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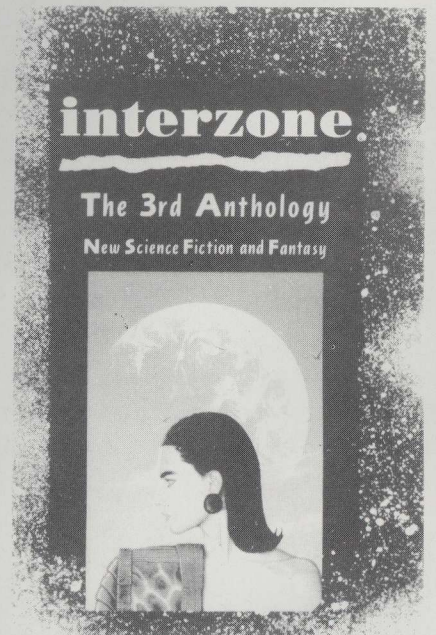
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Submissions: unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed, but each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We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

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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 27

January/February 1989

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Cover by Brian Salmon for Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* (courtesy of Simon & Schuster Ltd.)

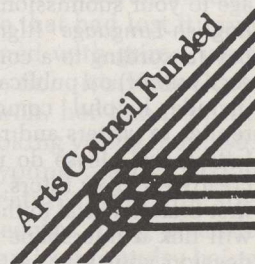
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Interface

David Pringle

As *Interzone* grows the story submissions keep on coming in – from “name” authors and total unknowns, from British writers and persons overseas. Right now we have more good material in hand than ever before, enough to justify moving to monthly publication (which we’d like to do when we have the financial resources). There is no let-up in the flow of new sf and fantasy stories from young writers, a heartening sign that we are still a very long way indeed from the oft-predicted age of post-literate barbarism.

Let me repeat a few words of advice for the benefit of beginning writers. We are looking for intelligent, well-written, adult, entertaining science fiction and fantasy. We are unlikely to accept hackneyed space-opera or sword-and-sorcery material or conventional ghost stories. Read a couple of issues of *IZ* before you submit to us: this will give you an idea of the type and quality of fiction we publish. However, don’t feel too constrained by what we are already publishing; we think our present standard is high but we’re always looking for stories which are even more innovative and more rewarding than our present material.

Stories should be typed, with plenty of spacing between lines and generous margins all round. They shouldn’t be stapled together or bound in any way, and each manuscript must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Submissions from overseas should be in the form of a disposable manuscript accompanied by a small envelope and two International Reply Coupons for an airmail response (don’t send US or other foreign stamps). Type your name and address, and the word-length of the story, on the top sheet of the manuscript. The preferred length is 2,000 to 6,000 words. We occasionally publish longer stories, but these are unlikely to be the work of little-known writers. And please don’t send more than one story at a time.

Make sure you keep a copy of any manuscript you send us, as we cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to your submission. We buy *First English-Language Rights* only, and pay (according to a contract we send each author) on publication. We try to include helpful comments in our replies to writers and rarely use form letters, but please do not treat us as creative writing tutors. Don’t send us first draft material in the hope that we will lick it into shape for you; try to develop your story as far as you are

able before submitting it to us. And remember: *Interzone* needs your support to continue. If everyone who submitted manuscripts to us also subscribed to the magazine, then perhaps we could afford to appear monthly and hence publish even more stories. So: best of luck.

MAGAZINES GALORE

One question we’re frequently asked by aspiring writers is where else they should submit their sf and fantasy stories if we reject them (and, alas, we do reject the bulk of the material we are sent, including some which is worthy of publication). *IZ* is still the only professional British sf magazine, but there is now one other high-paying market for fantasy-cum-horror stories. That’s **Fear** magazine, edited by John Gilbert and published by Newsfield Publications, 47 Gravel Hill, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1QS. Currently a bimonthly, it’s now up to its third issue and I’m told it should be going monthly in 1989. They’re only averaging three stories per issue so far, but they do pay very well and they may be interested in the occasional sf piece as well as the more traditional horror fare.

A new quarterly British sf magazine, provisionally entitled **The Gate**, has been announced for early 1989. I understand it’s going to be paying much the same rates as *IZ* and will be concentrating on science fiction proper rather than fantasy or horror. Of course it remains a completely unknown quantity at this time of writing, but you might like to give it a try. The editor is Richard Newcombe, 28 Savile Rd., Westwood, Peterborough PE3 7PR.

Then there are the fiction fanzines. Leader of the pack in Britain is probably **Back Brain Recluse**, edited by Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3LA. Its latest issue, some 48 A5 pages in size, has fiction by Ian Watson, Lyle Hopwood and others – well worth a look. A new A5 fanzine, complete with laminated cover, called **Works**, is edited by Dave Hughes and Andy Stewart, from 12 Blakestones Rd., Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UQ. It carries a good range of short stories. Then we have **Dream** magazine and others: watch *IZ*’s “Small Ads” column for details of most of these amateur or semi-professional publications (some of which do pay their contributors).

There’s also a rather scruffy news-

and-reviews magazine called **Critical Wave**, worth getting if you want to keep in touch with the British sf scene in general. It’s edited by Steve Green and Martin Tudor from 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, West Midlands B92 7LQ. Subscriptions are £3 a year. *Critical Wave* has a long way to go if it’s ever to become a true UK equivalent of the invaluable US news magazine *Locus*, but it may get there if its editors are persistent enough – and so far they’re setting a good pace.

AMERICAN MAGAZINES

The extant US science-fiction magazines include **Analog** (trad hard sf – impenetrable to many readers), **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction** (a more “literary” blend of sf and f), **Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine** (very little to do with Asimov these days; under Gardner Dozois’s editorship it’s probably the best sf magazine), **Amazing** (the oldest of the mags, but it’s been close to the bottom of the heap for a long time) and **Twilight Zone** (more fantasy and horror than sf; it publishes some excellent writers from time to time). Then there’s **Omni**, the highest-paying market, which is only partially devoted to fiction.

Hopeful British writers may stand a better chance of publication in America if they concentrate initially on the little magazines rather than any of the big boys listed above. The wee ones include **New Pathways**, a somewhat avant-garde mag which has been advertising regularly in *IZ*; and **Argos F & SF**, edited by Ross Emry, Penrhyn Publishing, PO Box 2109, Renton, WA 98056, USA. The latter seems more interested in fantasy than sf, and lately it’s been publishing stuff by Keith Laumer, Mike Resnick and other writers of repute. Another which I’ve just seen for the first time is the glossily-produced **Aboriginal Science Fiction** (“Tales of the Human Kind”). In size and frequency this one is comparable to *IZ*. It has colour artwork, book reviews by Darrell Schweitzer and others, and five or six stories per issue. The editor is Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA.

Aboriginal is one of the magazines which was competing with *IZ* for the title of “Best Semi-Prozine” in the most recent round of the Hugo Awards. In the event, neither magazine won. The honour went to good old *Locus*, for the thirteenth time. According to Charles Ryan, *Aboriginal* may not be eligible to compete in that category next year, since its circulation will be well past the 10,000 mark. The same may be true of *IZ*, though it’s unclear to me whether this will disqualify us for the Hugo

Continued on p.66

Barrington J. Bayley

Tommy Atkins

Harry hated the time he had to spend on the factory floor. The workers there were all women and girls. Whenever he went to inspect or repair a machine he could feel their eyes on him, and could sense their nudges and sneers. To make matters worse, three of the women had limbs missing.

Otherwise it would have been a welcome and familiar environment, in normal times. The steam engine in the yard drove a jungle of roaring belts and pulleys to power mills, lathes and boring machines. On gloomy days, glowing gas jets supplemented the daylight that filtered through the sooty glass roof panels. The factory produced small arms parts, in a veritable flood that was carried away in lorries that arrived each day. Sometimes there weren't enough lorries and the crates piled up higher and higher in the loading bay. War work.

There had been four mechanics under Harry before the war. Now, as factory engineer, he had to do the routine servicing himself. He threw the clutch on the drive belt and the capstan lathe started turning. A turbaned girl slouched nearby, taking advantage of the break in her work to drag on an acrid-smelling Woodbine.

"It'll do," he said. With an aloofness he found mildly irritating, she nodded and took her place; recalibrated the turret, turned on the sud-tap and applied the tool to the first steel cylinder, all with easy automatic skill. She would make another four hundred connecting rods before her shift was finished.

Harry's shift, though, was ending. Wearily he made his way down the aisle, his consciousness all but drowned in the noise of the huge shed and the familiar odours of oil, grime, worn leather, steel shavings and suds. This environment was his world; he had known it since he was fourteen. But only in the past year had it become a nightmare.

Not that anyone said anything, but the feeling was there. The feeling that something was expected of him. Something he did not want to do.

He climbed the iron steps to his office, which a wooden partition separated from the offices of the management staff. Perce Ambler, his Sunday-shift replacement, had arrived. He was carrying a large roll of stiff paper under his arm. "Hullo, Perce," Harry said. "Anything there I should see?"

"Nothing much, Harry. Just another poster the Ministry sent." He shifted it awkwardly with his arti-

ficial hand, but made no resistance when Harry reached out to take it from him. Harry spread out the gaudy sheet. It was the *I'm Doing My Bit* one, an example of the recent more blatant variety.

Perce hurumphed and sat at his desk, hiding himself in the reports Harry had left. How glad Harry was that it was Perce, not he, who would have to put up the poster. Perce who had done his bit, and was nearly seventy anyway.

"See you Tuesday, then," he said, trying to make his voice cheerful. "By the way, I've put a new bearing ring on number eighteen."

"Right."

The steam engine was chuffing boisterously as he made his way across the yard. It had helped make a lot of rifles, mortars and machine-guns, Harry thought. It had helped kill a lot of the enemy.

He was tired. It had gone on for so long. For six days of the week he worked twelve to fourteen hours. On Sundays he worked eight hours. One day off once a month. Tasteless low-grade food. And nothing to talk about, nothing to think about, except the war.

The bullish female security guard opened the gate for Harry to step through. The dusk light, the grey drizzle, intensified the town's air of exhaustion. Apart from the elderly there were few male civilians to be seen, and even fewer who did not limp on prosthetics or display artificial hands.

Harry had noticed a tendency lately for people on the street to look permanently dazed. Fortunately there wasn't a great deal of bombing, now that the air defences had learned to keep out first the airships, and then the big four-engined bomber planes. Overheads, echelons of barrage balloons hovered, flapping elephantine ears.

At the corner he bought a newspaper. WE GIVE IT TO THEM ran the headline. "It has been a great day for the allies on the continent," read the leader. "We have delivered two more hammer-blows..." He stuffed the paper in his pocket and continued through the town. The posters made it like walking through a gaudy, but somehow tatty, corridor, lurid, exhortative, stirring unnatural energy into a life that had lost it from any other source. Some, darkened with grime, were from the war's distant past. *Go, Son, It's Your Duty*, pronounced a dignified matriarch, her hand on the shoulder of an erect, serious-looking young man. *Go!* pleased a diaphanously clad young beauty, gazing into her husband's thoughtful features. Marching soldiers, climbing biplanes, battleships firing gigantic guns. Women and children in an iron foundry being

herded by whip-wielding alien guards in spiked helmets. *Do You Want This To Happen Here?*

Later posters made more veiled references. *How Much Does Your Country Mean To You? Will Our Young Men Stand Alone?* Pictures of clenched fists, of infantry scrambling over earthworks, of shells exploding, of awful carnage. A nurse stretched out her arms pleadingly to the spectator, while behind her stood shadowy, haunting figures of uniformed wounded.

The posters that were frankly blatant were new. There was the *I'm Doing My Bit* one Harry would have to live with on the factory floor from now on. *Who Is A True Patriot?* asked another, answering its own question with a citizen who had responded to the call and one who had not. *They Said I Couldn't Go, But...* a middle-aged man proudly announced, looking at where his arm had been. A young soldier on crutches looked soulfully out at Harry, a bloodstained bandage around his head, his left arm a stump at the shoulder, his right leg cut off at the knee. *I Could Still Fight, If...*

In fact Harry had volunteered for active service before conscription came in, but had been turned down on medical grounds. By the time standards were lowered and the age limit was raised to fifty-five, he had found himself on the Essential War Work list. He now wore a prominent War Work badge to protect him from some of the odium that an able-bodied man in civvies inevitably attracted.

From a later variant of public disgrace the badge could not save him. She stepped hesitantly from beneath a greengrocer's awning, just as he reached the top of Constitution Hill. She was quite pretty, despite some evident nervous strain, in her faded blue bonnet and embroidered blouse, over which she wore a lady's tweed jacket. A glance at the hem of her long crinoline skirt revealed the reason for her physical awkwardness. Her right leg was missing and had been replaced by the usual strut-cage prosthetic.

Her gaze flicked over Harry's body and her expression became stern as she steeled herself to an unpleasant duty. Paralysis descended on Harry. She crossed the road, almost graceful with her limping gait as she bore grimly down on him, and even as it happened it was a wonder to him how he involuntarily cooperated in his ignominy, slowing his pace and passively accepting the white feather she handed to him.

She was red in the face by now and stomped immediately away down the hill. Harry glanced around. The street was empty. But the incident had been observed by some women in the greengrocer's, who were peering at him through the doorway.

Simply he dropped the feather, and slowly began to walk again, passing by the long blank wall of a warehouse. He felt sick and resentful. Resentful that the war should press so far, should press, press and carry on pressing. The armed forces would be nowhere without people like him, he told himself. Despite all difficulties production had gone up and up, to unheard-of levels. If such levels of production could ever be maintained in peacetime, the world would be a paradise.

But in peacetime, of course, they would not be maintained. The grimy warehouse wall gave way to a hundred-foot hoarding behind which there was a

bombbsite. Harry realized he had been muttering to himself, and in his daze he did not hear the footsteps that approached him from behind. He only started with fright when someone bumped into him, and at the same time he felt something being shoved into his raincoat pocket. His assailant, whoever it was, rushed straight past him and hurried on, then disappeared into a side passage. All the impression Harry received was of a small, tatty man who, unlike everyone else one saw, carried no gasmask.

He stopped, and pulled from his pocket the object that had been thrust there. It was a booklet, or pamphlet. On the plain paper cover, which carried no imprint of any ministry, were the words:

ENDING THE WAR

An Explanation of the Tommy Atkins Movement

The few pages contained a cramped, badly printed text which Harry did not inspect. Instead, he replaced the pamphlet in his pocket, and continued to trudge home.

Harry's flat was about two miles from his place of work. His routine after the Sunday shift was to attend evensong at the local church, drowsing through the vicar's sermon on sacrifice and fortitude. Then he would walk home. It was not until he had eaten his meagre supper of tea, grey bread, whale-oil margarine and a scrap of cheese, that he took out the pamphlet again. He had guessed it was seditious literature, but the strangeness of the text confused him. "The followers of Tommy Atkins were not traitors, neither were they cowards," he read. "They tried to serve their country and civilization by bringing the war to an end."

And later: "For every man taken out of the line by Tommy Atkins, an enemy soldier was also taken out. If the ruinous conflict is to end there must be neither victor nor defeated, only a mutual refusal to fight. This war, now in its twenty-fifth year, is as destructive as ever and conceivably could continue until civilization is annihilated. The original causes of the belligerency have vanished into history. The struggle continues through the obstinate habit of national pride. Meantime millions have died, millions more will die, the flower of nations has been wiped out. Each new generation is raised only to be thrown into the military mincing machine.

"Our leaders view the terrible carnage with equanimity. It is not generally known that the ruling officer classes *collaborated with the enemy* in order to put down the Tommy Atkins movement. The officer classes equate any desire to end the war with treason. The treason lies not with Tommy Atkins, however, but with the officer classes who perpetuate the war. REASON, NOT TREASON, is Tommy Atkins' motto."

Harry's mind bounced off the disjointed and peculiar sentiments. Who was Tommy Atkins? The pamphlet seemed to presume a knowledge on the reader's part which he, for one, lacked. "The men at the front hate the war," it went on. "They have been driven beyond human endurance. Everyone hates the war, except those gaining pathological enjoyment from it. But the war does not stop."

Briefly he wondered whether he should report the pamphlet to the police. Then he went to bed.

That night Harry dreamed again of his brother Terence, missing in action six months before. His name had not appeared in the prisoner lists; he had to be presumed dead.

He was dreaming of how Terence might have died. Harry was dreaming of mud. Terence was floundering in it, bogged down and sinking, futilely struggling. No one was there to help him. His backpack pressed him in further, but he couldn't release it. As he disappeared, he was still clutching his rifle.

In the dream's confusion Terence then became the veteran who had talked to Harry once, invalidated out and spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair, sunning himself in scrubby parks. He had described to Harry the great swathe of mud that, after a generation of fighting, swayed to and fro across the continent, a fatal wound in the landscape and full of unsuspecting pits and deeps, composed in part of blood and excrement and rotting bodies. It was poisonous, too, because of the gas that was dissolved in it. "A million dead in one battle," the veteran had said, "and all for another mile of mud. You don't hear of Field Marshal Henry these days, do you? Course you don't, 'cos they carted him off to the gentleman's home. Lorst his reason, he did, after they told him where the regiment he sent out had got to. Gorn, they told him. Gorn in the mud. All smashed and blown up and drowned. They never did bring any bodies back."

Terence was in the wheelchair. Terence was sinking, the evil-smelling muck closing over him, sinking and suffocating, alone in the darkness.

Harry awoke with a start. A noise had aroused him, approaching rapidly from the south-east. It sounded like a motor-bike, except that it came from up in the air, quite different from any aeroplane engine he had ever heard. Steadily it grew louder, until it passed directly overhead. Then, abruptly, it stopped.

He got out of bed and peered curiously through the folds of the blackout curtain. Searchlights were weaving across the sky. Suddenly, to the west, red flames leaped up from the blacked-out city, accompanied by a loud roar.

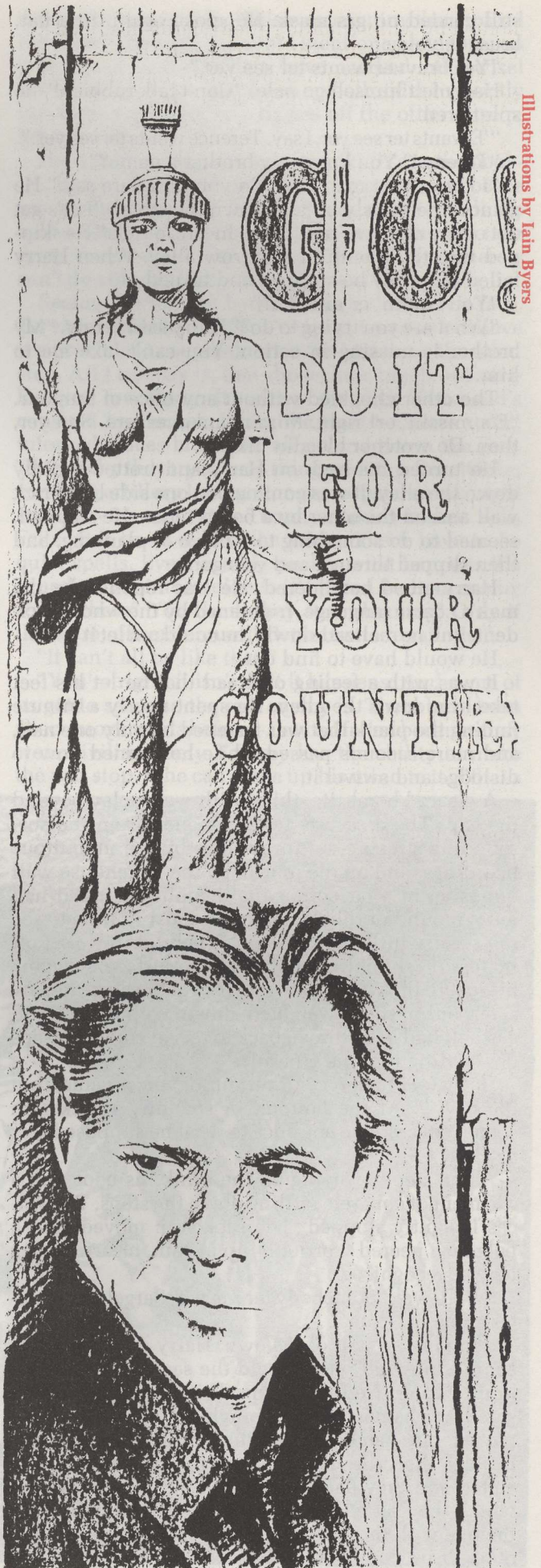
There had been no ack-ack, so he could have just witnessed the crash of an experimental plane. Fire engines clanged in the distance. He stared at the glow for a while, then stumbled back to bed and slept fitfully till dawn.

Harry rose at his usual time and puttered about the flat for a few hours. This was the one day per month that he had completely free, but he was so used to being at work that staying at home had come to seem aimless and depressing. Sometimes he told himself that having a family might have made a difference to him; but one way or another he just didn't seem to be the marrying type.

At midmorning, gas mask slung over one shoulder, shopping bag in his hand, he went out. The day was sunny and he felt glad to get into the open air. He had forgotten all about the strange pamphlet. It came as a shock when, at the same spot near the top of Constitution Hill, the same shabby little man stepped out and barred his path.

"Still gotcher white fevver then?"

Harry looked at the apparition, speechless. The stranger's hair was overgrown, his clothes ragged. He



Illustrations by Iain Byers

still carried no gas mask. He spoke again, in a flat, brusque voice.

"Yer bruvver wants ter see yer."

Harry felt himself go pale. "Don't talk rubbish!" he spluttered.

"E wants ter see yer, I say. Terence wants ter see yer."

"Terence? You know my brother's name?"

"I know a lot mate, more'n you do I dare say." He glanced nervously up and down the street. "Let's get aht of 'ere afore we're spotted. In 'ere, quick." He skipped into the mouth of a narrow alley. When Harry failed to follow he stopped and turned.

"You comin' or ain'tcha?"

"What are you trying to do?" Harry said firmly. "My brother is missing in action. You can't take me to him."

The other chuckled without any trace of humour. "E's missin' orl right. Missin' an' over 'ere. Sod yer, then. Do wotcher bleedin' like."

He turned his back on Harry and trotted rapidly down the alley. It was confined on one side by a brick wall and on the other by a board fence. He stopped, seemed to do something to a piece of planking, and then slipped through and was gone.

Harry stood bewildered. He was repelled by the man's coarse language, frightened by the whole incident. But, he realized slowly, he could not let it pass.

He would have to find out.

It was with a feeling of dread that he let his feet take him down the alley. He spent nearly a minute finding the plank that was fastened by only one nail, and more seconds passed while he learned how to dislodge and swivel it.

A cleared bombsite, thick with weeds, lay beyond the gap. The area was fully screened from the surrounding streets – on three sides by the ubiquitous hoardings, and on the fourth, by the warehouse wall opposite. In a far corner the demolition squad had left a mound of rubble. Harry was just in time to see the scruffy little man disappear behind it. He set off in pursuit, stumbling on the uneven surface, snagging his feet in the weeds. Skirting the rubble heap, he saw a tarpaulin sheet weighted down with bricks and earth. It had been drawn back to reveal concrete steps descending into the ground.

Harry crept nearer. A murmur of voices came from the cavity. At the bottom, in shadow, a sackcloth screen covered the entrance to what he supposed was a cellar.

As he stood swaying on the brink his boot sent a fragment of concrete rattling down the steps. The voices instantly stopped. The sackcloth moved, and a pale face peered worriedly up at him, clearing once he was recognized.

"Well, well! Somebody ter see yer, Sarge! Yer'd better come in, mate."

Showing no will of his own, Harry descended the steps while his "guide" held the sackcloth aside for him to enter. He found himself in a dank, dirty, ill-smelling chamber, lit by a single candle whose glow picked out patches of white mould on the walls. Besides the little man there were two others in the cellar, and they had turned on the packing cases on which they sat to watch him enter. He did not know the one with the soft, haunted eyes, but he knew the other. It was his brother Terence.

His brother Terence. Alive. But not only that. It came as an almost equal shock to Harry's consciousness to see Terence out of uniform. He was clad in a soiled raincoat beneath which there showed a frayed cardigan and a grimed shirt with the collar missing. Like his companions, he looked no better than a tramp.

To be out of uniform, even when on leave, was against military law. Terence rose, offering his hand with incongruous casualness. He was younger and taller than Harry, and had always been the stronger, but now he looked ill, his face pasty and gaunt. "So glad you could make it, Harry. By God, you look as if you'd seen a ghost. Get my brother a seat, Jenkins. And I dare say the stores would stretch to a brew-up."

Terence, alive and out of uniform... Harry found himself shaking his brother's hand limply, then flopping onto the crate the little man pushed behind him. Terence had reseated himself.

"You haven't got a fag on you, have you Harry? We're all gasping."

He nodded and handed over a packet of five Woodbines, refusing one himself and telling Terence to keep the remainder. He was in a funk. Already the sweaty, mildewy atmosphere was choking him. He could smell the unwashed men. He was struggling for breath, suffocating in the gloom. He didn't know how they could stand to live like this. They shared out three smokes from the packet and lit them from the candle flame, bending towards it in turn. Terence took a deep, shaky drag, then coughed for a while before he spoke again.

"This is a bit of a shock for you, I dare say, Harry? I gather they told you I'd been killed in action. They do that. Still, there might be a grain of truth in it from their point of view. We are presumed dead, with any luck. Drowned at sea."

"At sea? You were coming home?"

"Yes...for secret courts martial. They had to do it that way – too delicate a matter to be dealt with in the open, in the field. That would be to risk further disaffection. The firing squad would have been secret, too. You'd have been none the wiser. As it was, an enemy sub saved them the job. Got us a mile or so off-shore. There were two or three hundred prisoners and crew on board, I think. Probably a dozen made it to the beach – including us three, so meet my fellow survivors and companions ever since: Private Jenkins, who you've already bumped into, and Bombardier Parcival. You've heard of Laurence Parcival, the poet?"

Harry barely glanced at the third man, merely wondering in passing why an established literary personage did not hold a commission, though for his part he failed to recognize the name. He was surprised to hear of an enemy sub operating in coastal waters. The Navy claimed to control them absolutely.

Still, both points paled to insignificance compared to the import of what Terence was saying. "I'll come straight to the point, Harry," he hurried on. "I take it you read our booklet? Good. You'll want to know more details." He puffed nervously on his Woodbine, appearing distraught, though Harry was aware that in fact his brother was scrutinizing him closely.

"No denying it, it was all a bit of a shambles. You can guess why. Oath of secrecy or not, you can't keep

the matter with you? Aren't you with us?" Terence's voice became desperate. "Perhaps you need to be out there. You should see the bodies hanging like dirty rags on the barbed wire, thousands of them. You should see young boys going mad in front of your eyes, days after arriving. There's no way to describe what it's like. The docs admit it's beyond human endurance. That's why every man takes five grammes of diazine every morning – the anti-shock drug. You need it in your system or you just can't face it."

Harry had never heard of diazine. By now his senses had adjusted themselves to the mephitic cellar, and the cigarette smoke was easing his breathing. An eerie glow seemed to surround the men. Jenkins was busy with a primus stove and a tin pan. Bombardier Parcival had been watching the exchange, smoking quietly, otherwise still as a statue. Now he rose to his feet.

"Let me try, Terence," he said gently.

Harry saw how amazingly tall and slender he was when standing. His poetical face hovered in the gloom, dark eyes almost glowing. He seemed untouched by the wretchedness around him. Head bent as though to avoid the low ceiling, he began sauntering to and fro, the Woodbine dangling negligently from his fingers.

"They say the war will destroy civilization," he said. His cultured accents suggested social origins which reinforced the enigma of his lowly army rank. "Myself, I disagree; it would have happened already. I'm afraid something worse is happening. Society has gone through the point of exhaustion, has recovered, and has learned to live with the war permanently. If we can't stop it, it won't stop. Ever."

