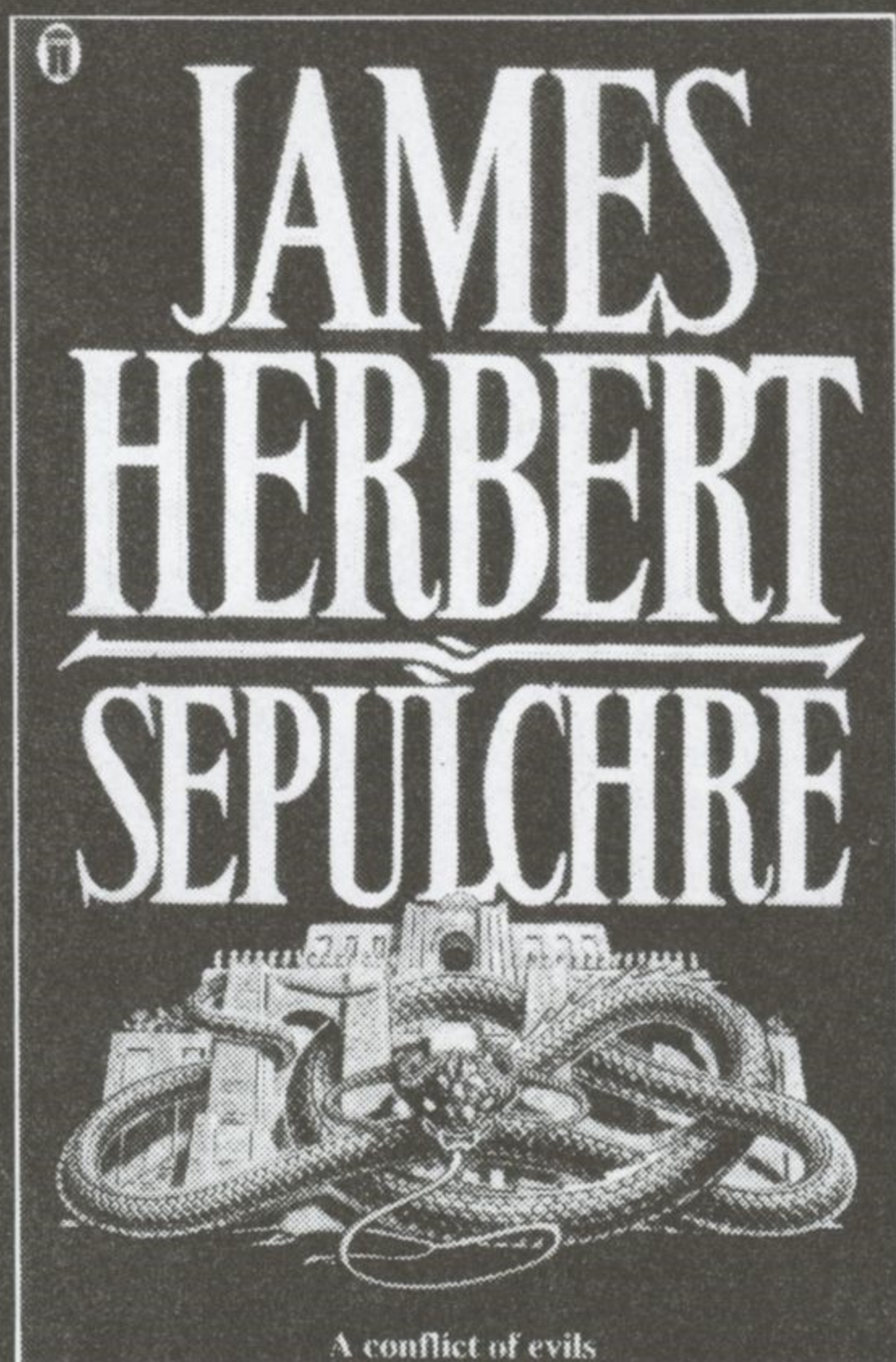
For all these reservations, *Empire of the Sun* is an enormously rewarding film, beautifully made, with only the horrible John Williams score a major error of taste. The set pieces are, as you'd expect, breathtaking, especially

the crowd scenes in Shanghai and the air raid on Lunghua; and the strength of Christian Bale's performance is another reminder of how wonderfully Spielberg has always directed children. A welcome surprise is the master's uncharacteristic restraint in lighting and sentiment: lumbered with filming in a more than usually lugubrious English summer, Spielberg has gone for a grey louring look to the Shanghai scenes, and there's hardly a sniff of the mawkish goo that curdles the emotion of his earlier films. Perhaps this, as much as anything, has prompted the indifferent American reception; but it may be just that, even blunted of its full Ballardian perversity, this rival perspective to familiar myths of World War II may hold little appeal for a public already so easily bored with uncomfortable history.

With *The Princess Bride*, another quirkily unfilmable novel on the opposite fringe of the genre makes its uneasy screen epiphany, once more doing the best it can with our island

Concluded on p.45

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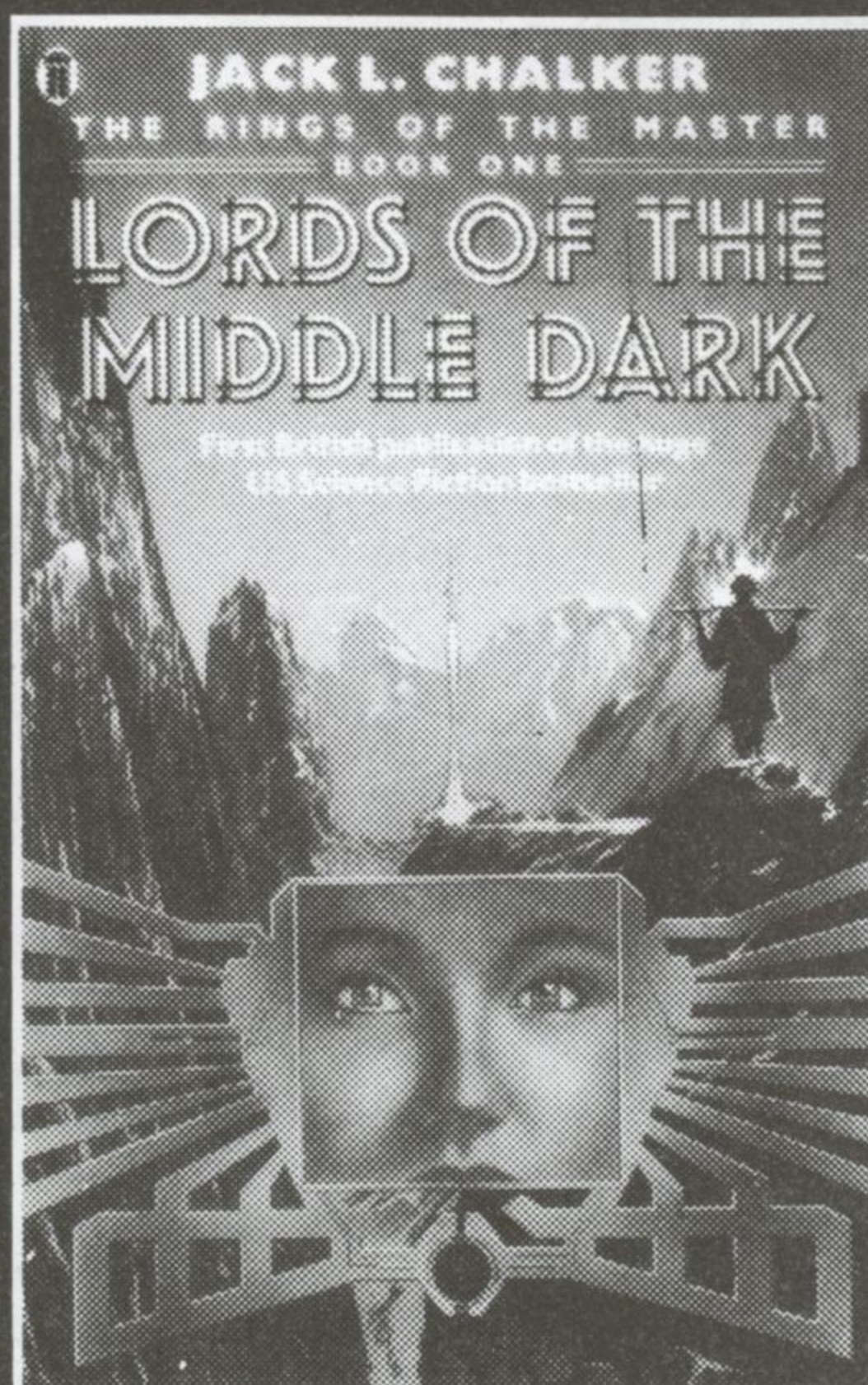


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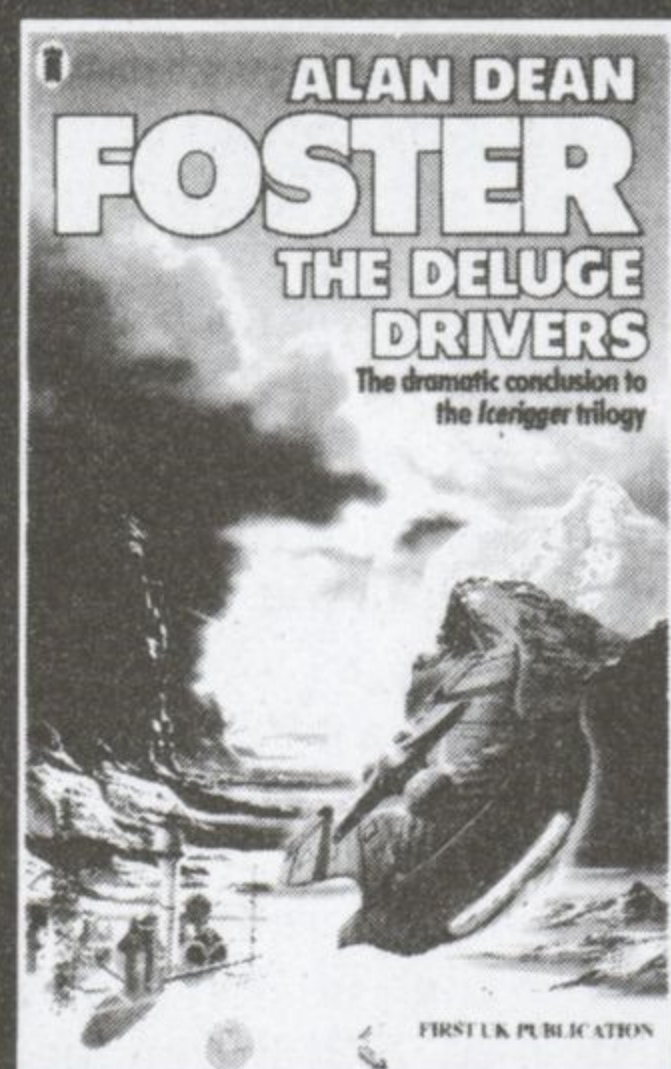


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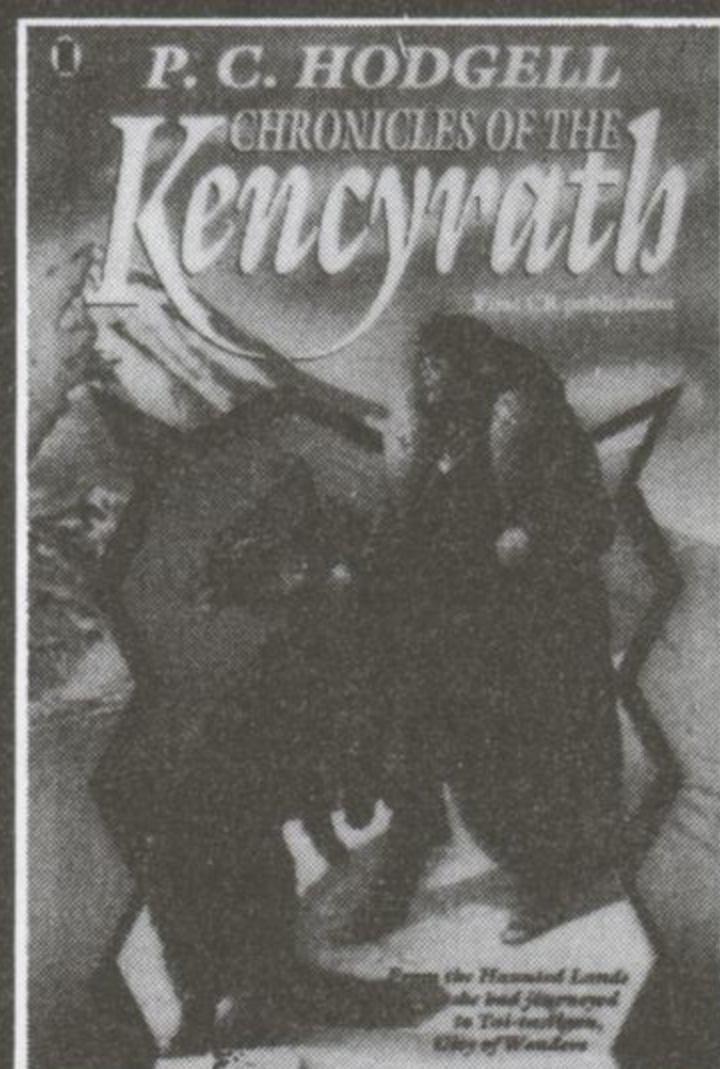


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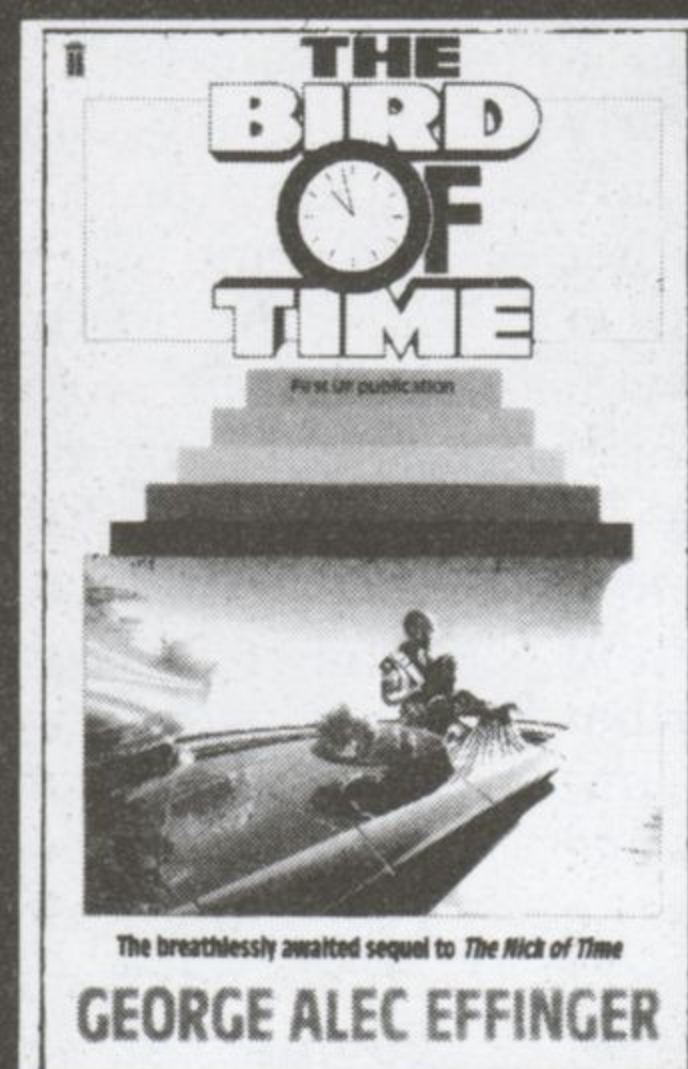


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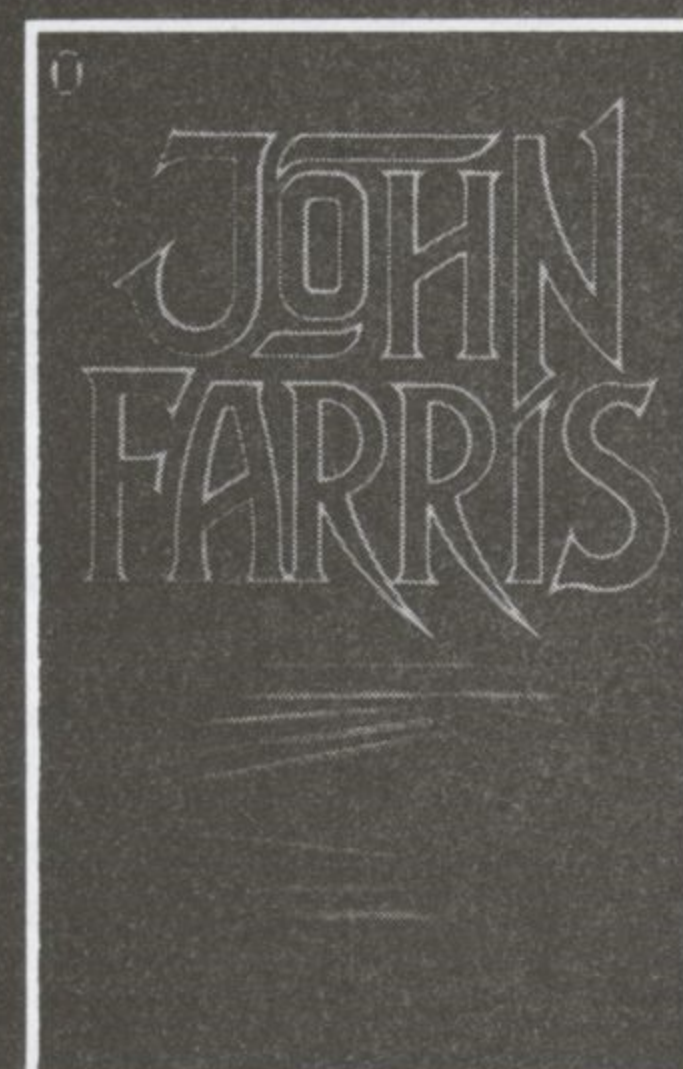


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Phillip Mann

Lux in Tenebris

From the chronicle compiled by the monks of Langevin Monastery:

"...and in the night, some two hours before dawn, it happened that the well began to blaze with a beautiful and radiant light and all men stood in awe of it."

Gerard, a stonemason, was hurrying home through the gathering dark, aware that night was not a time to be caught abroad. Slung over his hunched shoulders was a wickerwork cradle in which he carried his mallet and chisels; easy to hand should the need arise. The air was damp and he shivered and gathered his cloak more tightly about him. All day while working in the quarry, shaping the rough lumps of marble into smooth blocks for building, he had expected the rain to come. He had seen lowering clouds with rain in their bellies and heard the mutter of thunder and once a brilliant flash of lightning which made his shadow jump stark where he was crouched. That had been frightening. Gerard had seen lightning strike before. He knew the way that objects seemed to glow before a storm and how the earth seemed to exhale a graveyard smell. But the storm had not resolved itself into rain, and now the clouds were joining with the earth bringing an early dismal twilight, a foretaste of the coming winter.

The lane down which Gerard was trudging was an ancient track, established by the first men and women who trod the land. It followed the line of least resistance and this meant there were many detours. Rutted and uneven, the path was just wide enough for two pack horses to amble past one another. The worst mud holes had been capped with flat river stones and shingle but there were still plenty of places where a man could slip. In some parts the lane became a tunnel where it dipped under crowding hedges of blackthorn and holly. Gerard knew every part of the track. He had walked it almost every day of his working life.