He raised his cigarette to stare at the glowing tip. "It's a curious phenomenon when you think of it. A war as damaging and futile as this should have ended long ago. If they had any intelligence at all the respective governments would have arranged an armistice. But they haven't. They can only think of victory. They're gripped by patriotic mania, as is nearly everyone else – except those who have it rubbed off them at the front, and even there... In truth, our revolt was on a very small scale. And many of those who joined us did so for the wrong reasons.

"I wonder if you realize just what's happened to us all. What can one say of a society that sends its sons out to be killed by the million, for generation after generation? People are actually proud to have their sons blown up at the age of seventeen. What's the explanation? Really, it's simple. Man has a natural instinct for conformity. It's what makes large-scale societies possible. We have many names for it, mostly approving: social discipline, patriotism, solidarity, a sense of responsibility, or simply the ability to organize. But there's a darker side, the readiness to accept irrational belief, to stifle conscience in the name of some arbitrary 'cause', the tendency to automatic obedience. In the past there have always been individuals who were immune from this kind of conditioning and who formed their own attitudes. They acted like a leaven in society. Now their number dwindles. Guided by crowd emotion, society is learning a mode of behaviour more resembling the social insects: the ants, bees and termites. The ruling classes are unable to break free of it, so there's only one hope:

to appeal to those at the bottom of the pyramid."

"Thass right," Jenkins crowed, "the toffee-noses won't do nuffin'. Courst, the bombardier's a bit of a toffee-nose 'isself."

"Are you saying the war will last forever?" Harry asked, puzzled. "That's ridiculous. In fact it seems to be running out of steam at the moment. Our new push isn't as big as the earlier ones."

Parcival spoke firmly. "It will last forever, and technically speaking it's only at the beginning. Operations have been on a smaller scale recently, but that's only because both sides are busy developing new weapons. Already the enemy has flying bombs our ack-ack can't bring down. Only battle theatre weapons at present, but when they have the range to reach the home counties the bombing and the gassing will start all over again. 'The planet rolls through space, war fixed eternal on its face'."

Is he quoting his own poetry? Harry asked himself disdainfully. Such high-flown ideas seemed out of place, and they embarrassed him.

Terence coughed, as if realizing that his friend's didactic manner had made a poor impression.

"I had taken it for granted we could count on you, Harry."

"Well you shouldn't take it for granted. You may spit on patriotism, but some of us still have time for it."

He paused. "I don't know what makes you imagine I would think that way."

"But that's simple."

No one spoke. The silence seemed interminable, and Harry became uneasy.

"E's just a bleedin' Cuthbert after all!" Jenkins yelled suddenly.

"I'm not a Cuthbert!" Harry startled himself with his own furious reaction. "I tried to enlist right at the start! Even before conscription!"

"Then wotcher doin' wiv these, mate? An' these?"

Jenkins was rushing at him, punching him on the arm, kicking his shin. "Like yerself too much, don'tcha?" Suddenly the little man seemed to go into a paroxysm. He ripped his clothes open and cast them off, to reveal a scrawny torso. In a parody of a body-builder's stance, he raised thin arms and flexed puny biceps.

"Why ain't one o' these yours, then?"

Harry averted his eyes on seeing the circular scars visible at both shoulder joints.

"Ahrrr, that's nuffin', I've had all four done." Jenkins was relishing the moment. "Lovely it was, too, when they put the grenades among us."

Now Terence was moving; parting, with an air of deliberation, his raincoat, his cardigan, his shirt, pulling the garments down over his right shoulder. There, too, a circular scar could be made out under the grey dirt.

"It's a woman's, actually," he said casually. "Nearly as strong as the other one now. Remarkable how a female limb toughens up on a man's body."

"Even the bloody women got more guts 'n you!" Jenkins jeered.

Harry hung his head. The two men covered themselves.

"Well, that's why we thought you were one of us, Harry," Terence told him. "You haven't submitted.

You've resisted all the social pressures to conform, and that indicates a strain of individuality in you." Slowly, he added: "Of course, perhaps it's for a different reason."

"What do you mean by that?" Harry muttered resentfully. He glanced at Jenkins. "You think I'm a coward too?"

"Only you know the truth about that."

Terence gazed at him coolly. "Limb donation is largely what keeps the front manned, you know. If Fleming hadn't discovered nerve-grafting the scale of casualties would have forced the war to a standstill years ago. The bombardier is being fanciful when he says it will last forever, of course. But it will outlast our lifetimes. It isn't just limbs now, either. Killed-in-actions are being cannibalized for anything they've got intact - kidneys, livers, stomachs, hearts. And there's talk of the Medical Corps working on something new: organs grown in test tubes. Eventually, no matter how badly smashed up you are, the surgeons will be able to patch you together and put a gun back in your hands."

"All right, I'll bring you some clothes," Harry said dully. "And some rations. But only once, do you hear? From then on, stay away from me..."

Perhaps he hadn't spoken loudly enough. No one seemed to have heard him. Jenkins's voice floated past, saying gently, "I don't fink 'e'll do, d'you, Sarge?" And Terence was murmuring something in response.

With a scraping sound Terence moved his crate closer. "Never mind. Let's have a mug of tea before you go, eh? To show no hard feelings? We'll make it a drop of the hard stuff in better times, what?"

"Yes, I suppose so." Harry felt desperate to get out of the cellar; but by now there was a strong smell of brewing tea. Soon Jenkins was pouring it into tin mugs which he handed round.

"Bottoms up," Terence said cheerily. "To an end of it all."

The tea was greasy and strong, its bitterness overlain with the sweetness of condensed milk. It warmed his stomach as he forced himself to drink. His brother, to his vague surprise, began talking reminiscently of their boyhood, and of the exciting days when the war had begun. Everyone had been in favour of it, then. No one had expected it to drag on, and on, and on.

He put the mug down still half full. Jenkins glanced at it. Harry started to rise, but he felt dizzy, much more dizzy than he had earlier. He flopped back on to the crate, feeling a film of sweat form on his brow. Terence had stopped talking. They were all watching him, Parcival with his distant schoolmasterly look, Terence and Jenkins more closely.

Something in the tea. Their faces, the whole cellar, blurred. His unfocused gaze went to the brightest thing: the candle flame. Hazy and large, it filled his dwindling consciousness, before he fell at their feet.

When Harry awoke, and blearily opened his eyes, he became aware of sunlight. It was shining on the concrete floor against which his cheek rested. His head ached, and it was some time before he forced his gaze into focus.

Still unsteady from the effect of whatever drug he had been given, he clambered to his feet and stood



swaying. The sackcloth screen was gone from the doorway, and the sunlight streamed down the steps and across the threshold. Gone too were the mugs of tea, the primus stove, and all the meagre signs of occupation. Only the packing cases remained.

Clearly Terence and his friends were better organized than they had let on. Was there nothing here as evidence of their presence? Yes: on the case which had served as a table was a little mound of congealed candle grease. But Harry touched it, and it was cold and dusty.

He drew a deep breath. His dizziness went. The box that contained his gas mask, its strap still slung over his right shoulder, bumped against the concrete door post as he hauled himself up the steps and stood thankfully in the open air. As he was about to move off he spotted his shopping bag lying among the weeds some yards away where, he supposed, he must have dropped it in his excitement.

He picked it up and luckily was able to remember where to find the loose plank in the hoarding. Minutes later he was walking down Constitution Hill.

There, the familiar posters hit his brain. The sky pressed down, putting a lid on the world. At the bottom of the hill, he froze.

The woman who had handed him the white feather was standing on the other side of the road.

Harry's heart began to beat fast as the memory of his humiliation flooded into his mind. She was quite unmistakable, in the same tweed jacket and crinoline skirt that she had worn the day before. She looked at him and seemed to recognize him, for she glared accusingly before turning to limp off with an embarrassed air.

He felt a sudden impulse to go after her and thrust the Tommy Atkins pamphlet into her hands, much as she had forced the white feather on him. "You should read this," he would tell her. "It might change your mind about a few things." He went as far as digging into his raincoat pocket for it.

But it wasn't there.

He must have left it in his room. Funny, he remembered putting it in his pocket before he left.

But why would he do that?

He stood there with his hand in his pocket, fingering the absence. He gazed around him, and for the first time the gaudy exhortations on the hoardings struck a note of normality. The scene in the cellar was beginning to seem hallucinatory, dream-like. Three impractical idealists – mutineers, rather – cowering like rats. Wearing other people's limbs! Making a mockery of sacrifice! How different from the Terence he had always imagined, fighting and dying for his country without complaint!

With these thoughts, a luminous suspicion invaded the recesses of his mind. The person he had talked to could not possibly be Terence. The cellar he had just quit had been empty. There was no smell of men, or Woodbines; and none of the detritus that human occupants could not help but leave behind them.

Yet no more than an hour or two had passed, judging by the position of the sun, since he had left his flat.

Then there could have been no Tommy Atkins pamphlet either. And if there was no Tommy Atkins pamphlet...

My God, I've been cracking up, he thought. I'm having a nervous breakdown.

Terence was dead. There could be no doubt of it. Reported missing in action, and not turning up on any prisoner list. Terence had died in the mud, where his body was not found. And Harry, driven half-mad by repressed guilt, had wandered around demented and hallucinating. Somehow he had found his way to a deserted cellar, and had passed out or simply fallen asleep there. He supposed he had suffered the civilian version of shell-shock (though many doctors denied that there was any such thing as shell-shock; it was only an excuse for cowardice).

The white feather, he told himself. It all started with the white feather.

For the first time in months he felt calm. The sensation was as if he had lit a gas mantle and revealed a darkened room he had never seen before. With it was a feeling of triumph and of overwhelming relief. He had weathered the crisis. He had refused to identify with those enticing phantoms, rejecting their shadowy rationalizations. He had regained control over his own mind.

And the war would end, yes, when there was victory for one side or the other, that much was obvious. Acting automatically, he found himself following his daily routine of buying a newspaper on the corner. He stood there as he scanned the lead story. It was again of the big push, the imminent final breakthrough as the press would have it. But Harry had heard a dark rumour. It was whispered that the "big push" was really a last gasp, absorbing all the reserves. If it failed, there was not enough to hold the enemy back.

Shocking support for the rumour came in a paragraph at the bottom of the front page. "According to unconfirmed sources, the suggestion to train servicewomen for the front line has once again been raised in Cabinet."

The idea horrified Harry as much as when he had first heard it, several weeks ago. Surely it could not come to that! The most shameful and desperate resort of all – to send women into battle! Wasn't it enough that so many women were already willing to –

There were other rumours, of course, some of them officially encouraged. Such as that the enemy had a restitution scheme for his millions of war disabled, planning to requisition limbs from a conquered population. The story was widely accepted. After all, popular opinion had it that such reparation should be forced from the enemy without mercy, when victory came.

Harry could not really conceive that the war could be lost. His country's will was too strong. The nation would bear any sacrifice. Folding up the newspaper, he thrust it in his raincoat pocket and walked on. Soon he was entering the High Street, halfway along which was a sign he knew well. It hung over the pavement outside the registration office of the Donation Service, and it bore the symbol of that service: a solitary burning candle. No longer was it a torment and a rebuke. A warm haven beckoned, now that the decision was made. How much more life would mean to him once he had the feeling of pulling his weight with a community making every effort. He imagined himself greeting Perce Ambler with a new joviality. How foolish he had been to exclude himself from such comradeship! He saw himself on the factory floor, respected as a man, safe from sneers and silent insults.

Coming closer and closer, the burning candle seemed suspended from the pressing blue sky, its wax dripping like blood on to the pavement.

The Losing of Paradise

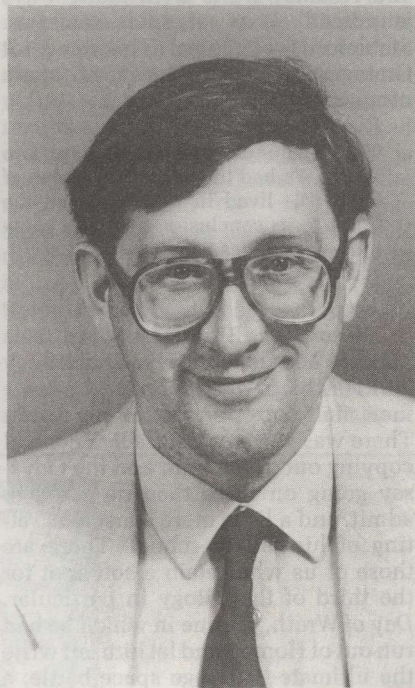
Brian Stableford

Profiled by Roz Kaveney

Actually, the early books were always better than we all allowed ourselves to think. Back in the 70s, you could always rely on a Brian Stableford novel to demonstrate at least intelligence, an informed acquaintance with even the wilder shores of sociology and biology and a certain knowing relationship with the genre clichés he regularly pulled out of the hat with a smirk. Now, after a five year break from fiction, during which he has produced, among other things, the definitive study of the British non-genre tradition of scientific romance, he has returned to fiction with *The Empire of Fear*, a state-of-the-art alternative world novel about vampirism and the scientific method, a novel whose quality will surprise many who have thought of him as a boiler of pots for Donald Wollheim, a novel which must be a serious contender for awards.

When, after five years away from fiction, he started writing again, he produced a group of short stories on biological themes, most of them for *Interzone*, and many of them reworkings of ideas he had had some time before "and stuck in a folder against further use." Among these was an idea for a vampirism story, which seemed more attractive now than a decade ago precisely because the development of a sub-genre of revisionist vampire novels – Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's St. Germain novels, Ann Rice, George R.R. Martin's *Fevre Dream* – had created a context in which re-examination of clichés about sharp teeth and flapping cloaks had become easy. He wrote the novella "The Man Who Loved the Vampire Lady" and sold it to *F&SF*; then developed the ideas in it further and sent the outline and the existing story, now the novel's first section, to Simon and Schuster, who were known to be trawling for original work.

This is a novel about vampirism which includes some serious thinking about vampirism as a biological mechanism instead of a metaphor for sexual dominance; it is an alternative world novel which includes some serious thinking about the mechanisms of history. The premise is that vampirism



spread to Europe in the late Classical period, and that Attila persuaded the rulers of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires to accept his hegemony as the price of immortality. By the Seventeenth Century, this system is under pressure; the growth of technology and mercantile capitalism has proceeded at a slightly different pace, but the cult of the intellect and the first stirrings of democratic impulses are nonetheless well underway. Francis Bacon and Kenelm Digby are kept off-stage, but are crucial influences on the politics and thought of Edmund and Noell Cordery, the scientist heroes of the novel.

The view of history here is a materialist one, in which the Church, the scientific method and the feudal theories underlying vampire rule are seen as ideologies, "like other ideologies, which is to say things on which realities act." Because of this materialist view, it is a fiction in which "right and wrong end up defined largely in terms of progress, in the context of a crisis of knowledge." Even among the reactionary villains of the piece, the novel sets up a contrast, and plays

favourites, between the feudal chivalric ethos of Divine Right and a Machiavellian *realpolitik*; "*realpolitik* is a limited way of looking at the real world of politics, but it does look at the real world." The villains, Richard Coeur de Lion, and Vlad the Impaler, have adopted ideologies which suit their class interests; immortality imposes a certain flexibility. Richard has illusions about the way the world works, illusions which are dangerous to himself and to others. Vlad is a more effective and drastic villain. This is a novel which avoids serious anachronism by borrowing from history only characters whose survival to the date at which the novel is set is part of the premise, an anachronism that is a given. In this thoughtful model of alternative history, situations which parallel ones in our world occur not because of any Law of Conservation of Reality, but because that is how history works; "Alternative history has its own aesthetics, which comes from showing the similarities that persist when all else is different."

It is also a book which concentrates on vampirism as a means of immortality; in his entry on the subject in the Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia of SF*, Stableford remarked that immortality had had an unnecessarily bad press from fiction, and sets out in some measure to redress the balance. He assumes that an aristocracy of immortals is liable to decadence, but also assumes that the problems of immortality derive from attitudes to it rather than being intrinsic limitations. It is not assumed that all immortals will become eternally senile Struldbruggs, but rather that immortals will be prone to stasis: the minstrel Blondel remarks that Attila would not have gone mad with the years if he had not been mad to begin with.

Just as Stoker's *Dracula* was in large measure a novel about the fear of syphilis, *The Empire of Fear* is a novel about sexually transmitted diseases in general, and about AIDS in particular. Superficially, this is one of the aspects of the novel which might be seen as worrying or even as offen-

sive, but the whole point of the novel is that, in it, vampirism is seen as essentially morally neutral. "It is a novel about freeing our minds of cant."

The Empire of Fear is a novel, not so much about doing science, as about thinking in a scientific way. Noell Cordery has to learn to see through performances; he does not have to do much to make his discoveries except to look with a clear mind at what he is shown in Africa:

It came to him with a slight shock of revelation that the vampires of Adamawara could not have known what a silly thing they did when they brought him to see this ceremony. They had intended to show him a great display of godly power and magical extravagance... He had seen neither gods nor devils, nor anything at all to humble the soul of a common man with fear and dread. He had seen only opportunity – the birth of a confident understanding which made him feel that he was no longer a bondsman in the empire of fear, but a free citizen in the republic of enlightenment.

Noell puts together a version of the germ theory of disease from observation and from the work of others. In showing the process by which he does so, Stableford cheats a little in assuming as a minor premise the availability of microscopes of rather better quality than obtained in our world. But, even in our world, "the really interesting question is how people failed, on the information available to them in the 17th Century, to discover the germ theory of disease until Pasteur in the 19th."

One of the real strengths of *The Empire of Fear* is that in it Stableford confronts the question of spirituality, of a set of values whose power he has to acknowledge, while entirely lacking sympathy for them. The Seventeenth Century was an age of sages, and Quintus is a representative example of that intellectual class even though he is a completely imaginary one: at times he sounds like Montaigne, at others like Pascal and at others like Bruno – Stableford sets up an intellectual pastime for the aware reader of trying to work out who this character is meant to be the alternative-world equivalent of and refuses any straightforward answer. The scientist Noell needs a sounding board and an interlocutor; he also needs a mentor or a father figure, and Stableford had killed Edmund Cordery off in the early sections of the novel.

The interruption in Stableford's work has coincided with years during which we have all thought a lot more about the fictiveness of fiction; he sets up and refuses a number of genre tropes apart from the expected ones about vampirism and chivalric combats; the gruelling journey through jungle and savannah towards the hidden vampire city of Adamawara is a

retort to the ease with which gallant gentlemen explorers usually gain access to the refuges of Lost Races. Stableford had been re-reading Rider Haggard for critical articles, and wanted to provide a more realistic mode of treks through the African bush; accordingly, "the finding of the bodies in the forest of the Silver Death is a sort of grace-note reference to the finding of Silva in *King Solomon's Mines*, and the sentimental dreamy immortal Berenice is a sort of alternate version of She-who-must-be-obeyed." A lot of Lost Race novels, notably *Lost Horizon*, set up static utopian societies, and Adamawara is a (in many ways jaundiced) view of such societies. Stableford is as cynical as his star-pilot Grainger on the subject of static utopias:

"We had our unspoiled Earth once, you know. We had the primitive Garden of Eden. We lived in it. We played the Game to its conclusion then. We know the result. It was Paradise versus civilization. Paradise lost."

These days, Brian Stableford feels less hostile to the *Dies Irae* trilogy (1971) which were for many people their first introduction to his work. There was perhaps a little less cynical copying out of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* going on there than he cared to admit, and a little more conscious setting of himself to school. There are those of us who retain a soft spot for the third of the trilogy in particular, *Day of Wrath*, the one in which he had run out of Homer, and let himself write the ultimate 120 page space battle, a battle in which successive waves of secret fleets, alien races and ghosts of those killed in previous volumes charge to their doom, a battle in the course of which the universe is destroyed utterly and then put back together again. E.E. Smith, eat your heart out. There is a bravura in these widely contemned early works which Stableford only now really feels able to come back to. These were the novels of his early postgraduate days; he typed the third volume in a postgrad laboratory one Christmas vacation – it was warmer than his room – and was interrupted by a not entirely sober Vice Chancellor on a tour of inspection, who was so amazed and delighted to see someone working that he did not bother to find out at what.

But for most of us, early Stableford means above all the "Grainger" books. These too started as material from the "work abandoned" file: *The Halcyon Drift* (1972) started off as a mood piece about shipwreck and isolation, and to sell got spatchcocked into a cliché plot outline about interstellar treasure hunters. Once he actually found himself having to write it though, he had to make it something he could take seri-

ously for at least the time being. In the Grainger books, he found himself having his cake and eating it, taking a lot of standard Space Opera material and subverting and deconstructing it like fury, while also enjoying it for its own sweet sake. These and the "Daedalus" books were more fun to do than the early stylized work; he even came to be interested in the minor characters, though perhaps rather too late in the series to do anything much with them.

When Stableford was young and buying large quantities of Astounding Science Fiction from market stalls, he liked the sort of story that John W. Campbell had many of his tame writers specialize in, problem stories. The Grainger books to some extent, and the Daedalus books rather more so, were partly a homage to this tradition of sf story-telling, and partly a way of raising serious objections to the political implications of the whole "can-do" philosophy. The series are both built round groups of puzzles, and in both he set himself a different set of plot constraints. Grainger, for example, never hits anyone, on principle – the most he ever does, and that in a real crisis, is jog somebody's elbow.

Grainger at least was a hard-bitten space-pilot of a kind the genre had seen before; the hero of the Daedalus books by contrast was a woolly-minded and fair-minded liberal of a kind that the genre had never before quite had to come to terms with. Further, one of the things about these ecologically based puzzle stories was that in many cases there was actually no solution whatever to the problem; *City of the Sun* (1978) and *Critical Threshold* (1977) both deal with colonies that have been changed so much by interaction with the local flora as to be no longer really human. To placate Donald Wollheim, he wrote *Wildeblood's Empire* (1977) in between, with its aliens and its sword-fight and its rather more conventionally soluble problems.

The other thing about the two series was that in them he experimented with a tone of voice entirely different from the hieratic and stylized cold objective note he had struck in the trilogy and in other early work. While the voice of the Grainger books is itself a literary exercise, drawing heavily on Chandler's Marlowe and MacDonald's Travis McGee, there was a new flexibility to his writing in these books – you never felt the austere, omniscient and smug ghost of Cordwainer Smith looking over his shoulder. The accomplished smooth style of *The Empire of Fear* is that of a man who has been through both sets of exercises and put both behind him.

He returned to something like the "objective" voice in the two novels in which he came closest to imitating Olaf Stapledon, in looking at vast tracts

of time in a reasonably serious-minded way, *The Walking Shadow* (1979) and *The Realms of Tartarus* (1977). Both are written out of a fair measure of dislike for ecological mysticism of the sort that has produced Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis." In *The Walking Shadow*, we have a world-wide, unified, constantly metamorphosing form of perfectly balanced life, and no-one likes it very much – it thrives on making it impossible that any other life forms continue to exist. Most of Stableford's aliens tend to be justified in the haughty tone they adopt towards the human race; here, the La are self-satisfied ecological fascists, who try and bully what is left of humanity into sharing their attempt to aestheticize the biosphere and all human life within it. This is also the Stableford novel in which boy more or less gets girl, but only as they pass into something which might be oblivion, after several billion years of time-jumping; no-one has ever particularly accused Brian Stableford of being an *enthusiastic* sentimentalist.

Rats, like immortals, have generally got a bad press in sf, and, in *The Realms of Tartarus*, Stableford set out to redress the balance. This is the novel in which the problems of a wrecked

world ecology are solved by building a huge platform, with its own controlled biosphere, on top of the mess, which proves to be a bit hard on the human mutants, and intelligent rats, who end up living in the dark. Here Stableford was writing out of a real dislike for people who write about evolution and other species in terms of human feudal metaphors and human sexism which don't remotely apply; one has only to look at the mess traditionally made of understanding bees or lions. One of the results of Stableford's materialist philosophy is that it is not good intentions alone which produce positive results; this is a utopia like Omelas in the Ursula le Guin story, built on oppression, but the evolutionary pressures its founders set up unawares have morally ambiguous results which cannot be simply walked out upon. A new intelligent race is born out of the squalid wreckage of the underworld, and the manipulative alien observer says he planned it all the time. There is something in Stableford's work to make both reactionaries and *bien pensants* uneasy.

Simon and Schuster will be producing a collection of Stableford's stories on biotechnological themes at

some point in the near future. This collection will include stories *Interzone* has been publishing over the last couple of years, as well as various older stories, like "The Engineer and the Executioner," rewritten to get the science right.

Also forthcoming in the reasonably near future will be a trilogy for New English Library, which starts with a heavily reworked version of the DAW novel *Journey to the Centre* (1982) and goes on from there.

He is currently working on a trilogy which Simon and Schuster have just bought, a series of thrillers set in the years 1870-1917, not in an alternative world, but rather in the real world as we now fail to remember it – a more numinous version of the world in those years, one closer to mythology. Stableford has been working hard on Victorian fantasy for Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder*, and these books are as much the result of that as the Haggard echoes in *The Empire of Fear*. The working titles for this metaphysical steampunk trilogy are *The Werewolves of London*, *The Angel of Pain* and *The Carnival of Destruction*. This interrupted career will henceforth be one to watch.



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Bob Shaw

To the Letter

Above Hillowen a tiny bell pinged a cracked F, reprising the note a moment later as he gently closed the door behind him. The basement room in which he found himself was divided by a tall counter of blackened wood, behind which were a bead-curtained door and shelves bearing rows of very old ledgers. The single window did not quite reach footpath level, and as a result the light which filtered into the room was tired and grey, the colour of January rain.

Whoever owns this place should apply for a grant to go Dickensian, Hillowen thought. It doesn't look much like a threshold of earthly bliss, but I suppose it's best to stay shabby in this part of town if you don't want to attract too much attention. He tapped on the counter, waited, then tapped more firmly.

The bead curtains chattered and from behind them came a small, elderly, dapper man with brown eyes and a pleasantly ugly face. He advanced with a friendly smile, placed his fingertips on the counter and gave a courteous little bow.

"Good afternoon to you, sir," he said in a voice which had no discernible accent and yet created the impression that English was not his first language. "May I be of assistance?"

"Mr Zurek?" Hillowen said.

The smile became faintly rueful. "For my sins."

"Ah, good! Well, my name is Hillowen and I'm a close friend of Mr George Lorrimer." Hillowen produced an airmail envelope from an inner pocket. "I have a letter of recommendation from him."

"Lorrimer," said Zurek, frowning slightly and showing no interest in the letter. "Lorrimer...Lorrimer..."

"You and he did a little business," Hillowen prompted. "About six months ago. He's living abroad now," he added with a meaningful lowering of the voice.

"Ah, yes!" The brown eyes refocused on Hillowen. "Of course I remember the gentleman! I fixed him up somewhere in the South Seas, didn't I?"

"That's right - Tkumirui Island."

"With a selection of uninhibited maidens and the local copra concession."

"And permanent balmy weather!"

"That was it," Zurek said, chuckling. "A little banal, perhaps, but never mind... So long as he's happy, eh?"

"Oh, he's happy all right."

"Good, good!" Zurek's eyes had suddenly become less ingenuous than his smile. "And I take it, Mr Hillowen, that you are interested in a similar transaction?"

"Well..." Hillowen swallowed, suddenly feeling nervous now that the preliminaries were over. "Yes, that was the general idea."

"Hmmm." Zurek's smile gradually faded, the brown eyes becoming professionally concerned. "Mr Hillowen, I know this will be a disappointment to you - especially after what you have heard from your friend - but I very much doubt that we can do business with you."

Hillowen stared at him, frowning. "Are you telling me you're not interested?"