Gerard was now entering the most dangerous part of his journey home. Here the track sloped down,

following the contours of a hill, into a narrow valley. At the bottom the path became marshy where it crossed a stream and entered a corner of the wild wood. As a young man, an apprentice as he then was, Gerard had once been attacked here and robbed and left for dead. His mature face still carried the scars of the beating. Now he was far more formidable. His profession had given him hard muscles and a deftness and accuracy of hand. Any robber would receive tit-for-tat with interest...but yet Gerard hurried along, head down, looking neither to right nor left and with his thumb notched in the Y of his staff and his fingers curled tightly about the shaft. The truth is that Gerard was no longer worried about earthly robbers. Like most men of his time he was afraid of the dark.

It was a sad time in the history of Europe. Long gone were the days of harmony between man and nature. Gerard the stonemason knew nothing of the humour of men who once saw smiling dryads in the shadows of trees and teasing spirits in waterfalls and who peopled their night sky with heroes and lovers. His was a world of darkness and threat: the sub-lunary stinking place of fallen man. Here devils, hot from hell, fierce monstrosities of sickness and spite, waited in the darkness to snare the unwary soul.

Gerard was devout after the fashion of his time. The words he heard on Sunday were, as far as he was concerned, absolute truth. He knew he was a sinner. A son of Adam, he was born in sin, would die in sin and, except for the intercession of a compassionate deity, would spin out eternity, roasting, like meat on the spit in a great man's hall. Gerard did not ask many questions. Gerard did not want questions. Like most men, he wanted peace. He was grateful when luck favoured him, and he kept his fingers crossed for an easy, uncomplicated death. As though by instinct, Gerard knew that questions meant trouble. Questions were the seeds of doubt. And doubt was one of the most subtle means of the Devil. He had heard the priest say so. Even so, Gerard was a man, and God had given

him eyes and a brain and he could not help but see and think.

Just now Gerard was thinking of home as he steadied himself on the steep path down to the river. He was thinking of Anne, his sturdy young wife, and the infant son who was crying when he left home at dawn. He hoped there had been no problems and they both would be waiting for him when he reached home. Home was a square hut with woven rush walls daubed with mud and protected by a low prickly fence. He had built it himself shortly before his marriage. Within the hut there was a fireplace in the centre ringed with stones and dug deep. Gerard thought of that fireplace. It would be glowing brightly now as Anne, her head on one side and holding her hair up from the ashes, blew on the embers. Soon there would be flame and above the flame a black cooking pot which contained vegetables and the meat and bones of a rabbit. The baby would be lying on furs and gurgling up at the shadows of the fire on the roof beams. The baby would have fed at the breast already.

That was home. Gerard still had a few miles to go before he reached it.

Using his staff for balance, Gerard crossed the river on the well-worn and slippery stepping stones he had used so many times before. He noticed that the water level was higher than it had been that morning. That meant there had been rain in the hills.

Beyond the river the path entered a stand of silver birch trees and then plunged directly into the wild wood. Within the wood it was already dark night. Gerard walked with his wooden staff advanced in front of him to ward off the low branches. There was no question of Gerard losing his way, though he might stumble. Within the wild wood there was only one path.

Gerard muttered a prayer, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of..." and wished that he could remember all the words. He also tried to still a nagging fear that he was being followed.

The path did not stay in the wild wood for long. At its deepest it passed under the heavy branches of oak trees and then began to wend towards higher ground. Gerard rounded a fallen trunk and stopped still in astonishment. In front of him, deep in the wood, were lights. These were not torches of flame such as he had seen before and which might have meant that a great lord was passing this way with guards and servants. These lights burned with a steady blue incandescence cutting sharp swathes through the dark of the forest. Gerard heard himself cry out. He crouched down quickly. He could hear sounds; the breaking of underbrush as though a cow was wandering loose. There was a roaring too like the wind that precedes a storm, though no trees swayed. Then suddenly, one of the lights swung round and picked him out. He was surprised and blinded, and tried to hide in the forest floor. But he was too late. He heard a crashing in the underbrush as creatures moved towards him.

He could not pray, though he wanted to. He could not think. He felt his bowels churn. Through tightly clenched eyes he saw redness.

A twig snapped beside him and Gerard's senses screamed. He was appalled to feel something touch

his shoulder. It was like a nuzzling. Absurdly he thought of his baby son with his butting head and queening lips as he sought to suckle.

Gerard was aware when the light left him. But still there was the pushing. It became more insistent. Gerard forced his clenched eyes open. He expected to see some embodiment of pestilence walking in darkness; some creature with fangs and horns. But what he saw he could not understand. There were wedge-shaped figures in white. They towered over him and were prodding him. Angels? Devils? Gerard did not know. He saw stumpy arms like exposed intestines and legs like inflated bladders.

But the heads... They were shiny black balls reflecting the forest canopy where it was caught in the light. Gerard stared at them and saw his own face reflected. The face that peered back at him was his own but with the nose expanded so that to himself Gerard looked like a ferret.

Now that his eyes were open the nudging stopped. The white bulbous arm retracted into the parent body. At its tip Gerard saw a small black mouth like the head of a lamprey. The figures seemed to study him. Others approached, stamping through the undergrowth and Gerard found himself completely surrounded. They all shone their lights down on him.

In simple terror Gerard shook like a dog with a nightmare and then he toppled forward onto his face, unconscious.

Above the dark forest the storm clouds broke. Pelting rain lashed the upper leaves of the canopy. With the rain came a change in the atmosphere, and a wind sprang up. The rain dribbled down out of the high trees, making the leaves of the undergrowth bob and bend. It dripped down onto the huddled shape of Gerard where he lay, curled up, near a fallen trunk. Above him the trees flexed and creaked in the wind.

Gerard stirred. His first thought was of pain. But there was no pain, just a numbness. He could smell the damp earth and hear the siling of the rain on the high leaves. He could feel where his cloak was tucked snugly round him and up under his nose. His basket of tools was clutched tight to his chest.

Warily he straightened his legs and turned and sat up. There were no strange lights, no sounds other than those of nature. He found his staff near him and climbed carefully to his feet, easing the cramp in his leg. As he stretched, something fell from the folds of his cloak and clattered to the ground. Gerard felt about on the forest floor and found something solid and smooth, not unlike a chisel or the handle of a hammer. It fitted easily in his hand like a good tool should, and there was a small boss just up under his thumb. Without thinking, Gerard pressed the boss and a brilliant beam of hard blue light stabbed out.

With a scream Gerard dropped the object and scampered blindly into the thickets. Bramble and supplejack tore at him and tripped him. He clung to the damp earth and lay still.

For ten minutes he didn't move but stared through the leaves and tangled branches of a blackthorn at the brilliant ray of light which shone along the forest floor and lit the undersides of the tree branches. He saw large drops of water, spilled from cupped leaves



above, tumble through the blue light. He saw a hedgehog trundle into the light, snuffle among the leaves and fallen branches and then wander away into the darkness. It seemed unharmed.

Slowly Gerard crawled forward until he was close to the source of light but on its dark side. He reached out and dipped the tips of his fingers in the light. He felt nothing. No tingling. No fire. With a muffled prayer Gerard slipped his fingers round the object and lifted it. The beam moved with him, stabbing into the wild wood, making the shadows march.

He pressed the stud and the light went out. Pressed again and it shone. Off again. On. Off. On. Filled with wonder Gerard gathered his things and rejoined the path and began to make his way home. He lit his path with a brilliance that the world had never seen before.

The village was dark and the air was bitter with the smell of doused fires. Standing in the centre of the village and close to the well, Gerard let the beam of light play round the small enclosure. The houses seemed to rear as he illuminated them. Somewhere a dog began a querulous barking. Other dogs responded. There was a muttering. A man's voice was raised. Other voices. A window glowed redly where a fire was puffed to life.

Sudden realization came to Gerard. He switched out the light, but not before its raking beam had revealed a man with a bill-hook creeping through a doorway.

Fear, which had for a time been held at bay by wonderment, rushed on Gerard. What was this he was holding? What devil's toy? What if he was found?

There would be questions...and perhaps worse than questions.

Quick in the darkness, he dropped the object down the village well and was horrified when, moments later, from its deep clear water, came a blazing light. Dazzled, he reeled away from the stone sides of the well and plunged into the darkness. Behind him the light reached up through the smoky air like a column of blue flame.

Gerard darted across the village enclosure and half-climbed, half-fell over his small fence and stumbled into his hut. His wife Anne, ruddy faced above the glowing embers and with their baby in her arms, stared at him open-mouthed. He stopped her mouth with his hand before she could scream. She had not been to sleep. She had sat up waiting for him, worrying, and then had come the commotion. He quietened her with his arms, holding her and rocking her and stroking her hair. There was no time for explanation...and what explanation was there anyway?

Outside, everything was confusion – running feet, men shouting, the lowing of cattle, children crying, the squawk of chickens...The village bell began to clang. There was an ominous clatter as pitchforks and spike-toothed rakes, the traditional weapons of the village, were dragged from the eaves of the huts.

Gerard and his wife held close together by their fire. "What...?" began Anne, but Gerard shushed her. Outside their small hut there were footsteps and then a pounding on their door.

"Away. Rouse yourselves." It was the voice of Vallé, the shearer. "Away Gerard. We have need of your strength this night. There is some divilment. Bring

hammer and spikes."

"Coming now," called Gerard and he stood. He touched a finger to his lips as a warning to his wife. Then he picked up his basket of tools. The mallet was not there. He wondered if he had dropped it out there in the wild wood. But he knew he hadn't. The mallet had been taken...exchanged perhaps.

Through the remaining hours of that long night the men of the village maintained their vigil. They stood with pitchforks raised round the blazing well.

With dawn the brilliance of its light faded to a clear shimmering haze.

Simon, the blacksmith, a man with shoulders like an ox and carrot red hair, cautiously advanced to the well opening and looked down. His pale freckled face was bathed in a rippling effulgence. He staggered back, shouting that he was blinded, but then the darkness cleared from his eyes and he beamed at the assembled menfolk, proud of his courage.

As daylight established itself, the women and children crept out and joined the men. In silence, the entire population of the village stood round the well and stared and waited.

During the night, a messenger had run to the nearby monastery which was named Langevin. It was the abbot of this monastery who took charge of the spiritual welfare of the small village. Soon monks with sandalled feet and flapping robes came hurrying down the lane and into the village. They looked serious and perplexed when they saw the well with its faint blue glow in the morning sunlight. Simon explained with expansive gestures how he had looked down the well and the abbot, who had finally arrived at the wellside aboard the commissary cart, reached out his hand over the lip of the well and stared in wonder as the underside of his hand turned a bright and radiant blue.

"Sancta Maria."

Sancta Maria indeed. The abbot was not the first to note that the colour of the light from the well was close to that of the cape worn by the Virgin Mary in the stained glass window in the monastery chapel. That observation made him cautious. The subtlety of the devil was not to be underestimated. He called for prayers and psalms and holy water. The monks and the village folk knelt down before the well. In front of them stood the abbot with a crucifix in his hand, held high.

The singing swelled while all eyes squinted through half-closed lids. Then there were prayers and finally the abbot dashed holy water over the wellside. "In Nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

Nothing moved. If there were a devil in the well it should at least have been provoked by the singing. The holy water should have stung it. It should have roared aloud and shown itself and then slunk away in a puff of smoke. But nothing happened. The abbot approached the wellside cautiously and as he did so the sun was hidden behind a cloud. Magically it seemed, the well glowed more brightly. And in every heart, save one, it was taken as a sign. When the villagers were released by the abbot, Gerard stood up and dusted the mud off his knees. He crossed himself and looked across at his wife. She would not meet his gaze and looked to the ground.

Events began to move quickly for the small village. The day after the appearance of the light, the Bishop from the nearby city, Jean de Lautremont by name, arrived on horseback. With him was a full retinue of dark-clad priests, scribes, a father confessor, theological advisors and guards. The Bishop took charge.

Jean de Lautremont was a vigorous man in his early fifties with a shiny bald head tanned brown by the sun. His eyebrows were fair and bushy above deep-set blue eyes and he had a habit of staring at something or someone without blinking so that he seemed to devour his subject. Broad of shoulder and deep-chested, he walked with a swagger, like a warrior... which in a sense he was. He regarded himself as God's warrior and a guardian of God's truth. The Bishop was a man of the enlightenment. He was a famed scholar, one who delighted in plumbing God's mysteries whether with pendulum or logic and who enjoyed disputing with heretics. He had attended many burnings.

As soon as he arrived, the Bishop swung down from his horse and ordered that a bucket of the "light" water be drawn for him. He tasted the water with the tip of his tongue, savouring it with his lips, and pronounced it sweet. Then he blessed the well and peered down into it. He saw the bright point of light in the depth of the well and was troubled in his mind. He knew that fire did not burn in water...and in any case this did not look like fire. It blazed with a steady, unwavering light. This was like...Jean de Lautremont searched in his mind. He too thought of the Virgin Mary and remembered a time when he was a boy and stood in the cathedral after mass. Sunlight, pouring in through one of the high stained-glass windows, had completely engulfed him. He had swooned and fallen believing that Mary had placed her mantle over him. And now, here he was again, lapped in blue. But he was a man, well versed in the ways of the world, and he would not swoon. With a sigh the Bishop drew back from the well. How nice it would be, he thought, if faith were truly a simple matter of coloured light.

There was no denying the beauty of the radiance, and de Lautremont with his fine judicial mind could see many problems ahead. This simple village well, with its mysterious shining water, had all the makings of a miracle. Miracles were tricky things and the church of Christ trod a fine line when it came to dealing with the supernatural. The church needed to remain ahead of popular superstition while not appearing foolish. Certainly the Bishop did not want to seem gullible. On balance, in his opinion, miracles were best when they occurred in someone else's diocese. He realized the need to move with caution. Discussion at a high level was necessary. Meanwhile, there would be chatter and speculation. That was unavoidable. Wells, in the normal course of nature, did not suddenly begin to pour forth beautiful blue light. A miracle, if this were a miracle and not just a *lusus naturae*, would need time to make its effects and meaning known. Bishop de Lautremont decided to give the shining well time.

The Bishop kept his thoughts to himself. He spoke calmly with his advisors and did not mention the possibility of a miracle. He then addressed all the village people and warned them against incredulity.

Which done, he filled some flasks with the well water and departed back to the city.

As he expected, the villagers were not cautious. Word spread. Word of a miracle. During the afternoon after the Bishop's departure, the sick of the village were brought out on straw pallets to bathe their limbs in the light from the well and wash themselves in its water. Cures were effected. Gerard watched with astonishment as a man who had been blind and dumb since his fourteenth year began to grunt as his tongue loosened and then shout praises as the daylight entered his eyes.

Neighbouring villages heard of the news and soon the well was the talk of the province. Within days, the narrow lanes leading to Gerard's village were dark with the hoods of pilgrims. Shanties and brushwood lean-tos sprang up overnight and the well became the gleaming centre of a motley crowd of humanity.

During all the excitement Gerard held his peace. No one connected him with the light from the well, but his wife looked at him strangely. Each morning he trudged to his work at the quarry and each evening he returned. Always he contrived to be with company when he came to that part of the track which led through the dark forest. But one day, returning home, he was alone, and curiosity overcame his fear.

Daylight lingered, and spokes of sunlight slanted down through the still, dusty air of the wood. He came to the place where the path led round the fallen trunk. There he glanced about, and then broke through the underbrush bordering the path. Almost immediately he found evidence of the bulky strangers. Saplings lay splintered. Some larger trees had been severed a hand's span above the ground and their trunks dragged away. In dried mud Gerard found wedge-shaped foot prints. Further on he came to a clearing where he could look up and see a circle of sky. Something huge had rested here. It has pressed the bushes so flat that they were indented into the forest floor. Three small areas had been completely cleared, right down to the soil. In the centre of each the soil had been turned. To his countryman's eye it was obvious that something had been planted...or buried.

He was about to dig when he heard voices on the path and crouched down. And when the voices had passed he found that his nerve had failed him and he quickly broke back through the bushes and onto the path and hurried home.

As he approached the village Gerard could hear the crowd. It sounded like the buzzing of angry bees when a cow has upturned their hive. Several hundred of people were camped in the fields waiting to visit the well. With difficulty Gerard made his way past mountebanks and peddlars and children with sores and old men with goitres and women who lay, pale-faced, on stretchers. In every face there was the light of hope despite the stench and the smoke and the cramped conditions. Wherever he listened, Gerard heard word of the latest cure.

Thoughtfully he came to his own small hut and stepped inside.

That evening Anne and Gerard sat close while the baby fed at her breast. Then Gerard held the child and rubbed its back and let it gnaw at his finger for it was fretful with teething. Anne went

to a corner of the hut and returned with a beaker of water which she held up, tempting the child's lips.

"Tis from the holy well," she explained. "I had to fight for it."

Since the well had become such a crowded place, most of the villagers had taken to drawing their water from the river which meandered in the lower meadows.

Gerard dashed the beaker from the child's lips and its contents slopped on the floor.

"He'll have none of it," he said, and handed the child back to Anne. She looked at Gerard in surprise and anger but held her peace.

During the rest of that evening she tried to keep the child quiet, for it was obvious that Gerard was upset and she feared that any sound might provoke him.

Finally the child slept. Gerard sat in front of the small fire poking at the embers with a stick. Occasionally he started to speak and then lapsed into a brooding silence again.

After a time, Anne set her mending aside and came and squatted down beside him with her arm across his knees. "Tell me," she whispered. "Tell me what troubles you."

Gerard slipped his arm round her and squeezed. Haltingly he told her as best he could what had happened to him on that night when he returned home late. He saw her eyes grow round with astonishment and then fear as he described his meeting with the strange creatures in the wood and how they had left for him, rolled up in his cloak, the instrument which made the light. When he had finished his story he swore her to secrecy with his strong stonemason's hand round her thin wrist. She nodded and held close to him.

That night, on their hard bed, they made love under the rough covers. Later Anne held Gerard close and whispered, "You should tell someone. The well may be a miracle. Perhaps they were angels you met in the wood. But you should still go up to Langevin and tell them about the light."

Gerard nodded in the darkness. "You are right. I will go tomorrow."

But he didn't.

The days slipped past. The last balmy days of Autumn merged with the first grey rainy days of Winter and the village became a sea of mud. Despite inconvenience, people still came to the well and still there were miraculous cures. The village prospered. Rich men paid in gold to be bathed in the water from the well. Painters captured the great outpouring of light on canvas and several teams of scholars arrived and made careful measurements and scratched their heads in wonderment before departing.

Everything was recorded. Since the first founding of their order, monks within the stone walls of Langevin monastery had recorded the history of the region. Now they kept a careful tally of all the cures that were effected and wrote glowing accounts of the visits of great men. They also kept the accounts.

Little by little Gerard stopped worrying about the well. It seemed to have brought good fortune. And in any case he was too busy. Being a good craftsman, he had been invited to repair the worn floor stones in the old monastery. Another baby was on the way and he had to make provision for the winter.

Bishop de Lautremont became a frequent visitor

to the well, sometimes staying at Langevin Monastery for up to three days. He talked to those who had been cured and made careful notes on what they said. It was widely known that he drank the well water to help his indigestion. It was also known that he had had long meetings with his archbishop and with a cardinal sent from Rome.

These senior church officials advised caution, and de Lautremont heeded them. But gradually the mind of this strong and fastidious man was seduced. He began to take pride in this humble corner of his diocese and in the well that poured forth its light in all weathers. For those who wanted a sign, he reasoned, this was surely it. Poor Jean de Lautremont did not realize that he was one of those who most craved tangible proof of God's care. He knelt for hours at the side of the well staring down into its effulgence. The light seemed to enter him through his eyes and nose and mouth.