"That's about it, I'm afraid."

"But this is preposterous!" Hillowen looked about him as if appealing to an invisible audience. "I thought you'd be coaxing me, wheedling, making all sorts of extravagant promises." His sense of grievance mounted rapidly. "After all, it's not the Channel Tunnel shares we're talking about - it's my immortal soul!"

"I know that, Mr Hillowen, and I'm sorry."

"But you were keen enough to do business with George only months ago! Surely one soul is just like another."

Zurek shook his head. "Mr Lorrimer is a young man with many years on earth ahead of him, and he has a regrettable tendency towards goodness. There was a very real possibility that, left to his own devices, he would have eventually acquired enough spiritual credits to cancel out the debits with which we all enter this world.

"The One I serve..." Zurek glanced around uneasily. "My principal felt that it was worth while inducing Mr Lorrimer to enter into a binding contract, whereas in your case, Mr Hillowen... Well, not to put too fine a point on it, you are practically in the bag."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of that," Hillowen said heatedly. "I haven't led a bad life. How do you know that I won't earn enough of these spiritual credits, as you call them, to get me into heaven?"

"That tie you're wearing - London School of Economics, isn't it?"

"Yes, but..."

Zurek patted his lips, a gesture which failed to conceal a smirk. "As I said, Mr Hillowen - you are practically in the bag."

"How can you be so sure I won't change?" Hillowen demanded. "I admit I'm no longer in the first flush of my youth, but I have quite a few years left in me yet. Time enough to get religion, time enough to..." He broke off as he saw that Zurek had pulled one of the ledgers from the shelves behind him and was opening it.

“Ah, yes,” Zurek said, the index finger of his right hand coming to rest at an entry. “Norman Stanley Hillowen! You are fifty-three years of age and you have severe cardiovascular problems, plus a liver which has absorbed far more than its fair share of punishment... Would you like to know exactly how much time you have left to you?”

“No!” Hillowen cowered back. “No man should ever be burdened with that kind of foreknowledge. Even a disciple of Satan himself would not reveal the exact figure.”

“Four years,” Zurek said unconcernedly. “Four years, all but... let me see... eleven days.”

“This is terrible,” Hillowen quavered. “You’re not the sort of person I thought you were. When I came in here you seemed quite decent and pleasant, but now...”

“What did you expect?” Zurek cut in. “Use your brains, man! What do you think He would do to me if I didn’t go all out to obtain the most advantageous terms for Him in every deal?”

“Deal?” Seizing on the word, Hillowen advanced to the counter on rubbery legs. “Did you say deal? Can I have a deal?”

“Are you sure you still want to do business?” Zurek squinted like a jeweller examining a watch. From behind him, a lean black cat sprang noiselessly on to the counter.

“With only four years left to me! For God’s sake...” Hillowen paused as both Zurek and the cat shrank back from him. “I’m sorry... slip of the tongue... you must understand that all this has put me under a considerable strain.”

“It’s quite all right.” Zurek was abstractedly stroking the cat.

“Thank you, thank you,” Hillowen said fervently, leaning on the counter for support. “Now, here’s what I propose. In exchange for my immortal soul...”

Zurek silenced him by raising his free hand. “Not so fast, Mr Hillowen! Before you go on, let me say at once that you cannot have material wealth. No currency notes, bankers’ drafts or property deeds. No gold or other precious metals.” As if quoting from a well-memorized legal document, he added, “No valuable stone, mineral or artefact, the last term to include products of genetic engineering and...”

“I don’t care about any of those things,” Hillowen cut in, “but – just as a matter of interest – why can’t I have them?”

“Liquidity problems.” Zurek gave a fatalistic shrug, then his smile began to revive. “However, for our more forward-looking clients, we can occasionally offer some quite interesting long-term securities.”

Hillowen tilted his head pensively. “What kind of securities?”

“Well, if you wanted, I could probably get authorization to offer you...” He gave a meditative sniff and tapped on the counter as though keying an invisible computer. “Let’s say three-thousand one-dollar preference shares in Kwangsi Imperial Railroads.”

“Kwangsi? Where’s that?”

“China.”

“China!” cried Hillowen, his temples beginning to throb. “I don’t give a toss about anything in China. What I really want is...”

“Another thing you can’t have is extra time,” Zurek said firmly, making it clear that he had no intention of relinquishing his superior bargaining position.

“There’s no point in your asking for immortality, or even to live to be a hundred. Even if I were to make you a younger man again – say, in your forties – you would only go on for your allotted four more years and then something would happen to end your time on earth. Four years is the time remaining to you – and nothing can alter that.”

Hillowen nodded. “I’m not as naive as you seem to think. Four years are a brief span of time, but if I am allowed to live them as I want to those four years will contain enough ecstasy to make them equivalent to four centuries. I have had a good life, by the material standards which satisfy most people – an excellent house in Royal Tunbridge, respected position in the community, success in my profession, but the one thing denied to me, the one thing I craved above all others, was... was...”

“Political success is also out of the question,” Zurek said quickly. “When I think of how we were taken in by that woman and what she has done to...”

“No, no, no! I don’t care about politics. All I want from what remains of my life is... is to be...”

“Say it, Mr Hillowen.” Zurek picked the black cat up and cradled it against his chest. “Marge and I can be very understanding.”

Hillowen took a deep breath and expelled it in a rush of words. “I want to be irresistible to women.”

“Is that all?” Zurek said, unceremoniously dumping the cat on the floor. “Why didn’t you say so at the start and save us a lot of time?”

“You mean...?” Hillowen had to take a deep breath to ease the pounding in his chest. “You mean you’ll do it?”

“Yes.”

“But I mean *really* irresistible to women. I want them to go weak at the knees at the sight of me. I want them to be unable to keep their hands off me.”

“I understand perfectly,” Zurek said in matter-of-fact tones. “You are now totally irresistible to women – or you will be as soon as you sign the necessary contracts.” He gave a doleful smile. “Nothing but forms these days, is it?”

Hillowen was taken aback and made suspicious – everything was now going almost too smoothly. “I must say you agreed to that very quickly.”

“I’ll let you into a little secret,” Zurek said gently as he produced a sheaf of documents from under the counter. “You’re the third irresistible-to-women I’ve had today.”

Hillowen blushed and tried to look nonchalant. “Is it a perennial favourite?”

“Only among our male clients. Now, if you would like to read through these forms...”

“No, no,” Hillowen said, still embarrassed. “I’m sure everything is fine. Mr Lorrimer tells me he is very happy with his contract. He says you are observing it to the letter.”

“It’s nice to know we’re appreciated. In that case, if I could just have your signature here, please...”

“It doesn’t have to be in blood, does it?” Hillowen peered uneasily at the proffered forms. “I’ve always been a bit squeamish...”

"Ballpoint will be fine," chuckled Zurek, taking a silver pen from his pocket. "Here, use mine. Now, if you will just sign here...that's it...and once again here...and once more on the pink copy...and just once more for the computer centre...Fine!"

Ballpoint and contract vanished together, and Zurek shook Hillowen's hand with a smile of warmth and great sincerity. The cat leapt up on to the counter beside him and began to purr.

"Mr Hillowen," Zurek announced genially, "we have a deal!"

"Splendid," Hillowen said, his heart beginning to pound again. "So that's it, then, is it? I don't feel any different. What do I...?"

"All you have to do, Mr Hillowen, is count to three."

"And as soon as I've done that I'll be..."

"Completely," said Zurek, maintaining his smile.

"Well," Hillowen said, deciding not to waste a second more of his four years, "in that case - one!"

"Goodbye, Mr Hillowen."

"Goodbye," murmured Hillowen, and suddenly he was seeing everything through a kaleidoscope. Far from causing him alarm, the experience was quite amusing. Zurek's teeth, for example, had become a hinged circle of white; and the cat's head was a black billiard ball with sixteen ears.

"Two," Hillowen said, chuckling.

The kaleidoscope began to spin, and he gave himself up to a mild, delightful dizziness. The universe purred softly all around him. *Why is all this necessary?* he thought, but for some reason he was becoming very drowsy.

"Three," he whispered, and immediately was engulfed in a cosy darkness.

He awoke abruptly to sharp, random noises and found he was lying on his back, unable to see anything but meaningless patches of colour. The sounds were annoyingly loud, the colours intensely bright, and he had a vague impression of being in the open air.

Suddenly, from directly overhead, a blurred pink ovoid began to descend. He blinked at it uncertainly as it came into focus - and then, with a twinge of astonishment, he recognized it as a face. The face had melting blue eyes, a powdery nose, and a huge lip-sticked mouth which was curving into a tender smile.

"Oooza booful boy, den?" it crooned. "Ooza booful, wooful ickle diddums?"

Wrinkling his tiny features, kicking with his tiny feet in rage and frustration, Hillowen threw his bright green rattle out of the pram. Then he began to howl.

Bob Shaw, who made a long overdue *IZ* debut in our last issue, has a particular fondness for "Strange Little Shop stories," and says it is an ambition of his to edit an entire anthology of them one day. The above piece will be reprinted in a new collection of his short stories which is due to appear from Gollancz in Spring 1989.

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Before I Wake

In his dream Abernathy stood on a steep rock ridge. A talus slope dropped from the ridge to a glacial basin containing a small lake. The lake was cobalt in the middle, aquamarine around the edges. Here and there in the rock expanse patches of meadow grass gleamed, like the lawns of marmot estates. There were no trees. The cold air felt thin in his throat. He could see ranges many miles away, and though everything was perfectly still there was also an immense sweep in things, as if a gust of wind had caught the very fabric of being.

"Wake up, damn you," a voice said. He was shoved in the back, and he tumbled down the rockfall, starting a small avalanche.

He stood in a large white room. Glass boxes of various size were stacked everywhere, four and five to a pile, and in every box was a sleeping animal: monkey, rat, dog, cat, pig, dolphin, turtle. "No," he said, backing up. "Please, no."

A bearded man entered the room. "Come on, wake up," he said brusquely. "Time to get back to it, Fred. Our only hope is to work as hard as we can. You have to resist when you start slipping away!" He seized Abernathy by the arms and sat him down on a box of squirrels. "Now listen!" he cried. "We're asleep! We're dreaming!"

"Thank God," Abernathy said.

"Not so fast! We're awake as well."

"I don't believe you."

"Yes you do!" He slapped Abernathy in the chest with a large roll of graph paper, and it spilled loose and unrolled over the floor. Black squiggles smeared the graphs.

"It looks like a musical score," Abernathy said absently.

The bearded man shouted "Yes! Yes! This is the symphony our brains play, very apt! Violins yammering away – that's what used to be ours, Fred; that was consciousness." He yanked hard on his beard with both hands, looking anguished. "Sudden drop to the basses, bowing and bowing, blessed sleep, yes, yes! And in the night the ghost instruments, horn and oboe and viola, spinning their little improves over the ground bass, longer and longer till the violins start blasting again, yes, Fred, it's perfectly apt!"

"Thank you," Abernathy said. "But you don't have to yell. I'm right here."

"Then wake up," the man said viciously. "Can't, can you! Trapped, aren't you! Playing the new song like all the rest of us. Look at it there – REM sleep mixed indiscriminately with consciousness and deep

sleep, turning us all into dreamwalkers. Into waking nightmares."

Looking into the depths of the man's beard, Abernathy saw that all his teeth were incisors. Abernathy edged toward the door, then broke for it and ran. The man leaped forward and tackled him, and they tumbled to the floor.

Abernathy woke up.

"Ah ha," the man said. It was Winston, administrator of the lab. "So now you believe me," he said sourly, rubbing an elbow. "I suppose we should write that down on the walls. If we all start slipping away we won't even remember what things used to be like. It'll all be over then."

"Where are we?" Abernathy asked.

"In the lab," Winston replied, voice filled with heavy patience. "We live here now, Fred. Remember?"

Abernathy looked around. The lab was large and well-lit. Sheets of graph paper recording EEGs were scattered over the floor. Black countertops protruded from the walls, which were cluttered with machinery. In one corner were two rats in a cage.

Abernathy shook his head violently. It was all coming back. He was awake now, but the dream had been true. He groaned, walked to the room's little window, saw the smoke rising from the city below. "Where's Jill?"

Winston shrugged. They hurried through a door at the end of the lab, into a small room containing cots and blankets. No one there.

"She's probably gone back to the house again," Abernathy said.

Winston hissed with irritation and worry. "I'll check the grounds," he said. "You'd better go to the house. Be careful!"

Fred was already out the door.

In many places the streets were almost blocked by smashed cars, but little had changed since Abernathy's last venture home, and he made good time. The suburbs were choking in haze that smelled like incinerator smoke. A gas station attendant holding a pump handle stared in astonishment as he drove by, then waved. Abernathy didn't wave back. On one of these expeditions he had seen a knifing, and now he didn't like to look.

He stopped the car at the curb before his house. The remains of his house. It was charred almost to the ground. The blackened chimney was all that stood over chest high.



He got out of his old Cortina and slowly crossed the lawn, which was marked by black footprints. In the distance a dog barked insistently.

Jill stood in the kitchen, humming to herself and moving black things from here to there. She looked up as Abernathy stopped in the side yard before her. Her eyes twitched from side to side. "You're home," she said cheerily. "How was your day?"

"Jill, let's go out to dinner," Abernathy said.

"But I'm already cooking!"

"I can see that." He stepped over what had been the kitchen wall and took her arm. "Don't worry about that. Let's go anyway."

"My my," Jill said, brushing his face with a sooty hand. "Aren't you romantic this evening."

He stretched his lips wide. "You bet. Come on." He pulled her carefully out of the house and across the yard, and helped her into the Cortina. "Such chivalry," she remarked, eyes darting about in tandem.

Abernathy got in and started the engine. "But Fred," his wife said, "what about Jeff and Fran?"

Abernathy looked out his window. "They've got a babysitter," he finally said.

Jill frowned, nodded, sat back in her seat. Her broad face was smudged. "Ah," she said, "I do so like to dine out."

"Yes," Abernathy said, and yawned. He felt drowsy. "Oh no," he said. "No!" He bit his lip, pinched the back of the hand on the wheel. Yawned again. "No!" he cried. Jill jerked against her door in surprise. He swerved to avoid hitting an Oriental woman sitting in the middle of the road. "I must get

to the lab," he shouted. He pulled down the Cortina's sun visor, took a pen from his coat pocket and scrawled *To The Lab*. Jill was staring at him. "It wasn't my fault," she whispered.

He drove them onto the freeway. All thirty lanes were clear, and he put his foot down on the accelerator. "To the lab," he sang, "to the lab, to the lab." A flying police vehicle landed on the highway ahead of them, folded its wings and sped off. Abernathy tried to follow it, but the freeway turned and narrowed, they were back on street level. He shouted with frustration, bit the flesh at the base of his thumb. Jill leaned back against her door, crying. Her eyes looked like small beings, a team trying to jerk its way free. "I couldn't help it," she said. "He loved me, you know. And I loved him."

Abernathy drove on. Some streets were burning. He wanted to go west, needed to go west. The car was behaving oddly. They were on a tree-lined avenue, out where there were few houses. A giant Boeing 747 lay across the road, its wings slewed forward. A high tunnel had been cut through it so traffic could pass. A cop with whistle and white gloves waved them through.

On the dashboard an emergency light blinked *To The Lab*. Abernathy sobbed convulsively. "I don't know how!"

Jill, his sister, sat up straight. "Turn left," she said quietly. Abernathy threw the directional switch and their car re-routed itself onto the track that veered left. They came to other splits in the track, and each time Jill told him which way to go. The rear-view mirror bloomed with smoke.

Then he woke up. Winston was swabbing his arm with a wad of cotton, wiping off a droplet of blood.

"Amphetamines and pain," Winston whispered.

They were in the lab. About a dozen lab techs, post docs, and grad students were in there at their counter-tops, working with great speed.

"How's Jill?" Abernathy said.

"Fine, fine. She's sleeping right now. Listen, Fred, I've found a way to keep us awake for longer periods of time. Amphetamines and pain. Regular injections of benzedrine, plus a sharp burst of pain every hour or so, administered in whatever way you find most convenient. Metabolism stays too high for the mind to slip into the dreamwalking. I tried it and stayed fully awake and alert for six hours. Now we're all using the method."

Abernathy watched the lab techs dash about. "I can tell." He could feel his heart's rapid emphatic thumping.

"Well let's get to it," Winston said intently. "Let's make use of this time."

Abernathy stood. Winston called a little meeting. Feeling the gazes fixed on him, Abernathy collected his thoughts. "The mind consists of electro-chemical action. Since we're all suffering the effects of this, it seems to me we can ignore the chemical and concentrate on the electrical. If the ambient fields have changed... Anyone know how many gauss the magnetic field is now? Or what the cosmic ray count is?"

They stared at him.

"We can tune in to the space station's monitors," he said. "And do the rest here."

So he worked, and they worked with him. Every hour a grinning Winston came around with hypodermics in hand, singing "Speed, speed, speed!" He convinced Abernathy to let droplets of hydrochloric acid fall on the inside of his forearm.

It kept Abernathy awake better than it did the others. For a whole day, then two, he worked without pause, eating crackers and drinking water as he worked, giving himself the injections when Winston wasn't there.

After the first few hours his assistants began slipping back into dreamwalking, despite the injections and acid splashings. Assignments he gave were never completed. One of his techs presented him with a successful experiment: the two rats, grafted together at the leg. Vainly Abernathy tried to pummel the man back to wakefulness.

In the end he did all the work himself. It took days. As his techs collapsed or wandered off he shifted from counter to counter, squinting sand-filled eyes to read oscilloscope and computer screen. He had never felt so exhausted in his life. It was like taking tests in a subject he didn't understand, in which he was severely retarded.

Still he kept working. The EEGs showed oscillation between wakefulness and REM sleep, in a pattern he had never seen. And there were correlations between the EEGs and fluctuations in the magnetic field.

Some of the men's flickering eyes were open, and they sat on the floors talking to each other or to him. Once he had to calm Winston, who was on the floor weeping and saying "We'll never stop dreaming, Fred, we'll never stop." Abernathy gave him an injection, but it didn't have any effect.

He kept working. He sat at a crowded table at his high school reunion, and found he could work anyway. He gave himself an injection whenever he remembered. He got very, very tired.

Eventually he felt he understood as much as he was going to. Everyone else was lying in the cot room with Jill, or were slumped on the floors. Eyes and eyelids were twitching.

"We move through space filled with dust and gas and fields of force. Now all the constants have changed. The read-outs from the space station show that, show signs of a strong electro-magnetic field we've apparently moved into. More dust, cosmic rays, gravitational flux. Perhaps it's the shockwave of a supernova, something nearby that we're just seeing now. Anyone looked up into the sky lately? Anyway. Something. The altered field has thrown the electrical patterns of our brains into something like what we call the REM state. Our brains rebel and struggle towards consciousness as much as they can, but this field forces them back. So we oscillate." He laughed weakly, and crawled up onto one of the countertops to get some sleep.

He woke and brushed the dust off his lab coat, which had served him as a blanket. The dirt road he had been sleeping on was empty. He walked. It was cloudy, and nearly dark.

He passed a small group of shacks, built in a tropical style with open walls and palm thatch roofs. They were empty. Dark light filled the sky.

Then he was at the sea's edge. Before him extended

a low promontory, composed of thousands of wooden chairs, all crushed and piled together. At the point of the promontory there was a human figure, seated in a big chair that still had seat and back and one arm.

Abernathy stepped out carefully, onto slats and lathed cylinders of wood, from a chair arm to the plywood bottom of a chair seat. Around him the grey ocean was strangely calm; glassy swells rose and fell over the slick wood at waterline without a sound. Insubstantial clouds of fog, the lowest parts of a solid cloud cover, floated slowly onshore. The air was salty and wet. Abernathy shivered, stepped down to the next fragment of weathered grey wood.

The seated man turned to look at him. It was Winston. "Fred," he called, loud in the silence of the dawn. Abernathy approached him, picked up a chair back, placed it carefully, sat.

"How are you?" Winston said.

Abernathy nodded. "Okay." Down close to the water he could hear the small slaps and suckings of the sea's rise and fall. The swells looked a bit larger, and he could see thin smoky mist rising from them as they approached the shore.

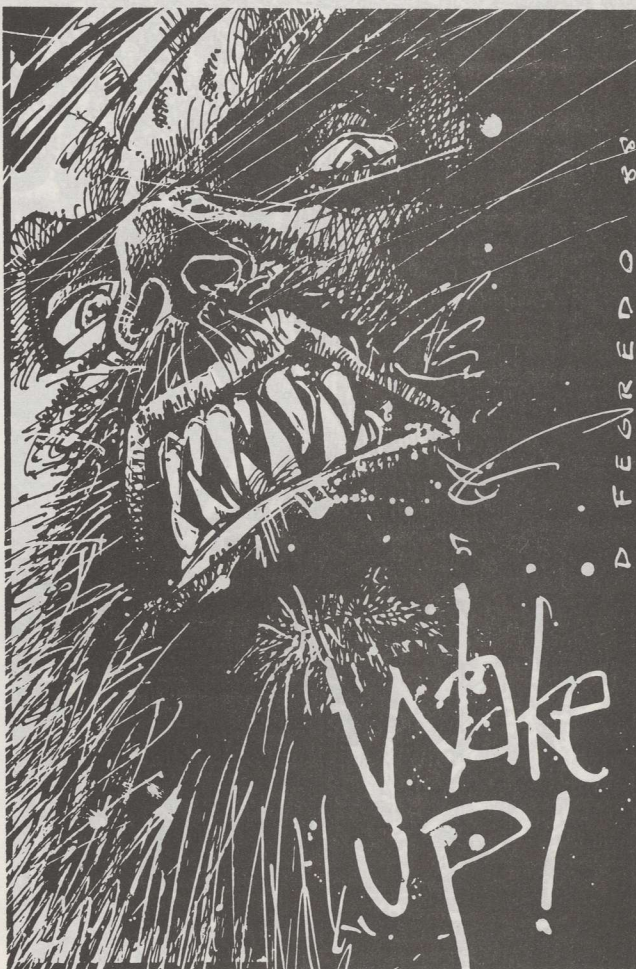
"Winston," he croaked, and cleared his throat. "What's happened?"

"We're dreaming."

"But what does that mean?"

Winston laughed wildly. "Emergent stage one sleep, transitional sleep, rapid sleep, rhombencephalic sleep, pontine sleep, activated sleep, paradoxical sleep." He grinned ironically. "No one knows what it is."

"But all those studies."



"Yes, all those studies. And how I used to believe in them, how I used to work for them, all those sorry guesses ranging from the ridiculous to the absurd, we dream to organize experience into memory, to stimulate the senses in the dark, to prepare for the future, to give our depth perception exercise for God's sake! I mean we don't know, do we Fred. We don't know what dreaming is, we don't know what sleep is, you only have to think about it a bit to realize we didn't know what consciousness itself was, what it meant to be awake. Did we ever really know? We lived, we slept, we dreamed, and all three equal mysteries. Now that we're doing all three at once, is the mystery any deeper?"

Abernathy picked at the grain in the wood of a chair leg. "A lot of the time I feel normal," he said. "It's just that strange things keep happening."

"Your EEGs display an unusual pattern," Winston said, mimicking a scientific tone. "More alpha and beta waves than the rest of us. As if you're struggling harder to wake up."

"Yes. That's what it feels like."

They sat in silence for a time, watching swells lap at the wet chairs. The tide was falling. Offshore, near the limit of visibility, Abernathy saw a large cabin cruiser drifting in the current.

"So tell me what you've found," Winston said.

Abernathy described the data transmitted from the space station, then his own experiments.

Winston nodded. "So we're stuck here for good."

"Unless we pass through this field. Or - I've gotten an idea for a device you could wear around your head, that might restore the old field."



"A solution seen in a dream?"

"Yes."

Winston laughed. "I used to believe in our rationality, Fred. Dreams as some sort of electro-chemical manifestation of the nervous system, random activity, how reasonable it all sounded! Give the depth perception exercise! God, how small-minded it all was. Why shouldn't we have believed that dreams were great travels, to the future, to other universes, to a world more real than our own! They felt that way sometimes, in that last second before waking, as if we lived in a world so charged with meaning that it might burst... And now here we are. We're here, Fred, this is the moment and our only moment, no matter how we name it. We're here. From idea to symbol, perhaps. People will adapt. That's one of our talents."

"I don't like it," Abernathy said. "I never liked my dreams."

Winston merely laughed at him. "They say consciousness itself was a leap like this one, people were ambling around like dogs and then one day, maybe because the earth moved through the shockwave of some distant explosion, sure, one day one of them straightened up and looked around surprised, and said 'I am'."

"That would be a surprise," Abernathy said.

"And this time everyone woke up one morning still dreaming, and looked around and said 'What AM I?'" Winston laughed. "Yes, we're stuck here. But I can adapt." He pointed. "Look, that boat out there is sinking."

They watched several people aboard the craft struggle to get a rubber raft over the side. After many dunkings they got it in the water and everyone inside it. Then they rowed away, offshore into the mist.

"I'm afraid," Abernathy said.

Then he woke up. He was back in the lab. It was in worse shape than ever. A couple of countertops had been swept clean to make room for chessboards, and several techs were playing blindfolded, arguing over which board was which.

He went to Winston's offices to get more benzedrine. There was no more. He grabbed one of his post-docs and said "How long have I been asleep?" The man's eyes twitched, and he sang his reply: "Sixteen men on a dead man's chest, yo ho ho and a bottle of rum." Abernathy went to the cot room. Jill was there, naked except for light blue underwear, smoking a cigarette. One of the grad students was brushing her nipples with a feather. "Oh hi, Fred," she said, looking him straight in the eye. "Where have you been?"

"Talking to Winston," he said with difficulty. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes! I don't know when, though..."

He started to work alone again. No one wanted to help. He cleared a small room off the main lab, and dragged in the equipment he needed. He locked three large boxes of crackers in a cabinet, and tried to lock himself in his room whenever he felt drowsy. Once he spent six weeks in China, then he woke up. Sometimes he woke out in his old Cortina, hugging the steering wheel like his only friend. All his friends were lost. Each time he went back and started working again. He could stay awake for hours at a time. He got

lots done. The magnets were working well, he was getting the fields he wanted. The device for placing the field around the head – an odd-looking wire helmet – was practicable.

He was tired. It hurt to blink. Every time he felt drowsy he applied more acid to his arm. It was covered with burns, but none of them hurt anymore. When he woke he felt as if he hadn't slept for days. Twice his grad students helped out, and he was grateful for that. Winston came by occasionally, but only laughed at him. He was too tired, everything he did was clumsy. He got on the lab phone once and tried to call his parents; all the lines were busy. The radio was filled with static, except for a station that played nothing but episodes of "The Lone Ranger." He went back to work. He ate crackers and worked. He worked and worked.

Late one afternoon he went out onto the lab's cafeteria terrace to take a break. The sun was low, and a chill breeze blew. He could see the air, filled with amber light, and he breathed it in violently. Below him the city smoked, and the wind blew, and he knew that he was alive, that he was aware he was alive, and that something important was pushing into the world, suffusing things...

Jill walked onto the terrace, still wearing nothing but the blue underwear. She stepped on the balls of her feet, smiled oddly. Abernathy could see goose-pimples sweep across her skin like cat's paws over water, and the power of her presence – distant, female, mysterious – filled him with fear.

They stood several feet apart and looked down at the city, where their house had been. The area was burning.

Jill gestured at it. "It's too bad we only had the courage to live our lives fully in dreams."

"I thought we were doing okay," Abernathy said. "I thought we engaged it the best we could, every waking moment."

She stared at him, again with the knowing smile. "You did think that, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said fiercely, "I did. I did."

He went inside to work it off.