On one special occasion he prayed with a loud voice like a man possessed. So great was his intensity that he fell down in a swoon. His concerned attendants carried him back to the monastery where he slowly recovered.

In his sleep he saw a vision. The Virgin Mary, radiant of face, reached down from high Heaven and touched him and immediately he was filled with the clear blue light of God's love. When he awoke he found he was whole and simple. Gone was the disputation and argument and secret doubt. He felt a simplicity and purity he had never known before. He was at one with his faith. He smiled kindly upon the world. In gratitude, Jean de Lautremont invited the patient monks of Langevin to produce an illustrated history of the well at his expense.

Then winter bit, and a cruel winter it was. Snow drifts closed the lanes. Hungry wolves came down from the North in packs and howled about the village in the night. The mill pond froze. Black ice grew in the trees and even the surface of the stream froze over. But the well did not freeze. At night it was a scene of wonder to see the snow flakes tumbling in its brilliance like wraiths, a hundred yards above the earth, before pitching into darkness.

Many people died of exposure that winter and their bodies could not be buried until the thaw set in.

Anne became ill and Gerard cared for her and his young son who now could walk. The family survived, but only just, and when the spring came they were near the end of their strength.

One night in spring, almost six months to the day since the well started to shine, a great shout went up in the village. Gerard stepped outside his hut to see what the trouble was and knew immediately. The light from the well had begun to wane.

The next night it began to flicker and one was sent from the village to the city to tell the Bishop. The people of the village and those who were camped there, gathered in silence as the well fought a losing battle against the darkness. An hour before dawn the light flared for the last time, and died.

Next morning when they lifted water from the well, they found it was milky and filled with fine bubbles. It tasted sour and burned the lips. The following day

the well began to stink and on that day Bishop de Lautremont arrived.

He inspected the well. He stared down into it and then staggered back gasping and with his eyes streaming. He saw the darkness and smelled its evil breath. He did not understand. And yet he knew that something terrible had happened.

That night, in the monastery, he knelt on the cold stone floor in front of a plain wooden cross and tried to pray. But the prayers would not form properly. The words seemed to die as soon as uttered. In his mind there seemed to be an echoing darkness, like the darkness at the bottom of the stinking well into which he had peered. This was worse than any physical pain he had ever known. He felt guilty in a way that he could not describe.

Late in the night he got stiffly to his feet and left the small chapel.

In the morning the stink about the well was worse. Wherever the villagers turned the air was infected and the breeze brought no relief. People walked about with wet scarves over their mouths because the odour of the well made the lungs sting. Finally, Bishop de Lautremont ordered the men of the village to tip rocks and stones down the well. Gerard was brought from his work at the monastery and charged to re-shape an old mill-stone into a plug and this was lowered into place by sweating, retching men. The mill-stone was covered with fresh earth and the earth was raked flat and holy water was sprinkled there.

De Lautremont looked on with tired, bloodshot eyes. He knew that every effect had its cause. God had withdrawn his favour, that was the effect. He, Bishop de Lautremont, was the cause. There had been something lacking in his faith. God had made him the custodian of the well to test him, and he had been found wanting. God's vengeance was just on earth as in Heaven. The Bishop vowed that very day that he would live a life of such austerity and pain as to make the beggars pity him. "For the gates of Hell are wider than a lifetime," he thought. "And those who have much shall have nothing, and only the poor shall know God."

He could not bring himself to speak to the inhabitants of the village but left at mid-day to walk barefoot back to the city.

Not so the abbot of Langevin. He saw an end to revenue and gave vent to a righteous anger. He called together all the people of the village and any others who were still present and made them kneel down in the place where the well had been. There he harangued them. "This is a punishment. How can it be other than a punishment? Someone has fostered evil. And this place of light and healing and miracle is become an abomination." He looked at the bowed heads of the villagers in front of him and nodded to himself. Oh, he would make them sorry. "Just as you do not leave a thorn in your foot, so you must not allow evil to thrive among you. Pick out the evil doer. Root him out I say... for the fires of Hell are eternal and the pain is everlasting. Amen."

"Amen," murmured the villagers.

Gerard, kneeling beside the men and women he had known since childhood, felt his bowels turn to water when he heard the talk of fire. When he stood up he swayed and for a moment blacked out though he did



not fall. He had no doubts concerning the identity of the transgressor. He felt that everyone knew. But when his sight returned he found that nobody was paying special attention to him. No one was looking directly at their neighbour. Everyone looked guilty.

That night Gerard and Anne held close to one another. Neither slept. Within Anne the new baby kicked and Gerard kissed her belly.

In the morning the news was worse. A widening circle of darkness surrounded the site of the well and within its circumference all plants were dying. Those who had drunk the well water during the last days before the light's disappearance, began to complain of sickness. A young man began losing his hair in handfuls. An old woman bled at the gums. Two children died and a wife aborted.

Gerard did not go to work that day but stayed in the village and helped with the burials. The whole place smelled of death.

Gerard felt guilty. He sat with his head in his hands wondering what he could do. Gerard knew that the problem was his and his alone. He was the one who had brought the light to the well. He had failed to tell his story when the miracles started happening. He had stood by and watched while people sickened...

Confession was a possibility, but Gerard scorned it. And in any case, confession would only lead to questions, and questions would lead to more questions and there would be no end to it...except fire and pain.

He decided to flee.

Some hours before dawn, Gerard roused Anne from her uneasy sleep and made her dress the child. She

grumbled and complained but Gerard would not listen. He gathered their few possessions together and rolled them in a blanket. This he tied on his back along with his tools. He made a second pack for Anne and then he urged her and the child from the hut. They were not the only families leaving that night, it seemed. Half the village was already afoot.

They made their way south, away from the dark wood and, after two days of walking, they came to a town close to the sea. Anne had relatives who lived there and they were able to seek refuge.

Luck favoured them. Stonemasons were in demand after the hard winter and Gerard was able to find work repairing sheep cotes with stones taken from an old Roman theatre. They started life afresh and the only tale they told about their old village was how the light from the well had suddenly died.

The first year was hard.

But in the second year they prospered. Gerard was able to buy himself a position in a company of masons and began to work on a church. Thus he was assured of employment for many years. After five years he was able to take on his first apprentice.

It was while Gerard was working on the church that word came of the death of Bishop de Lautremont. According to the story, that poor unhappy man had starved himself to death and died alone. Neither Gerard nor Anne paid much attention. They had a growing family to attend to and a demanding business. And besides, they never talked about the past and tried not to think about it.

The years slipped by.

It so happened that one Autumn it was necessary for Gerard to visit the city on business and he decided to take his eldest son Pierre, who was now a barrel-chested young man of twenty, along with him for company. There were two routes they could take. The first was direct: a proper thoroughfare with inns and resting places and a regular flow of travellers. The second route wound through the hills following an ancient track and happened to pass the small village where Gerard and Anne had once lived and where their first son, Pierre, had been born. The way was now little more than a track and rarely used.

Gerard's son looked at him with surprise when Gerard urged his horse off the main road and down onto the narrow path.

"Thought you might like to see where you were born," said Gerard and ducked to avoid some low branches. Pierre pulled a face. He had been looking forward to the pleasures of the city, but he made no protest and followed his father.

Evening found them close to the site of the old village where the well had once blazed. No one lived there any longer. The village had been abandoned shortly after the well had died and a new village had grown up some half mile away in the lower meadows close to the river. It was damper in springtime than the old village and more open to the west wind, but the water was clean and the soil rich and dark.

In the golden light of the setting sun, Gerard stood on the site of the old well. Still nothing grew there. In fact nothing grew within a fifty-foot radius. The soil was bald and hard. Beyond were low shrubs and bushes and then the cultivated grasslands.

"So where was I born, father?" asked Pierre, hoping to jog Gerard out of his reverie and into action. His father looked up. He had been remembering. He had been thinking back to the night when he walked home holding in his hand the thing that made the wonderful blue brilliance which lit up the trees and the huts. No one had ever seen it in its fullest brilliance except him.

"Born? Oh, you were born over here." Gerard led the way out of the bare clearing and through some hip-high bushes. "A lot of us lived together in this part. There were lots of huts and places for pigs and chickens."

Some of the old houses were still standing though their walls were slanting and caved. Most had long since fallen to the ground and decayed. All Gerard could find was the place where the hut he had built had once stood. It was completely overgrown and undistinguished.

"Well thank you for showing me the place father," said Pierre. "But, perhaps now we ought to be looking out for somewhere to stay the night."

They remounted and rode down to the meadow flats. "Now remember," said Gerard. "You are to tell no one who we are. If anyone asks you say we are travellers who thought we were taking a short cut. Do not mention my name." Pierre did not understand why his father was so insistent on this secrecy but he didn't argue. There were many things he didn't understand about this journey.

They found lodging for the night in a stable. A toothless old woman welcomed them to the hostel, such as

it was, and a young woman bedded them down and brought them rye cakes and ale. Gerard thanked her. "It is very few strangers we see coming through these parts," she said, being inquisitive.

"And I am not surprised," replied Gerard. "The old village has a strange past."

"Have you been there?"

"Aye."

"Then you are braver than me. I won't set foot there."

"Why?"

"Devils dance there. Round where they had that well. Everyone knows that."

Gerard questioned her about the old inhabitants of the village but received little satisfaction. The girl was not interested in the past and didn't want to think about it. When he told her that they were thinking of taking the path that led through the wild wood and past the old quarry she threw up her hands. "No one goes that way," she said. "Not even the priests."

"Why?"

She didn't answer. She crossed herself and withdrew from them as though they were already damned and could somehow infect her.

"And why are we going that way father?" asked Pierre as they settled down into the straw for the night.

"Because it interests me," said Gerard and he rolled over.

The next morning they set out early. They crossed the water-meadows and came to the place where the new track from the village joined the ancient path. The path dipped down and after following the river for a couple of hundred yards, turned sharply and entered the wild wood. To Gerard the wood looked no different. He even recognized some of the trees. But both he and his son pushed their cloaks back and made sure that the swords they carried were easy to hand as they passed into the gloom under the trees. Gerard muttered a prayer, and Pierre whispered a quiet Amen.

The fact is that the wood was frightening. It had a brooding watchful presence which unsettled the horses and made both men talk in whispers. The track was easy to follow, but it was overgrown by the lower branches of trees, and they had to shield their faces and stoop behind the necks of the horses.

After they had progressed for a few minutes, a smell greeted them, a smell of lemons. It made the horses snuffle. The men urged them on, patting their manes and whispering to them. Pierre felt a pricking in his eyes and would have turned back, but his father was leading, and he was too proud to show his fear.

They came to a place which Gerard remembered well. The path turned round a large fallen trunk before heading out of the wood. The trunk was covered with fungus and a tangle of forest ivy. The smell of lemons was very strong, but it was here that Gerard dismounted.

"Where are you going, father?"

"Wait here. There is something I want to see."

Gerard broke from the path, backing into the branches which rasped round him and sprang back to form a dense wall. Within seconds he was lost from the sight of his son.

Gerard knew where he was going. He plunged

steadily through the tangled undergrowth, breaking the young trees underfoot when he had to and dragging his cloak clear from the thorns of bramble and wood rose. He held his cloak over his mouth to protect him from the stench of lemons which was now almost overpowering.

Stumbling, Gerard suddenly burst into a place where there were no trees or bushes. Above him was a black canopy. The light was very dim and his eyes were streaming, but Gerard could see where three trees grew. They were like no trees that Gerard had ever seen before. They were coal black. Branches sprouted a few yards above the ground and spread like vines. Where they encountered the old forest trees, they coiled round them and then grew on. In this way, sturdy native trees such as oak and ash and holly, stunted above their trunks, propped up the weight of the huge black canopy. The bark which covered the trunk and branches of the black trees had the same soft living texture as the velvet which covers the antlers of a young stag. Gerard reached up and touched one of the branches. He felt a mild sting in his finger ends and pulled his hand away. Part of the bark came with it, like a smear of carbon.

Nothing grew under the canopy and no woodland creatures would walk there. Looking down Gerard could see bones and the mouldering shapes of small creatures that had been asphyxiated in the cloying air. It was beginning to affect Gerard too. He found himself gasping and realized he had been holding his breath. There was a numbness in his feet and a tingling in his hands. He turned and stumbled back and could only breathe more freely when he was out from under the canopy.

"Hi. Over here. I'm leading the horses out. They're getting sick." It was the voice of his son calling and sounding distant in the still forest. Gerard broke through to the path and barged along it, following his son. He caught him up after a couple of minutes. One of the horses was dragging and trying to lie down. Pierre was pulling at the bridle. Gerard gave the horse a heavy thwack on its flanks and that got it moving.

They travelled as fast as they could. Soon they came to the edge of the forest and out into the clear air. Quickly they splashed over the river and climbed up the far bank and then on and up and out of the valley. They came into morning sunshine and threw themselves down on the ground gasping.

The horses began to recover. They snuffed the air and tossed their heads and then began to crop the grass patiently.

"What was in there, father?" asked Pierre, speaking for the first time since they had emerged from the forest. His father didn't reply. "I didn't know what to do... whether I should go in after you or not. The horses were staggering. I was going to lead them out and come back for you." Still his father said nothing. "I hope..."

"You did the right thing," said Gerard. "I was the fool for coming here."

Pierre didn't know how to reply to this. He went back to his first enquiry. "Did you see something in there? Was it a devil?"

"I saw trees," said Gerard. "Just trees. Black trees. It was them that caused the smell."

"But..." began Pierre, but Gerard interrupted him.

"That was all I saw, and when we get to the city and later when we get back home, we say nothing to anybody. Not even to your mother. Is that agreed?"

"Whatever you say, father."

Gerard looked at his hand. The fingers were still black where he had touched the tree. He wiped them on the dew-wet grass and then held his hand out to his son. The two men shook hands.

The path climbed on, past the quarry where Gerard had worked when he was a young man, and up to a pass in the hills.

Reaching the pass, Gerard and his son stood up in their stirrups and looked back the way they had come. They could see right down the valley and across the wild forest and even to the site of Gerard's old village. The sunlight brought out the colours of the forest where it was healthy: beech green and elm green mixed with the more sombre tones of holly and spruce. The sunlight also revealed a black stain which was spreading over the forest like a mantle of darkness, like the shadow of Satan himself, and which was probing into the valleys and had reached to the very edge of the valley beneath them. Faintly they caught the aroma of lemons.

Phillip Mann is British-born but now lives in New Zealand. He has had four sf novels published by Gollancz - *The Eye of the Queen* (1982), *Master of Paxwax* (1986), *The Fall of the Emirates* (1987) and the forthcoming *Pioneers* (July 1988, £10.95). He has also written several plays. This is his first appearance in *Interzone* or (so far as we are aware) in any sf magazine.


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Destination: Gloom

Charles Platt

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Heathrow Airport.”

I suppose the British Airways flight attendant means well, but to me she's about as welcoming as a plate of cold kippers. Her voice is tense and awkward; it sounds insular and self-consciously prim, as if she doesn't much like this American fad for extending an effusive greeting toward a plane-load of foreigners. Indeed, effusiveness and foreigners have never been very popular on this side of the Atlantic. But the ritual has become part of a flight attendant's duty, and the British always do their duty; so she tries to be nice in that uniquely insincere style. As I listen to her Universal English Female Voice (the prissiness never varies, from Buckingham Palace to Coronation Street), I wonder: how is it possible for a nation such as this to produce modern science fiction?

Science fiction, after all, is a literature of transcendence. By speculating beyond everyday reality, sf writers transcend its constraints. When they do their job properly, they make transcendence seem logical and plausible; and this, in turn, is most effective when the writers show some faith in science and social change.

But on my 1988 visit to “Thatcher's England” (a phrase implying all too accurately the condition of lost liberty, of ownership that now afflicts the nation) the only social changes I can detect are toward autocracy, frustration, and reimposition of the old class structure. As for science: it still survives, as is evidenced by concepts such as *Hotel* (the horizontal-takeoff-and-landing space-plane that would be a next-generation space shuttle). My copy of that admirable British weekly *The Economist*, however, informs me that even at a time of budget surpluses, government funding for science is going to be cut still further, and projects will be financed on strictly practical grounds. As one-time nuclear physicist, now-science-fiction writer Dave Langford put it to me on the second day of my visit, when I asked him if he ever missed doing research: “Not the way that they do it here.”

So where do Brits find the creative energy to write tales of mankind conquering the universe? They don't. More often than not, they depict the universe conquering mankind. “Downbeat” writers (a label encompassing everyone from John Wyndham to J.G. Ballard) have prevailed since World War II, and the country has long been infatuated with that seemingly self-defeating form, the Disaster Story. I suppose this is still transcendence of a sort, in that annihilating the everyday world is one way of escaping from it; and J.G. Ballard has said that his tales of global catastrophe are “a literature of psychological fulfillment.” To Americans who still keep faith in the concept of growth, however, it all looks like a British penchant for defeatism. From the sunny perspective of, say, California, a writer such as M. John Harrison seems quite perverse in his preoccupation with death, deformity, and doom.

Twenty years ago, before I emigrated from London to New York, I angrily denied the “nihilism” epithet as it was then applied to stories that appeared in *New Worlds* magazine. Being British by upbringing, I have a personal weakness for morbid stories, and have even written a few myself. But it is a weakness; because I think the real business of science fiction should be the realistic depiction of people overcoming, rather than surrendering to, forces that are greater than themselves.

This can-do outlook is sometimes laughed at as an American myth. The United States, after all, is a nation where one's right to the pursuit of happiness is written into the Constitution, and citizens seem to imagine they can cheat death itself merely by swallowing enough vitamins.

But Americans are not the only ones who want to believe in human potential to change the world. Right here in *Interzone*, readers have been complaining about stories that are unnecessarily depressing. I don't like the style in which these readers express their complaints (for some reason, people who moan about “downbeat” stories always sound illiterate) but I empathize

with their point of view. Many of us read sf, I think, because we're dissatisfied with everyday life – especially if everyday life truly sucks, as seems to be the case for a sizable minority of Britons in 1988. This doesn't mean that we want simplistic escapism, which tends to be too unconvincing to be satisfying. Rather, we need stories that suggest, plausibly, how limits might be overcome. This is one reason for the success of so-called cyberpunk fiction: Instead of tiresomely warning us of the paths of existence, the intractability of social problems, and the awful side-effects of science (which we know about already), it celebrates technology and depicts future societies that have embraced it.

Still, I suppose it's understandable if British writers can't summon much enthusiasm about the future. Quite apart from having to live in a depressing political climate, they must find it hard these days to make a decent living from their craft; and as George Orwell observed, poverty does tend to limit one's imagination.

In the 1950s and 1960s, writers such as John Brunner, Kenneth Bulmer, E.C. Tubb, and Brian Aldiss more than doubled their British income by selling their work to American paperback publishers. By contrast, many British writers today find it difficult or even impossible to be published in the United States. American editors (on a modest scale, I count myself as one) are put off by the provincial tone and dour worldview of authors such as Ian Watson or Keith Roberts – even though their prose is elegant and their books are highly imaginative.

Other British genres and media suffer from similar difficulties. There are a few exceptions: British horror is exportable, because morbidity is more appropriate in it; and British pastoral fantasy has some appeal (I count *Watership Down* as a classic example). Some movies find success: *Brazil*, for instance, generated considerable interest in the United States, even though its gloomy ending, depicting the triumph of bureaucracy over the

individual, seemed tiresomely defeatist to most of my American friends.