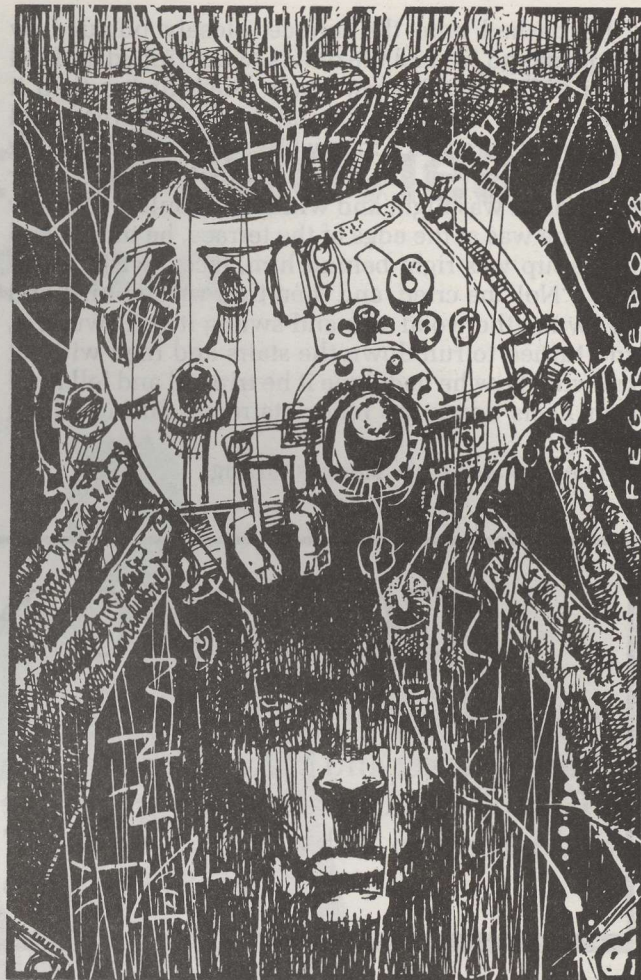
Then he woke up. He was in the mountains, in the high cirque again. He was higher now and could see two more lakes, tiny granite pools, above the cobalt-and-aquamarine one. He was climbing shattered granite, getting near the pass. Lichen mottled the rocks. The wind dried the sweat on his face, cooled him. It was quiet and still, so still, so quiet...

"Wake up!"

It was Winston. Abernathy was in his little room (high ranges in the distance, the dusty green of forests below), wedged in a corner. He got up, went to the crackers cabinet, pumped himself full of the benzedrine he had found in some syringes on the floor. (Snow and lichen.)

He went into the main lab and broke the fire alarm. That got everyone's attention. It took him a couple of minutes to stop the alarm. When he did his ears were ringing.

"The device is ready to try," he said to the group. There were about twenty of them. Some were as neat as if they were off to church, others were tattered and dirty. Jill stood to one side.



Winston crashed to the front of the group. "What's ready?" he shouted.

"The device to stop us dreaming," Abernathy said weakly. "It's ready to try."

Winston said slowly, "Well, let's try it then, okay, Fred?"

Abernathy carried helmets and equipment out of his room and into the lab. He arranged the transmitters and powered the magnets and the field generators. When it was all ready he stood up and wiped his brow.

"Is this it?" Winston asked. Abernathy nodded. Winston picked up one of the wire helmets.

"Well I don't like it!" he said, and struck the helmet against the wall.

Abernathy's mouth dropped open. One of the techs gave a shove to his electro-magnets, and in a sudden fury Abernathy picked up a bat of wood and hit the man. Some of his assistants leaped to his aid, the rest pressed in and pulled at his equipment, tearing it down. A tremendous fight erupted. Abernathy swung his slab of wood with abandon, feeling great satisfaction each time it struck. There was blood in the air. His machines were being destroyed. Jill picked up one of the helmets and threw it at him, screaming "It's your fault, it's your fault!" He knocked down a man near his magnets and had swung the slab back to kill him when suddenly he saw a bright glint in Winston's hand; it was a surgical knife, and with a swing like a sidearm pitcher's Winston slammed the knife into Abernathy's diaphragm, burying it. Abernathy staggered back, tried to draw in a breath and found that he could, he was all right, he hadn't been stabbed. He turned and ran.

He dashed onto the terrace, closely pursued by Winston and Jill and the others, who tripped and fell even as he did. The patio was much higher than it used to be, far above the city, which burned and smoked. There was a long wide stairway descending into the heart of the city. Abernathy could hear screams, it was night and windy, he couldn't see any stars, he was at the edge of the terrace, he turned and the group was right behind him, faces twisted with fury, "No!" he cried, and then they rushed him, and he swung the wood slab and swung it and swung it, and turned to run down the stairs and then without knowing how he had done it he tripped and fell head over heels down the rocky staircase, falling falling falling.

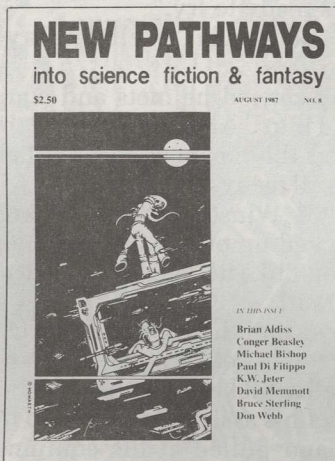
Then he woke up. He was falling.

Kim Stanley Robinson (born 1952) lived in Switzerland until recently. His first novel, *The Wild Shore* (1984), was the lead title in Terry Carr's last series of "Ace Specials." That book has been followed by *The Memory of Whiteness* (1985), *The Planet on the Table* (1986) and others. He has now returned to America, where his latest novel, *The Gold Coast*, is currently attracting much praise. Robinson is "simply one of our best writers," according to Gene Wolfe, and we are delighted to be publishing him in IZ for the first time.

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My 'Ten Best' SF Movies

J.G. Ballard

When it turns to science fiction, cinema closes its eyes and moves into a rich and uneasy sleep. The collective dreams and nightmares of the twentieth century have found their most vivid expression in this often disparaged but ever popular genre. A few great directors, from Fritz Lang to Steven Spielberg, have worked in science fiction, but until the sixties most sf films were little more than B-movies. With limited special effects, minor actors and minuscule budgets, and usually ignored by the critics, the only things that these films had going for them were powerful stories, unrestrained imagination, and, first and foremost, a hot line to the unconscious. In these often modest films, as almost nowhere else in the popular arts of our age, classical myth and scientific apocalypse collide and fuse.

Like most of my fellow sf writers, American and British, I nurse ambivalent feelings towards the science-fiction movie. Despite our heroic efforts, it is not the printed word but the film that has defined the images of science fiction in the public mind and also, incidentally, exerted a huge influence on architecture, fashion and consumer design. Even now, the future is anything with a fin on it.

Far from being a medium of escapist entertainment, the science-fiction film has always been a sensitive barometer of the cultural and political climate of the day. Our deepest fears of an irrational superscience stalked its blue corridors long before latter-day environmentalists became concerned for our planet's future. In the fifties, Cold War paranoia and the terrors of nuclear Armageddon prompted a cluster of remarkable science-fiction movies, among them *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Them!*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, which were handicapped only by their meagre – by present-day standards – special effects. Unlike the novelist, the film director cannot leave his locations to the reader's imagination.

In the sixties, however, the special effects at last began to match the inspiration of the filmmakers. Indeed, within a decade the technology of film



Max (Mel Gibson) in 'Mad Max 2' (Warner Bros.)

design became sufficiently advanced (as in *Star Wars*) to show an advanced technology in decline. A host of rusty spaceships and battered robots now swerve out of the screen toward us like ancient DeSotos on the streets of Havana with a million miles on the clock, each one a parable of post-industrial decline.

At its worst, the science-fiction film offers the sheer exhilaration of the roller coaster. At its best, and to its credit, it tries to deal with the largest issues

facing us today, and attempts, however naively, to place some sort of philosophical frame around humanity's place in the universe.

FORBIDDEN PLANET (1956)

This remarkably stylish colour film is a quantum leap forward in visual confidence and in the richness of its theme – an update of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Walter Pidgeon plays the Prospero figure, Dr Morbius, a brilliant but flawed scientist living alone with his

daughter on an isolated planet. Robby the Robot is the ever obliging Ariel, and the crew members of a visiting spaceship are the stranded mariners.

The film's real originality, however, lies in making the brutish Caliban figure an externalization of Morbius's own libido. This gives an unsettling force to the final confrontation, as Morbius's lustful id, never seen directly, throbs and oozes along in full Oedipal splendour, melting down steel doors on its way towards a quivering Anne Francis. The special effects were unequalled until *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

DR STRANGELOVE, OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB (1964)

Nearly twenty-five years after its release, Stanley Kubrick's black satire has lost none of its impact. In this story of an insane US Air Force general who launches an all-out nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, Kubrick cunningly mixes documentary realism with the ultimate in graveyard humour – the death of mankind treated as scarcely more than the last sick joke.

Kubrick's masterstroke is to tilt the dramatic action of the film so that the audience's sympathies slide across the value scale and eventually lie with the targets being satirized. We come to admire the magnificent B-52s with their sleek A-bombs and brave if baffled crews; we despise the wimpish president for trying to do a deal with the Kremlin, and we almost welcome the nuclear Armageddon when it comes. By enlisting us on the side of our darkest fears, Kubrick exposes all the sinister glamour and unconscious logic of technological death.

ALPHAVILLE (1965)

This moody and powerful allegory is Jean-Luc Godard's most accessible film, made for that consumerist and politically conscious sixties audience that he dubbed "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola." *Alphaville* blends utopian satire, pop art, and comic-book imagery to create the alienated landscape of the distant planet Alphaville, whose cowed population is tyrannized by an evil computer. However, *Alphaville* is in every way indistinguishable from contemporary Paris. The "spaceship" of secret agent Lemmy Caution is his Ford Galaxy, and similar linguistic plays link the action together in a far more convincing way than might seem possible.

For the first time in the science-fiction film, Godard makes the point that in the media landscape of the present day the fantasies of science fiction are as "real" as an office block, an airport or a presidential campaign. His original title was *Tarzan Verses IBM*, but the film transcends its pop imagery

to create a disturbing world that resembles a chromium-plated 1984. Sadly, after *Alphaville* Godard abandoned the genre.

BARBARELLA (1968)

Sex, which many enthusiasts thought they had invented in the sixties, here makes its appearance in the sf film. The relationship between sex and science fiction or, more to the point, its virtual absence from the genre, has always been a puzzle – explained, I would guess, by the fact that science-fiction writers constitute an authentic community of naifs, generally nervous of change, politically ultra-conservative, eager not to think about what adults do after dark.

At any rate, it is inconceivable that the masters of classic science fiction could have come up with this rich and saucy confection, in which the interplanetary sex adventures of the French comic-strip heroine are elegantly transferred to the screen. Roger Vadim, who in *And God Created Woman* created Brigitte Bardot, here turns his affectionate and ironic eye on another of his wives, Jane Fonda, who achieves immortality as she cavorts naked in a fur-lined spaceship.

SILENT RUNNING (1971)

Douglas Turnbull, who supervised the special effects in *2001*, directed this moving ecological fable, and there are strong echoes of Kubrick's epic in the scenes of giant starships sailing along the tideways of space. The premise – that one day in the future all the vegetation on Earth has died, and that the last remaining trees are stored in vast, orbiting space vehicles – may take some swallowing, but the theme is so well handled that the film taps into all our unease about the abuse of this planet and its environment.

Much of *Silent Running*'s success is due to Bruce Dern's superb performance as a watchman and gardener in one of the forgotten greenhouses. His dogged, cantankerous manner exactly suits the character of this last conservationist alive, who refuses orders to dump the vegetation, kills the crew, and sets off into deep space with only the trees for company.

DARK STAR (1974)

Dark Star is the *Catch-22* of outer space. The anarchic spirit of Joseph Heller's novel, with its inverted logic and padded-cell humour, presides over John Carpenter's extraordinary low-budget feature. Reportedly made for \$60,000, *Dark Star* was originally filmed in 16mm by a group of students at the University of Southern California, and later transferred to 35mm. Watching this brilliant extravaganza, one is forced yet again to accept that

talent alone is always enough.

Like many ostensible satires – in this case, of the science-fiction movie itself – *Dark Star* soon transcends its own subject matter. The sealed world of the spaceship, with its exhausted, near psychotic crew, its "dead" captain in his cryogenic capsule periodically revived to be asked for advice, and its intelligent bombs that have to be argued out of detonating prematurely, soon begins to resemble that other spaceship, called Earth.

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH (1976)

A brave failure, Nicolas Roeg's excursion into science fiction reveals the excitements, and hazards, of illustrating a conventional genre theme – the visiting alien destroyed by an uncaring Earth – with images taken largely from outside that genre. Here the alien is played by rock star David Bowie, whose strange, hypersensitive presence instantly convinces us that he has come from another planet. His growing estrangement is seen not as a reaction to the brute incomprehension of others, but in terms of his own seduction by our television and communications landscape, with its unlimited tolerance of deviant behaviour.

Above all, the Bowie figure is seduced by the fragmentation and sheer ironic style of life on Earth, perfectly exemplified by Roeg's film technique – a mix of elegant photography and fashionable dislocations. But with his alien dismantled and demoralized, Roeg has nowhere to go, since he cannot rely on the genre's conventions to rescue his film. And without the genre's conventions the behaviour of his hero becomes merely modishly psychotic.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977)

Spielberg's mastery of the science-fiction medium was already evident in *Duel*, his 1971 classic of highway paranoia. From *Autogeddon* he moved on to two major themes of sf, monsters (*Jaws*) and interplanetary travel (*Close Encounters* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*). That these have become three of the most successful films in the history of the cinema underlines my long-held belief that science fiction is the literature of the twentieth century.

Close Encounters combines lavish special effects with the complex and poetic story of a power-company technician whose life is transformed by a series of UFO visitations. He becomes obsessed with a strangely shaped mountain in Wyoming, a model of which he constructs in his family living room. The film proceeds by a series of powerfully allusive images, which climax with the arrival of the alien spaceship, a visionary landing that

resonates for years in the spectator's mind.

ALIEN (1979)

Alien is a tour de force of pure horror, a barrage of brutal eruptions (some literally so) that obscure the existence, behind the blood and terror, of an extremely elegant sf film. Returning to Earth, the crew of the *Nostromo* is diverted to a remote planet and there unknowingly picks up the alien organism, which then proceeds to metamorphose its way through the cast until defeated by the courage and wiles of Sigourney Weaver, the science-fiction film's first feminist heroine.

While all this is going on, one has barely a pause to notice a host of fine details: the claustrophobic world of the spaceship, with its fraying camaraderie; the entropy of long voyages, time

slowing down so that a brief conversation seems to last all day; the stylish interior of the *Nostromo*, a cross between a computer terminal and a nightclub; the final appearance of the alien, an insane mesh of ravenous teeth straight from the paintings of Francis Bacon that materializes just after Weaver strips down to her underwear. Dinner, fortunately, is delayed, at least until the sequel.

MAD MAX 2 (1981)

This second, and by far the best, of George Miller's *Mad Max* trio is a tribute to the power of the sf film to break free of its conventions and renew itself in a creative burst of ideas and images. On one level the ultimate road movie, *Mad Max 2* is a compellingly reductive vision of postindustrial collapse. Here the end of the world is seen as a

nonstop demolition derby, as gangs of motorized savages rove their desert wastes, bereft of speech, thought, hopes, or dreams, dedicated only to the brutal realities of speed and violence.

Above all, *Mad Max* is an example of how sheer virtuosity can triumph in the film medium. A host of images wrench the retina – garish vehicles, fearful road armour, and weird punk hairstyles, the sense of a world discarded after Judgement Day. In its raw power and vast scenic effects, *Mad Max 2* is punk's Sistine chapel.

The above article first appeared in the magazine American Film, October 1987. It is reprinted here by permission of the author.

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

On tube and stage, 1988 was a year like any other: *Star Trek* and *Dr Who* came back from the grave to haunt their children's children; the BBC tried another duff space series (*Red Dwarf*, of which the best that can be said is that it makes *Dark Star* look like *Dark Star*); big names dipped a toe in sf waters (*Hapgood*, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*) and only succeeded in losing it to the sharks. But it was in some ways a remarkable, perhaps even a landmark, year for sf films. For one thing, there wasn't a single hit science fiction movie. *Robocop*, *Innerspace*, *The Running Man* are all, strictly speaking, last year's films, and only the first of them was an international boxoffice killer. The two fantasy films that did make big money in 1988, *Beetlejuice* and *Roger Rabbit*, were novelty funnies: expensive style comedies, rather over-insistently unique and off-the-wall, but likable and even laudable in their willingness to be strange.

By significant contrast, the one flop of truly apocalyptic proportions was the numbingly conventional *Willow*, so resolutely Cellulitized to its own particular wall that the combined efforts of a legendary producer, a reliable fantasy director, and the absolute most terrific actress inside the orbit of Saturn (J. Whalley) couldn't prise it loose into some lumbering semblance of animation. It'd be a bold observer

who read in these ambiguous entrails the imminent doom of straight genre pictures, but there is perhaps a hint that audiences are getting a tad fatigued with the more threadbare swash-&-buckle adventure scenarios. The new year already offers a couple of attractively deviant prospects: Gilliam's *Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, Jools Temple's alien sex comedy *Earth Girls are Easy*. Mind you, there's also the sequels to *Back to the Future* and *Aliens*, and the ever-looming glut of comic-to-screen mutations – including Tim Burton's increasingly strange-sounding *Batman*, the by now redundant *Dredd* movie, and of course that one about the giant exploding psychic octopus – so it's perhaps best to suspend optimism for a while yet.

Still, what surely has to be the year's milestone event in sf film passed unremarked outside the trade press: the death and strange rebirth of Charles Band and his once-legendary Empire Entertainment. Band, you might remember, was the nearest thing to a Roger Corman for the 80s: a cheapie director-turned-producer who in under five years built up an astonishing production stable devoted to witty, small-budget exploitation quickies for a specialized but lucrative niche in a market transformed by the impact of a new category of consumer. For Corman in the late fifties, the golden goose was

the youth B-movie: shoestring sf, beach 'n' bike hepping, lashings of camp horror, all that timeless trash. Band wasn't the only manufacturer to see that a clear equivalent was emerging in the early 80s from the rapid expansion of the homevideo market, particularly in the teen audience; but the shrewdness and panache with which he farmed it were distinctive from the start.

Empire productions varied chaotically in quality, but often managed to rise refreshingly above their competitors in the same generally sleazy marketplace. Early gems like *Trancers*, *Terrorvision*, and especially *ReAnimator* established a distinctive studio profile of bizarre wit, off-the-wall genre scenarios, and snappy non-nonsense direction. These first ventures went for a limited theatrical exposure to spark interest prior to the video release that brought in the real pennies; but with a massive expansion in production in 1985-7 a direct-to-video pattern tended to predominate, with only a few items with cult-circuit potential let out into drive-ins and late-night cult slots. By 1987 Empire had their own studios in Italy, production had increased to a dozen features a year, and the new subsidiary Beyond Infinity Pictures was churning out a string of bottom-of-the-market idiocies with arrestingly sophomoric titles that seemed to cost more than the film.

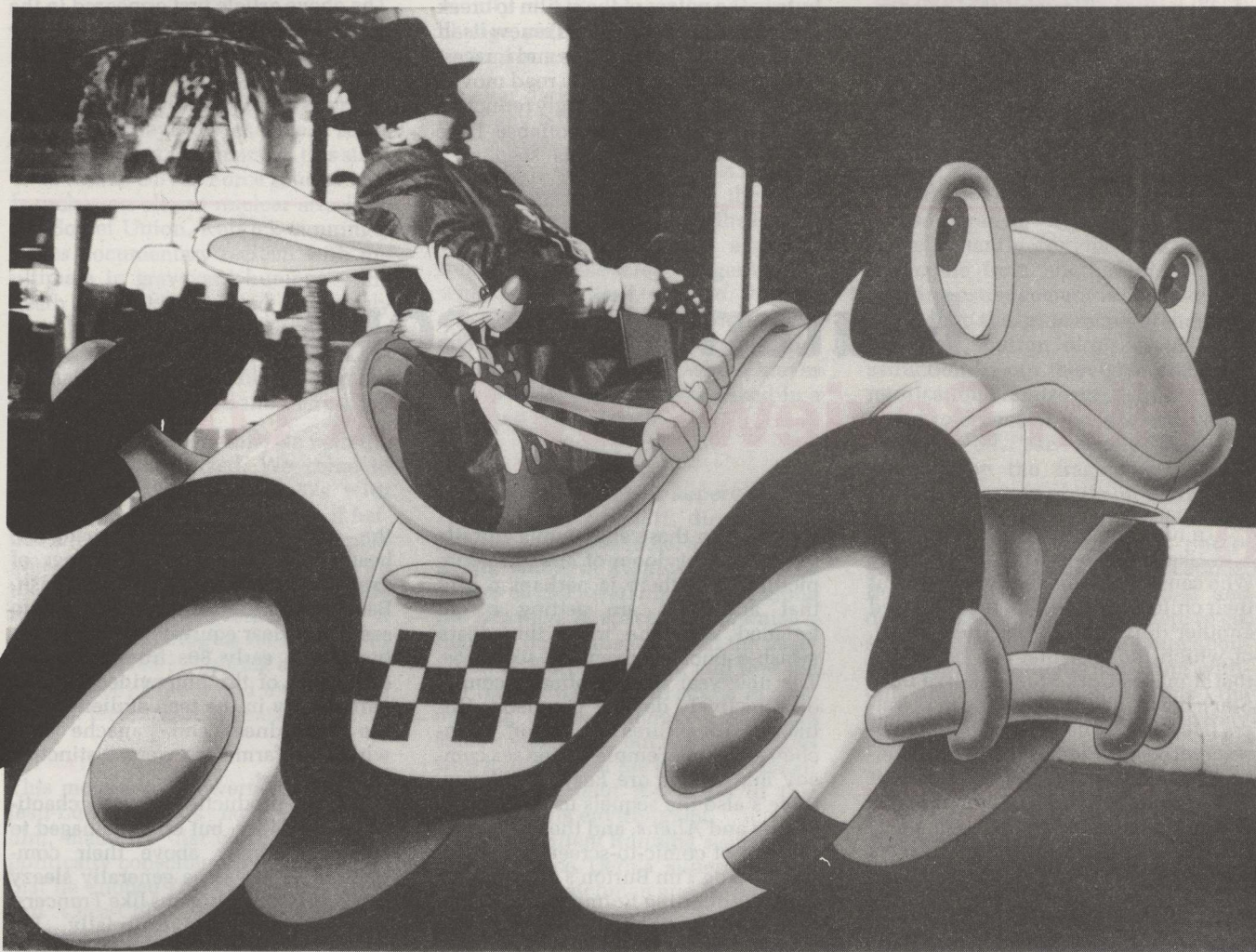
(Remember *Slave Girls from Beyond Infinity*, *Assault of the Killer Bimbos*? Has anyone actually seen these movies?)

Unfortunately, this grandiose programme of Empire-building was supported by some apparently rather Cannesque financial footwork, and when the bottom sank away from the international video market in 1987-8 the imperial foundations sank with them. In spring of this year a straitened Empire announced a major strategic

owed a lot to his very success in exploiting a specific niche for a specific audience. But by the end of 1987 the video market was so saturated with cheap horror and fantasy that it more or less drowned in its own puke. Empire's problem wasn't so much that their product lost its innate distinctiveness (the *Beyond Infinity* line, at least, could hardly be accused of that) as that the customers couldn't discriminate in the shops. After you've rented ten stiff in a row off the same

ing for the traditional big-screen outlets.

Meanwhile, though, there are two ironic footnotes to the end of Empire. One is that most of the frozen Empire and *Beyond Infinity* releases will now appear, under the new Dutch-backed Epic Pictures masthead, so that we can look forward after all to the much-trumpeted *Piranha Women*, *I Was a Teenage Sex Mutant*, *Space Sluts in the Slammer*, and *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama*, as well as Stuart Gordon's Joe Haldeman-scripted



From 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit?' (Touchstone Pictures)

shift, away from the deluvium of cheap video releases towards a few mid-budget and higher-profile theatrical features; but it wasn't enough to convince the banks. In late summer Band was forced out by his backers, and the assets (including the Italian studios and a catalogue of some fifty features, many of them unreleased or in suspended stages of production) sold off.

What distinguishes this history from a hundred similarly Byzantine corporate fandangoes in the wacky world of film finance is what it signals about the changing state of the market in genre cinema. Band's down-fall

genre rack, you tend to look for something new even if the eleventh is relatively kosher. In particular, as any retailer can tell you, 1988 was the year the video nasty finally snuffed: not, as we once might have projected, under the censor's knife, but peacefully and almost forgotten in its bed. *Rambo* and *Terminator* clonelets have inherited its dodgy mantle, and already the *Robocop* ripoffs are moving at the far end of the shelf. But these too are mortal, and it really looks like childhood's end for video as a force for innovation in the market – and with it, as a medium for unpretentious wit and inspired entertainment too quirky or unassum-

Robojox and Band's own directorial comeback in a combined followup to *Trancers*, *Dungeonmaster*, and *From Beyond*. (Great concept, but regrettably it's only an anthology pic...) The second, perhaps less surprising, sequel is that Charles Band himself is already back in business with new money and many of the key personnel from Empire, including star director Gordon; and has even announced his first production, with a bigger-than-ever budget and theatrical rather than video release. Yes, it's a remake, helmed by Gordon, of the Corman clas-

Concluded on p.64

Ian Lee

Driving Through Korea

You could say it's just a story about some men in a car, driving through Korea. It seems quite plausible in many ways if a little odd around the edges. Many things that happen are quite ordinary and might have happened to anyone before or since; but there are also signs of metaphor and hidden meaning and the longer the journey goes on and the further it gets from home the more things happen that defy belief.

To that extent, it's just like life.

It might have been called a story about two men in a car, driving through Korea. But actually there were three men from the start, if you count Jim. Jim is the Korean driver. The other two originals are in the back and they do all the talking, so it's easy to forget that Jim's there. And then before long they pick up another, so really it appears (if that's not too oxymoronic) to be a story about four men in a car, driving through Korea.

The trouble is, though, that even this is not right. One cannot in all honesty pretend it's a story about four men in a car driving through Korea because in reality (if that's the right word) one of them is an alien. In the extreme sense: which is, "not of this earth" rather than just "not from Britain" or, as the Koreans would say, "not from Korea." The alien knows which one it is. But to start with the others don't. In fact, owing to the alien's ability to adopt an alien form (alien to him, her or it, that is, though inconspicuous and commonplace to the humans in the story), the others don't realize at first that there's an alien "in the frame" at all.

Why should they? They only believe things are true if they can pick them up with their senses. But rather than continue until the denouement with cumbersome circumlocutions such as (for example, not meaning to be significant) "the sentient being in the form of a Korean chauffeur" (so as not to give anything away), the story will rely on the usual shorthand: it will consider things according to their outer appearance rather than their inner being. It is to be hoped that this device, also imitating life, will help retain the necessary suspension of disbelief.

To that extent, it's just like a story.

Jim has a round head and black hair and so much brow and cheekbone that his eyes have all but disappeared. He drives with a sort of practical directness that is rough and insouciant, treating the car as a machine, in the Eastern fashion, rather than as a minor deity, as Westerners do. He sits in the

front and wears his blue suit and drives and that's about all. He speaks only a few words of basic English: coffee, tea, yes, no, Ford Cortina, can't stand this rain, Charles and Diana – things like that.

At the start the front passenger seat is empty, then later, but not much later, the fourth man will sit in it next to Jim. (Time is not important except that it gets in the way and confuses things. It's not a story about time; more about space, really. Not inner space or outer space but the bit in between; that is to say "space" itself. To that extent, it's only half like science fiction.) The fourth man will sing a little and recite some strange, rather personal poetry and no-one else will quite know what to make of him. He comes from a society that the others do not understand and will be dressed in a way that sets him apart from ordinary mortals. But that's not to say he's the alien. Oh no, it's not as easy as that.

One of the two men in the back is in Korea on business. The other is a student, travelling on a geography scholarship. There is a younger man and an older man. They came (separately) to size up Korean industry; they haven't been here more than a couple of days but already it's bigger than when they arrived. The older wanted to buy and wanted to sell and was particularly interested in electronic components. As the younger of the two said (would an alien be so ironic?), isn't everyone these days? They met for the first time at Kimpo airport and these were the few details of personal history they told each other. But can one trust the stories of people one meets in airport lounges or on long journeys through foreign landscapes? Isn't there always the temptation to try out fantastic personae; isn't that what they mean when they say travel broadens the mind – that it broadens it to include things which are not true and the will to behave outrageously out of character without being considered mad or embarrassing one's friends?

The two men in the back watch the countryside. Let us call them Arthur and Billy, for this is what they told each other they were called. Arthur is older and taller; as he sits, his legs are doubled up like a cricket's and his knees come almost up to the bottom of the car windows. He has a rather worn appearance, like the car, and is, one might say, beginning to rust a bit under the door sills and on his wing cases. (That's not a hint, either; it's a sort of fanciful metaphor.) Billy is younger and shorter, with an air of rebellion about him. Perhaps it is generated by the Glaswegian accent, perhaps by the James Dean haircut and the poor posture. But Billy would have counted Jim; he

would have said three men and a car. Arthur wouldn't. Now, is that significant? Or just part of the generation gap put in as verisimilitude: the sense of the post-war Western babies that it's about time we stopped treating the rest of the world as scenery and walk-on parts for *The Caucasian Story*? As Billy might have said. For the alien, on the other hand, the very concept of hierarchy was a struggle: initially he/she/it had a tendency to count everything, including the family of earwigs living under the rubber mats on the floor of the car, and would have found it impossible to summarize the situation at all.

At Kimpo, Billy had lost his luggage. That is, the airline lost the luggage on the way to Kimpo. Billy explained this to Arthur, who had been puzzled as to how anyone could arrive in Korea with no luggage. Arthur had helped Billy describe his situation to the airport officials. After all, they were both a long way from home. Billy was grateful but a little suspicious at first at the way Arthur had taken him under his wing and suggested they share a taxi into Seoul. Billy watched for chinks in Arthur's masculinity. Later, the luggage turned up. It was very new.

Why Korea? Because it's there. That is to say, it is very much "not here" and that's important. Here is always too complicated and blurred and shades of grey; but Korea is black and white, Yin and Yang, North and South and no-one knows much about it.

To that extent it's easy to understand.

"It looks like Scotland, doesn't it?" says Arthur, as the car enters a tawny Korean glen.

"Aye," replies Billy. "But without the rain."

"Can't stand this rain," chirrup Jim suddenly, looking over his shoulder with a big grin, untroubled by semantic suitability. Outside the sun shines in a crisp clear blue November Korean sky. The silver bark of the birch trees shimmers through a faint mistiness that hangs over the soft russet hills. A US Army helicopter sweeps across the sky at spotting height and chatters away over the brow of a hill. In fact, Jim appeared to say, "Can't stand this lane," an interpretation given plausibility by the way the car sashayed dangerously across the carriageway under the helicopter's gaze. But Arthur and Billy have already learned to aim off for Korean pronunciation. Some small concessions have to be made to the conventions of perception when one is a long way from home.

There is a minute or two of silence. Then they pass some smallholdings and Billy sits up abruptly, looking out of the window.

"Why are the trees wearing little waistcoats?" he asks, in a voice sufficiently loud for Jim to think he is being spoken to.

"Yes, please?" he calls over his shoulder, foxed by the question.

"Nothing, Jim. Don't worry," says Arthur. A magpie struggles through the air from one side of the highway to the other. Definitely not a strong swimmer. The car drones on, spluttering ominously on the upward incline, heading North on the expressway towards Seoul, which is now only an hour ahead.

"The straw jackets," says Arthur authoritatively, as if delivering a lecture, "are put on the fruit trees in the autumn. The tree's colony of insects and other

parasites flocks into the straw for warmth as the cold weather approaches. Then, just when they think they've got their heads down for some serious hibernation, the gardener comes along, takes off the jacket and burns it."

"Tough," says Billy, with Glaswegian sang froid.

"Tough, indeed," says Arthur in a rather more melancholic and meditative tone. He glances sideways as he speaks, trying perhaps to gauge the tone of Billy's remark.

But what the characters are thinking is an unknown quantity. The story will not attempt to be definitive about that. If it were not so, then all would be revealed and if all is revealed, then what would be the point of carrying on? Thus, it is a journey of discovery, driving through Korea; and what could be more realistic than that?

At this point a small figure becomes visible on the horizon, standing at the side of the road up ahead. At first, it could have been a sign (a road sign, that is, not a portent) but then it becomes more distinctly human. At about 440 yards it becomes a Western figure, male, facing the oncoming car. At 220 yards it is identifiable as a man wearing a bottle green parka and trousers. At 110 yards the figure stretches out its right arm across the nearside carriageway and at 50 yards it is possible to see distinctly that there is a thumb pointing heavenwards from a fist at the end of the arm.

"Stop, Jim," says Arthur, giving Jim two hefty slaps on the shoulder.

As the car stops, the man approaches the driver's window. At 6 feet one can see that he has a black shirt with a white collar. And in that collar is no place for a tie.

"It's a bloody priest," says Billy under his breath.

"Can we offer you a lift?" says Arthur more helpfully, leaning forward to speak through the front passenger window that Jim has leaned across to open.

"Ah thought ah'd seen everything in this country: invasion tunnels, a DMZ patrolled by Swiss bank managers, commercial shipyards still working and little winter coats on the trees. And now a lift from a couple of Brits in the middle of nowhere," says a voice emanating from a quizzical face at the window in perfect Tennessee English.

It seems to turn the tables on anyone who might have thought it was odder to find a Confederate preacher hitchhiking in that same nowhere. Jim clears a space on the front seat and the padre climbs in, placing a small haversack at his feet.

"Well, hi there, y'all," he goes on. "Guess I'm a little unexpected for you too. Name's Forsythe, sky pilot to the US troops in Korea."

Introductions are effected and Forsythe spends a good deal of effort twisting round in his seat to shake everyone's hand and smile at them with plenty of perfect teeth and clear blue eyes.

Bracken, hills, magpies, blue sky, trees, more bracken. It seems an underpopulated country, still clean in the bright November sunshine. Some of it looks strangely familiar: silver birch trees and poplars mingle with the modest spirit of the landscape and columns of woodsmoke rise from half-hidden farmhouses to convey a reassuring mood of rural peace



and tranquility. Only the padded blue jacket and conical headgear of an occasional peasant in the middle distance or a glimpse of a turquoise roof swept up at the eaves remind the travellers that they are driving through Korea. Except for the alien of course. To the alien it is unremittingly strange and new and frightening and one thing is no more strange or Korean than another. For the alien is not used to a world where things have one form and changing thoughts are hidden. In his/her/its world there is no concept of opposites or difference, since at some time everything takes a turn at being everything else.

The car drones on. Jim notices that the traffic in the opposite direction, heading south, is becoming heavier but he doesn't say anything, partly because his passengers are deep in conversation and partly because he would have to say it in Korean.

Instead, noticing that it is almost time for the news, Jim puts on the car radio. Sounds emerge as of an unrolled drawbridge being raised against the foe, that is to say, an ancient creaking or, as the Koreans would say, music.

It puts Billy in mind of the music playing softly in the background at the lunch they had just had at a Korean research laboratory. He starts to tell Forsythe about it but Forsythe looks singularly unmoved.

"We had this pickled cabbage stuff called kimchee," says Billy. "And loads of little steaming bowls of soup with meatballs and fish and stuff, all with mounds of whiter than white rice."

The squeaking on the radio has stopped abruptly,

as it had done towards the end of the lunch. The travellers are unaware that this is not the typical ending of all such Korean music. They are similarly unaware that the Korean voice that follows the music is not just any old continuity announcer but Korea's top news presenter. The gist of the announcement is that the Land of the Morning Calm is in danger of becoming the Land of the Afternoon Panic as news spreads of an alien spacecraft having been found near the DMZ. Rumour has bred rumour and spread like a disease, causing large numbers of both uneducated and educated Koreans to believe that some dread alliance has been formed by the North with evil spirits or the Devil and that the long-feared invasion is about to roll.

Billy is telling Forsythe how Arthur had failed to get to grips, literally, with the chopsticks and had had to resort to a fork.

The radio is saying, effectively to Jim only, whose eyes are now as round as flying saucers, that there is reason to believe that the spacecraft held one occupant only but that the occupant was capable of changing its form to match anything it might see in its surroundings, including a human being. In a shamanistic society such a notion strikes a chord and for the Koreans who hear this the landscape once more springs to life and begins to vibrate with immanent beings as it had done in the days of their forefathers.

Arthur is trying to retell a joke he made at lunch about silicon chips and potato chips and bap (Korean for rice) and then he recounts how the Koreans hadn't laughed but had all looked at the radio speaker in the corner, where the music had stopped and a voice was saying something in Korean. Then the lunch had

finished rather abruptly. Arthur and Billy and Forsythe belatedly realize that the music has stopped this time too. Billy tries to laugh but no sound comes. Arthur catches Jim's eye in the driving mirror and is immediately assailed by a powerful feeling of *déjà vu*.

The Korean voice on the radio continues for a few moments as they listen, uncomprehending, then stops to let the rasping music start again. Jim turns it off and there is an eerie silence in the car. Does anyone notice that Jim has started to grip the steering wheel more tightly? Only Forsythe seems to remain comfortably innocent in a world of his own choosing. He rummages in his haversack and pulls out some crumpled sheets of paper.

"Let me read y'all a pome," he says, breathing in dramatically before beginning,

"I have a pet magpie called Imagination,
who gathers shiny objects for me
and decorates my world.

When I first had my magpie,
she was black and white and I feared her strong beak.
But now we are more intimate, I see
that she is green and purple like shot silk
and must really struggle to fly."

The alien, here, in the midst of this, formlessly manifesting though an earthly form, is aware of the increased anxiety the poem seems to create but keeps its/her/his counsel.

After a silence of several miles, Arthur, perhaps trying to get the mood back down to earth, asks Billy what assessment he has made of Korean industry so far.

"Well..." begins Billy, pausing to gather himself for an opinion. "It looks to me as though they worked out how to make a three-pin plug the week before last and they'll probably have a man on the moon by next Christmas."

"A man on the moon..." muses Arthur, looking up out of the window and remembering all the round moon-faces he has seen since he arrived. "I feel as though I'm on a different planet already." Down to earth hasn't worked.

Later, without prompting, Jim pulls in to a service area beside the expressway.

"Coffee, tea; yes, no," he says economically.

One explanation would be that Jim is not the alien but believes that one of the others might be. He has pulled in in the hope of getting rid of his passengers and making good his escape. But one must remember what was said at the outset. The story proceeds by reference to what appears to be happening. Motivation is invisible; it keeps you guessing. It is also the key to behaviour and is revealed in stories precisely because in life it is next to unknowable. We certainly cannot guess what this alien's motivation might be and a Korean's is hardly more limpid. Perhaps Jim is simply hungry or needs a pee. Perhaps he wants to talk to others of his own kind to find out how seriously the alien story is being taken.

There are refreshments for the humans at an open counter and petrol for the cars at a Western-style array of pumps. The alien doesn't actually need refreshment of this kind but is content to go along with the interlude for the time being. As they arrive the area is deserted. But then a large number of silver coaches

with high sides and small windows arrive and suddenly there are great throngs of Koreans clutching polystyrene cups of coffee and small wads of food. It is like a convocation, a murmuration of birds of the air sweeping through the sky to a temporary roost. Their breath, however, steams like cattle's in the cold air.

Arthur and Billy get out of the car and walk towards the open-sided building which seems to be the source of most of the coffee and the food. The throng beats them to it; it is a determined throng and will not be delayed; and it is fired with suspicion. Arthur, six foot four in his stockinged feet, towers above the little Koreans like a tall white crane and, like a crane, is languid, while they are filled with starlings' intensity. They have seen cranes before, of course, but not here, not so close. You can even see the pinky colour of its skin, its round eyes, its lack of cheekbones and its thin sandy hair. Arthur looks nervously around at the Koreans, who pretend to ignore him, believing that to look at danger is to invite it to approach. Arthur has to duck slightly to get his head beneath the awning over the coffee counter and see what is on offer.

Behind glass are strange pots of liquefied snake, small pastries containing fried entrails, skewered magpie brains, who can tell? A diminutive lorry driver to Arthur's left is jabbering something across the till and receives a sort of pancake filled with what look like fiery-red duck giblets. Arthur looks round in despair for Jim, who has apparently dematerialized (hyperbolically speaking that is – in other words, he is nowhere to be seen). Everything is labelled in Korean, an unpronounceable script which strikes Arthur disturbingly dumb. Here, where language is a kind of meaningless graffiti, there is nothing to hold back the underlying fear of being pecked to death by other people. The alien is calm, thankful for the protection of her/its/his adopted identity.

A high pitched chatter returns Arthur's attention to the counter. Then the starlings clear, swirling off to perch on low walls and peck their booty. The crane is next, but can only stand with mouth open, no words coming out. Billy intervenes, pointing to the coffee urn and holding up two fingers. No problem. Then he spins his fingers in the assistant's gaze like a conjuror's flourish and directs her attention to some doughnuts nestling in the corner of the display. The assistant seems effortlessly to understand; it is like a display of magic.

"Ah ken fine whit it's like when folks canna understand ye," says Billy in his best broad rapid-fire Glaswegian with a grin.

A few minutes later, after a brief stop in a reassuringly Western-style convenience (though the receptacles seemed to have been set rather low), Arthur and Billy re-emerge from the other side of the building with a copy of an English language paper. There is a large headline which declares the discovery of the alien spacecraft.

"They thought it was you," says Billy to Arthur. "They've never seen anyone over five foot eight before." He looks around, noting that the Koreans have melted away again as quickly as they came.

The newspaper, which Arthur and Billy stand and read open-mouthed, says that a flying saucer has been



been found the previous day near the DMZ.

"It must have landed when we did," suggests Billy provocatively.

It is large, smooth and round. Scientists from the US forces are assisting the ROK Army in investigating the find and have already issued statements reassuring the population that it is not some fiendish device from the North. Remembering the throng, Arthur and Billy doubt whether the populace has believed it.

"They're off to find the straw jacket," says Billy laconically.

Arthur and Billy look around the car park to see where Jim has parked. The Korean-built Ford Cortina is easy to spot as it is distinctively black with white doors. Billy said when they first saw it that it was a motorized magpie, the Korean national bird. Forsythe is sitting on the bonnet and Jim, standing in front of him, is gesticulating, evidently trying to convey something important. Jim is saying something over and over in Korean and then pointing at the sky. Forsythe only looks puzzled. As Arthur and Billy approach, Jim is trying to make use of his few phrases of English. He points at the car once more and says "Ford Cortina" and again points at the sky.

"He's trying to tell you that a flying saucer has been found near the border," says Billy, making Jim jump a little as he speaks from behind him. Billy hands Forsythe the paper.

"I would've thought, being in the Forces, that you'd have known..."

The alien is now aware that the humans' interest has been aroused and that discovery is only a matter of time.

Or, to put it another way: only a matter of space. That is to say, it will be assumed (by the humans) that the alien is enormously different from them because the alien comes from enormously far away and has an enormously different constitution. For the alien, on the other hand, such matters are relatively irrelevant; it would not judge this story by the ink used to print it.

So, as promised, we now appear to have four men in a car travelling through Korea. But one of them is an alien. Somehow they have convinced Jim (if he really is, that is) that the story must be a hoax and they are heading for the border "to see some sights." While they travel they are talking about the war and about neutrality. On the back window ledge of the car, apparently unheeded, lies the newspaper open at the headline: UFO EMPTY: ALIEN PILOT AT LARGE. The humans still think it's all happening to someone else but the alien knows different and is beginning to feel uneasy. Having acquired on her/his/its travels, driving through Korea, the experience of Earth-conditions he/she/it needed for its/his/her own reasons she/it/he is now keen to return home. The alien has begun to manipulate affairs for his/her/its own benefit and in doing so runs the risk of revealing her/its/his presence.

The discussion is mainly between Arthur and Billy. Billy starts by saying that he thinks it would be a good idea to extend the DMZ (the demilitarized zone – the dee,emm,zee) by an agreed amount each year until eventually the whole country would be neutral. Arthur is not impressed by this plan and states forcefully that the peace is kept by the existence of strong opposing forces. The charmed life of the Swedish and Swiss accountant/soldiers who, as UN nannies, supervise neutrally the DMZ, counting the Siberian cranes and carving their initials on the trees, is sustained by the willingness of the US to defend the attack corridors of Kaesung-Munson and the Chorwon Valley. According to Arthur, the neutrals are a theatrical device, a fiction, part of the vacuum in space through which the fundamental forces of the Universe operate. But it is those forces – attack and defence, good and evil – which are real, he declares, not the void through which they flow.

Billy innocently suggests that little is known of the North and one must beware of assuming that their intentions are inevitably hostile. Arthur's exasperation ignites at this. Does Billy not realize that there is an army of 900,000 in the North, that they have tunnelled 15 kilometres under the border, that people with birth defects are not allowed to live in Pyongyang? Does he not know that brave British men died here in defence of freedom? "Does Imjin River mean nothing to you?" asks Arthur passionately. (Would an alien be so emotional?)

Billy is awed by this outburst but also a little angry.

"I'm from the North, you know. Scotland was North Korea once." It is enough to shut Arthur up.

Jim and Forsythe don't appear to follow it at all. Forsythe is turning over pages of a book of homilies entitled *He Brings Us Fruitful Seasons* and humming the chorus of "All Things Bright and Beautiful" as he does so. Other than this, there is an awkward silence, which Forsythe, turning in the front seat, is the first to break.

"So, it's us and them, is it, my friend? But the question is, who is 'us'? Let me tell you. While we're sitting here in this car it's 'us' in here and 'them' out there. Another time it might be 'us' because we're Caucasian and 'them' because they're Korean. That'd put Jim here on the other side, wouldn't it."

He breaks off to smile at Jim and give him a reassuring pat on the shoulder. Jim smiles back.

"Then again," continues the sky pilot, "Another day 'us' might be Europeans and then I'd be one of 'them'. Or it might be older people against younger people, tall against short." His eyes seem to flick like a laser between Arthur and Billy as he says this, then he drawls more lazily, as from a Tennessee porch with a pipe and a slug of Southern Comfort on a summer's evening and casually adds, "Or it might be that we all has to come together as 'us' on this planet, because 'them' is what's coming from up there." Everyone remembers the alien and lingering doubts about the credibility of the hoax theory are unanimously magnified. After a pause, Forsythe adds with chilling throw-away candour:

"I'm a deserter. They wanted me to take sides. I went mad."

(Would an alien be so peculiar?)

Forsythe points a bony finger at his temple and screws it in. As he does so, the engine, climbing a long hill, splutters like someone clearing their throat. They are North of Seoul now, no longer on the expressway, but still driving through Korea.

"She's not too good on the hills, is she Jim?" says Arthur, loudly and cheerily, trying once more to rescue the mood.

Later, but not much later, Jim pulls in to a gravel-covered car park at the top of a hill and they all get out. A long stretch of road is visible in both directions winding through the hills but no traffic sounds. In fact, everyone notices how quiet it has suddenly become now the car has stopped and they are away from towns. They have arrived in the hills above Imjin River.

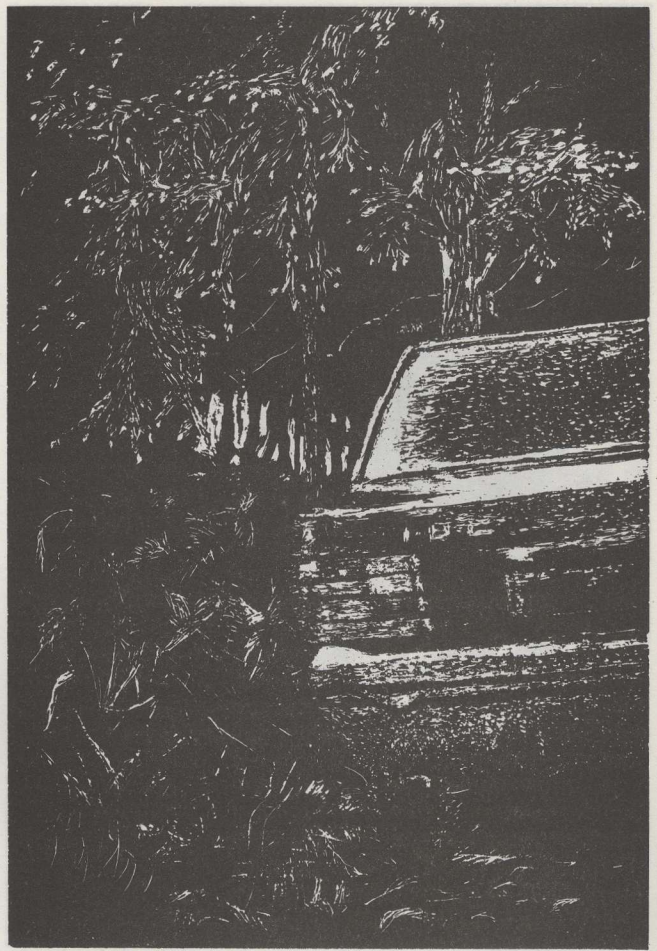
There are no old men on ancient pedal Hondas, no women with babies strapped in quilted eiderdowns on their backs, no buses, no G.I.s, no smoke from any chimney. There are no magpies fluttering from the hills, no cattle, no life visible against the brown land or the deepening clear blue sky. The alien, who is amongst them, listens to the heartbeats of the humans, having stilled its own. It hears the heartbeats quicken and knows that the humans' thoughts are turning to its presence. A more sophisticated breed than it had given them credit for.

Forsythe zips up his parka and, raising his palms together before him as in prayer, speaks in the voice of a poet,

"Sometimes I think I am dreaming God.

Sometimes I think I am dreaming, God."

Not surprisingly, Arthur gives Forsythe a strange look. Jim looks at Arthur. Billy looks at Jim. Forsythe looks at everyone with his bright, flickering eyes. Perhaps Arthur is remembering that Billy had no luggage at Kimpo. Is Jim looking puzzled because of Forsythe's sudden appearance at the roadside and the strange shirt he is wearing with no place for a tie; perhaps it is a sort of space-suit? Maybe Billy thinks



it strange that Arthur's agent in Seoul didn't recognize him, and had appeared to be expecting someone else. Does Forsythe regret that he has attached himself to a party of other-worldly disputants, whose car has put them down in the middle of somewhere and whose number includes a mysterious alien with unknown intent?

"It's a poem I wrote," says Forsythe, unapologetically.

In silence the four men leave the car and walk to the vantage point at the front of the car park which commands a view of the valley and the Imjin River. Through the mist a silent plain is visible, a green and purple land, spreading out of sight towards the mysterious North. In front of them on the ground a model landscape has been built within a neat low rectangular wall. They look down as gods upon this replica scene, which is labelled with small brass plaques in English and Korean to show the course of the battle. They stand, heads bowed, like mourners, and the wind blows their differences away.

Quite suddenly, each of them has realized that none of them knows any of the others. None of them went to school together; none of them has bumped into any of the others at the supermarket, at a night club, on a train or on a package holiday; religion, art, culture, family, nation, race, social class – none really has anything in common. It brings them together as close as only strangers can be.

In the fading light the miniature landscape becomes more real than the one in distant gloom. Billy, hands in pockets away from the cold, notices that the battle was taking place on the day he was born. Arthur,

stamping his feet and shuffling clumsily from side to side, observes that here there was fighting on the day he got married. Forsythe sees the date and announces out loud, "My father was here before. This was where he died." No-one knows how to take this. Jim leans over a miniature mountain, points to the plaque which pays final tribute to the British troops and, selecting from his tiny vocabulary of their tongue, says proudly, "Charles and Diana." (Would an alien, posing as a representative of a liberated people, choose such a phrase to express respect and gratitude for the sacrifice of young lives?) Miraculously, the others seem to understand.

Somehow the humans begin individually to know also that the alien is near and, more than that, they realize that the other humans present also know. They cannot see the alien but they can feel a presence. At the edge of the car park the South Korean flag rattles in the wind, its blue and red reflecting the darkening colours of the Eastern and Western sky. What had been a business trip became a jaunt became an adventure is becoming a conclusion. But it's all the same. Black and white, Yin and Yang, sun and moon, heaven and earth, war and peace, North and South, spring, summer, autumn and winter, science fiction and life.

Then, spontaneously and simultaneously, they turn to look back at the Ford Cortina and they know: they were the characters in the story and the vehicle was imagination. As they hear the chatter of the spot-

ting helicopter across the valley, the Ford Cortina flashes its headlights and they know. (Would an alien mind have risked trying to be human when he/she/it had the option of being a motorized magpie? Perhaps it was obvious all along.) In the blink of an eye he/she/it becomes the avian original and when the helicopter lands to take Forsythe away the orderlies see only a solitary magpie, the national bird, a gleam in its eye, flapping and struggling home in the last evening glow, its green and purple sheen invisible to those looking for the black and white. Billy, Arthur, Jim and Forsythe say nothing. But now that it's too late, they know.

Ian Lee (born 1951) grew up in the Midlands, dabbled in poetry as a teenager, and graduated from Cambridge University. He worked as a bookseller in York before becoming a civil servant in the Ministry of Defence. Now living in London with his wife and two children, he has recently returned to writing. A couple of his stories appeared in the late lamented *Jennings Magazine*.

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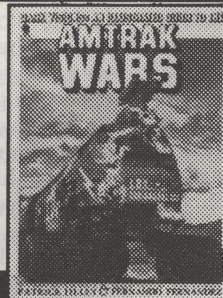
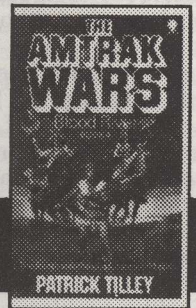


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THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

Kathy Acker

Interview by Stan Nicholls

New York-born Kathy Acker has had books in print since the early '70s with several American small presses. Her work incorporates autobiography, self-confessed plagiarism, pornography, and diverse fragments run together to produce a texture rather than being concerned with character or plot. Having never shied away from describing violence, brutality, ugliness and graphic sexuality, her career has been controversial.

Now for the first time a major publisher, Picador, has issued two of her works – *Blood & Guts* in High School (£3.95) and *Empire of the Senseless* (£10.95), the latter set in a chaotic and bleak near future. The following interview took place shortly after she appeared in conversation with *sf* writer William Gibson at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts on 8th June, 1988.

Do you work to an outline?

No. It takes me about two years to write a novel, and if I knew beforehand what I was going to write, I'd be bored. In fact I did write one novel that way, *Kathy Goes to Haiti*, and it only took me six months. It's much easier that way, it's faster; but it felt like a task. I did it to say, look, I can write a conventional novel – although I was taking the piss out of all the conventions. Everything that interests me isn't in that kind of writing. What interests me is to amuse myself, and to find out something, to get somewhere. It's a bit like a journey. What I do is write in sections, and then the sections come together. I do that because I've always earned my living by performing, so I do the sections as performances. I start off with a problem or a question and I look for material about the problem, and in a way one thing leads to another and becomes a sort of voyage. I always end up somewhere else.

Through many drafts?