But Douglas Adams is the only science-fiction writer I can think of who has had any real success in the United States in the last ten years. (I discount Aldiss's *Helliconia* trilogy because it operates more as fantasy than as science fiction.) Even Adams remains preoccupied with the vicissitudes of an intolerable status-quo; he only makes them palatable by satirizing them.

Ballard and Aldiss have both suggested somewhat circumspectly that anti-intellectualism in America is the real reason why British sci doesn't do well there. True, U.S. readers seem less willing to extend themselves when a book requires some hard work on their part. On the other hand, if U.S. science fiction is all so witless, and British readers are so superior to it, why do they continue to buy so much of it? Could it be that American expansionism is more than simplistic wish-fulfillment – that the whole point of science fiction is to dwell on the possibilities, rather than the penalties, in progress?

Unfortunately, the very fabric of postwar British society is inimical to progressive thought. Looking out of the window of the train as it approaches London from Heathrow, one sees an endless succession of pokey little semi-detached homes on neat little streets that stand like a monument to conservatism, as if imagination and ambition are seen here as dangerous qualities to be suppressed at all costs. Life in these claustrophobic enclaves must be crimpingly restrictive; yet the nation validates and celebrates it in TV shows from *Crossroads* to *Eastenders*.

Moving toward the urban centre, one sees probably the most tawdry, tasteless modern buildings in the world, mimicking the starkness of American architecture while rejecting its redeeming grandeur and audacity. Arriving in some small, shoddy hotel room, where the blankets are barely big enough for the bed and the towels are not much larger than table napkins, one turns on the TV news and finds trade unionists smugly regretting the inconvenience they are poised to inflict upon the hapless general public. In America, union leaders are seldom seen on national or even regional news, but on BBC and ITV they are treated as celebrities, as if Britons derive morbid pleasure from contemplating the agents of their own immobilization. This symbolic preoccupation with impotence is then literalized on the early-evening news with a closing human-interest item that typically dwells on the misery of someone afflicted with an incurable disease or deformity.

In a social climate such as this, one can only admire the obstinate radical

stance of *Interzone* (while noting, of course, that its crusade on behalf of innovative fiction is largely sustained with imports from the United States).

Is there any cure for the British malaise? Certainly, and the prescription is simple enough. British writers who wish to restore some measure of vitality and vision to their work should emigrate. Not necessarily to America; even France would be an improvement. Freed from daily confrontations with shop assistants who take pride in their own unhelpfulness, telephones that don't work properly, government censorship, foul weather, public transport that stops running at midnight, pubs that close at eleven, and all the other cruel impositions, writers would surely find a new pleasure in life that would translate into a new optimism in their work. Upon revisiting their homeland, they too would hear the ominous tones of a British Airways flight attendant "welcoming" them; and they would be thankful (as I am) for having had the sense to escape from this nation of grim despair.

Films, continued from p.33

weather. (Look closely at the length of shadows in the sunnier scenes: the hapless crew obviously had to do most of their location takes at dawn to get any sky at all.) William Goldman's curiously winning original novel was a whimsical fantasy played as an elaborate game: a beloved fairytale classic exhumed from the author's childhood and (purportedly) edited to approximately the form in which it was first read to him. A long, ingenious introduction tells the story of Goldman's own affair with S. Morgenstern's novel, and editorial inserts in the text note quirks and excisions in the process of putting together his "good parts" version. The result is a minor classic of ironic romance, deftly exploiting the double perspective of child and adult in the reader's experience of story; and fifteen years on, here is Rob Reiner's film of it from Goldman's own screenplay.

Goldman's screenwriting, of course, is amongst the most consistently versatile and adroit in the business, with an agreeable sense of technical flair and a seductive streak of wryly sentimental naivety. It's fair to say, though, that his original scripts have tended to make more successful films than those like *Marathon Man* or *Magic* that he's written from his novels; and *The Princess Bride*, Goldman's personal favourite of his books, is an especially tricky case. The editorial frame has to go, and the film version's solution is to substitute a hammy Peter Falk reading Morgen-

stern's novel to his sceptical grandson. Occasionally the new frame works neatly to disarm absurdity ("Just a minute. Is this a kissing book?"), but the narrative tricks are neither as intricate nor as in the novel, even when the story itself transfers okay. The ascent of the Cliffs of Insanity, a set piece of spectacular preposterousness in the novel, surprisingly does quite well in the movie thanks to some inspired location shooting (and despite some rather ludicrous dummy work in longshot). But the novel adds a sublime autobiographical aside claiming the cliff-jumping scene in *Butch Cassidy* was inspired by Goldman's own childhood memory of the scene in Morgenstern's novel. Alas, the joke is left behind in the film, with too much else; unfortunately, since if anything the story needs even more metafictional help on screen. Film is an unforgiving medium, especially of fairy tales, and tackiness is all the harder to deflect. Reiner's delicate touch with fragile material was well displayed in his three fine earlier films, but something has gone seriously awry with this one, and the audience's tolerance of gurdy glop is put under moments of severe strain. The cast don't help, despite some energetic coarse performing all round: only Christopher Guest's Spanish sword-master has the proper match of rakish camp with jaunty moustachios to carry his role consistently, while lead Carey Elwes' public-school raffishness is hopelessly adrift in a comic role. Still, there are good jokes, snappy lines, and the swordfight clip (of course) has already passed into legend. Just be sure not to stay around for the end-title song.

In the States, *The Princess Bride* was a big hit and *Empire of the Sun* a disappointment. This seems to me the wrong way round, and it may be we'll see a reverse over here. The British, after all, are less patient of mush than any nation on earth with the possible exception of Norway. But what both of these versions too obviously show is that film is a difficult instrument for the transposition of finely-scored narrative voices, especially where dealing with complex overlays of child and adult perspective. The richness of *Empire of the Sun* the novel is at heart that its hero is an impossible creation, and one that curiously has more than a little in common with the real subject of Goldman's book: the mind of a child as remembered by a middle-aged man, remade and extended with adult inventions and meanings. For better or worse, that ruthless objectivity that filming brings to its material requires us to view Jim Graham as a real boy caught in a real war in a real world. That may be a lot of what Ballard's about, but it's still a long way from the whole.

Julio Buck Abrera Salvage

The uncompromising light over the receiving bay of the Manila City Morgue aged the two men; its harsh, ceramic glare forced each facial line downward. Both appeared rigid in posture, slightly indignant in attitude. One looked fresh, almost crisp in a tropical Police Captain's light khaki uniform; the other wrinkled and uncomfortable in a tight-fitting Italian suit. The two stopped before an oddly sheeted trolley. A white-smocked attendant hurried to join them. He had been warned they were coming.

The Police Captain was a familiar, faintly feared habitu  of the city morgue. He was rumoured to be a member of some secret but potent military agency. High-ranking bureaucrats avoided him, addressing him as "Sir" when they were trapped. The officer was known for his unreasonable impatience. He would stand over a newly-arrived cadaver and tersely demand quick, concise forensic reports. Whenever possible he preferred briefings in straight English: "broken thigh-bone" rather than "fractured femur"; "slashed throat" rather than "lacerated trachea." The speeding attendant did not know the civilian with the Captain. He was obviously a nervous foreigner. He hoped the European would not vomit or faint.

The Captain's wide, quick-moving hands told the attendant that there would be no pleasantries, no introductions. There never were. He was to get on with the briefing. The morgue attendant nodded to both men politely, then carefully lifted the sheet. The man in the Italian suit gasped and turned away.

The attendant drew a long pencil from a vest pocket. It would serve as his pointer. He began immediately. "The lateral and rotational tendons of her right arm and left leg have been severed here," he said, tapping four infected slits beneath an elbow and on both sides of a knee. "The arm and leg were wrenched free of their sockets, then twisted askew at mid-joint. The two limbs were reset with

with plaster-of-Paris and rags. The new settings are approximately 45° to what they should be." The technician's pencil rocked back and forth descriptively. "To move forward or backward, she would have been obliged to crawl on the ground like a crab. One arm and one leg would have dangled above her like antennae.

"Her right eye had been violently removed." Two light taps on a concave eyelid. "We believe it was done by a person with an abnormally long and powerful thumbnail. Probably a woman. We recovered a dark-green chip embedded in the tissue of an eye socket. We think it is nail polish. Locally available, but very uncommon.

"Her nose has been slashed and vertically laid open." The pencil hovered over two obscenely glistening canals. "She had been sexually abused. Recent lesions and skin eruptions indicate that she was probably tied up at night. She was unable to protect herself against rat and cockroach attacks. A week ago she weighed 23 pounds; she weighed nine when we received her. Her name is Gloria. Her parents called her Glory. She was three years old last November."

The Police Captain nodded curtly. His body movements indicated dismissal. The attendant primly wiped then pocketed his pencil. He left without a word.

The officer gently closed the sheet over the tiny corpse. Her offset arm and leg formed two odd prominences. "Glory was reported kidnapped eight days ago," he said to the Italian journalist. His voice was soft, more pleasing to the ear than the cold staccato of the thin-lipped attendant. "Her parents had sent her out for her usual morning walk. Her nursemaid was struck on the head from behind. Glory and the nanny's purse were both gone when she recovered consciousness."

The Italian swore in several languages. He exhaled loudly. He was having difficulty controlling his emotions. He did not want the Captain to think him un-

reliable. An alarmed report on his mental stability, or lack of it, could jeopardise his story. He resorted to professional queries. "Why did they go to such horrible lengths?" he finally asked. "A demand for secrecy, ransom and a midnight release near a church would have been far simpler, less risky, more profitable than ... than this!" The Italian waved his hands helplessly at the trolley.

"This particular gang does not work that way," said the Captain. He moved to the side of the trolley and removed the sheet once again. He wanted the reporter to remember what had been done to the child. His superiors had emphasized it.

"These people never ask for ransom money," he said. "That would involve telephone calls, written notes, meetings and risky pick-ups. Such things are far too complicated for them. They probably don't even know how to use a telephone, let alone read and write. We are dealing with simpleminded, illiterate, ignorant jungle folk. They come to the city from remote slash-and-burn clearings. They have been interbreeding for generations. Their group is usually held together by some bizarre religion. They recognize no law outside of their own. Anyone not of their family is considered a non-believer; something less than an animal." The officer took a deep breath.

"These people kill for centavos," he continued. "Even hardened murderers and thieves are horrified by their ways. Their *modus operandi* is always the same. They snatch a pretty girl-child, disfigure her to draw pity and avoid recognition; then rent her out to professional beggars. Their charging rate is 20 pesos a day - more, if they can teach her to beg on her own. The renting mendicants pretend the child is theirs. They carry her through traffic, soliciting alms. You've probably seen them scratching at your car window. Toothless, dried-up old hags with a drugged, deformed infant cradled in their arms. To them it is big business. Our religion instructs us to give money to beggars. These people capitalize on it.

"With luck, if the child is strong, the gang can keep her miserably alive for months. When she gets too sick to be rented out, she will be immobilized with drugs. She will be left dazed on a mat on the sidewalk with an open cup. One of the clan will watch from a distance, returning only to collect the coins. That's how we found Glory. She had been dead for several hours. Even her mat and beggar's cup were gone."

The journalist was stunned. "These people risk murder and kidnapping charges; musketry offences, for 20 pesos a day - one U.S. dollar!"

"Yes," the Captain answered thickly. His throat was dry. The pores of his face had opened. His dark skin had paled to burnt powder. "Usually for much less!"

The conversation chilled into a long silence. Both men seemed dazed by the cheap, unfeeling sordidness of the crime. The officer broke the spell. He sidled closer to the Italian, tugging at his sleeve. "We know who they are," he whispered urgently. "Our teams have found their hideout. We get the bastards tonight! Wear plain dark clothing. No jewellery. Take nothing that could be lost and traced back to you. No recording or transmitting devices. You will be searched. Someone will telephone with instructions."

The Captain straightened. His excited manner was suddenly repressed. The reporter perceived a hidden



edge in the policeman's voice; a shadow of deceit in his eyes. "The General told me to tell you that there will be one further condition." He countered the Italian's raised eyebrows with a smile that seemed curiously like a sneer. "He said we will discuss it with you tonight."

The policeman was suddenly solicitous. He held the Italian by the elbow, graciously leading him towards the morgue's exit door. "You look tired," he said; "It must be the heat. Go straight to your hotel room. Do not attempt to telephone anyone. We will know if you do. Wait for our call." He leaned forward, whispering again: "And thank you for your donation. Ciao, Carlo. Merry Christmas. God bless you," he said with a pleasant smile. "See you tonight!"

The familiar cameraderie alarmed the Italian. It seemed sinister; almost Sicilian in its duplicity. Carlo nodded; then stepped obediently into the tropical sun. The sudden humid heat after the sterile coolness of the morgue was breathtaking. Carlo nervously did exactly as he was told. The morning at the bank, the criminal courts at City Hall, the jail and now the morgue had drained and exhausted him.

Once safely in his hotel room; Carlo Russo purposefully swept all the pillows from his bed. He took a silver vial from his suitcase, shook out a red pill, then swallowed it dry. Carlo wanted sleep. He adjusted the air-conditioning, hung a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door, then removed all of his clothing. Flat on his back, he nailed his eyes and his mind to the texture of the ceiling. His exposé on "salvaging" was beginning to take shape.

Carlo Russo's indifferent attitude towards sex was the principal reason his magazine had selected him for the choice Manila assignment. Other correspondents had quickly wasted body, spirit and mind on the wild, cheap and abundant sex available in Manila. Carlo's editors considered him extremely trustworthy in the debilitating minefields of alcoholism and sexual promiscuity. He was a hard-working, teetotaling human rights advocate who also happened to be a medically confirmed asexual.

Carlo was not born sexless. It was the result of an accident. He had fallen out of a window when he was nineteen years old. After he had physically recovered, it soon became obvious that he had also suffered some form of brain damage. Carlo had lost all interest in, and memory of, sex. He could not remember ever desiring or experiencing a kiss, an embrace or even an erection. It was a mystery to his doctors; an embarrassment to his family. Girls, and even boys, were given to him to shake his memory. These adventures always ended with bored impotence.

Carlo's forgotten sexual energies were channelled instead towards scholastic excellence. He graduated *summa cum laude* and was class valedictorian. He had chosen Political Science as a major; English as a minor. The Foreign Office had wanted him badly, but the Italian government could not compete with the salary offered by *Consorzio Italia*, Europe's most prestigious weekly news magazine.

Carlo's innate ability to perceive hidden truths had quickly secured him the rank of senior foreign correspondent. The recent Philippine revolution had called for him to report and comment on the political news

flashes emanating almost daily from Manila. Here, Carlo had accidentally stumbled upon a startling story of cheap death and violent retribution. He frankly hoped it would lead to an international award for journalism.

His ambition, however, was slowly being eroded by his nerves. His gentle background had not prepared him for the mindless violence which loomed before him. Carlo remembered the stained sheet with the two irregular promontories. He imagined the bewildered terror of the three-year-old child. He divined the bloody vengeance to be exacted this very night. Carlo shuddered with the thought. He was not sure he had the courage to continue. He felt both outrage and fear. He also felt strangely excited.

Single-minded stubbornness and a deeply ingrained belief in the dignity of human rights had obliged Carlo to disagree vehemently with his editors. They had countermanded his initial coded telex. In it he had proposed to break away from political reporting and concentrate instead on exposing a gang of Manila policemen who illegally executed suspected criminals. Carlo was so thoroughly convinced of the viability of his crusade that he hurriedly returned to Rome, stopping only to make an important purchase in Tokyo. He personally presented his concept to his superiors.

"I do not believe Manila's street executions are politically motivated," Carlo began. His audience of two senior editors, a company lawyer and a representative of *Consorzio Italia* gave him the respect of a closed-door conference. "The new Philippine government has nothing to do with it. If they did, the killings would be far more discreet. These murderers never bury their dead. On the contrary, they want the bodies to be discovered. They want everybody to know what has been done. I believe the assassins do it to teach others a lesson."

Carlo produced a thick folder of Manila newspaper clippings. They graphically illustrated the direction of his presentation. Sprawled bodies in sewers were sensationally photographed. Some had been garrotted to the backbone; many were eyeless; a few headless. All had been trussed hand and foot with picture-hanging wire, tortured with cigarette burns, stabbed in tender spots with icepicks, then shot dead. The circumstances were always the same. A hardened street criminal with a long record of violent crime, usually a young male with tattoos all over his body, would suddenly be accosted by tough, clean-cut-looking men. The next morning, the gangster's body, or parts of it, would be stumbled upon by some horrified commuter. On rare occasions, the body of an attractive young woman would be discovered, brutally abused, in some rat-infested cesspool. She would later be identified as the wife, or live-in girlfriend, of some cop-killing hoodlum.

"The scope and magnitude of the executions goes far beyond anything in South America," Carlo continued; "It is a secret, unilateral war against human rights. In Manila it is called 'salvaging.'"

"A strange choice of word," a senior editor interrupted. "Doesn't 'salvage' mean to save or recover from loss by destruction - usually at sea?"

"Yes, it does," Carlo agreed. He was glad the question had been asked. "But that is a secondary meaning.

The primary meaning is archaic, but appropriate. It means: 'payment made, or due.'

The word now made sense. The editor motioned to Carlo to continue. Carlo explained how his political newsbeat had naturally placed him in close contact with military and police personnel. Often, during the long hours between press statements, he and some friendly officer would share a table of food. Other foreign correspondents would casually join them.

Carlo had once dined with a Brigadier General of high responsibility. The Brigadier was exhausted. After two drinks, he had fallen asleep. The conversation around the table centred on a recent, particularly nasty crime in the city. A Chinese grocer and his family of twelve had been brutally hacked to death with jungle bolos. The killers had taken fifty pesos (\$2.50) and a black-and-white television set. Believing the General asleep, Carlo loudly concluded that the crime was random in nature, with no premeditation. The lack of a more substantive motive, plus the notorious ineptness of the Manila Police Department, would probably mean the continued freedom of the murderers. Other journalists readily agreed.

The Brigadier suddenly popped to attention. The Italian's unkind words had made him lose face in front of foreigners. He excused himself to make a telephone call; returning almost immediately. The other reporters had left. Carlo and the Brigadier were alone. Before taking his leave, the General cryptically confided that the particular crime discussed had been solved an hour ago. The killers were in custody. He discouraged further conversation by hastily bidding farewell. The General's eyes were level and clear; his skin dry when he shook Carlo's hand. The General was cold sober.

Two days later Manila's morning newspapers published gruesome pictures of three men. All had body tattoos; all had long records of violent crime. They had been wired together, tortured, icepicked and shot. A neighbour reported that the trio had been abducted at gunpoint while watching television. The black-and-white TV had belonged to the murdered Chinese family.

Carlo had stumbled upon a secret panel of criminal conspiracy. He knew the name of a man who was intimate with murderers! It was a significant break. Carlo cautiously questioned senior police and military officers. He was surprised to learn that every single officer was openly aware of "salvagings" – and that they had absolutely no intention of doing anything about them. Many confidentially supported the killers. Some seemed to think of them as unsung heroes.

Officials of the new Manila government were far too engrossed with Rightists, Leftists and Communists to be bothered with common street crimes. Officially, the executions were regrettable; but until the killings had something to do with maintaining popular support, or securing new international loans, the problem of "salvaging" known criminals would have to wait. Political murders were of course a different matter. With benign neglect, no official reprimand and the moral support of their peers, the executioners were given license to continue.