Oh yes. Initially I write whatever I want. I allow myself the freedom to have something that might not make causal sense. The second draft consists of going over the first and saying, "Why did I write all this? What's it about? What's the story?" Mostly, my pieces are read live, so if they don't hold together I'm going to look a fool in front

of that audience. I go over the thing, and I guess the word would be rewrite it, according to what I think the continuity is, what it's about. So there's one straight line. Sometimes the rewriting is 50%. It's really cut-up; I'll just take chunks out. It's not rewriting for good or bad sentences, it's to get this "surface." Then I do another rewrite which is about at least making it readable. That's the point when I type it up. My books are written very much for my voice. Not that I'm the only person speaking, but I'll be the one reading them aloud. What I say when I get new editors is that I don't mind copy editing at all. I know I'm not the most perfect writer in the world, and I'll work with them on that level. But they are not allowed to edit me for sex or violence – I don't welcome being edited for content.

Who are you writing for?

Of course for myself to begin with, because of my interest in this kind of journey, and then for other people. I came out of the poetry scene, and some of the most radical of the experiments of poets in America are very difficult. Especially the language poets. I don't think their work's written at all for other people. Except insofar as every piece of writing can be said to be for someone else. I think commercial novels are written totally for other people. Often they are written by somebody who has an idea, which they patent, and then the team comes in, and this team of editor, and maybe even some other writers, decide how the book's going to look. It's written like a film script, and that's very foreign to how I write. They might as well have one of those computers that test out how advertising is going to work. They want a well-tested book that's going to sell. That's really writing for other people, and it involves a certain gauging of who the audience is, which has all sorts of ramifications. It means you're modulating whatever your work is for your version of that audience. That's the antithesis of what I do. If I imagined an audience I wouldn't be able to go into the areas I get into. You're looking for the goodwill of the largest possible audience, which really fashions your product.

But my writing's not a product, it's a process. A lot of my style came out of the writers who were influenced by the abstract expressionist painters, and the word "process" was used in terms of writing. Until *Empire of the Senseless* I thought of writing as process. I still do, but I'm not so interested in the sentence showing the actual process of the thought. I used to think of my sentences being almost mirrors of the way thought works, but now I'm concerned more with narrative.

In 'Great Expectations', you say, "A narrative is an emotional moving..."

I think I meant that in the same way Jackson Pollock would have said it. In that what the narrative is doing is showing the process of thoughts – I don't just mean rational thoughts, but all the complex we call mentality. What it's doing is showing what that mentality looks like, as it multiplies or meshes with the verbal. It's hard to get behind a word, so what you're seeing is the movement of thought. In *Great Expectations* I was showing this movement.

You've been labelled post-punk, post-punk feminist, post-punk pornographer, counter-culture... Do people categorize you because they don't understand what you're trying to do?

Yes, I think so. Because the categories mostly came from publishers. They had nothing to do with me. Maybe it's best to say what I came out of. I was trained as a poet, mainly by the second generation of something called the Black Mountain school. I knew the Beats, and I slightly knew the New York school. I knew John Ashby. My earliest connections were with the Film Co-Op in New York, which became the Film Anthology Archives, so I knew a lot of underground film makers, and they were friendly with the Fluxus people, such as Robert Kelly. When I was at university I met David Anton and Jerome Rothenberg, who were also second generation Black Mountain, but another school. I was very influenced by conceptual art, in its heyday at that point, when women were starting to do a lot of what was called body performances. In my early twenties my work was much more readily accepted by the art world

than it was by the poetry world. In poetry at that time there was no real understanding of how one worked conceptually. People weren't examining why they wrote and the way language works. Except of course for William Burroughs. My generation of New York poets were working more intuitively. Then punk came along, which was very much out of the art world in New York. Very different from here I guess. So, bringing that mixture over, I don't know what people made of it. That's not how novelists are born in England.

How would you label yourself?

Usually I just take the easy way out, it depends who asks me. If I'm asked what kind of novels I've written, on the whole the question isn't serious, it's like, "What do you do?" So you have to explain how you are not quite like Jackie Collins, although yes, you do sell. If the person's interesting I might say "pornography." If I'm in a slightly different mood, I'll say I write like William Burroughs. I say that because Burroughs is the only person known at all over here they could identify with. It's a hook. I went into Harrods and they were flogging *Empire* – God knows why, some pervert there presumably ordered it – and the assistant said, "You're a bit into acid, aren't you?" I couldn't say, no, I'm not a hippie, because he wouldn't have understood. So I said, it's a little like acid, it's like a journey. You're negotiating what you think their territory is with what the territory of the book is.

Are you happy with the Burroughs comparison?

That's the nearest, I suppose. I don't know who one would mention as a comparison, unless one knew something about the poets here. A wonderful book was published last year called *White Chapell, Scarlet Tracings*, by Ian Sinclair, and it's just fabulous. There's a group of writers around Ian that have taken a lot of the work of the American poets, such as the Black Mountain school, and started working on that stuff. I feel pretty close to them. But because of something in England – the good old class system perhaps – they're not known.

In 'Blood & Guts', you say, "Dreams cause the vision world to break loose our consciousness." Dreams and dream imagery seem to be important to you.

I like dreams. I like any way that shows things to you you can't control. I've always been interested in the whole range of mentality that's outside the rational. To me, the supreme writer of rationality is De Sade. He took the method of rational thinking to its ultimate degree. There's one way of seeing his books as being extreme black satire on his culture. He took their method of thinking, the right-wing method, and pushed it and pushed it and showed



Photo of Kathy Acker courtesy of Pan Books Ltd.

it for what it was. I don't know why people never take him politically; he wrote the most vicious political satire. Dreams are one thing, but there are all sorts of ways of getting there. It's a matter of putting a certain part of the mind to sleep and getting another part coming in. I spent some time in Haiti, and I've known people who were into voodoo, and that fascinates me. Some of the research I did for *Empire of the Senseless* was about taboo, and how other societies aren't structured on the Oedipal complex. What I noticed in Haiti is there's a different type of mentality. We think causally. In Haiti they don't think that way at all. "Therefore" and "because" are not words in their language. They think in terms of good and evil.

You acknowledge that a central part of your work is plagiarism. Somebody said to me recently that you only degrade what was worth saying in the original. What are you trying to do in this area?

Some of the stuff I plagiarize ought to be degraded! What I do is I don't write from a blank page, I've never wanted to. I was taught that you start being a real writer when you find your own

voice, and I noticed at rather a young age that I had great difficulty finding my own voice. What I really loved was other people's work. I became very interested in schizophrenia. This was in one of my earliest published works. What I did there was to take a section of real autobiography about my daily life. Then I figured out "Who am I not?" Well, I can tell I never murdered anyone. So I took some biographies of Victorian murderesses, probably because that was what I could find, and I rewrote them. I didn't change them much, but put them into first person, so they were fake autobiographies. Then I put the two sections of writing next to each other. I did that formally, again and again, to see what happened to identity. It became increasingly complex. I kept the experiment up for about three years, getting into the areas of language and memory. I came out with – whatever, the feeling, the discovery – that identity doesn't exist in the way that we think it does. That identity isn't centred. I don't mean that everyone who's schizophrenic is really sane. I found out something even more radical: that what you do when you write fiction is you...make. You

don't express, you're not reporting when you write fiction, you're actually making. That when people relate the news, they're not saying what happened, they're saying what they want to have happened, and that's what you're doing when you write fiction. There's very little difference really between fiction and journalism. So suddenly I wasn't so interested any more in the area of the self. Because it was fiction anyway. Everything was a text. In *Great Expectations* I turned to other texts to do my writing; something painters had done for years. Working like this I became interested in other problems. If you copy something, has it the same meaning? Is there such a thing as originality? Where does creation lie? *Empire of the Senseless* is something new, but the period of my books from *Great Expectations* to *Don Quixote* was about plagiarism. As to whether I denigrate the texts I plagiarize, I don't think it's the question at all. It's totally irrelevant really. Do the cubists denigrate the various materials they put into their paintings? Saying I denigrate the original texts is thinking in very traditional English terms of good and bad literature. This business about culture – good literature: great culture – is very much a political can.

It seems to me that in taking the narrative out of its context you put language in the position where its only power is as language.

Until the recent novels that's what I was doing. I wanted to take these texts out of context, see how they worked by putting them next to each other; to see what the structures were that underlay them and how the language was being used. What were the various relations between control and language, and power and language? I've used very loaded texts in terms of cultural meaning, such as pornography. I think this is what upsets people. It isn't the amount of sexual description – which isn't all that much in my books – but that the sex was taken and put next to something else. The books are like a laboratory for me, and unless you look at them that way it must be difficult. Because there isn't a narrative, apart from a narrative of my questioning how it works. It's a mental search. *Empire* is not a cosy book, it's not something where you can identify with the story. With most books what you do is fantasize. You know: "I'm the hero. I'm the heroine." How could you do that with my books? Who would you become? You could only become the questioner, the searcher, and that takes a lot of effort.

I get the impression you're trying to nail something down in your books.

Oh yeah, but I can't say it's any one thing. I suppose the books are pretty political, and there was a period when I thought the society I was living in

was totally hypocritical. I felt like I was living in a spy story, and I couldn't find the real meaning, couldn't figure out what was really going on, but if I wrote about it I could work out the truth. A process of deconstruction really. Suddenly I came to an end of that, and thought it's not true that I'm living in a spy story any more, I do kind of know what's going on now. I think something's happened in the last ten years. The various economic, political and personal power structures have become more evident. It's a question now of living in a very chaotic – deconstructed – world. There aren't any rules any more and we almost don't know how to live, how to relate to each other. The problem now is to build up. All language is a story. What we do is tell one another stories, we don't tell one another the truth. There's no such thing. I'm telling you who I am now, I'm telling you what I do. It's a story. I have this feeling that everybody wants to find something that has meaning, and when we go to William Gibson, or to Banks's *The Wasp Factory*, it's because they touched something. Despite the media, certainly despite the TLS, everybody knew that *Neuromancer* meant something.

Possibly the only really valid question to be asked about cyberpunk is whether it actually exists...

Well, obviously Gibson wrote his thing and there were imitators, and to that extent it exists; and you've got people like Bruce Sterling. I'm not the most well-read person in science fiction, but I think cyberpunk's something new. If people are now talking about post-cyberpunk, it's ludicrous. It's like modernism – no one knew it was around until everyone started to say, oh, it's happened.

In 'Great Expectations' you said that Hawthorne set 'The Scarlet Letter' in an earlier age so he could say things about his own time and get away with it. Science fiction does the same sort of thing, albeit mostly by setting stories in the future.

I think sf here is the only way that writers who aren't doing the "great English novel" can get away with what they do. It's been the only venue for any sort of... I don't want to use the word experiment because that marginalizes... but just writing an any way other than the conventional. I remember a friend of mine, Peter Wollen, who did *Bananas* and *The Saturday Night Reader*, and they had Moorcock and Ballard... That was the area in which, before I came to England, the writing that intrigued me most came from. *Interzone* is still one of the only fiction magazines that's interesting to me. Much more so than *Granta*.

You've been quoted as saying, "I really hate liberalism." Can you expand on that?

I've said that many times. What I mean is that liberals are usually right-wingers in disguise, and we should know the right-wing when we meet it. Every time you try to fight something the liberals come in and mess it up. Although they're not direct, not straight. I've had lots of fights with liberals. A constant fight about this business that human beings are good and wonderful, violence is evil... In the United States, one example was when the hippies, in order to fight the establishment, set up a separate society. They were after setting-up the good society as opposed to the bad, and in their society everybody loved each other and there were no problems with jealousy... One of the biggest ways the communes messed-up was sexually. There was a real unwillingness to accept that there's anything non-simplistic about human nature, that we can be contradictory about lots of things. Jealousy, envy, lust and greed are what broke up the communes to some degree. Another way of saying it is that they posited a dualistic universe – good is over here, that's us, and evil is over there. That's what the right-wing does. It says, evil is over there; you're evil, that's evil, this is evil, porn is evil... What I loved about the punk movement was its acknowledgment of Nazi symbology, which was saying, "If the system's evil, we're evil." That can go the wrong way too, but the whole dualistic theory has to be gotten rid of. As long as we're politically acting dualistically we're just engendering the same society. We need non-dualistic models, basically. My feeling is that the West is in a mess. I don't know what's going to happen, but I guess when I'm being at my most simplistic and goo-goo minded, I'd say everyone should study Zen Buddhism.

So your work is basically pessimistic?

I think my impulse is to try to find more than survival. I'm definitely interested in value. Geoff Ryman said something interesting when I talked to Gibson at the ICA. He said, "He's a real post-modernist, and you're not." I asked him what he meant and he said, "He's just interested in surfaces, absolutely not interested in value." Curious statement. Anyway, I'd love to be optimistic! I think I want to be optimistic and can't. It's very hard. Just surviving's really not good enough. We all survive and then we die – that's the story of every human being. It seems to me that what's happened, along with these huge political and economic changes, has been a cultural change. Values have disintegrated so that the only value left is life. Like Jerry Rubin taking all those vitamin pills. It's really, really boring. Finally, how many vitamins can you take, you know?

John Brosnan

An Eye in Paradise

“Nice place you got here,” I told Millington as I looked out the window. “Really like your moon.”

“Thank you,” he said coldly as he came up behind me. “It’s size, I feel, and its red colour, add a sense of drama to the sky. Now would you mind telling me who you are and what you’re doing here.”

“Edwin, who is he?” asked the tall blonde in the gold lamé gown. “How could he just appear like that from nowhere?”

I turned in her direction. She’d gotten up from the dinner table and had her arms folded tensely across her impressive chest. I winked at her and said, “Lady, nowhere is a relative term.”

She looked worriedly at Millington, hoping he was going to pull answers out of the same thin air I’d materialized from. I had to admit he’d done a peachy job with her. She had cheek bones that could cut glass.

Millington said to me, “Are you someone’s idea of a joke?”

Now that hurt. “I’m as real as you are, bud. And that’s a hell of a lot more real than she is.” I pointed at the limbo toy.

He winced. “Don’t, please...”

“She doesn’t know?” I knew the answer but I wanted to needle him.

“Of course she doesn’t. Don’t say anything more. Please.”

“Edwin, what’s he talking about? What’s going on?”

“It’s all right, darling. Nothing to worry about,” he told her with a reassuring smile.

I told him, “Yeah, you’re the one who’s got something to be worried about...” I flashed him my ID. He stared at it and frowned.

“So you’re a private investigator? So what? What right does that give you to intrude into my estate. According to the contract the Company guarantees total privacy.”

“It does. But I work for the Company. I can enter any client’s estate... if the circumstances demand it.”

“What kind of circumstances?” he asked suspiciously.

“Do I have to spell it out, bud? You read your contract. Or your legal program did and then gave the gist in plain English. So you know the rules...”

“Rules?” He looked surprised. “But there are no rules. You can do anything you want within your own estate...absolutely anything...” He paused and glanced guiltily at the toy who was looking more and more confused.

I grinned at him and said, “Can’t see a mark on her.”

“No, no,” he protested. “I’m not like that!” He turned to her. “Kris, I’ve never hurt you, have I? Ever?”

She shook her head, totally perplexed. I figured she was soon going to blow a tube or whatever in CenCom. I said to Millington, “Relax, I don’t give a damn what you get up to in here with your toys.”

“I told you I’m not like that! Yes, I heard the rumours of what some people do in their estates but I’m not that sort of person.”

“Sure you aren’t,” I said, still grinning. “Not yet, anyway. Having absolute power tends to make most people a bit kinky – sooner or later. Goes to their head, or somewhere.”

“And I tell you...” he began. I held up my hand to cut him off. I said, “No rules about what you do in your own estate but there are rules about what you can do in someone else’s estate.”

He looked blank. “What do you mean?”

“Your wife is also a client of the Paradise Now Company, right?”

He glanced again at the toy then said to me, “Let’s go and continue this discussion outside.”

“I’m easy,” I told him.

“Edwin, what is this all about?” demanded the toy as he opened the French windows that led out onto the balcony.

“I’ll explain everything later,” he told her. “You wait here. We won’t be long.”

I went out onto the balcony. He followed me and closed the doors behind him. The house jutted out over a deep gorge. On the opposite side was a huge waterfall. I went to the balcony rail and peered down. The waterfall, wide as it was, dwindled to a blue thread before it reached the bottom which I figured was at least a mile away. I turned to Millington and yelled over the roar of the rushing water, “Hey, turn down the volume!”

He raised his hand and the sound of the water died away to a muted rumble.

“She can’t hear us now,” he said, referring to the toy who was peering worriedly at us through the French windows. “Now tell me what Gloria has to do with your intrusion here.”

“I’m here because you murdered her.”

His eyes went wide. “This is insane! There must be a malfunction in CenCom. It’s causing an aberration in my estate construct!”

“There’s no malfunction. No bug in the system. I’m real. And your wife is dead. Because you murdered her.”

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he cried. "I didn't even know she was dead, much less had anything to do with it!"

I sighed theatrically, leaned back against the railing and gazed upwards. Tethered to the roof of the house was a small airship. It was a gaudy thing coloured in bright blues, reds and yellows. With its coloured pennants flapping in the breeze it looked like a tropical fish. I returned my gaze to Millington. "When you and your wife first came to Paradise Now you shared an estate, right?"

He nodded. "Well, yes. For about six months in real time. But it didn't work out..."

"It never does," I told him. "When you become a god it's hard to continue making compromises, no matter who with. So after six months you moved into separate estates."

"Yes."

"But you maintained a mutual access arrangement, right?"

"Yes. At first we used to visit each other regularly but after a while, well... we both had our own things going and, well, I can't remember the last time – in real time – that I saw her."

"I can tell you that, Bud. Two days ago in real time, which is when you entered her estate and murdered her."

"I did not murder her!"

"You were the only one with an open access to her estate, bud. Plus you had a motive..."

He gave a forced laugh. "Why on earth would I want to kill Gloria?"

"Oldest motive for murder there is, next to jealousy. You killed her for her money."

"This is getting more absurd by the second. I don't need anyone else's money. I'm rich. You must know that. I couldn't be here if I wasn't wealthy."

I took out a cigarette and lit it. He winced. "Don't mind if I smoke, do you?" I asked. "After all, it's not real smoke and your real lungs are safely in Storage."

"It smells reall though."

I shrugged.

"So go on, tell me why I would have wanted to kill Gloria for her money."

"Because you're broke," I told him.

He laughed again. "Nonsense."

"You are and you know it. There was a big crash on the market recently. You got wiped out. And someone from Outside told you what happened. You knew your wife's money was safe. All her stocks were in Japanese companies. You also knew you'd inherit it if she died. So you went into her estate and knocked her off."

He stared at me for a long time before he said, "Are you telling me the truth? About the crash, I mean?"

"Nice act, bud, it's not going to wash with me," I told him as I dropped ash on his spotless patio floor.

"It's no act, believe me," he said with an exasperated sign. He turned and glanced again at the toy who was still staring worriedly at us through the window. "Look, how could I have possibly murdered Gloria in her estate? Her real body is safe in Storage. You can't kill anyone in an estate... unless they're a toy, that is."

"Oh, yes you can, bud," I told him sharply. "It's called 'psychic death', as you well know."

He gave me a blank look. "Psychic death? What's that?"

"Going to keep this innocent act up until the last, are you? Okay, we'll play it your way. 'Psychic death' is when you convince someone in an estate that you've killed them and they die for real. It's like that old thing about a guy asleep who dreams he's falling. If he doesn't wake up before he hits bottom then he never wakes up."

"But that's a fallacy," Millington protested. "An old wives' tale. There's no truth in it."

I shrugged. "Maybe not as far as the falling dreamer is concerned in the real world but in an estate it's no fallacy. Let's say I was to pull a gun and put a bullet through your right eye. The 'reality' of the experience would cause a psychic blow-back all the way to CenCom and the result would be a power surge down the wire to your brain in storage. Goodbye Ed Millington."

He frowned. "I've never heard about any of this before," he said. "Surely the Company would have warned us about such a danger."

I looked up at the pretty airship again and then back at him. "The Company rep explained all about the phenomenon and you know it, Ed. I'm getting a little tired of this, you know. Why won't you just come clean and admit it? Save us all a lot of time."

Anger flared across his face. "And as I keep telling you I don't know anything about this! I swear to you I didn't enter my wife's estate and murder her!"

I shook my head wearily. "Ed, it's all on record in CenCom. You got into her estate and took on the form of her dead father. She hated the guy, didn't she?"

"Yeah," he admitted.

"Yeah. So you went into her bedroom and strangled her."

"No!" he cried. "No, it's not true!"

"You want to argue with CenCom, bud? It's all there, in 3-D, for anyone interested, like the police, to replay to their heart's content."

"But I don't remember it!" he protested, his voice rising to a shout.

I raised my hands to him. "Okay, calm down. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, bud. Maybe you've erased it from your mind, either consciously or unconsciously, but believe me – Gloria was murdered and the Company has overwhelming evidence that you did it."

Millington kind of sagged inwards. He took a step towards the balcony and grabbed the top railing with one hand as if to keep himself from falling. I gave a silent crow of triumph. I'd finally got to him where it counted. The seeds of doubt were starting to sprout!

I was sure it was the mention of memory erasure that had done the trick. Old Millington had a history of blanking out unpleasant memories, even before he'd bought his Company plot. Gloria had told me he'd spent a fortune having specialized chunks of his memory removed through drug therapy.

Looked like Gloria's plan was going to work after all...

He was staring down into the gorge. I stepped closer to him. "You're finished, bud. You might beat the murder rap on a technicality – the legal program I consulted said you'd probably get away with manslaughter – but there's no way you can inherit Gloria's money now. And that means the Company is cancel-

ling your lease on your estate. As of now.”

He gave me a pained look, then he glanced at his toy again. “No,” he groaned.

“You been back in reality recently?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“Well, things are grimmer than ever. Too many people, rampant inflation, plagues, and what’s left of the ozone layer is held together with chewing gum. Not a nice place for someone who doesn’t have a bank-roll. Shit, a tube of sun-screen costs a fortune alone...”

He closed his eyes.

“How long have you been here, bud?”

“I...I don’t know. Hard to keep track of time in an estate.”

“Yeah. Well, I’ll tell you. In real time you’ve been here fifteen years. You were forty-four when you signed your Company contract. That makes you fifty-nine. Now I know the ageing process is slowed down in Storage and when they thaw you out you’ll probably only be the equivalent of fifty or so in real time. But fifty is *old* these days, bud. You’ll be on the junk heap even if you beat a prison sentence. Compulsory retirement is at forty-five, unless you’re in one of the special categories of profession, like politics. So you’ll end up in one of the government hostels eating gruel and watching soaps twenty-four hours a day. Sounds fun, doesn’t it bud?”

He groaned again.

“But there’s a way out,” I told him.

He turned quickly towards me. “There is?”

“The Company wants to avoid bad publicity. It would like to avoid a trial. If you did the decent thing the Company could cover up your wife’s death. And your fate too.”

“What’s the decent thing?” he asked suspiciously. He had good reason to be suspicious.

“That,” I said, and pointed over the balcony.

He looked puzzled for a bit then his mouth dropped open. “Jump? You want me to *jump*? Kill myself?”

“It would solve a lot of problems, including yours.”

“No, no...I couldn’t.” He shook his head vigorously.

“Think again. You really have no choice. You wouldn’t survive long back in reality. The shock of losing all this...” I gestured at the estate, and at the anxious-looking toy, “...would be too much for you. A man can only stand so much reality, Ed.”

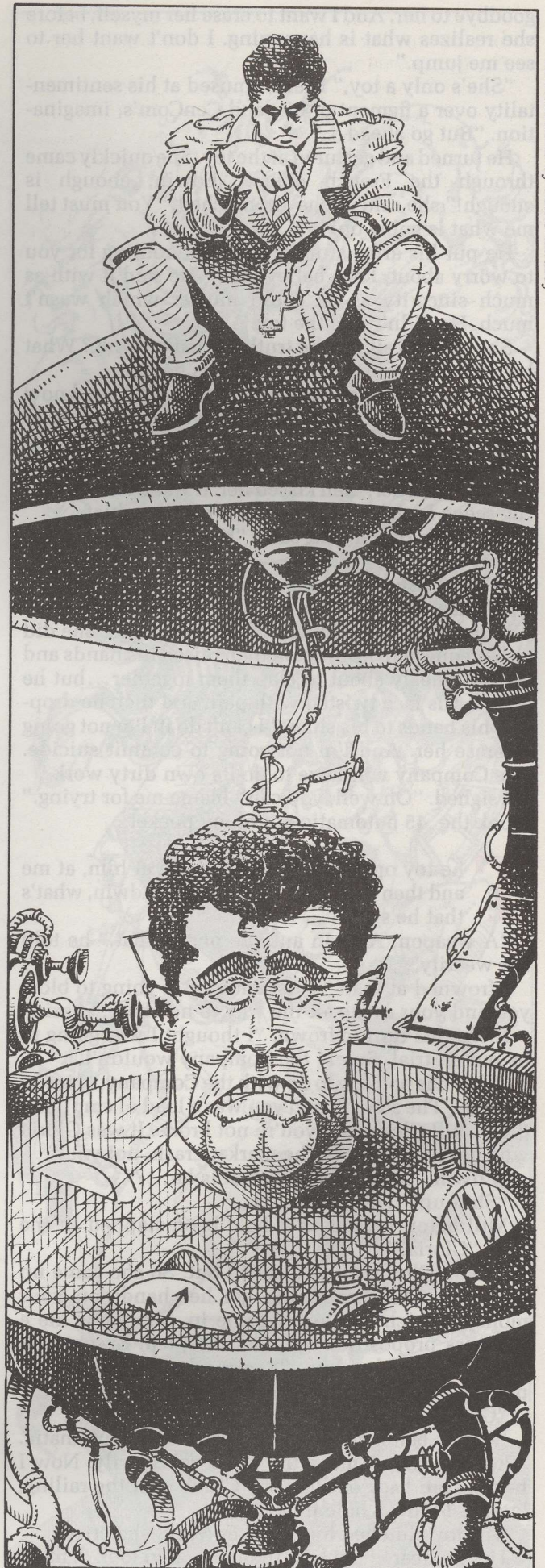
He looked down into the gorge again. I saw his knuckles go white as he tightened his grip on the railing. “No...” he said softly.

“Go on,” I urged him. “Get it over with. Either jump or be prepared to leave this place immediately. For good, bud.”

Long seconds, or whatever the equivalent units of time were in his estate, passed. Then he took a deep breath and looked at me. “What will happen to... her?” He inclined his head slightly in the direction of the toy.

“What do you think?” I said roughly. “Once the link between you and CenCom is broken she goes ‘poof’, along with this house, the scenery, your planet, the moon and the rest of your little universe in here. The Company doesn’t run a rest home for retired toys.”

I waited again while he thought again then he said, “All right, I’ll do as you say but first I want to say



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

goodbye to her. And I want to erase her myself, before she realizes what is happening. I don't want her to see me jump."

"She's only a toy," I said, amused at his sentimentality over a figment of his, and CenCom's, imagination. "But go ahead..."

He turned and gestured at the toy. She quickly came through the French doors. "Edwin, enough is enough!" she said as she approached. "You must tell me what is going on!"

He put his arms around her. "It's nothing for you to worry about, Kris, believe me." He said it with as much sincerity as he could muster which wasn't much. He didn't fool the toy.

She said, "Tell me the truth - what's wrong? What has this man told you? And *who* is he?"

He shook his head sadly and said, "Kris, you know I love you, don't you? That I'd never do anything to hurt you?"

"Yes..."

He hugged her, then kissed her. It was such a touching scene I wished I'd brought a handkerchief.

He let go of her and said, "Kris, close your eyes. Tight."

"What?" She gave him a puzzled look.

"Please. Trust me. Do as I say," he pleaded.

After giving me a quick, suspicious glance she did as he requested. Millington then raised his hands and was obviously about to clap them together...but he didn't. His face twisted with pain and then he dropped his hands to his sides. "I can't do it. I'm not going to erase her. And I'm not going to commit suicide. The Company will have to do its own dirty work."

I sighed. "Oh well, you can't blame me for trying." I took the .45 automatic out of my pocket.

The toy opened her eyes, looked at him, at me and then at the gun in my hand. "Edwin, what's that he's got?"

"A weapon. And an antique one at that," he told her wearily.

I frowned at that. "This 'antique' is going to blow you and your estate all the way to nowhere," I said.

It was his turn to frown. "I thought I was going to be put on trial. Surely the Company wouldn't..."

"This has nothing to do with the Company," I interrupted. "The story I spun you was a load of crap. You didn't kill Gloria and you're not broke. It was Gloria who got wiped out in the market crash, not you."

"Edwin," said the toy, "What is he...?"

"Shut up!" I told her.

Millington looked as if he'd been slapped in the face. "Gloria?"

"Yeah, Gloria. She's cleaned out. So she came up with this little scheme to get her hands on your money. Which is where I came in. She made me a business proposition which I accepted. Except that now..." I leered at him. "...our relationship has got personal as well. Your wife is a good lay, Ed."

"Gloria and you...?"

"You'd better believe it." I raised the automatic. "Pity you didn't make the jump voluntarily. Now I have to fall back on Plan #2. Climb over the railing, bud, or I blow a hole in you."

The toy clutched his arm. "Edwin!" she cried.

He was scared but he still managed to look defiant.

I had to admit the guy had balls. They may have been in Storage but they were still working. "How did Gloria ever meet you?" he asked. He was obviously stalling for time but what did I care? I had all the time in his world.

"Through her business program. Got an invitation to visit her in her estate to discuss doing a job for her. When I found out what the job was I said no at first but Gloria is a very persuasive woman."

"What is she giving you for this?"

"Apart from herself, half of your money. I'll be able to afford something I never expected to have - my own estate here in Paradise. Not bad for a small-time private investigator, eh?"

"I'm very impressed," he said drily.

I gestured with the gun. "Okay, talking time is over. Jump or I shoot...right now."

He gently pushed the toy away from him. "I'm not going to jump. You'll have to shoot me."

"No problem," I told him cheerfully. I was just about to squeeze the trigger when something came between us. A woman. Simultaneously, both Millington and I cried: "Gloria!"

She turned to me. "Lower your gun. I'll handle this."

Confused, I obeyed her. "What are you doing here? You're screwing things up."

She ignored me and moved closer to the toy who was looking more baffled than ever. Gloria gave an approving nod as she studied the toy. "A nice piece of work, Edwin," she told Millington. "Your taste is improving."

"Edwin," cried the toy, "Who is this woman?"

He went to the toy and put his arm around her. "Someone I thought I knew but I guess I didn't after all," he said, glaring at Gloria.

Gloria laughed. "If you could see your face!"

"Gloria, why have you changed the plan?" I demanded. But she ignored me again. I started to get angry. Millington, on the other hand, was now looking puzzled. Then his face suddenly cleared and, amazingly, he laughed too. I exchanged a confused glance with the toy. When Millington's laughter died down he said, "The date...it must be the 23rd of September in the real world..."

"What's the bloody date got to do with anything?" I snarled.

"Wait," he said and held up a hand. Then he turned to the toy. "Kris, you're feeling sleepy." Her eyes immediately closed and she swayed on her feet. "Go to bed and sleep. When you wake up you'll remember none of this," he continued. The toy walked unsteadily to the French windows and disappeared inside. Millington turned back to me, grinning. Gloria was grinning too. "The date has everything to do with what's been going on," he told me. "You see, the 23rd of September is our wedding anniversary and once upon a time it was a tradition of Gloria's to play practical jokes on me on that date. Began one year when I forgot our anniversary completely."

"I decided to revive the custom. For fun," said Gloria to him. "Besides, it gave me an excuse to pay you a visit. It's been a long time."

It was slowly sinking in and the more it sank the angrier I got. "You mean to say all this was just a bloody hoax?"

Gloria nodded at me, the same infuriating grin on her face.

"But all those hours we spent together planning this... all those *other* hours we spent together! All that just so you could pull a joke on your husband? I don't believe it!"

"It's true, I'm afraid," said Gloria.

I waved the gun at her. "Well, whatever your reasons I still want the price we agreed upon. Enough money to buy into Paradise Now."

"Don't worry, Tony, you won't be leaving here," she assured me.

Millington started to laugh again. "I should have caught on from the start..." he said wheezingly. "The way he talked, all that 'bud' stuff. Archaic! I should have remembered your addiction to those old private eye stories. And now I even recognize him. You based him on that lover of your's, that young Italian toy boy, Tony..."

"Tony Assante," said Gloria, nodding.

"My name's not Tony!" I cried.

"What is it then?" Gloria asked me.

"It's... it's..." I realized I couldn't remember my name.

"You're Tony," Gloria said firmly. "Tony the toy boy."

I stared at her a long time. "No," I said softly. I refused to believe it. "I have memories. I have a life, back there in the real world..."

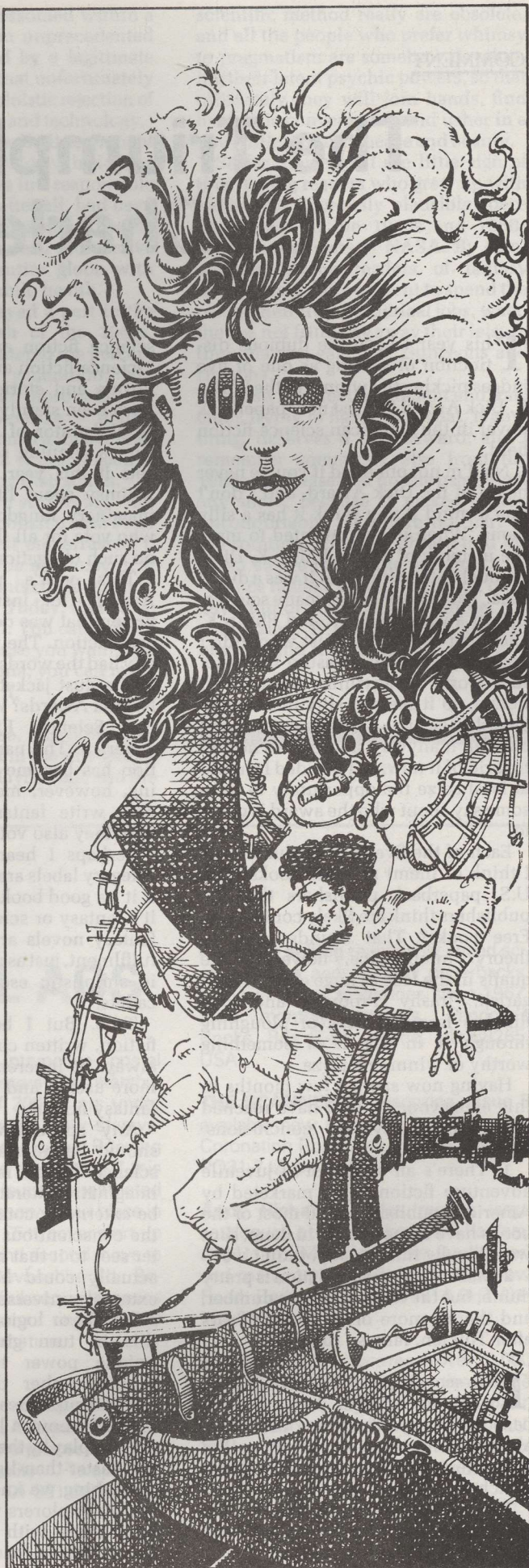
"All fake," said Gloria. "Sketched by me and filled in by CenCom. You were created in my estate just a few days ago in real time. A tasty diversion, I admit, but just a temporary one..."

I aimed the gun at her. "Fuck you, lady," I said and pulled the trigger. A stick popped out of the muzzle and a small flag unfurled from it. On the flag was the word "BANG!" I stared at it. Millington started laughing again. Hysterically.

I looked at Gloria. "I'm real," I told her. "I have feelings. Damn you, I can *think*!"

"Then stop thinking, Tony," said Gloria and clapped her hands.

John Brosnan is an Australian who lives in England. His previous contribution to IZ was "The One and Only Tale from the White Horse" (issue 15). He is the author of many books (some of which he'd probably rather not own up to), and his first serious sf novel, *The Sky Lords*, was published by Gollancz in 1988. Brosnan is known as a film critic, and he also writes frequent book reviews for the London magazine *Time Out*.



The Triumph of Whimsy

Charles Platt

This year I have the dubious distinction of serving as one of five judges picking the winner of the Philip K. Dick Award for best new paperback novel in the American science-fiction field.

No, I'm not offended if you've never heard of the Dick Award, and I don't much mind if you think it has a silly name. When it was invented to mark the memory of author Philip K. Dick, I thought at the time that it was a dumb idea. There were far too many science-fiction awards already, and Philip K. Dick had been a relativist who didn't believe you could measure the absolute worth of anything, least of all fiction, so it seemed silly to name an award after him. But they went ahead and did it anyway, and there's no getting rid of it now, so I decided I should at least seize the opportunity to have some say about who the award is given to.

Each of the five Dick Evaluators (as I think of them) receives books from U.S. paperback publishers that the publishers think are likely contenders. Free books? That sounds nice, in theory. In practice, however, one quails in the face of huge effluxions of garish, trashy Product, and one flinches from the task of ploughing through it in search of something worthy of winning a prize.

Having now spent a few months in this endeavour, I find I have reached two fairly obvious conclusions. Namely:

1. There's an awful lot of juvenile adventure fiction being marketed by American publishers, and most of the books have no new ideas in them. (But we all knew this already, didn't we?)

2. Most of the science fiction is pretty dumb, but the fantasy is even dumber, and there's more of it. Twenty years after Tolkien, fantasy rules O.K.

This second point is the one that I want to address here, mainly because I know it applies in Britain almost as much as in America. (We have Piers Anthony; you have Terry Pratchett.)

To begin with fundamentals: People still talk about the "science-fiction field," but the fact is, most of it isn't

science fiction any more, and most "science-fiction awards" go to fantasy novels and stories. We Dick judges have been sternly admonished by the administrator of the award to make sure a genuine science-fiction novel gets it this year, not some piece of whimsy about little creatures in an imaginary kingdom. But the people who vote for all the other awards feel no such obligation.

This year's prestigious Nebula Awards, for instance, all went to fiction that was demonstrably not science fiction. The winning novel actually had the words "A Fantasy" printed on its dust jacket. Who votes for the Nebula Awards? Why, the members of the Science Fiction Writers of America. The name of this organization has become somewhat misleading, however; most of the members now write fantasy, which explains why they also vote for it.

Perhaps I hear someone say that category labels are irrelevant. After all, if it's a good book, who cares whether it's fantasy or science fiction? Not all fantasy novels are lightweight wish-fulfilment, just as not all science fiction is simplistic escapism about space cadets.

True. But I believe that science fiction, written conscientiously, must always be inherently more important, more useful, and more powerful than fantasy fiction.

Any speculative novel can and should be internally consistent, but science fiction is the only kind of imaginative literature that can claim to be externally consistent, too. That is, the conscientious science-fiction writer sees to it that his imaginary events actually *could happen* in the real, external universe without violating scientific or logical plausibility. And this in turn gives science fiction unique power to model alternate futures, rather than merely create escapist pipe dreams.

Yes, I know, a lot of science fiction doesn't play by the rules and never did. Its faster-than-light drives violate everything we know about relativity, and its explorers wander across alien landscapes with scant concern for extraterrestrial bacteria.

But even a trashy science-fiction novel pays lip service, at least, to the spirit of science and the discipline of plausible speculation. By contrast, fantasy fiction almost invariably rejects any hint of science, simply because the fantasy world can't work if the author admits that there is really only one kind of objective truth: the kind that results from deductive reasoning based on experimental data from repeatable observations.

So, fantasy rejects science. Is this such a crime? In fact, I believe it is.

We can agree, perhaps, that although many modern problems have been created by technology, we need more technology in order to solve them. In short, there's no way to undo "progress" and force everyone to go back to a low-tech primitivism, living off the land. Therefore, literature that encourages us to think in a rational way about inventing the future is more valuable, right now, than fiction that says "What, me worry?" and lures us away to a world where magic, rather than logic, is how we make everything turn out right in the end. And since there is a shortage of science students in the West, we might even agree that fiction which encourages illogical, whimsical wish-fulfilment among young readers is a pernicious influence.

In the 1980s the United States has had a president who believes in astrology, the British government has slashed expenditure on pure research, and the space programs of both nations are dormant and/or malfunctioning. These conditions prevail for the same reason that fantasy novels are popular: there's not much interest, these days, in tackling problems in technology. We'd rather sit back and watch escapist movies on our VCRs imported from Japan.

This is why I feel that the decline of rigorous science fiction, and the ascendance of fantasy, are more than a literary matter. They are symptomatic of our reluctance to deal with urgent issues.

It's worth noting that the trend toward fantasy began just twenty years ago. Prior to that, it simply did not exist as a category of modern mass-market fiction. There were some classic

Arthurian legends, and some delightful pieces of make-believe on the level of *The Wind in the Willows*, but this material was mostly written for young children. There certainly were no authors busily cranking out trilogies, for adults, about Other Realms where unicorns and wizards could coexist in some absurd medieval utopia.

Two books facilitated the decline of rationality and the rise of fantasy. One was *Lord of the Rings* and the other was *Conan the Barbarian*. Since then, it's mainly been a process of imitation.

But why should a fairy tale by a clapped-out British academic, and swash-buckling yarns of blood lust by an American hermit with a mother fixation, suddenly captivate the hearts and minds of readers on both sides of the Atlantic?

Because of the social context. The late 1960s was a time of unparalleled credulity. Teenage youth was in ascendancy, and was ready to believe just about anything. Astrology, tarot, numerology, macrobiotic food, mantras, reincarnation, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, Rolfing – we were inundated with an incredible shitload of half-baked twaddle, of which significant residues persist to this day.

Of course, most of the fads existed on a smaller scale prior to the 1960s. But to someone who lived through that period, it was extremely clear that faith

in pseudoscience blossomed within a few short years to an unprecedented degree, accompanied by a legitimate concern for ecology that unfortunately seemed to entail simplistic rejection of most forms of science and technology.

To some extent this disillusionment with science was fuelled by the failure of scientists to behave in a responsible fashion. The 1950s, after all, had been a period in which atmospheric testing of nuclear devices spread radioactive fallout across the entire globe with scant concern for public health.

But drugs also played a part in the anti-science backlash of the 1960s. Acid, in particular, altered the perceptions of an entire generation. Not everyone tried it, but those who did were quick to popularize – hence, legitimize – the notion of a higher reality, a mystic realm in which objective logic was an irritating distraction.

I do believe we are still living with the legacy of those foolish times. Prior to the 1960s, you felt embarrassed if you took astrology too seriously or if you believed that plants could respond to human emotions. Today, there's no shame attached at all. You can believe just about any nonsense you want, and if you live in California, you can make a good living out of it.

There is, of course, one other possibility. Maybe I'm the one whose faith is misplaced. Maybe logic and the

scientific method really are obsolete, and all the people who prefer whimsy to pragmatism are somehow developing their latent psychic powers, so that ultimately they will join hands, find harmonic convergence, and usher in a new millennium of peace and beauty.

So far, however, I see little sign of this. Young readers who grew up with Heinlein's rigorously plausible space adventures in the 1940s and 1950s became engineers at NASA. By comparison, young readers of fantasy novels seem quite content to spend the rest of their lives in clerical jobs, when they're not frittering away their leisure time playing games of Dungeons and Dragons.

So I sit here feeling ancient and irascible, trying to figure out what, if anything, deserves a Dick Award, and I remember something else from the 1960s – a phrase that no one uses much any more, because it makes us too uncomfortable. "If you're not part of the solution," this old phrase told us, "then you're part of the problem."

Since fantasy literature doesn't offer any kind of solution to anything, the conclusion, it seems to me, is both obvious and inescapable.

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Yoshio Aramaki

Soft Clocks

"When I look at the stars in the sky, they appear so small. Either I am growing larger or the universe is shrinking – or both." – Salvador Dali

It was noon on Mars. The party was already in full swing under blinding equatorial sunshine. The theme was "Blackout in Daylight." Our host was DALI, surrealist, paranoiac-critic, millionaire, technophobe. His estate covered an area of the Lunae Planum about the size of Texas.

Gilbert, the producer of the affair, had left orders that all guests were to wear costumes taken from the paintings of the original Salvador Dali. Even I could not get out of it. Nearly naked receptionists, their faces made up into masks, took away the business suit I'd worn from Earth and dressed me in a plastic costume with golden wings, taken from the "View of Port Lligat with Guardian Angels and Fishermen."

I wandered out into the grounds, dazzled by the landscape. A pond of mercury and mirrors flowed at unsettling angles. A dimensionless black mountain reflected the Spanish seaside village, Port Lligat, where Dali had spent so many years. Erotically shaped pavilions stretched to impossible horizons.

"This is indeed surreal, is it not?" said a man's voice behind me. I turned around. The man's hair stood straight up, the Dalist trademark. His moustache was waxed and curled at the ends. He held a glass of Martian blue mescal, clearly not his first. "Oh, excuse me. What are you supposed to be? A donkey?"

"I'm sorry?" I said.

The man's upper body weaved from side to side, though his feet were planted solidly in the red sand. "No, wait, I see it now, you're a tiger..."

Not just the mescal, I thought. The hallucinations were typical of Martian Disease, a form of low-grade encephalitis. According to the literature, the victim's interpretations of an object shifted without the perception itself changing. The disease was responsible for an abnormally high level of neuronal activity and some even claimed it gave the victims telekinetic powers. The last was of course not verified.

I couldn't imagine what I must have looked like to him. He seemed to find it amusing enough.

"I'm from Tokyo," I said. "I am – or was – Vivi's analyst. You sent me a letter –"

"Ah, yes, doctor. Welcome. I'm the famous DALI OF MARS. How are you enjoying the party? Vivi should be with us soon."

"Good, that's good," I said. I'd known that coming here would mean seeing Vivi again. Now I found my-

self afraid of the idea.

"Gilbert should be here somewhere. He produced all this. You'll want to meet him."

"I don't remember him being on the list," I said. "Is he one of the...uh, candidates?"

"Ah, the list. So you're wanting to start work already, eh?" DALI was distracted by a young woman in a death's head mask and a tight suit cut away to reveal her breasts and buttocks. His eyes bulged with a look of insatiable greed.

"Yes," I said. "I'd like to get started as soon as possible. It would be much easier if I could get back my normal clothes..."

"Yes, of course," DALI said. "The 'candidates,' as you put it, should be in the bar." He pointed toward a building shaped like a snail's shell lying on its side.

"Thank you," I said, but DALI was already walking toward the woman with the death's head.

Dressed like a normal person again, I made my way to the bar. Chairs were set up along the wide spiralling aisle, and leather bags full of mescal hung from the curved ceiling. Several of the guests were already drunk. As DALI would have put it, they looked like "snail meat marinated in good champagne."

I found a seat in a bulge of the wall, close enough to hear the conversation. As an outsider, it sounded to me like a herd of geese being stampeded by a pig. Highly symbolic words and phrases shot out of their mouths, one after another. There was a certain harmony to it, but it didn't last. The loudest of the voices belonged to Pinkerton, the pig among the geese.

His name and that of Professor Isherwood, the Rheologist, were the first two on DALI's list.

"No, no, no," he shouted. He was dressed as the artist's self-portrait, in smock and beret. "You're all wrong. The hatred of machines goes all the way back to my ancestor, Salvador Dali. His is the true paranoiac-critical view of technology. It's my perfect understanding of this that Vivi so admires. That's why the odds all show that I'm going to be picked for her husband. The odds are 92.4 percent, in fact, calculated objectively."

"Fool," said Isherwood. He sat across the table from Pinkerton, wearing a corduroy jacket over a sweater. "Loudmouthed fool."

"What?" Pinkerton came out of his chair, leaning across the table with both hands spread wide. "You're nothing but a monkey, a simpering toady to technology. You haven't got a prayer. Our engagement will

be announced any day. Vivi's husband will be Pinkerton, genius painter of Mars, new incarnation of the first, the original, Salvador Dali!"

Pinkerton settled back in his chair, checking his hair in a hand-mirror. Isherwood stared at him, his hands shaking. There was a glass of mescal in one of them and it shattered with a transparent sound. Blood streamed onto the tablecloth.

"Ah," Pinkerton said. "This is true beauty. I think I'll show this tablecloth in my next exhibition."

The other two at the table, Boccaccio the barber and Martin, the movie actor, laughed without much conviction. Pinkerton seemed serious. "I think I'll call it, 'Jealous Donkey, with his Tail Caught in his Horse-shoe, Insults an Angel'."

"This is ludicrous," Isherwood said. He got up, knocking his chair over, and started out.

"Sir?" I said. I offered him my handkerchief.

"Thank you," he said. He wrapped the handkerchief over his cut and glanced back at Pinkerton. "The man is insane."

"Martian sickness," I said. "Maybe he's not in control of himself. Will you sit down?"

Isherwood nodded and sat across from me. "I've never seen you before," he said. "Are you from Earth?" When I nodded, he said, "You talk like a psychiatrist."

"A marriage counsellor, right now," I said. "I was trained in psychiatry. But there aren't many openings these days. Not on Earth, anyway."

"My name is Isherwood."

"I know," I said. "I've read your articles on the rheoprotein."

Isherwood raised one eyebrow, but didn't take the bait. "You're here as a tourist?"

"I'm studying Martian disease," I said. It was the cover story DALI had instructed me to use. "I want to see if there's any truth to this mind-over-matter business."

"Odd work for a marriage counsellor," Isherwood said. "I think maybe you're here to test the various suitors for Vivi's hand. What do you say to that?"

I looked down. My training was in psychiatry, not espionage. I didn't know how to go about deceiving him.

"Good," Isherwood said. "So I'm to be the first. Tell me, what are my chances?"

"I couldn't tell you yet. There have to be tests and interviews, I have to compare your test data with Vivi's..."

"You already have Vivi's data then?"

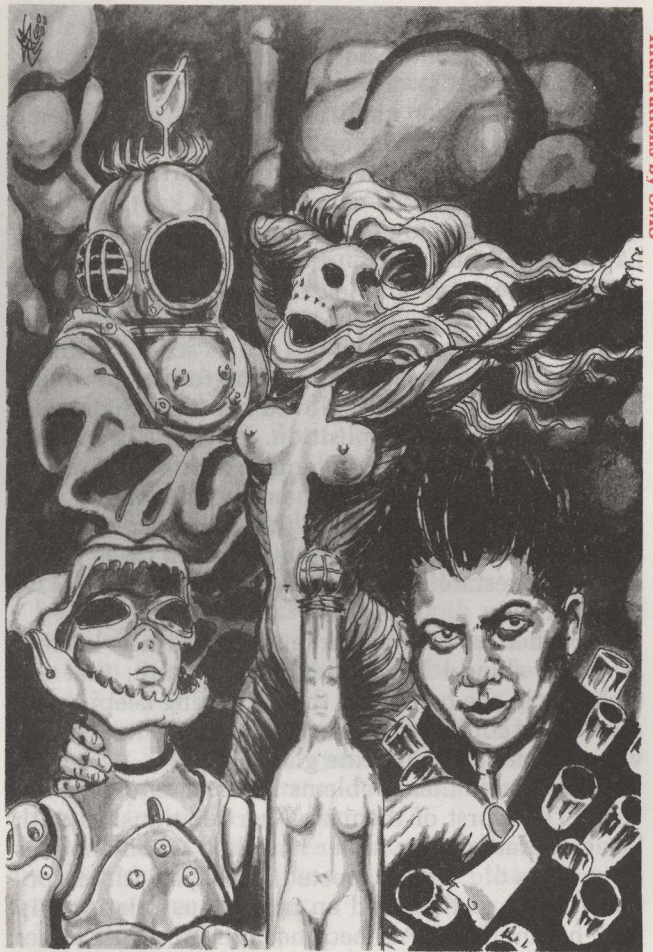
One thing was already clear. Isherwood was in love with Vivi. I only had to speak her name to arouse his jealousy.

"I treated Vivi personally while she was studying on Earth," I said.

"Personally?"

"Needless to say, we were just doctor and patient, nothing more." His stare cut into me. I found myself rushing to explain. "She suffered from acute technophobia. It's different on Earth than it is here. There are machines everywhere. You can't get away from them. Computers and televisions and video cameras in every room. It's bad enough for an ordinary person coming from Mars, but with Vivi's special —"

Isherwood cut me off. "That's true. She has a very delicate nervous system. It was a mistake to send her



Illustrations by SMS

to Earth in the first place."

"But your work is technological. Don't you think it would be a mistake for the two of you to marry?"

"Well, I don't think so, of course. I'll be with her no matter what happens."

"But you have powerful enemies. And are you sure she cares for you? You're old enough to be her father."

"I don't know," Isherwood said sadly. "My Beatrice's mind is more mysterious to me than the construction of Phobos."

"So she hasn't refused you completely, then."

He looked theatrically at the curved ceiling. "No, she only smiles like the Mona Lisa." I wondered if he meant Da Vinci's or Dali's.

We moved to his office so we could have privacy for the formal tests. I gave him TAT, Improved Rorschach, Super Association Test, Differential Colour Test, Abnormal Sentence Completion, and everything went well. There's often a problem with defensiveness in this sort of testing, but Isherwood was open and friendly, often showing a childlike innocence.

I'd almost told him about Vivi in the bar, but he'd interrupted me. Now, the longer I put it off, the harder it was to bring the subject up again.

I'd found out about it during her analysis in Tokyo, three years before. It was early summer when she first came to my office. I could see crystalline sunlight through the green leaves outside my window. By the end of June the heat and monoxide would turn everything to grey and brown.

Vivi was a student at the art college near my office.

She was a referral from the local hospital, where she'd been taken after she tried to disembowel herself with an ancient short sword.

When I saw her medical records things became clearer. The plane bringing her to Tokyo had crashed, and only the replacement of her heart, lungs, and stomach with artificial constructs had kept her alive. Knowing her technophobic background, the surgeons had kept the information from her. But her subconscious had evidently at least suspected the truth.

She was only eighteen, beautiful as a butterfly. I was twenty-seven, just out of medical school, without even a nurse or a secretary, trying to make a living from referrals. I suppose I loved her immediately. Of course, I realized my position. It would have been improper for me to take advantage of our relationship as doctor and patient. More than that, though, I simply didn't have any confidence that I could make Vivi happy. A conservative attitude, but then I was young and hadn't established myself, and my future was far from certain.

I saw her for over a year, and helped her, I think. Maybe I should have told her the truth, that the technology she hated was the only thing keeping her alive. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. Her feelings were too delicate, like fine glasswork.

There were other problems I was able to help her with. The worst of them was her relationship with her grandfather. Her father had died when she was three years old. She suspected, perhaps with reason, that DALI had then had an incestuous relationship with her mother. DALI became both substitute father and rival for her mother's love. I had persuaded her to confront some of these Oedipal conflicts, and begin to resolve them.

When she left to go back to Mars I thought I would never see her again. And then the letter arrived from DALI. Vivi was twenty-one now, old enough for marriage, but she rejected every man who even broached the subject. DALI had decided that she was to marry and I was to choose from his list of candidates. The thought of selecting her husband was distasteful to me, but it would mean seeing Vivi again. I accepted.