The published statement of a local police chief blatantly underscored the department's casual approach to a certain kind of murder. A patrolman in the chief's

precinct had been positively identified as one of four uniformed men who had arrested a suspected child rapist. The suspect was later found in a rice field, shot dead. The identified policeman displayed a wounded left hand: the last joint of his little finger had been neatly sliced off. He claimed his injury had occurred while fighting for his life. He said the dead suspect had pulled a hidden knife. The patrolman stated that he shot the child abuser in self-defence – thirteen times! The fact that the officer had had to reload his .38 calibre service revolver, twice, and that the police blotter had reported no such incident, was shrugged off as a clerical error. Why the body was dumped in a rice field was not even discussed. The police chief made a public statement: "No police officer in his right mind," he bluntly declared for the benefit of all policemen, "would mutilate himself just to avoid prosecution for something so trivial as salvaging!"

Threat of exposure was no threat at all. If anything, exposure simply closed the ranks. Of the hundred, perhaps thousands, of reported salvagings in Manila, not one single suspect had ever been jailed, tried, booked or even questioned. It was a crime against humanity. Carlo argued that he was in a unique position to expose repeated mass murders. He claimed he could accomplish the exposé sensationally.

Carlo Russo produced and submitted for inspection a new type of camera that he had just purchased in Tokyo. "The concept of this camera was originated by an anthropologist/photographer from the *National Geographic* magazine," Carlo explained, holding it high for everybody to see. "The scientist found that today's sophisticated primitives would not behave naturally when directly in front of a camera. He developed a series of lenses and mirrors which photographed an object 45° to the right of the aimed camera. The primitives he was photographing assumed that he was concentrating on some object directly in front of him. His real subjects ignored him – and were photographed going about their normal business.

"The Japanese improved on the idea. They hid the angled mirrors within the body of the camera. They also made the whole unit double-acting. A photographer was free to photograph an object directly in front of him, or could press a hidden button and surreptitiously photograph another object 45° to his camera's right."

Carlo proposed to offer the Brigadier money and anonymity in exchange for photographs and an eyewitness account of an actual "salvaging" in progress. Carlo intended to use his new camera. He would record an actual act of murder – and the murderers. "Perhaps that," he announced with the conviction of an outraged reformist, "will be enough to stop the insanity of legalized murder!"

"What will you do if the killers insist on developing the film?" The question came from the company attorney.

Carlo smiled. He broke the Japanese camera open. "If you look inside you will find two spools. The Japanese have cleverly added the bonus of allowing one single unit to house two separate rolls of film: one for the straight shot; the other for the angle shot. If the killers demand the right of developing the film,

I simply give them the roll containing the straight shots. I will retain the incriminating angle shots."

The new camera overwhelmed all objections. The business manager of *Conorzio Italia* was enthusiastic in his endorsement. The sensational perversity of the on-the-scene photographs of acts of murder – and the murderers – would revolutionize sales. The outraged morality of the reporter would be a dignified plus. Competitors would not be able to accuse the magazine of publishing a "snuff" piece, as the reporter would, at high personal risk, expose the identity of the killers.

A tape recording mentioning the Brigadier General by name was contrived. It was supposed to be a record of a meeting between Carlo Russo and his senior editor. Carlo's planned proposal to the General, and his editor's concurrence, was play-acted out. The tape would serve as an incentive for the General to co-operate. It would also be Carlo's life insurance policy. No mention was made of the camera.

Carlo was given \$5,000 and a plane ticket back to Manila. The Italian did not waste time. He barged unannounced into the General's office and aggressively outlined his plan. The General was stunned. He said Carlo was insane, mistaken and an idiot. Carlo responded by playing the contrived tape from Rome. He airily added that, without the General's co-operation, a speculative story, naming names, would be printed. The result would be even more embarrassing. The excited Brigadier was suddenly subdued. He said he would have to consult with others. He promised to be in touch within three days.

Two days later, an obvious military type in mufti approached Carlo at the Manila Hilton coffee shop. Carlo followed the soldier to an employee's dressing-room, where another military type was waiting. The door was bolted. Carlo was stripped and thoroughly searched. He was led to a telephone booth outside the hotel. The soldier in civilian clothing remained beside the booth. As soon as the telephone rang, he left.

"Good evening, Mr Russo."

"Good evening," Carlo answered. He immediately recognized the cultured voice of the Brigadier.

"I assume you know who I am?"

"Yes, General; I do."

"Please tell us again what you wish. Our conversation is being monitored by others."

Carlo sketched a brief but precise outline of the proposal concocted in Rome. He even volunteered his hope that international exposure of the deed would embarrass the new government, who would force the "salvaging" operations to shut down. He frankly admitted that the reporter involved would probably receive worldwide recognition. He did not mention his threat of a speculative story with names.

"You are," the Brigadier correctly assumed, "an ambitious human rights advocate who wishes to witness the ultimate violation so you may report it first hand – thus helping mankind, and your career."

"*Con su permiso, mon General,*" Carlo said in formal Spanish.

"Well said," the General responded. He was openly pleased with the respect shown to him. "What if your readers say your money influenced, or even induced, a salvaging?"



"I do not plan to mention the money," Carlo quickly assured him. "Besides, Manila is averaging 15 salvagings a week. That's 60 bodies a month, every month, for I don't know how many years. The act of salvaging itself is no longer news. My editors want a balanced, in-depth report which would show how a salvaging is accomplished — and why. It would be helpful if you would explain your reasons for these executions. I assume there is a purpose."

"Yes," the General agreed after some thought. "I suppose each Third World execution seems like just another act of mindless violence. It would be comfortable for law-and-order Americans and Europeans to believe that." There was a long pause. Carlo assumed a hurried discussion; a vote. "Your proposal has been discussed with others," the General finally said. "They say it has merit. We wish first to underscore certain conditions."

Carlo felt his pulse quicken. He knew he had won. "Such as?"

"We are not killers for hire, but our Widows and Orphans Fund is desperately underfunded. Christmas is almost here and..."

"I will deposit \$5,000 in cash, in any account you wish."

"Total anonymity."

"Agreed," Carlo lied.

"Your camera will be turned over to one of my men after the act. We will process the film. We must be sure none of our identities is compromised."

Carlo was prepared for this condition. His speech was well rehearsed. "I will of course turn over the film," he said. "But the camera must remain with me. It is my personal favourite. My editors still want me to report on your political situation."

"Very well," the General conceded. He suddenly sounded tired. "Tomorrow morning one of my men will accompany you to a bank to deposit the money. After that, you will go with him to our criminal court, our city jail and our morgue. If your article is to be balanced, you will need some background information."

"Agreed."

"You will never return to this country, or make testimony against us."

"Agreed."

"Good night, Mr Russo."

"Ciao, General."

The General cradled the telephone gently. He turned to the others in the room. There were two athletic-looking sergeants, a colonel and a captain. "The camera," the General said softly. The Captain nodded.

The red pills from the silver vial had not brought on sleep. Carlo rose; primed himself with a cold shower and hot coffee. He cleaned his precious camera twice. He would load it with two rolls of film later. It was risky, but he was afraid the killers would demand to examine its interior. He did not want them to see two rolls of film in the unit.

The telephone call came at 10.20 p.m. Carlo did not recognize the heavily-accented voice. He was ordered to leave the Manila Hilton through the main door. He was to proceed down United Nations Avenue until he reached M.H. De Pilar Street, a two-block walk. He was to turn left, then walk slowly on

the right side of M.H. De Pilar. Someone would approach him. The recognition code word was "Glory"; the name of the child in the morgue. Carlo was to respond with anything he could remember about her. It was a clever way of reminding him of the morgue; of why they were there.

Carlo slung his camera. He did exactly as he was told. He soon found himself in the heart of Manila's red light district. Being a foreigner, with a camera, the Italian was almost invisible. After only one block, a well-dressed, athletic-looking young man asked him for a light. The young man had a thick neck, cropped hair and spit-polished shoes. The word "Glory" hung in the air. Carlo responded by stating her age. The young man nodded, then turned on his heel. Carlo followed.

They walked to a garishly lit bar with topless girls gyrating before mirrors. The girls were in another world. They seemed mesmerized by their own reflections. The two men walked directly to a toilet where another young man was waiting. The door was securely barred. The procedure of stripping and silently body-searching Carlo was repeated. Carlo was relieved of his wallet, ring, necklace and watch. His camera was opened and meticulously examined for a recording device or transmitting wire. They did not ask why he had two rolls of film in his pocket.

Carlo was finally taken to a fire exit door. It opened into a humid, foul-smelling, unlit alley. A car with two men in its front seat started its engine. Carlo and his two escorts silently piled into the back seat. The unmarked sedan slid slowly into the honky-tonk lights of M.H. De Pilar.

Carlo recognized the two men in front. They were the Brigadier and the Captain. He was mildly surprised. He had imagined that they would have preferred to remain in the background; selecting targets, assigning assassins, away from danger and exposure. The Captain was driving. The two officers seemed relaxed; casually reclining in their loose-fitting civilian clothing. Only Carlo was tense.

The General broke the silence. "My captain tells me your afternoon was exhausting, but profitable. He said your questions were concise, intelligent and very perceptive."

"Thank you. It was a most revealing day."

"Please tell me about it," the General said, making himself comfortable. "We have time. It is a long drive."

Carlo gathered his impressions. "Your courts are overworked," he began. "Your judiciary system is at a standstill. Material witnesses do not appear, change their stories or refuse to testify. Some have plainly been bought off; others are obviously terrified. My morning in court was spent watching one postponement after another. One criminal case had been going on for three years! Not one single convicted criminal was sentenced to prison."

"Your penal system is in turmoil. Jails are packed to unmanagability. A holding complex designed for 800 inmates has 12,000! Prisoners sleep and cook on the floor — which is slimed with rotten food and urine. Individual cells are no longer locked. Your jail is more like a cattle pen. The delivery of food and the carting away of the dead are done at the perimeter gates. The wardens remain outside. They are afraid to enter. I do

not think they know what is going on inside. Your prisoners are in control of your prisons!"

"Well!" the Brigadier declared, "I see my Captain did not exaggerate! And what have you concluded from your observations?"

Carlo took a deep breath. He knew that the General was really asking for a preview of his article. A reckless word now could mean disaster.

"I believe your judges and prosecutors are aware of the situation," Carlo answered carefully. He wanted his words to sound thoughtful. The success of his deception – and his life – could depend on their perception of the slant of his article. "I suspect a tacit agreement with wardens to incarcerate only the most dangerous of dangerous criminals. I now understand why your patrolmen ignore petty crimes. The offenders would not be able to pay bail or fines. The wardens would not accept them. There is a hint of impotence.

"I suspect you are all harbouring a secret. If the criminal element knew that they could do almost anything with impunity; that you cannot send them to prison; then you would have anarchy. I think you all know this. Perhaps that is why you are here tonight. Your executions simply lend visibility to a profile which has been lost in an overcrowded, underfunded constitutional system. Your unlawful salvagings are demands for respect for the law!"

The General was silent for a long time. "There is more to it than that, Carlo. There is also a three-year-old girl called Glory. Did you know that we have more lawyers in this country than engineers, plumbers and carpenters combined? Hungry human rights lawyers would stand in line to defend her murderers' rights. The defending attorney would get free publicity; reputation; wealth. Glory's killers would be freed on some obscure, legal technicality.

"Our policemen are barely high school graduates. They make mistakes. I doubt if any of them have, or could have, read our constitution. A lot of what we do is simply revenge and restitution. Glory had rights too. I hate those goddamned animals! I want to kill them all!"

The General ended with a barely audible growl. Carlo changed the subject.

"I notice that most of your prisoners have tattoos all over their legs."

The Captain volunteered the answer. "It is a sign that they have done hard time in a penitentiary. Criminals place them on parts of their bodies which are not normally visible. Tattoos are against the law. They mean that the bearer belongs to a powerful street gang. Homosexual wolf packs leave them alone."

"Have you ever made a mistake – salvaged the wrong person?"

There was a long pause, as if everyone in the car had taken a deep breath.

"No," the Captain finally answered. His voice and face had turned grim. "They all deserved to die."

"Do you feel you are doing the right thing?"

"Yes!"

The naked affirmative did not invite further questions. Carlo's heart froze with the realization that he had just made a terrible mistake. He was not asking "why" certain criminals deserved to die; he was asking "why" his companions chose to kill. Carlo under-

stood too late that these men considered themselves as vigilante/patriots. Their reasons for leaving their families at night to do combat in the streets were complex, with many subtle undercurrents. Some felt the need for quick revenge. Others were simply trying to stem a tide of lawlessness. The General was there to instill fear and respect, perhaps to prevent the future murder of a policeman. Carlo's last two questions had graphically illustrated that he did not understand them. They correctly perceived the reporter as just another human-rights liberal who would vomit, then pray, over Glory's body, but would defend with a sword the rights of her torturers.

The relaxed atmosphere in the automobile had undergone an ominous change. There seemed to be a frighteningly intense, but silent, anger vibrating in the air. A spark might ignite it. Carlo wisely elected to remain silent.

The Captain eased the car into a stream of fast-moving traffic. They were heading out of Manila. They paid the highway toll and proceeded southward. After ten minutes, they exited and slowly made their way to a deserted feeder road, dotted with cratered potholes. The Captain switched off the headlights. He allowed the car to move silently forward in neutral. A distant silhouette marked a desolate shack in the middle of a field of banana trees. The car stopped. A gentle wind passing through the banana fronds clapped like the patter of heavy rain. The General switched off the car's interior lights, then snapped his fingers. The two men beside Carlo jumped out. They separated; silently approaching the shack from opposite directions. The Captain and the General walked directly to the front door. There were no dogs. Their approach had gone unnoticed.

A cloud moved from the moon. The ground turned blue. Carlo saw that all four men had drawn their pistols. Alone for the first time, Carlo took the opportunity to load two rolls of film into his camera. He primed then raised it. The General glanced back and angrily waved his index finger. Carlo froze in place. His inexperience had nearly endangered their enterprise. Flashes from his camera would have alarmed those within.

The Captain approached the door alone. It was only a thin scrap of plywood hung on two loops of wire. He kicked it open and entered loudly. The two young men immediately followed. There were screams. A man roared. The fragile shack trembled with unseen violence. Carlo heard flesh being slapped; the wet sound of open mouths being punched. Urgent words: "Look out! He has a knife!" A hollow thud which meant a solid body blow. The groan of an injured man. Deep, dangerously sharp voices whispering orders. The General beckoned to Carlo with a hand-wave. The two men entered the shack together.

A kerosene lamp had been lit. Two similar-looking men, probably brothers, were kneeling on a dirt floor. They both looked lean, oily and dangerous. Their hands were drawn behind them. They were handcuffed. Their bleeding mouths were stuffed with rags. An old woman cowered in a corner. A girl of about twenty held onto her.

There was a scraping sound; then a weak fluttering movement. The Captain leapt forward. He threw aside

a lice-ridden mattress. Beneath it was a little girl. She could not have been more than four years old. She was gagged; her hands and feet bound with rags. Ravaging cockroaches had already drawn blood. The gang had kidnapped again! The little girl was not maimed, but her drowsy, disorientated eyes and chemical-smelling vomit indicated that she had been heavily drugged. The gang had been waiting for first light to mutilate her.

The Captain jerked his head. One of the young men dashed forward to untie her. He carried her outside. Everyone's face seemed frozen in iron. Carlo began flashing pictures of the scene. A bag of plaster-of-Paris lay half open. Rolls of gauze and strips of rag were piled in a corner. A straight-edged razor in a filthy plastic wash basin served as their surgical panel. A coil of rope on a wooden crate was their operating theatre.

The General grunted and kicked one of the kneeling men. A young man kneed the other. The two brothers rolled to the dirt floor. Wire was quickly produced and tightly wound around their ankles, thumbs and wrists. The police handcuffs were removed.

The two men knew what the wire meant. They both struggled fiercely. The wire cut into their flesh. The thumb of one man rolled away with an audible "pop." The old woman was picked up and violently thrown to the floor. She too was gagged, then bound with wire. A silencer was attached to an automatic pistol. Each of the three prisoners was quickly, almost surgically, shot in the back of the head.

Carlo began to tremble uncontrollably. The soldier who had carried the child out of the shack returned. Ice picks were suddenly produced. He, the Captain and the other young man immediately began to mutilate the dead bodies. Eyes, ears, noses and throats were stabbed repeatedly. The puncturing of flesh was done with practised efficiency. They started at the head and worked routinely to the torso. The three impacting picks had the flat sound of tiny hands clapping.

Carlo's face glowed with oily perspiration. The room seemed to be closing in on him. The terrible smell of cordite, fear and brutal death thickened the atmosphere. Carlo thought he might faint.

The trousers of the two men were cut away. Their lower parts were a solid mass of tattoos. The sphincter muscles of each body had relaxed; the dead were freely urinating. Carlo glanced at the General's watch. Break-in, to murder, to total mutilation, had taken less than 90 seconds.

The young girl was stripped naked. She was forced down on all fours, gagging with fear. Body fluids from the dead had turned the dirt floor into a richly coloured puddle of foul-smelling muck.

"What about her?" Carlo asked. "Surely you are not going to abuse or kill her! She may be a visiting girlfriend."

"She's their scout," the General said, lifting her pretty face to the lamp. Her eyes were wild with fear. She smiled at the Brigadier. She moistened her lips with quick darts of her tongue.

"She selects a likely kidnapping candidate," the General continued. "She tells her gangmates the best



time and place to make a snatch. She is the one who breaks the joints, plucks out the eyes and slits the nose. Those two punks made the actual snatch. The old hag was a retired beggar. She was in charge of renting the children out to her friends; later leaving the babies to die drugged on mats. We have been after these animals for a long time. Hot Lips here was our lead. Each time a child was kidnapped, a housemaid in the neighbourhood – one with always the same description – would produce a telegram informing her of a relative's death in her barrio. She would leave with a promise to return. A police team followed her here." The General nodded to the Captain.

The Captain removed five bullets from his revolver. He set the mechanism so that the next pulled chamber contained the sole live cartridge. The Captain approached Carlo, stepping gracefully over the three sprawled bodies. He squared himself with the Italian. Carlo thought he was going to be struck. The Captain took Carlo's camera and tossed it to one of the young men. He set the revolver in Carlo's hand.

"I mentioned one further condition," the General whispered to Carlo. "This is it. You too must kill!"

The young girl did not know the English words, but she grasped their meaning. She lay on her back. She began to grind her hips into the mud, staring wide-eyed at Carlo. She seemed to be searching for a sign.

The Captain stepped back and removed another gun from his belt. It was the automatic pistol which was used to shoot the three kidnapers. He pulled to cock it. He levelled it with both hands at Carlo's head.

"It is the only protection we have," the General continued. "At the Academy is was called 'bleeding a fellow officer.' It is a personal guarantee that you will keep your word.

"You have five seconds to kill her, Carlo. Photographs from your own camera will record your deed. If you do not, the Captain will kill you – and then he will kill the girl." The General moved away from the trembling Italian.

"Five!" the Captain began the countdown.

Carlo stood motionless over the helpless creature. She snuggled her thighs between his two spread feet. She undulated provocatively. Carlo looked down. There wasn't a hair on her body. Perspiration glistened like oil on her thighs, her underbelly, her armpits. She smiled invitingly. Her teeth were short, sharp and perfect. Carlo involuntarily wondered if her perspiration had taste.

"Four!"

The young woman rubbed her nipples with the rough palms of her hands. She squeezed her breasts together. Her nipples responded. They rose to the size of bullets. She was very young. She was muscular, country-bred, strong. She had an attractive mole on the drooping edge of one breast. It reminded Carlo of a third nipple.

"Three!" The Captain spread his feet; bent his knees. He was going into a firing position.

The soldier with Carlo's camera aimed the lens. Carlo could not remember if he had set the next frame for straight shot or angle shot.

Carlo pointed the revolver at the girl's head. She undulated more fiercely. Her dark eyes swept the room. She was telling the others that they could have

her too. She opened her mouth. She made suggestive movements with the moist tip of her tongue. Her left hand shot forward. She gripped Carlo by one ankle. Her right hand brushed against his belt. She lifted her torso. She hurriedly unzipped him. Carlo had never felt such absolute power.

"Two!" The Captain steadied himself against the expected recoil.

The young man suddenly lowered Carlo's camera. He looked puzzled. He turned the camera over to examine the lens.

Carlo felt his blood rise. A pleasant rush of vaguely remembered warmth stirred and welled within him. It was a strangely familiar sensation. The girl searched Carlo's eyes. She suddenly smiled. She had found the sign she had been looking for. Carlo felt her hand enter his opened zipper. His member thickened. He was having an erection!

"Three-year-old Gloria," the Brigadier whispered from afar. "Remember what she did to Gloria!"

Carlo began to shake uncontrollably. He looked down at the girl's pretty face. Her eyes were set wide apart. It gave her a sweet angelic look. She removed her right hand from his trousers to brush away a curl from her eyes. The pores and palm lines of her hand were ingrained with streaks of plaster-of-Paris. She had a long, powerful nail on her thumb. It was curved. It was filthy. It was as thick as a talon. And it was painted green.

The soldier raised the camera once again.

"One!"

The Captain looked natty and crisp in his starched khaki uniform. He returned the salute of several junior officers. He rapped smartly on a door, then entered the Brigadier General's office. A visitor was seated before the General.

"We've had another communiqué, Sir," the Captain announced briskly. "The Italian Ambassador is threatening to go directly to the President. Your name is on record in Rome. They have Carlo Russo's planned proposal on tape."

The General nodded. He calmly folded his hands. He turned to his visitor. "Do you see the trouble you are causing us," he said with measured patience. "Be reasonable, Mr Russo. Telephone your editors. Tell them you are alive and well. They think I have killed you."

"Only after you take me on one more salvaging operation," Carlo answered. His voice was high-pitched, but firm. "Just one more, then I promise I will telephone Rome. I will leave your country."

"But that is what you said last time," said the General. "And the time before that. We have taken you on four different operations in the space of a week! I don't know when you sleep. On the last operation you even forgot to bring your camera!"

"Just one more, General," Carlo repeated. "One more – then no more. Please, I promise." Carlo began to whine and sob like a petulant child. He clasped his hands together. He rocked back and forth in his chair.

The two officers looked down at him with disgust. Carlo's eyes were unnaturally bright. His palms were wet. He was perspiring freely, yet the day was early; still cool. Carlo refused to bathe or change clothing.

The overripe smell of the first salvaging was still upon him.

"I don't need a camera," Carlo whispered wildly. "Don't you understand? I can remember! I can remember – everything!"

Julio Buck Abrera was born in Manila, and now lives there once more. As a youngster he travelled the world with his

diplomat father and later served in the US Air Force (stationed in Turkey). He subsequently worked as a bartender, warehouseman, office clerk, salesman and construction executive, before returning to the Philippines in 1975. Now in his mid-forties, he is determined to become a freelance writer (having done everything else twice). "Salvage" is his first story to find acceptance, though he has since sold a couple of other pieces and has recently completed a novel.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

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Book Reviews, 1

John Clute

In a letter to the editor published in *Interzone* 23, Martin H. Smith has aimed a few sharp animadversions against this reviewer's negative response (in issue 21) to *The Legacy of Heorot* by the Niven/Pournelle/Barnes blockbuster squad. As he makes some scattershot assumptions about my attitudes toward America (where my heart lies), and hard sf (which I love as much I love space opera, which begat it), and sf novels designed primarily to entertain the reader (yum), it is something of a temptation to become disputatious at this point; but as Mr Smith might profitably be regarded as already having made his mind up, and as the review in question can be read by anyone who wishes to check on whether it actually said what he seems to think it said, I think it might be a good deal more valuable to address a more significant implication of his letter.

Mr Smith states that he has not read *The Legacy of Heorot*, making it clear that he has no grounds to judge whether or not I make a plausible case for dismissing the book. The heart of his complaint lies elsewhere. In Mr Smith's mind my real sin (I suspect) lies in what he might describe as a misapprehension of the task of the reviewer. For Mr Smith, the ideal reviewer is a kind of advocate, a bringer of good news, a door-opener, and it is therefore a betrayal of his function to vitiate the pleasures of a text like *The Legacy of Heorot* – "Some of us," Mr Smith says, "actually want to enjoy ourselves" – by labouring unduly to understand it, as though one were a spy reconnoitring an enemy fortress. If *The Legacy of Heorot* belongs to an honoured and popular category of writing within the buttresses of sf, then it is an act of disloyalty against those who love that category to trash the exemplum. The task of reviewers of sf is not that of dismantling the works they are meant to announce, or so I read Mr Smith to argue. The real task of reviewers of sf is that of proclaiming gifts.

What I have presented Mr Smith as claiming is surely not dishonourable. Which is not to say it's not pretty troubling. Here in the tangled beehive of sf, most of us who review books already know each other too well for comfort, and perhaps for honesty, and most of us have no need of Mr Smith to persuade us to do the mealy mouth. As a reviewer of sf for 25 years, I have myself come inevitably to know most of the writers whose books I comment upon, and to feel a kind of collegiality with them – a personal connection which includes, by the way, both Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, though not yet Steven Barnes. Because of this club-like camaraderie, I have often felt (and I suspect most other reviewers have felt) an awful temptation to stroke,

to act as an audience-warmer or emcee, and to avoid giving pain (which can always ricochet into one's own face). And it is a consequence of this dubious punctilio that the beehive buzzes with so many "friends" who will not review the books of anyone they know, in case they have to tell the truth.

But it is the truth that sets us free.

In the communications matrix of sf, in the arterial web of words we inhabit, reviewers who will not tell the truth are like cholesterol. They are lumps of fat. They starve the heart. I have certainly been one of them myself, have sometimes kept my mouth shut out of this "friendship" which is nothing in the end but self-interest. And perhaps it is time to call a halt. Perhaps we should establish a Protocol of Candour, a convention within the community that excesses of intramural harshness are less damaging than the hypocrisies of stroke therapy, that telling the truth about *The Legacy of Heorot* is a way of expressing love for *Protector*. Because truth is all we've got. Because if we don't talk to ourselves, and if we don't use every tool at our command in our time on Earth to tell the truth, nobody else will.

Which brings us to the unfortunate *Blue Fruit* (Simon and Schuster, £9.95), a first novel by Adam Lively. Not identified in any fashion as sf or fantasy by its publishers, *Blue Fruit* may have been conceived as a fabulation whose references to sf/fantasy topos are no more than quotes aimed downwards at the reader from those higher regions where Craig Raine chats with Kafka about the metaphysics of First Contact. If *Blue Fruit* seems therefore only to make indolent half-cocked sense of itself as a tale of time travel, and to give scant compass to the confrontation with alienness that seems to lie at its timid heart, it may be that the reader has failed to note the contented self-referentiality of the author's use of the time travel topos, or of any other quoted material.

The story is strangely simple. In 1787, a young English doctor named John Field who has dabbled in music finds himself at loose ends in the Far East, takes passage on a Russian whaler with whose captain he establishes a vaguely Conradian relationship, and after a great storm sees an unknown land in the offing, which he wishes to

explore. The captain has him landed on the beach (of Erewhon, as it were) and leaves the book. Field wanders about for a while until he comes across what turn out to be railway tracks, though he is no more capable of registering their strangeness than Karl Rossmann (from Kafka's *America*) would be. Soon adopted by a black family, Field gradually begins to settle into what (though Lively gives no names) looks very much like 20th-century New Orleans (without automobiles), and to participate in jazz sessions. He has somehow travelled through time, perhaps into what the sf reader would conceive of as an alternate future (though Lively, by paying no attention to the repertory of apparatus of modern sf, makes absolutely no use of that repertory to enrich the structure of his fable). And here, after a brief Malcolm-like experience (à la James Purdy) with a grotesque corporation guru, the novel ends. There have been some moderately enlightened descriptions of jazz.

The text is made up entirely of a letter John Field writes (backwards through what Lively is disinclined to call time) to his father in 1787, but no care has of course been taken to shape the form and manner of that letter into a dramatic enactment of the coulisses of estrangement separating the two eras; within a page or so of starting his missive, John Field is speaking of "diplomats" (first OED reference being 1813) and using "introverted" in the Jungian (rather than the very different 18th-century) sense. The contrast between Lively's bemused indolence on this score and the fructifying pyrotechnic density of (as an example) David I. Masson's "The Two-Timer" is deeply numbing. But perhaps we are simply not meant to care. About Field himself we are clearly not meant to bother our heads: the historical John Field (1782-1837), a rather weird Irish composer and pianist who lived some time in Russia and influenced Chopin, is 20 years too young to fit into *Blue Fruit*; and in any case Lively's fatally torpid version of Field is as a dinky fiddler capable of rambling on about Purcell and Handel concerts in 1780 without managing a mention of Johann Christian Bach, the dominant musical figure in the London of that time. But then, Lively's John Field is just a quote of the real John Field. And when Field

describes a washing machine as roaring with pain on being turned on (page 127). Lively is just quoting the style of Craig Raine's "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home." And so it goes. Into the dire mortuary somnolence of *Blue Fruit*, quote after quote raises its head and dies, stupidly. John Kemp's dust-wraper is neat.

At Cadigan's *Mindplayers* (Gollancz, £10.95) bangs into play with panache and true grit on the part of gumption-filled Alexandra (Deadpan Allie) Haas, who tells her own story, how she mindplayed once too often with an illegal device, how she gets chosen to become part of the establishment, how she learns what it means to become a hotshot pathos-finder, and finally how boring a lot of hard work can become if there's no storyline to string it out on. Along the way are some sharply visualized renderings of the technology of mindplaying, which can be defined as visiting another's mind for fun and therapy without becoming part of its matrix. Deadpan Allie moves from one form of crypto-telepathy to another with inexpressive ease, and some of her patients have mindscapes of startling verisimilitude. But the realization slowly dawns on Deadpan (and the reader) that after she gets educated and hired by a wise elderly entrepreneur out of the Heinlein Umwelt (minus nipples) there is really no story at all to tell, though a couple of hundred pages to tell it in, and the novel loses all its steam long before gravity brings it to a halt.

It is perhaps too bad that the Protocol of Candour cannot be put to immediate use with Neil Ferguson's *Putting Out* (Hamish Hamilton, £10.95), for the author has been identified with *Interzone* from the beginning. *Putting Out* expands on the goonish semiology of "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" from issue 13, and this reviewer knows the man personally. But despite any number of reasons for not praising it unseemly, *Putting Out* is in fact a very good book, quite brilliantly told, though intermittently skittish in its control of affect, so that the reader sometimes cares rather less than s/he should about the marbled intricacies of Ferguson's plotting.

In the near future of a New York not dissimilar to the near future of the real New York, except for the fact that the style-codes of the presentation of self in everyday life have been significantly foregrounded, the mayoral race between the manichean tuxedos of Rocco da Silva and the slurry agnosticism of the hi-fashion garbing of Tina Rauch is reaching its climax, when the building that houses her couturier is bombed. Lieutenant Max Faraday – the semiotic cop from "Randy and Alexei" – is brought immediately into

the case, and it is his subsequent dazzling water-spider dance through the sign-systems that shape the buskined harlequinades of post-modern urban life that makes up the substance and the joy of *Putting Out*. Along the road to his solution of the bombing and the murder that follows it, Faraday participates in one of the most arousing and convincing heterosexual seductions ever penned, which is rendered with extraordinary erotic intensity (nothing skittish here) through a pattering semiological dance of penetration codes. By the signs he embraces, Faraday is both humbled and liberated; what Ferguson seems to tell us all, in this poised poignant novel, is that the truth will make you dance.

Book Reviews, 2

Paul J. McAuley

The fundamental laws of physics, the creation of the Universe and its end, and the ultimate fate of humankind: all are the raw stuff of hard sf, and all these and more feature in Frederick Pohl's *The Annals of the Heechee* (Gollancz, £10.95). It's the fourth and final volume of a series which began more than ten years ago with the *Nebula* and *Hugo* winning novel *Gateway*, set in a Galaxy littered with the million-year-old artifacts of the mysterious Heechee, including, in the Solar System, an asteroid spaceport complete with working spaceships. The Heechee had withdrawn inside the event horizon of a black hole to hide from the Assassins, an even more advanced race of beings of pure energy, inimical to all civilizations, which appeared to be tampering with the physical evolution of the Universe. When humans began to investigate the abode of the Assassins, using scavenged Heechee ships and instruments, some of the Heechee emerged from their hiding place, which brings us (bear with me) to the beginning of *Annals*.

Humans and Heechee have established a joint watch over the Assassins, something in which Robin Broadhead, the main protagonist of the series, still maintains an interest even though he is dead, existing along with many other dead people as a machine-stored intelligence in a computer network. Pohl has a great deal of fun with the interactions between "meats," ordinary living people, and characters who live in terms of milliseconds: the electronically simulated environments of their choice, able to do half a dozen different things and hold a conversation with a meat person at the same time – so much fun, in fact, that there is little room for anything else. The byplay between

superfast machine-stored dead people and lumpen meats is mirrored in the structure of the novel, in which great chunks of exposition are embedded in a slender and slowmoving plot concerning infiltration of the Earth by Assassins via Heechee and human children evacuated from the Assassins Watch station, leading to confrontation and a rather sudden denouement. Although Pohl gives a convincing extrapolation of what life might be like in the ultimate electronic world, anyone who buys this book with the expectation of learning definitive answers to the questions of just what the Assassins are, and how and why they are re-engineering the Universe, is going to be disappointed.

By now I suppose I should point out that the preceding novel in the series, *Heechee Rendezvous*, was also touted as the finale; and in some ways *The Annals of the Heechee* does come off as a kind of afterthought, in which the latest developments in cosmology have been tipped in without any attempt to try and tie off the series in anything but the most perfunctory manner. And Pohl, unlike Arthur C. Clarke, who has also worked this ground, is not given to mysticism – in fact, religion does not get so much as a look-in here – so perhaps it's no wonder that depiction of the godlike Assassins is fudged at the very last moment, leaving the book to fade away to a diminuendo of unanswered questions. While the resolution Pohl gives is a neat enough twist, it is a twist nevertheless: it just about works as the end of a novel, but it cannot bear the weight of expectation built up over the space of a four-volume narrative. It's as if the reader must work through a series of Chinese Boxes only to be rewarded with something very like the thing he started out with: except that it is smaller, and resolutely closed.

But there is still a lot to admire here. Pohl dresses up his cosmological speculation with superlative skill, and slyly sends up the Campbellian dictate which dominated sf in the so-called Golden Age of the forties and fifties, namely that (white, male, American) humans should be shown as the dominant, superior species in the Universe. Read as a novel of ideas (and what ideas!), *Annals of the Heechee* works well enough, as long as you don't expect answers to many of the questions it raises; but it is more a tail-piece than a satisfactory conclusion to the grand, ambitious themes of the Heechee series.

From diamond-hard sf to fantasy, by way of Orson Scott Card's *Wyrrms* (Legend, £2.95) which, although wrapped up in the trappings of high fantasy – a medieval society, a hero upon whom the fate of the world devolves,

a quest through colourful landscapes with raffish companions – has at its heart a biological concept whose implications are worked through in the best manner of hard sf (a concept, incidentally, of passing similarity to that used in Card's last novel, *Speaker for the Dead*, but nonetheless ingenious). Card has shot up in the past few years to become one of the most popular of new American sf writers, and the invention and rich characterization displayed here goes towards explaining why.

So why didn't I enjoy it as much as I hoped to? For one thing, the extrapolation of a hard sf idea suffers in its forced marriage to a plot which depends on the quaint notion that the course of history is entirely determined by the actions of uniquely dynamic individuals. The join shows in an indigestible three-page expository

lump and a certain amount of twisting of the history of human colonization of the alien world to make sure the story comes good. In other words, the plot does not flow from the idea, but the idea is subservient to the plot. For another, we have here a girl drawn towards a long-planned mating which will produce an antiChrist to herald both the doom of all humans in the colony and the resurgence of the previously dominant alien race: a girl called Patience, travelling across a world called Imakulata, accompanied (among others) by a man called Angel and two geblings called Rack and Ruin, towards the last of an alien race which humans call, uh, wyrms. As Glenda Slagg would have said: Geddit? Quite why Card, who won the Hugo and Nebula for best novel with *Ender's Game*, who swept the board again with the sequel, *Speaker for the Dead*, who by now must surely be in full command of the direction of his career, feels he has to satisfy fannish appetites for truly dreadful puns, is not the provenance of this column (if Frederik Pohl can leave questions unanswered, so can I: the curious are referred to Harlan Ellison's column in the February *FF&SF* for further enlightenment). All I can say is that Wyrms embodies all of the virtues and not a few of the vices of modern mainstream American sf: if you're looking for a well-paced, well-imagined adventure story, look no further.

From that bastard child to out and out fantasy, beginning with Daniel Kane's *Power & Magic* (Gay Men's Press – P.O. Box 247, London, N15 6RW, as W.H. Smiths are unlikely to stock it – £4.95, all royalties to the Terence Higgins Trust). Those of you who, like me, would be hoping for revitalization of fantasy's tired tropes through gay consciousness (as in Samuel R. Delany's *Neveryond* series, or many of

the Women's Press novels) will be disappointed. Instead we find the usual bucolic world threatened by an irruption of a dark power which can be halted only by...but we've been here before. Kane introduces a couple of nice twists – the Saviour could be either of twins, one of whom is a gay man brought up in our world – but he also tries to squeeze every cliché known to fantasy writing, not to mention one or two ("Kiss me Gethalon. Make love to me," one of the twins whispers to a mighty-thewed warrior. "I need you tonight so badly.") more usually found in bodice-rippers, into a novel about one sixth the length of the average triple-decker. Nice cause though.

After *Power & Magic's* torrent of torrid clichés, Ellen Kushner's *Swordspoint* (Unwin, £3.95) comes as a draught of cool springwater. The setting is an archetypal city state, at times reminiscent of eighteenth-century Geneva (albeit without the Calvinists), at others of seventeenth-century London (not to mention Fritz Leiber's *Lankhmar*); the plot one of sexual and political intrigue amongst the city's ruling aristocracy, in which Richard St Vier, the best of the swordsmen who hire out their skill to settle matters of honour, and his lover, a self-destructive student who has forsaken his noble family, become entangled against their will. Desire, in this novel, is not synonymous with the soft-focus mechanistic couplings of most romances, historical or otherwise; it is as heady, dangerous and life-changing as it sometimes is in real life. As for the fantasy element, it is actually vanishingly small, being no more than a period setting which never was in our history; but by freeing herself of the restraints of historical accuracy, Ms Kushner has given herself the imaginative space to weave a tale as witty, beguiling and ingenious as a collaboration between Jane Austen and M. John Harrison. In short *Swordspoint* is a well-nigh faultless first novel, and if my praise doesn't make you rush out and buy it, then the well-deserved puffs from Gene Wolfe and Samuel R. Delany should.

Arthur Quest Peter T. Garratt

Contrasting items emerge from the Cgrail this time. Nikolai Tolstoy offers *The Coming of the King: The First Book of Merlin* (Bantam, £12.95). Not quite the first, surely. Tolstoy's own (non-fiction) *Quest for Merlin* found a real figure behind the legendary enchanter – but far from being a mentor of the real Arthur, he was a later figure, and they are unlikely to have

met. This background is now superbly realized in fictional terms. Every possible Dark Age ingredient, save perhaps the Great Cauldron of Washing Up on the Island of Prydein, is included. Sadly, the tone changes rather too often and abruptly for my taste, and the blending of realistic, fantastic, and mystical elements is awkward. Flights of apocalyptic fancy slow and confuse the action, and often seem more suited to an epic poem than a novel. The use of humour is equally varied: subtle here, vily in appropriate there. I am as reluctant to believe that the Kings of Britain were entertained by displays of public farting, as I am to read about such. Well worth looking at, even if hard-going in parts.

David Gemmell is less ambitious in his *Ghost King* (Century, £6.95), and less scholarly (he thinks, for instance, that the Brigantes lived in Scotland). However, he hits his mark better, in terms of producing an above-average semi-historical fantasy read. It's worth it for the last line alone, though the printing is poor for the price. *Talesin* by Stephen Lawhead (Lion, £2.99) does contain some outstanding writing, nearly all of it taken verbatim from the original *Talesin* and other ancient Welsh writers. They wouldn't have minded, and recently Joy Chant succeeded with a similar idea in *The High Kings*. Lawhead lacks her ability to pastiche convincingly: what good writing he manages himself, is buried in a haystack of dully written and marginally relevant scenes, agitated by unexplained motives and wildly thrashing loose ends. To add insult, some scenes which might have worked, such as the arrival of Atlanteans in sub-Roman Britain(!) are glossed over. One can only hope that the next volume of the "Pendragon Saga" will be far more severely edited.

The Misplaced Legion by Harry Turtledove (Legend, £2.95) is easy to read, and doesn't contain any obvious howlers. However, this saga of Roman legionaries mysteriously transported into an identical twin of the Byzantine Empire lacks originality. Dedicated to L. Sprague de Camp, it owes him almost everything. All the characters are straight from the historical fantasy rep, and a slim knowledge of Byzantine history is all you need to predict the end of Book 1 (there's more to come). De Camp himself has a reissue out: *The Goblin Tower* (Grafton, £2.95) is a typical fun fantasy, not a vast amount to it, but enjoyable, well put together, and well flattered by the imitations.

I'm not sure if I would have enjoyed *Time-Fighters* by Bernard King (Sphere, £3.50) any more if it had not been the middle part of a series. On the whole, I think not. It seems to be relatively independent of the first part (which I haven't seen) but makes down

for this with an unnecessary proliferation of sub-plots and minor characters. The elements of a good read are here, but they have become scrambled, and too much is given away early on, so what could have been an intriguing mystery becomes a succession of slightly ambiguous tableaux.

Fantasy, Etc

I am impressed by Greg Bear, whose **The Infinity Concerto** and **The Serpent Mage** have just been published in the UK (Century, £5.95 each; the first has also been issued in Legend "A" format at £3.50). These two volumes stand head and shoulders above much that passes as fantasy. In the first a young man called Michael finds a way into the world of the Sidhe (pronounced "Shee"). There are other humans already there, trapped by the haunting power of music, but Michael is trained for a special but undisclosed task. This fantasy world has its roots in Celtic folk tales: it is alien, perilous and unstable, echoing the novels of George MacDonald rather than Tolkien. In the second volume the Sidhe begin to follow Michael into our world. The first part of the book, with the rediscovery and performance of the "infinity concerto" itself, is impressive. However in the finale, with its apocalyptic transformation of the world, the element of wish fulfilment detracts from the credibility (even for a lover of Mahler and Mozart).

I was also delighted by **The Falling Woman** by Pat Murphy (Headline, £2.95), which centres around Elizabeth, an archaeologist involved in a dig in the Yucatan peninsula, and her estranged daughter Diane. Elizabeth has always been able to "see" people from the past, who live their lives silently among those of the present. Now the two women become intimately involved with an ancient Mayan priestess. The device of shifting the first-person narrative between mother and daughter has the effect of alternately reinforcing and questioning Elizabeth's experiences (and indeed her sanity), without giving the reader the security of a narrator's authority.

Those who have already enjoyed the "Deryni" stories of Katherine Kurtz will welcome **The Deryni Archives** (Legend, £3.95). This is a collection of eight short stories, set at various times during the 230 years covered by the three trilogies. They are a taster for anyone who has not yet tried Kurtz's work and a fine example of how it is possible to create another world which is both different from our own and also three-dimensional. I was especially impressed with her depiction of the

"church", recognizably consistent with our own medieval church, corrupt and misguided but with a genuine piety and spiritual power.

Less satisfying is **A Blackbird in Amber** by Freda Warrington (NEL, £3.95). I found this world a confusion of unpronounceable names and allusions to people and events from the previous novels in the series. The basic idea of a young woman wanting to use magic powers for good but finding the Emperor busy subverting those powers is well developed, but the whole is marred by frequent jarring and clumsy phrasing, an uneven marriage of poetic and colloquial styles. The style is also the problem with **Children of Ashgaroth** by Richard Ford (Grafton, £3.50). This is volume three of the "Faradawn" trilogy and will be welcomed by all vegetarians and animal-rights activists. Others may find the basic premise difficult to swallow. Can meat-eating really be the root of all evil? Sadly the events of the story are submerged in the words. Like many a vegetarian dish it is worthy and wholesome but it is also heavy going and lacking in variety. I was not disappointed by Terry Brooks' **Magic Kingdom for Sale/Sold** and its sequel **The Black Unicorn** (Futura, £2.95 and £4.95), but then I had not expected much. Both read like children's books, with place names such as "Deep Fell" and "Fire Springs," and a witch called "Nightshade." Unfortunately what they lack in imagination they do not make up in either humour or psychological depth.

If the purpose of a good horror story is to prevent sleep than all four books in this consignment are a disappointment. The nearest to achieving its target is **Spectre** by Stephen Laws (Sphere, £3.50), in which an evil entity has been called out of the past and searches for a group of friends who once lived in the Newcastle suburb of Byker. When they are all destroyed its power will be complete. In terms of sustained tension and hysterical panic this book works, and is well grounded in its physical locations: Newcastle-on-Tyne itself, nightclubs and motorway cafes, all of which add to the effectiveness. Evil from the past is also seeking to destroy in **Blood Heritage** by Sheri S. Tepper (Corgi, £2.95). This time the targets are all the descendants of the man who had originally imprisoned it. The main characters are helped by three very practical and homely modern "witches of Salem," who deserve a book to themselves. The evil in **Soulstorm** by Chet Williamson (Headline, £2.95) is imprisoned in an isolated mansion in Pennsylvania. The tension in this variant of the locked-in-a-haunted-house motif is built up gradually, allowing the characters to develop and relate to one another, and

there is plenty of time for both reader and characters to wonder if the powers in the house are really as evil as we fear. **Harvest Blade** by Tony Richards (Headline, £2.95) calls itself a "supernatural thriller" rather than a fantasy or horror story, and this is a fair description. Only in the final chapter does it become clear whether more than human violence and fanaticism have been involved. It is however a well written and well developed thriller.

(Phyllis McDonald)

The Digging Leviathan by James P. Blaylock (Morrigan, £11.95): "Was there a land at the centre of the earth, a hollow sphere wherein dinosaurs and mythical beasts sported in unimaginable jungles? And could you get there through tide pools off the Los Angeles coast?" Well, no. What at first appears to be an old-fashioned scientific romance, a story of Symmesian holes in the ice-caps and a world at the earth's core à la Edgar Rice Burroughs, turns out to be a gentle but high-spirited comedy of manners about the extraordinary doings of zany characters in present-day California. We meet a lunatic writer who entertains a hundred-and-one pseudoscientific theories, and a boy who has gills and webbed fingers and an incredible ability to magically "customize" machines. We also meet young Jim Hastings, a comparatively level-headed romantic who reads novels about Pellucidar and Fu Manchu, and his likeable though eccentric uncle, Edward St. Ives. All these characters dream of visiting the unknown realm beneath the earth. One group intends to reach the subterranean world by means of an elaborate mechanical mole, a Digging Leviathan. The other group, which includes Jim and his uncle and his mad father, means to make the journey by sea – or via the sewers. A delicately-written, poetic farce about a bunch of male obsessives, this is not a book which will appeal to all readers, though lovers of hoary scientific romances should respond to many of its densely-packed references. The illustrations by Ferret are highly effective.

(David Pringle)

In **Watchers** by Dean R. Koontz (Headline, £10.95) an ex-special-forces officer falls in with a Labrador that knows too much – and which the CIA, the FBI, the Mafia and the Something too Horrible to Bear Description all want to get their hands on. Imagine **Plague Dogs** rewritten by one of the "A-Team" screenwriters the night after reading *The Island of Dr Moreau*. I don't like the emphasis on the brand-names of guns, and it's a bit violent for my taste, but there's a sentimental ending and

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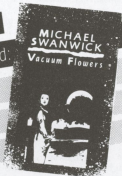
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dog-lovers will go for it. **Shade of the Tree** by Piers Anthony (Grafton, £2.95) is another pro-dog book. This straightforward who-is-this-threatening-my-babies horror story with a bit of telepathy thrown in is set in the same America as the Koontz: small towns, big isolated houses and something called "Diamond Blue Tip Matches." Anthony's usual brand of well-meaning sexual wish-fulfillment is too cuddly to get the suspense going—you know it's going to turn out OK. I wonder if Floridians really talk about "equines," "canines," "females" and "siblings" rather than horses, dogs, women, brothers and sisters?

Misery by Stephen King (Hodder & Stoughton, £11.95) has an author of bodice-rippers kidnapped by a fan and tortured horribly until he agrees to write a novel for her. Along the way to the gory conclusion he reassesses his work, realizing that the Gothic pot-boilers he pretends to hate are his best writing, and that he was only posing when he claimed to be doing it to raise the money to concentrate on the "real stuff." The action is interwoven with the novel being written, a clever effect but, for me, not quite enough to compensate for the gross nastiness of the violence. It shares a rural US setting with the Anthony and Koontz. I understand the isolated houses (torture, sieges and messy killings don't go down too well in an end-of-terrace) but why the Diamond Blue Tip Matches? Perhaps the manufacturers are paying all these authors to include them. Should they be changed to Swan's in British editions? By contrast **Freedom Beach** by James Patrick Kelley and John Kessel (Unwin, £2.95), also about Being a Writer, is set in a New York inhabited by well-meaning intellectual sexually-confused liberal-minded people who ought really to be in a Philip K. Dick book. A lot of the story takes place in dreams, giving the authors a chance to include affectionate and partially successful pastiches of Chandler, Aristophanes, Emily Bronte, Groucho Marx, Christopher Marlowe and others. I'm afraid it's a little too ambitious, and doesn't quite come off. It's hard to be sure, (it plots is nothing if not unclear) but the piece to be All a Dream in the end.

Now one for the cat-lovers. Julian May's **Intervention** (Collins, £10.95) is one big sf-convention masquerade, a renaissance-fair costume drama. Her protagonist is the perfect convention committee-member - 10 years in the hotel trade, then a second-hand sf and fantasy bookseller, heavy drinker, great lover (the earth really does move - he's psychokinetic), and telepathic as well. Some of the action takes place at a con (Boskone XXXII) and many of the supporting characters have been given names familiar from old skiffy

books (there is a Dalember and a Presteigne). And there are real Little Green Men. This is not the long-promised **Galactic Milieu** - the book that May says she was trying to write when she got sidetracked into the Pleistocene trilogy - but a prequel filling in some of the background, describing the doings of the grandparents of the characters of the other book and the circumstances of the Intervention, when the Galactic powers descended to Earth. It deals with one of the great themes of sf: misunderstood super-children growing up and trying to keep their powers secret from the adults. The main character identifies heavily with Olaf Stapledon's Odd John. In the end the telepaths come out and offer to use their powers for the benefit of mankind. In the *Saga of the Exiles* the plot falls foul of the Superman dilemma - the characters are so powerful that they have no obvious problems to contend with. The daemon ex machina that saves the day is not Kryptonite but a secretly metapsychic Irish mafioso (married to a Sicilian) who buys the Republican party and whips up prejudice against the superpowered chums. I somehow doubt that May voted for Reagan in '84. Julian May's US is very different from Dean R. Koontz's or Steven King's, and a much nicer place (except for the Mafia). None of the characters go west of Chicago or south of Washington and most of the action takes place in Northern New Hampshire, in a society of academics, sf fans, small farmers, wildlife rangers and wee grannies who occasionally go to Edinburgh for symposia or Sweden to accept their Nobel prizes. If America was really like that I'd consider emigrating. I know I ought to despise this rather fancish book, but taken on its own terms I found it immensely enjoyable.

(Ken Brown)

Great Sky River by Gregory Benford (Collancz, £11.95) is a distant sequel to the author's *In the Ocean of Night* and *Across the Sea of Suns*, and it embodies much the same themes: in the universe at large, a fight between organic civilizations and their cybernetic descendants; and, among humans, a conflict between the scientist/explorer type and the politician. In this book, the only people are a tiny band, a colony near the centre of the galaxy, being crushed close to extermination by formidable machines. Their culture and their fearful life on the margins of the mechanical ecology are memorably described, as is their final and rather ambiguous deliverance.

The Urth of the New Sun by Gene Wolfe (Collancz, £11.95) is a follow-up to the beautiful *Book of the New Sun*. Not to be disappointed by it comes as a surprise. I am delighted to report that

it doesn't disappoint: the novel is magnificent, and magnificently ends Severian's story. The Roman Catholic elements of the first books are more strongly present in this one: the renewal of the Sun takes on the aspect of a redemption, while Severian's role as a Christ figure is strongly indicated and explored. Yet this book is uniquely itself, not merely an appendix, and the final effect is one of great satisfaction and completion. **The Second Earth** by Patrick Woodroffe (paper Tiger, £7.95) is a revised and extended version of *The Pentateuch of the Cosmogony*, which was issued in 1979 in tandem with an LP record. It's a handsome book, a pseudo-biblical epic telling of the legendary birth, life and destruction of the first world inhabited by mankind, and of the flight through space to a second world, our Earth. While the text contains some interesting sf ideas, the vivid illustrations are the primary focus - Woodroffe is an idiosyncratic but consummate artist.

(Andy Robertson)

Non-Fiction

Brief mention of two goodies by British writers: **In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction** by Sarah Lefanu (Women's Press, £5.95), which we hope to review next issue, and **The Sociology of Science Fiction** by Brian Stableford (Borgo Press, \$9.95). The latter was published a year ago, but our review copy arrived late. It's based on an unpublished thesis submitted in 1978, so it shows some signs of age, but it remains a fascinating and valuable attempt to grapple with the questions of why sf authors write what they write and why sf readers like what they like. Clearly a sociologist's book, and not for literary purists (though of course Stableford also happens to be a very capable sf writer): order from Borgo Press, PO Box 2845, San Bernardino, CA 92406, USA.

Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World edited by Carl B. Yoke (Greenwood Press, £29.95) is a large collection of essays which deal interestingly with post-bomb and post-catastrophe scenarios in sf. One piece compares and contrasts Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*. Another itemizes "Deaths by Drowning," and others deal with the work of novelists ranging from Jack Vance to Russell Hoban. There is an intelligent essay by Judith B. Kerman entitled "J.G. Ballard: We are the Survivors." This puts the case that the disasters in Ballard's fiction are emblematic of the real world, real catastrophes that humanity is currently trying to surmount. Bal-

lard has been neglected by American academics, and it is good to see him being taken seriously here and not written off yet again as a mere "pesimist." **The Fantastic in World Literature and the Arts: Selected Essays from the Fifth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts** edited by Donald E. Morse (Greenwood, £25.95) is a less focused collection which covers a very wide range of fantasy – Tolkien and Gene Wolfe and Joan Vinge, but also many foreign-language writers and artists: Borges, Carlos Fuentes and even Max Ernst. The essay on adaptations of *Frankenstein* is illustrated with rare scenes from pre-Karloff productions. As with the preceding volume, most of these essays attain a high level of scholarship.

Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror: 1986 by Charles N. Brown and William G. Contento (Meckler, £32) is an impressive bibliographic tool, published last year in the US and now available in Britain. A hugely expanded version of the annotated "books received" lists featured monthly in *Locus* magazine, it allows you to access any sf or fantasy item published in 1986 via author, editor, title or contents – magazines as well as novels, anthologies and collections. A large-format, hardcover volume of 350 pages, it has been produced with care and intelligence, and for once the price does not seem too high for a book of this sort. It should be vital to all sf bibliophiles, and I look forward to the promised 1987 volume.

Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion by Neil Gaiman (Titan, £3.95) contains everything you could conceivably want to know about Douglas Adams and his ubiquitous creations – presented in a style which admirably suits the subject. **Dictionary of Demons: A Guide to Demons and Demonologists in Occult Lore** by Fred Gettings (Rider, £14.95) is a pretty picture book on an abominable subject. It provides a well-researched, alphabetical listing of demons from legend and literature, and it may serve as a useful reference source for fantasy writers. **Distant Music** by K.V. Bailey (Triffid Books, £2) is an entertaining collection of "poems and parodies of sf and fantasy" from a learned critic and letter-writer who should be well known to readers of *Foundation* and *IZ*. These tuneful verses, illustrated by Stella Hender, range in setting from Earthsea to Helliconia. (Order from Triffid Books, Val de Mer, Alderney, Channel Islands.)

H.R.F. Keating's **Crime and Mystery: The 100 Best Books** (Xanadu, £9.95) seems to have slipped out invisibly some time in late 1987. We haven't been sent a review copy, nor have I seen it reviewed elsewhere, but I'd like to mention it here because it's a worth-

while volume which deserves wider recognition. It's the follow-up to my own *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*, and precursor of a volume called *Horror: The 100 Best Books* which is currently being put together by Kim Newman and Stephen Jones for publication later in 1988. Keating writes breezily and informatively about a hundred crime classics, excluding thrillers and spy stories. His selections range from Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* through to James McClure's *The Artful Egg* and P.D. James's *A Taste for Death*. There's a welcome stress on the more recent books rather than the 19th-century forerunners, and all in all Keating provides an excellent means for finding your way around the detective-story genre.

(David Pringle)

Comics

The Graphic Novel *Glut Part Two*: or, the arrival of adult comics featuring no-one wearing underwear outside their tights. **Maus**, written and drawn by Art Spiegelman (Penguin, £5.95), must be regarded, and the cliché cannot be avoided, as a major turning point for the comics medium, both for the warmth of its reception in the mainstream world, and (connected of course) the uncompromising severity of its theme: the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. Spiegelman retraces his parents' experiences in Nazi-occupied Poland up to the point of their arrival at Auschwitz (future volumes will carry on the tale): a familiar obsession, but the shock of the new is in his graphic (an appropriate word) depiction; the Germans are cats, the Jews are mice. This device does not trivialize the evil displayed but transforms it out

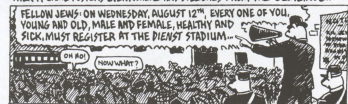
of the familiarity that leads to banality (Hannah Arendt's thesis), and perfectly exploits the ability of comics to lend surreality to experiences that are all too real.

Violent Cases by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean (Titan Books, £4.95), like *Maus*, explores memories of terror, but is in all other respects quite different – more (as the authors admit) of a graphic short story than a novel. McKean's eclectic, impressionistic art, reminiscent but not plagiaristic of the very hip Bill Sienkewicz, steals the eye and the immediate attention; and underlying it, Gaiman's sparse, slow-moving narrative of semi-mythologized (fantasized?) reminiscences of a meeting with Al Capone's osteopath as a young boy provide much of the mood and atmosphere which McKean then picks up and runs with. Memories of horror percolate into a filtered present/past; the effect is haunting.

Dave McKean's work can also currently be seen gracing the covers of DC's monthly horror comic, **John Constantine Hellblazer** (and quite exquisite covers they are too). Constantine is a supporting character, late of Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* (previously eulogized in *IZ* 22), a mysterious South London dealer in things both occult and sleazy (and incidentally a dead ringer for Sting) who has stood up surprisingly well to the trauma of being reconstituted as the hero of his own series. Written and drawn by Jamie Delano and John Ridgeway, both UK residents, this is that rarest of things, an American comic that actually depicts Britain as Britain and not as some place where Brits wear blue helmets and drink tea and Scots wear kilts, with nothing under them. So far, too, storylines have been refreshingly free of the standard transatlantic homogeneity, and this is by far the most politically outspoken comic



AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GRANDPARENTS IT WAS A FEW MONTHS QUIET. THEN IT CAME POSTERS EVERYWHERE AND SPEECHES FROM THE GEMEINDE...



being published in the DC/Marvel mainstream; *Hellblazer 3*, in particular, is a wonderful satire on Thatcherite values, in which demon yuppie stockbrokers come to sticky ends after the collapse of the soul market and the infernal dollar (presciently written before Black October). All this, and Maggie has fangs on the cover too.

Back firmly in the realms of science fiction is *Vic and Blood: The Chronicles of a Boy and His Dog* (quarterly from Mad Dog Graphics), an adaptation by Harlan Ellison himself of his

Also Received

Recommended:

Daughter of the Bear King by Eleanor Arnason (Headline, £2.95). Witty fantasy about a housewife who turns into a giant bear. Written in short, declarative sentences – a style which gets a bit wearing.

Empire of the Sun by J.G. Ballard (Grafton, £2.95). Movie tie-in edition with Warner Bros. Spielbergian cover which is unfortunately reminiscent of

looking paperback of an extremely ambitious utopian novel. Hardcover was reviewed by Lee Montgomerie in IZ 18.

Bring the Jubilee by Ward Moore and **Beasts** by John Crowley (Gollancz, £3.95 each). Numbers 19 and 20 in the Gollancz "Classic SF" series, and the last to appear in this large format. Good books, both.

Between the Strokes of the Night by Charles Sheffield (Headline, £2.95). Hard sf. Sheffield is no great shakes as a writer, but he's a grand ideas man.

Roderick at Random by John Sladek (Carroll & Graf, \$3.95). Humorous robot classic of 1983 vintage, published in the US for the first time – at last.

Bug Jack Barron by Norman Spinrad (Grafton, £3.50). Yet another sf classic (though not labelled as such). Raunchy material from 1969.

Star Maker by Olaf Stapledon (Penguin, £3.95). Fifty years old but still one of the most mind-blowing books ever written. Another large-format Penguin "Classic Science Fiction" reissue.

The Man Who Fell to Earth by Walter Tevis (Abacus, £3.99). Moving sf novel from 1963. Lasting better than the film? **Queenmagine, Kingmagic** by Ian Watson (Grafton, £2.95). Fantasy novel reviewed by John Clute in IZ 18.

Firechild by Jack Williamson (Methuen, £3.50). Old-fashioned but touching sf tale about a bio-engineered female homunculus.

Others:

The Star Trek Compendium by Allan Asherman (Titan, £7.95). Revised edition of what appears to be a standard illustrated work covering both the TV series and the films (up to number three). Well put together.

Buy Jupiter and Other Stories by Isaac Asimov (VGSF, £2.95). Goodish sf collection from 1975.

Encounters edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg and Charles Waugh (Headline, £3.50). Solid anthology about meetings with aliens. Includes such hoary classics as Leinster's "First Contact" (for the umpteenth time) as well as lesser-known pieces like Simak's moving "A Death in the House" and many stories of more recent date.

Strength of Stones by Greg Bear (VGSF, £2.95). First British edition of this early (1981) novel by a much-praised author.

The Hub by Chris Beebe (Futura, £2.95). Near-future sf by a new writer. Sadly, a mess: the hardcover was dismissed by Ken Brown in IZ 23.

Escape Plus by Ben Bova (Methuen, £2.95). Short stories tricked out by the publisher to look like a novel. Some good pieces.



famous post-holocaust short story in which Vic, a "solo," pals around with Blood, an intelligent telepathic dog, in their bid to scratch food, weapons and if possible, women, out of a shattered post-WW IV civilization. Thus far a straight adaptation (though presumably to be open-ended thereafter) it's faithful (as one might expect), competent and dull. Richard Corben's art does little to justify the transformation to the graphic medium (though at least Quilla June doesn't have his usual trademark of vast pendulous breasts) and the whole thing is massively over-written. It doesn't help either that Blood most closely resembles an Old English Sheepdog...

Which brings us, finally, back to graphic novels and a French offering newly packaged in English for the first time by Titan: Moebius's **The Gardens of Aedna** (Titan, £5.95). For years now we've been told that Continental bandes dessinées are infinitely superior to anything grown in the Anglophone world, but on the strength of this offering, I'm none too sure. This is very much a coffee-table comic – full of simply rendered but expressive and imaginative artwork, enhanced with truly gorgeous colouring – and only fleetingly a story with actual plot (two astronauts discover the simple life and sexuality on an alien Eden planet, big deal) let alone the work of natural philosophy the blurb would have us believe. The back up story, though, an absurdist tale of a hit man who falls in love, is rather more fun if less pretty.

(Lilian Edwards)

the early-60s Hayley Mills film *Whistle Down the Wind*.

Through Darkest America by Neal Barrett Jr (NEL, £2.95). Well-crafted after-the-bomb horrors. An example of what Brian Stableford (in *Anatomy of Wonder*, 3rd ed.) calls "the new post-holocaust romanticism"?

Rezevous with Rama by Arthur C. Clarke (VGSF, £2.95). Number 21 in the Gollancz sf classics line – now a regular small-format paperback series.

Mary and the Giant by Philip K. Dick (Gollancz, £11.95). Another non-sf novel written 30 years ago by the great Phil Dick. This one seems to have received higher praise in the US than any of the other posthumous works.

The Poison Oracle by Peter Dickinson (Mysterious Press/Arrow, £2.50). Excellent crime novel (one of Keating's 100 best) with slightly sf-y flavour.

Cutting Edge edited by Dennis Etchison (Futura, £2.95). State-of-the-art horror (sorry, *dark fantasy*) anthology, with stories by Straub, Laidlaw, Grant, Daniels, Yarbro, Campbell, Barker and others.

The Night of the Hunter by Davis Grubb (Simon & Schuster, £3.50). One of the new "Blue Murder" series of paperbacks: a 1953 thriller which was made into a good film by Charles Laughton. Not a fantasy, but admirably eerie.

A Warning to the Curious by M.R. James (Arrow, £3.50). Fine, understated horror stories from yesteryear, selected and introduced by Ruth Rendell.

Always Coming Home by Ursula Le Guin (Grafton, £5.95). Massive, good-

The Alien Debt by F.M. Busby (Futura, £2.95). "Great space adventure" which follows on from *Star Rebel* and *Rebel's Quest*.

Visible Light by C.J. Cherryh (Methuen, £2.95). Sf and fantasy short stories by a talented writer known mainly for her novels.

The Bewitchments of Love and Hate by Storm Constantine (Macdonald, £12.95). Feverish sf – follow-up to last year's *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit* (itself now out in Futura paperback at £3.95).

The Clocks of Iraz by L. Sprague de Camp (Grafton, £2.50). Humorous fantasy from 1971, sequel to *The Goblin Tower*.

Way of the Pilgrim by Gordon R. Dickson (Sphere, £3.50). Rebellion against alien overlords. Another wearisome (529 pages) Dickson novel.

The Official Batman Batbook by Joel Eisner (Titan, £6.95). Disappointingly, this turns out to be entirely concerned with the "Batman" TV series and not the comic books. Full of exhaustive detail for fans of the show.

Starquake by Robert L. Forward (NEL, £2.95). The hardest of hard sf, praised by the likes of Jerry Pournelle. It helps if you've already read *Dragon's Egg* and *Flight of the Dragonfly*.

Fantastic Television by Gary Gerani with Paul H. Schulman (Titan, £7.95). Reissue of a useful reference book from 1977. Full details of all the favourite series, including such turkeys as *Space: 1999*.

In the Valley of the Statues by Robert Holdstock (VGSF, £2.95). Reissue of a 1982 collection by a British writer whose stock has risen.

The Dream Catcher by Monica Hughes (Methuen, £1.95). Juvenile sf – sequel to *Devil on My Back*.

The Burrows Beneath by Brian Lumley (Grafton, £2.50). Pseudo-Lovecraft novel which was Lumley's first (from 1974).

RoboCop by Ed Naha (Corgi, £1.95). Ho-hum novelization of the film.

Web of Wind by J.F. Rivkin (Futura, £2.95). Sword-swinging, "feminist" fantasy – sequel to *Silverglass*.

The Forge in the Forest by Michael Scott Rohan (Futura, £3.50). Volume 2 of "The Winter of the World." Has a nice Ian Miller cover.

Thorns by Robert Silverberg (Futura, £2.50). All about pain and suffering. Reissue of a fairly good sf novel from 1967.

Quest of the Three Worlds by Cordwainer Smith (VGSF, £2.50). All of Smith's work is coming back into print in the UK. This opus from 1966 concerns the quest of one Casher O'Neill across some very strange landscapes.

Crabs: The Human Sacrifice by Guy N. Smith (NEL, £1.95). More unspeakable stuff from one of the great hacks of our time.

The Shattered Horse by S.P. Somtow (Headline, £3.50). Long historical novel set in the aftermath of the Trojan war. By Siamese-American sf author Somtow Sucharitkul, it verges on fantasy. Slangy dialogue breaks the spell.

The Bones by Sheri S. Tepper (Corgi, £2.95). More horror from the author of *Blood Heritage*.

The Asutra by Jack Vance (VGSF, £2.50). "Book Three of the fabulous Durdane trilogy," from 1973. Colourful.

Star King and The Killing Machine by Jack Vance (Grafton, £2.50 each). Everybody's reissuing Vance! These are two of his standard sf titles from the 1960s, in the "Demon Princes" series. Proficient stuff.

Huysman's Pets by Kate Wilhelm (Legend, £2.99). Hardcover was reviewed by Lee Montgomerie in IZ 19.

The Kid from Ozone Park by Richard Wilson (Drum, \$3.50). Craftsmanlike short stories from this late author. Drum Booklet #27: order from PO Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA.

The Mage-Born Child by Jonathan Wylie (Corgi, £2.95). Book three of "Servants of the Ark." Standard wizard-and-dragon stuff by a husband-and-wife team who write pseudonymously.

Cobra Strike by Timothy Zahn (Legend, £2.95). Routine space fiction: number 17 in the "Venture SF" series.

LETTERS

Dear Editors:

Interzone has over the years published many letters, mostly moderate, suggesting that the magazine should exhibit a more even balance between stories that portray the direction of intelligent life on this planet as of necessity a Gadarenish stampede, and stories more positively accented. Through replies and editorials you have given the criticism a fair hearing, but have said, in effect, that any bias of content toward the former type is because so many of the most creative and committed contributors see things that way.

The trouble is that when it comes to defending fast-held ideas, commitment may not be tempered with tolerance, nor does reasonableness invariably rule. To Richard Kadrey (IZ 22) even so mildly argued a case as Eric Savory's (IZ 20) is "screaming in outrage." That is just what it was not doing; but Kadrey himself does his own bit of screaming about "lame adolescent power sf" for "cretinous teenyboppers," and seems to imply that all sf that doesn't depict (and perhaps contribute to) what he forth-

rightly welcomes as the "inevitable" and evolutionarily sanctioned "dehumanization" of the individual, and of the human race, must belong to some escapist rubbish pile.

I am an admirer of Richard Kadrey's talent as a writer and artist. IZ 9 was notable for containing his *Synaptic Intrigue* collages, and particularly for its cover where he juxtaposed the endlessly and hopelessly circling prison-yard convicts of Doré's *Newgate Gool* (which was also recreated by Van Gogh) with a looming brain so dissected and annotated as to be suggestive of a like mechanical imprisonment and repetitiveness within its circuitry. How valid a cosmic paradigm, however, is, say, the hell of Grünewald's Isenheim *Altar Crucifixion* panel divorced from the symbolism of the opposed Resurrection panel; the split and dissected cranium if we take no account of, for example, the haloed heads of Leonardo's *Madonna Benois*; the circling Doré/Van Gogh prisoners unaccompanied by such images as Blake's *Albion's Dance* or his spiraling Dante and Virgil *Ascending the Mount of Purgatory*; the *Divine Comedy* itself with no *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*? In fact, Richard Kadrey's own dream-like, surrealist collage *Picnic in Altoona* in IZ 9, with its Pre-Raphaelitish and Dantesque ironies, is not without its purgatorial/paradisaical resonances.

Many of the best sf novels reflect a universe to which these modes and degrees of experience are integral. David Pringle in putting Aldiss's *Non-*

Stop among his best hundred sf novels (rating my own best ten) says of the inhabitants of this grotty vessel, as full of rats, shit and stench as Richard Kadrey could wish or imagine, and circling in apparently pointless orbit more times than the Newgate felons go round their exercise yard: "they are unaware of the true nature of their world." They, or some of them, do however become aware of the extent of their dehumanization and, in resisting it, discover their true situation. What David Pringle calls the "marvelous epiphany" which leaves the ship-dwellers in the closing sentences "as though everyone was about to be born" would not have occurred had the status of "dolls activated by chemicals" been true or had it been believed to be true. It is not uplift but insight and awareness, attained by the reader empathetically through his/her imaginative involvement, that significant of fosters.

As a magazine of sf and fantasy IZ does not fail in its insights, but they are generally nearer to a worm's (or beetle's) eye view of man and the universe than an angel's (and "angel" is no more a cop-out or escapist meta-

phor than is "beetle"). It was William Blake who, in *Jerusalem*, wrote of the range of human perception: "At will Contracting into Worms or Expanding into Gods."

K.V. Bailey
Alderney, C.I.

Dear Editors:

Interzone is going brilliantly, keep up the good work. And please ignore those people calling for the non-fiction parts to be scrapped; Nick Lowe's film reviews are better than movies, better than art!

Greg Egan
N.S.W., Australia

Dear Editors:

A line or two about *IZ* 20, 21 and 22. I didn't think that the long Geoff Ryman piece would work, being split between two issues, but the issue with part two arrived before I got around to part one so I was able to read right through. The fact that "Love Sickness" was such an excellent piece of fiction outweighed any difficulties. The number and quality of Tina Horner's illustrations helped.

Although there were no duds in these three issues I must admit that I found Garry Kilworth's "Dop*elgan*er" a little predictable, and Cherry Wilder's "The Decline of Sunshine" left me wondering what was going on. "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick and "The Only One" by David Garnett were particularly inventive. However, for me the star of the three issues was Eric Brown, whose "Krash-Bang Joe..." and "The Girl Who Died for Art" were nothing short of brilliant.

Art-wise, it was good to see more Russ Tudor and the return of SMS as both illustrator and cartoonist. Certainly continue with all the regular features, and particularly don't lose the interviews. I disagree with the correspondent in issue 22 who complained about long reviews. I think your current mix of long "essay" reviews and recommended/other capsule reviews is a good format. I look forward to your going bimonthly.

Ian Mundell
Marlborough

Dear Editors:

It's good to see that *IZ* is expanding, in readership, wordage and quality. Issue 23 was one of the best I've read since starting my subscription at *IZ* 16. David Brin's "The Giving Plague" was excellent; the idea of the "benevolent" virus was a fascinating concept, and the final irony of the narrator's stubborn self-determination was a nice touch.

The new perspective which Paul McAuley brought to the stock fantasy scenario of unicorns and cosy village folk was very chilling; the rationale

behind it was disturbingly plausible, too, as the growth of the "Early Learning Centre" bears witness.

I thought Chris Evans' story's blend of the mystery story with the painful and poignant study of how a mind can react to the realization of a life wasted, was on the whole a well-handled piece, although the ending lacked the note of discord which the outcome seemed to demand.

Kim Newman's "Famous Monsters" gave me the best laugh I've had since "The Next-But-One Man." Again, there were some memorable lines — "It's showbiz, you know. It's in the ichtor." More from this writer, please.

I thought the hard science in "Something for Nothing" was very ingenious, and S.M. Baxter avoided the mistake of allowing it to dominate at the cost of the characters.

But I think the biggest share of praise must go to Greg Egan's "Scatter My Ashes," a truly horrific story, and an infinitely more "dangerous vision" on the Ripper theme than anything Bloch or Ellison could dream up. I thought the story was a brilliant (and long overdue) condemnation of the sick voyeurism on which the so-called civilized world thrives. I remember a recent article in the *Third World First* publication, *Links*, in which journalist Nick Cater, on his visit to Ethiopia, speaks of a press-photographer who crouched by an old woman for three hours in order to catch the moment of her death on film; doubtless he received the same kudos as Egan's protagonist. It makes one wonder whether such violence as portrayed in "Scatter" really is founded in the monstrous appetite for atrocity which so clearly exists, and in the sensationalism, not just of films like *Rambo*, but in the media itself. "Scatter," for me, is, I'm sure, one of those rare stories which stay in the mind longer than most novels.

Matthew Dickens
Southampton

Dear Editors:

Charles Platt's piece on Alfred Bester upset me (issue 23). I think it's one of the saddest things I've read in *IZ*. This from someone who only read *The Demolished Man* for the first time ten days ago, but has read and enjoyed most of Bester's short stories by now. Time, as he so rightly informed us over 30 years ago, is indeed the traitor. I just wish he could have died happier...

Greg Egan's "Scatter My Ashes": don't you realize that some of us read *IZ* before going to bed? How am I going to sleep now? A horrible, brilliant story. Keep up with the book reviews — it's good to see what's available. I tell my girlfriend: "Interzone hated this — you'll love it!" And sure enough she does; then I borrow it...

Matt Quarremain
Bracknell

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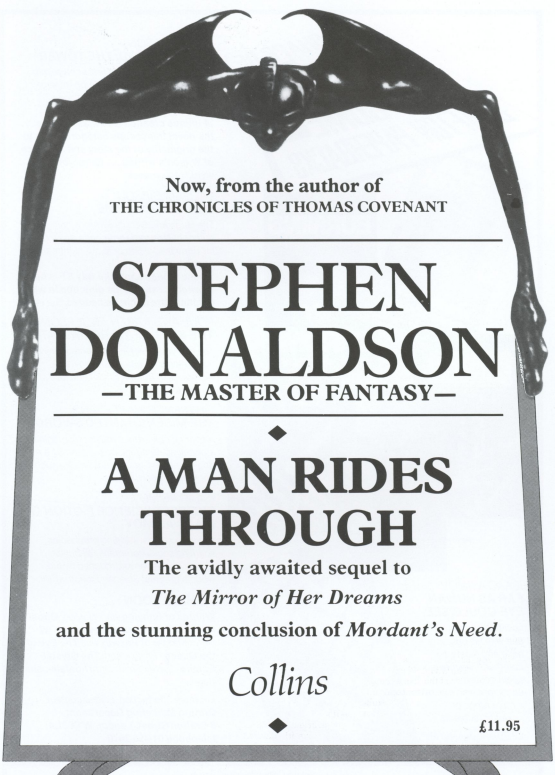
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