And so far, the first candidate was doing well. There was only one serious problem. Vivi was still technophobic, and Isherwood's occupation as rheologist naturally involved machines. I tried to delicately express my concerns, but Isherwood ignored me, instead indulging in still more poetry.

"I'm the one that really loves her. Pinkerton is only thinking of DALI's fortune. A square centimetre of any of his paintings is worth more than a hundred square feet in Manhattan. I'm different. Vivi has taught me the meaning of life. She is a heliotrope, blooming in the red desert of Mars."

"But you must see that Pinkerton is the more obvious choice. He is younger and, forgive me, better looking. As an artist, his career would not be so threatening to her. And he seems very confident of his appeal..."

"So you think so, too? But there are things I can offer her. Wonderful toys. Delights for the imagination. Just look."

He reached into a desk drawer and took out a soft clock. It was the size of a dessert plate and it hung

limply over his hand. He set it on the edge of the desk and the rim of the clock bent and drooped toward the floor.

"That's amazing," I said. I touched it with one finger and it gave slightly. The second hand moved continuously around the dial, following the deformations of the clock. "Just like in Dali's 'Persistence of Memory'."

"Made entirely of rheoprotein," Isherwood said. "Accurate to within a few milliseconds, and calibrated for the slightly shorter Martian hour. It must be kept reasonably cool, or it will melt, just like chocolate."

"This seems impossible," I said.

"It would be, with an inorganic mechanism. The problem is that the gears, for example, must resist other gears, and yet be flexible under pressure from gravity, or an external touch. The protein resembles a universal joint, only on a molecular level. Plus there is an information-carrying component, like RNA, that allows it to recognize other rheoproteins and respond appropriately to them."

"A very complicated toy," I said.

"It's not just a toy," Isherwood said. "It could bring an industrial revolution on Earth. Maybe you've seen some reference to it — they're calling it 'Flabby Engineering.' Some journalist's idea of a joke, I imagine. Anyway. An internal combustion engine could be produced in virtually any shape — long and thin, like a broomstick, or twisted, like a spiral. Not to mention cybernetics. Energy or movement can be passed on — or reacted to — with the kind of smoothness you see in living tissue."

"I even find it interesting from a psychiatric standpoint. The contrast between the hardness of machines and the softness of human beings..."

Isherwood didn't seem to be listening. "In factories this kind of material could contain, or even harness, the force of accidental explosions. Cars and planes would be infinitely safer." The mention of aeroplanes made me think of Vivi. "Submarines could be built to mimic the swimming of dolphins. With flexible machine parts all these six-decimal-point tolerances would become meaningless."

He held up his hands. "The possibilities are... well, beyond anything we could imagine."

For the rest of that day and all of the next I interviewed the remaining candidates. Boccaccio had little intelligence and no imagination. Martin, the actor, was driven by vanity and greed. Conrad, a well-known athlete, revealed a basic hostility toward women.

I interviewed Pinkerton late on the second day. As with all the others, I approached him in conversation and only later resorted to formal testing. He seemed eager to make a good impression once he found out what I was really up to. But under the relentless light of the personality tests he showed himself to be nothing but a dreamer and a braggart, completely self-obsessed. By the end of our session he was screaming and cursing me.

Of all of them only Isherwood was stable and sincere enough to be worthy of Vivi. His paternal nature would go well with her delicate personality and sensibilities. The only problem was Vivi's technophobia. If she married Isherwood it might very well send her over the edge.

The party lasted two days. The last guests were gone by the time I finished with Pinkerton. The butler showed him to the door and I was alone in DALI's huge cathedral of a house.

I had no sooner showered and changed than the butler came to my room with an invitation. "My master wishes you to join him for dinner, if that would be convenient."

"Of course," I said.

I followed him down to the lobby. Through a bronze door I could see a hallway that seemed to curve upward and over itself in defiance of gravity. When I looked closer I saw it was only an illusion.

The mansion was full of them. There were so many false rooms and staircases and corridors that the false parts seemed to put pressure on the real things, distorting them into nightmare shapes.

The dining room was so large it seemed a deliberate insult to rationality. Black and white chequered tiles receded to infinity in all directions.

"Welcome," DALI said, "please sit down." He was at the head of the long, narrow table. His favourite crutch leaned against the side of his red velvet armchair. But I hardly noticed him. At the far end of the table sat his granddaughter, Vivi.

She was ethereally beautiful. Her golden hair was cut within a few centimetres of her head. Her cheeks were sunken, her eyes hollow, and the muscles of her neck stood out like marble ornaments. It was obvious to anyone that she was critically anorexic. I smiled at her and she smiled back with what seemed to be great pleasure.

The first chair I touched collapsed and then sprang back into shape. It was clearly not meant to support my weight.

DALI smiled. "One of Mr Gilbert's designs. They are part of his 'Revenge Against the Machine Age' series. You see, if the function of a tool is removed, you have Art. Very witty, don't you think?"

"Very," I said, though the humour escaped me.

I found a chair that would support my weight and the dinner began.

DALI explained that shellfish had long been the object of his family's gluttony. "The bones, you see, are the objectivity of the animal. The flesh is madness. We carry our objectivity inside us and wear our madness for all the world to see. But the shellfish, the shellfish is an enigma. Objective outside, mad within."

He then proceeded to eat an astounding quantity of oysters, mussels, lobsters, crab, and conch. Unlike the classic bulimic he did not pause to purge himself, but kept on eating with undiminished appetite.

Vivi, meanwhile, did not even taste the small portion she had been served. "Grandpa won't listen to me," she said, her voice glistening like olive oil. "Please, doctor, won't you speak in your own behalf?"

I smiled uneasily, unsure what she was asking.

"This child wants everything," DALI said, breaking through the shell of a monstrous shrimp and attacking the soft, buttery meat inside. "I have always given her whatever she wanted." He looked at me meaningfully.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but —"

"No!" Vivi said. "Doctor, tell him that I only want to be with you! I want you to take me back to Tokyo with you!"

I was completely at a loss. It was natural for a girl

like Vivi to become infatuated with her doctor during treatment. It is a common hazard of psychoanalysis. But such feelings are shallow and temporary. Vivi needed a strong father figure, someone to love her faithfully and protect her. Someone like Professor Isherwood.

"Vivi, I —"

DALI grabbed his crutch and stood up. "Vivi! You will go to your room! Immediately, do you hear me?" He turned to me. "Please try to make her understand, doctor."

"No," Vivi said, "no, no, no!" She lunged for a table knife and brought it up to stab herself in the chest. I saw that I could not reach her in time and snatched away DALI's crutch. With the crutch I knocked the knife from Vivi's hands. She sank back into her chair, weeping.

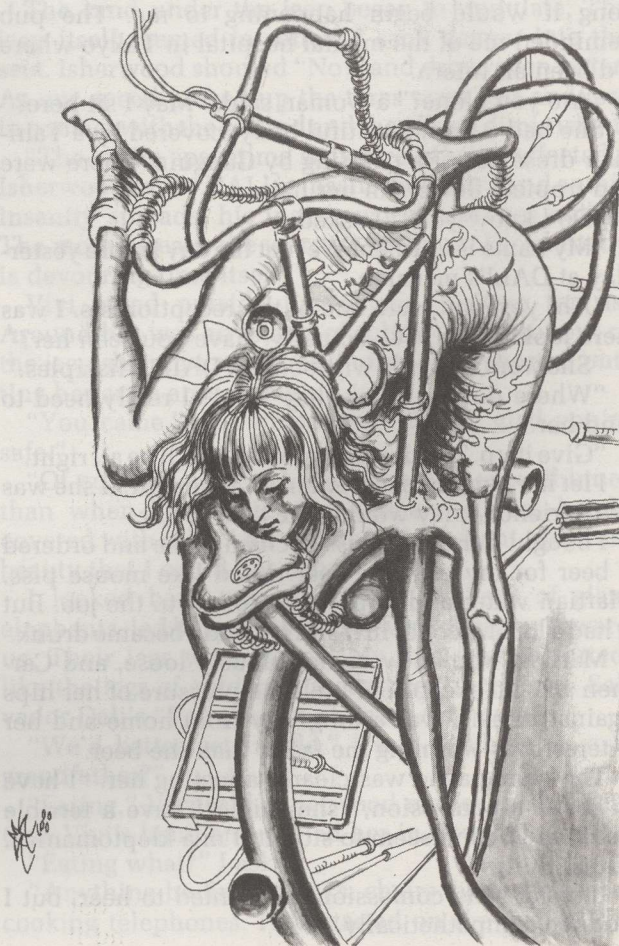
I looked back at DALI. It was as if I had taken his sanity when I took the crutch away from him. "Give me that!" he shouted, and tore it from my hands.

I already knew the crutch was both physical and psychological. It appeared in many of Salvador Dali's paintings. It was the symbolic tool he needed to support his soft world.

DALI and Vivi stared at each other across the table. The anger and jealousy sparked in the air between them. Vivi recovered first and ran from the room, covering her face with both hands.

We all have our crutches, I thought. Sometimes they are powerful weapons and sometimes they become dangerous dependencies.

The dinner was over.



I found the butler and asked him where Vivi had gone. He said she had just taken her car into town. "Probably to the Narcissus. It's a pub where the artists all go." He gave me directions and the key to one of DALI's cars.

The pub smelled of tobacco, marijuana, mescal, amyl nitrate, beta-carboline. The Chiriconians meditated silently in the centre of the room. A naked couple, tattooed with birds and snakes, wandered around until they finally found two seats by themselves. Two contending groups of monochromists formed living sculptures, the blues horizontal in a dark corner, the reds vertical under a bright light. The futurists walked rapidly around the edges of the room, talking in a truncated language which I could not understand. A pop-artist, wrapped in dirty bandages like a mummy, smelled of rotten sausage.

A Fauvist woman, dressed as Matisse's "Lady in Blue," approached me. "Buy a girl a drink?" she said. I nodded and signalled to the waitress. "So what group are you?" she asked.

"I am as you see me."

"That's what I was afraid of. Non-artist. What a drag. Too practical, no dreams." She drained her absinthe in a single swallow. "Oh," she said. "Here comes my friend." I was a little relieved when she left me for the old man, who moved with robotic stiffness. A cubist, apparently. I had heard the rumour that Fauvists were obsessed with wolves. Just as the thought came in to my head the woman in the blue dress turned back to me and smiled, showing cosmetically implanted fangs.

I looked away. Martian disease, I thought. Nearly everyone was affected to some degree. If I stayed too long it would begin happening to me. The pub reminded me of the mental hospital in Tokyo where I'd been an intern.

"Are you alone?" a woman said. "May I sit here?"

She had a firm, beautiful body, covered by a Tahitian dress out of a painting by Gauguin. There were red tropical flowers in her hair.

"Do I know you?" I asked.

"My name is Carmen. We met the day before yesterday at DALI's mansion."

"Ah, yes, you were one of the receptionists. I was here looking for Vivi, actually. Have you seen her?"

"She went for a ride with some of DALI's disciples."

"Where do you think they went? I really need to find her."

"Give it up. The desert is too big. She'll be all right."

I let her convince me. After all, I thought, if she was with friends, they would take care of her.

I bought Carmen a glass of champagne and ordered a beer for myself. The beer tasted like mouse piss. Martian water and hops were not up to the job. But it had a lot of alcohol in it and I quickly became drunk.

Martian women were notoriously loose, and Carmen was no exception. I felt the pressure of her hips against mine. I was a long way from home and her interest was warming me faster than the beer.

The champagne was clearly affecting her. "I have to make a confession," she said. "I have a terrible habit and I can't seem to stop it. I'm a kleptomaniac. I steal things."

It wasn't the confession I'd wanted to hear, but I nodded sympathetically.

"The guilt is really terrible," she said. "I'm suffering so much pain from it. Please, spank me, doctor." She started to cry.

No one seemed to care except a man at the next table, who said, "Why don't you just go ahead and hit her? That's what she wants." He was wearing a bowler and waistcoat and a short beard. He tipped the hat to Carmen. "Hey, Carmen, did you steal anything worth money this time?"

"You cheap old bastard!" Carmen shouted.

"Bitch!"

The man yanked her away from me and then both of them fell onto the floor. The man straddled her waist, backwards, lifted her dress, and began to spank her shapely buttocks. I got up to pull him away and felt a hand on my arm. It was the Lady in Blue. "That's Carmen's pimp," she said. "You'd do better to stay out of it."

The pimp opened her purse and felt inside it. "This bitch, she steals the most worthless shit. What the hell is this?" The thing he pulled out hung down through his fingers like chewing gum.

It was one of Isherwood's soft clocks.

"You thief!" Carmen shouted. Without warning she threw the clock into her mouth, chewed it and swallowed it.

I was not, it seemed, going to be spending the night with Carmen. But she had given me an idea. I ran to the phone and called Professor Isherwood.

The next morning I woke up with a pounding head and lurching stomach. I hadn't realized the after-effects of Martian beer would be so devastating. I took a hot shower and lurched downstairs just in time for breakfast. DALI was in an extremely good mood. He had already begun eating.

"Why don't you try one?" he said.

When I saw what was on the plate he offered, I panicked. I had meant Isherwood to give the soft clocks to Vivi to eat. DALI must have taken them from her.

I had no choice. I picked out a small pocket watch and ate it. It was cool and crisp, like an English wheat biscuit.

"I like to eat a full meal in the morning," DALI said as the cook brought in a sizzling alarm clock on a tray. The clock was deformed and spread out to the edge of the plate, but was still keeping time.

DALI stabbed it with a fork as if to murder it, and cut it into bite-sized pieces. His face was radiant with joy. Brown sauce dripped from his mouth and stained his napkin. "Doctor, this is wonderful."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "Vivi would like to try one."

"I don't want any," Vivi said.

"Please, Vivi," I begged her. "It's a gift from Professor Isherwood. He asked especially that you try it."

"No," she said. "I have no appetite. I don't want any, I tell you!"

My idea had been to warm her to the idea of technology with the soft clocks. They were so friendly and harmless looking. I had hoped she might use them to begin to overcome her technophobia. But I hadn't counted on the intensity of her anorexia.

At lunch and dinner she again refused to eat. Her loathing for the soft clocks was so intense that I was afraid she might attempt suicide with her fork. Her

personal physician was forced to give her an intravenous injection of protein simply to keep her alive.

The next day I returned to Earth. I had one last plan. Isherwood had given me copies of all his notes and a range of samples of the rheoprotein, and I took them to Sony's research and development laboratory. If Vivi's mechanical organs could be replaced with organs made of the rheoprotein, so close to living tissue, her subconscious self-hatred might be brought under control. Her gratitude to Isherwood would seal their marriage.

I had to hurry. If Vivi's anorexia continued to get worse she would even refuse the injections, and then she would surely die.

The Sony scientists were ecstatic at what I'd brought them. Within a week they'd developed prototype organs and made arrangements for them to be implanted as soon as Vivi could be brought to Earth. Isherwood's patent applications were filed and I was assured he would soon be a millionaire several times over.

I sat alone in my office with a flask of warm saké. It was bitter and sweet at the same time. I had probably saved Vivi's life, and made it possible for her to be married to the man I had chosen for her. I had fulfilled my mission.

Why was I miserable? Was it possible that I still loved her? Was it more than some childish infatuation?

But if I truly loved her I would wish only for her happiness. I would see her in her bridal gown. She would leave for her honeymoon with Isherwood. I would see them off. I would have the gratitude of the happy couple.

Gratitude! I smashed the saké cup against the floor. I staggered off to bed and lay there, sleepless, until long after the sun had come up.

My job, I soon learned, was not over. A telegram arrived from Vivi. "GRANDFATHER GOES MAD. MARS IS MELTING."

Isherwood was there to meet me at the abandoned shuttleport. I got into his jeep and we drove into the Martian desert, toward DALI's mansion.

"What's happening? Where is everyone?" I asked him.

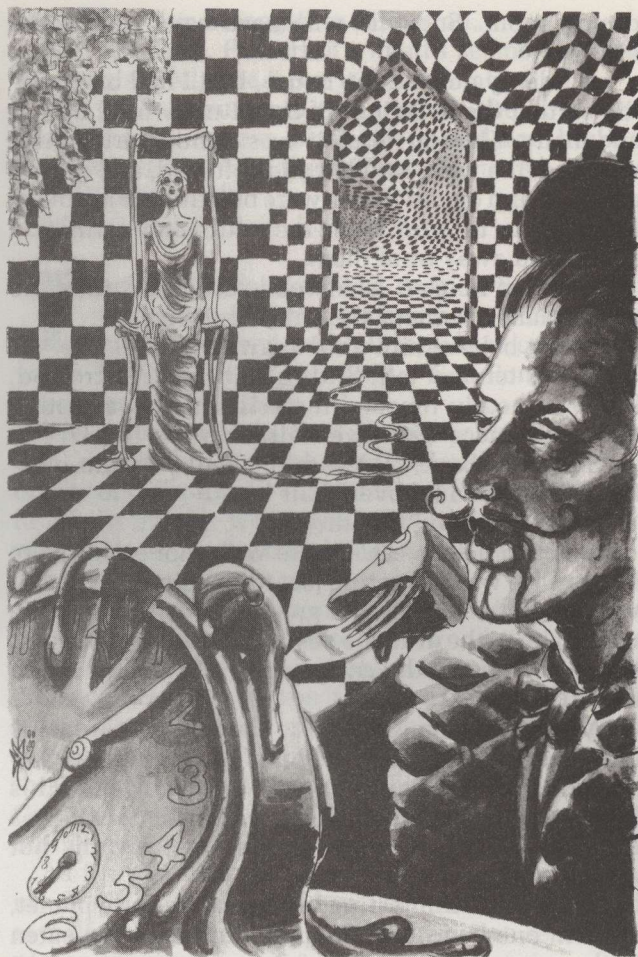
"He should never have eaten the soft clock," Isherwood said. "The results have been beyond anything anyone could imagine. It's a disaster, a catastrophe."

The desert was melting, reshaping itself. It formed two humanlike figures, which sank waist-deep in the sand and began to melt into each other. A twisted tree grew up to support the woman's head as it became soft and began to topple over. No, not a tree, I realized. A crutch. I recognized the scene from Salvador Dali's painting "Autumn Cannibalism."

"The rheoprotein mixed with DALI's digestive fluid, with his entire body chemistry. By the time it passed through his system the protein had absorbed his genetic message. Now everything that comes in contact with the protein becomes part of DALI, and part of his madness."

"The Martian sickness," I said. "He can telekinetically control the entire desert."

"Not control, exactly," Isherwood said. "The desert



has become a vast theatre of his unconscious."

The sand under the jeep began to undulate. The jeep itself seemed to soften. I sank deeper into the seat. Isherwood shouted "No!" and drove even faster. As our speed picked up the tyres were less and less in contact with the ground and the effects diminished.

"The entire spacetime structure is being affected," Isherwood said. "DALI is insane, bulimic. And as this insanity spreads, his insane world becomes edible. The more he eats, the worse it becomes. His gluttony is devouring time itself."

Vivi stood outside the palace, waiting for us. Around her was an island of solidity. As I got out of the jeep she ran toward me, but stopped short of putting her arms around me.

"You came," she whispered. "I'm so glad you're safe."

"Of course I came," I said. She was even thinner than when I had left. She was a skeleton, barely covered with skin. And yet she had a radiant, spiritual beauty that I could not deny.

I looked back into the desert. A herd of giant elephants, led by a white horse, were charging toward us. Their legs were impossibly long and distorted, like the legs of spiders. I recognized them from Salvador Dali's "Temptation of Saint Anthony."

"We'd better get inside," I said. "Where is your grandfather?"

"Eating," Vivi said. Isherwood ran for the house. I took Vivi's hand and pulled her in after us.

"Eating what?" I asked.

"Anything he finds. Desks, chairs, beds, he's even cooking telephones. He's started on the wall of the

dining room. Soon he will have eaten the entire house."

I suddenly noticed the house. DALI had once predicted that the buildings of the future would be soft and hairy. Here at least it was coming true. As I watched, the walls swelled and softened, and moved gently in and out, as if they were breathing. Fine black hairs began to grow from the walls and ceilings. I shuddered away from them.

"First the house," Isherwood said, "and then the entire planet. Perhaps the entire universe."

I didn't believe him until I saw DALI.

He was ten feet tall. Sitting with his legs crossed, his head nearly touched the ceiling. He was eating the mantelpiece when we walked in.

"So you're back," DALI said. "Will you join me?" He offered me a leftover chair leg.

"No, thank you," I said.

He continued to eat. He ate with more than mere hunger. He was not eating just to sustain himself, but with endless, thoughtless greed. It was the ultimate materialism, the ultimate desire to possess, to control, to own. To make the entire external universe a part of DALI.

"Mars has become the fantasy he inherited from his ancestor," I said to Vivi. "When he was a child Salvador Dali wanted to be a cook. As he grew older his hero became Napoleon. Now DALI OF MARS has become both. The imperialist glutton. Worlds not only to conquer, but devour.

I pictured DALI floating in space, large as a planet, Mars in one hand like an apple that had been eaten to the core.

Vivi shook her head. "It's horrible," she said. "How can he stand it? To eat so much. To become so huge."

And then I saw it. Vivi's anorexia was the antidote to DALI's madness.

It made perfect sense. Classical anorexia nervosa is very much tied to the patient's concept of space. A previous anorexic patient of mine used to feel ashamed whenever anyone entered the area around her she defined as her personal space. On occasion she would have to spend time at her father's restaurant. If any of the customers touched her it would send her into ecstasies of self-loathing. In time her bashfulness extended from being touched to being seen, and finally she could not bear to be seen even by inanimate objects, such as dishes.

Vivi's fear of things crossing her personal boundaries was the exact opposite of her grandfather's gluttony.

There were also her personal feelings for DALI. In fact I was beginning to see that her anorexic self-hatred was just a displacement of her Oedipal hatred for her grandfather. As Vivi grew up, the closed world of her inner space began to reach toward the outer world. The dining room played an important role in this. Receiving nutrition from one's family is like receiving trust. But the atmosphere at DALI's table, between his gluttony and Vivi's fear of him, was hardly suited to normal development.

This all came to a head with the artificial organ transplant. The anorexia was just another form of technophobia, a rejection of the outer world. Because

her subconscious realized the presence of a piece of the outer world – her artificial organs – inside her, the contradiction began to tear her apart. She rejected not only food, but the bridegroom candidates, anyone or anything that tried to cross her personal boundaries.

"Professor Isherwood," I said. "Do you still have any of those soft clocks?"

"Well," he said unhappily, "there is just one. I was keeping it as a souvenir."

"You must let me have it. It's our only hope."

DALI had eaten through the back of the house. He was now consuming the lawn furniture, and growing steadily larger. Within minutes he would be heading into the desert.

Isherwood handed me the clock. It was a small wall model with red enamel, not much larger than my hand. Vivi, as if suspecting what was about to happen, shrank from me.

"Vivi –" I said.

"No," she said. I put the soft clock in her hand. "I can't even look at it," she said. "It's shameful, embarrassing."

"Vivi, you must be strong. You must eat it."

"No, I can't. It's shameful. I'd rather die."

"It's not just your life. It's the lives of everyone on Mars." I hesitated, and then I said, quietly, "it's my life too."

"All right," she said. She was crying. "I'll do it. But Professor Isherwood must turn his back."

"Professor?"

"Yes, all right."

Isherwood turned away. Vivi slowly brought the clock to her lips. She flushed with shame. Her eyes filled with tears. I looked away. The clock crunched slowly as she bit into it, like a cookie. From the corner of my eye I could see her chewing, slowly, keeping it in the front of her mouth.

She swallowed. "All of it?" she asked.

"As much as you can. At least a few more bites."

When I looked back she had eaten half of it. The second hand swept around to the missing half and then disappeared. Thirty seconds later it reappeared at the other edge. Vivi shook her head. "No more," she said.

"Very well. There's something I have to tell you. You should hear this too, Professor. Vivi, when you came to Earth you were in a terrible accident. You were in surgery for many days."

"What does that have to do with –"

"Please. This is difficult for me." I was sweating. "In order to save your life, your heart and lungs –"

"No!" Vivi screamed.

"– and stomach had to be replaced –"

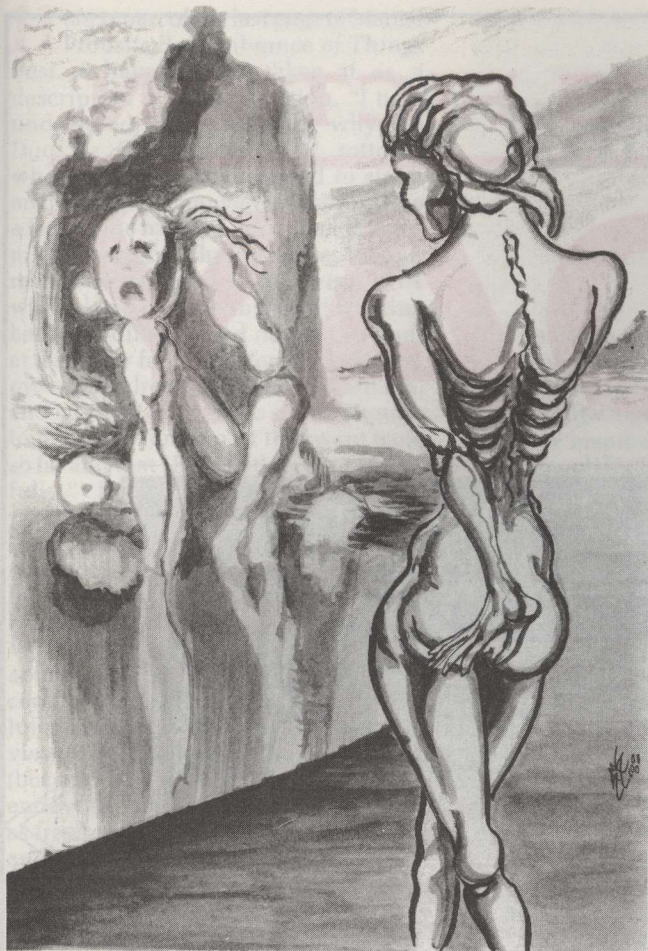
"No!" She tried to run but I held her arms.

"– replaced with artificial implants. Mechanical substitutes –" I couldn't go on. Vivi was screaming too loudly. I let her go. Immediately her eyes wrinkled shut and her throat began working. I saw her mechanical stomach heaving. I got out of her way.

She ran for the bathroom and flung the door closed behind her. It shut with a fleshy sound. I looked at Professor Isherwood as we heard Vivi being violently sick.

"You did that on purpose," Isherwood said.

"The rheoprotein has mixed with her digestive juices. Vivi has infected the house with her anorexia,



just as it was earlier infected with DALI's bulimia." I smiled tentatively at Isherwood. "Now the battle commences."

We ran outside. I could see DALI in the distance, running into the melting desert, thirty feet tall, devouring boulders and handfuls of red sand.

"Doctor!" Isherwood shouted. I ran to where he stood, at the edge of a pond. A naked woman floated face down in the water. Her body had turned soft and her fingers and toes had begun to melt into long, thin tendrils. I helped Isherwood pull her body onto the shore and turn her over.

It was Carmen, from the pub.

"She must have come back to steal something more valuable," I said. I couldn't look away. Her softness was ripe, erotic, intoxicating. Her full, glistening breasts wobbled provocatively. The soft flesh of her thighs rubbed against the damp blackness of her pubic hair.

Isherwood was captivated too. He bent over her and gently touched one arm. "The bones are still there."

"She still has her 'objectivity,' as DALI would say. There may be time to save her."

"Her, perhaps," Isherwood said, "but what about Pinkerton?"

He pointed into the desert. A gigantic hand had risen from the dunes. Its fingers held a cracked egg with a flower growing out of it. The form of the hand was reflected in the form of a huge man, crouching in the sand. The scene was from Salvador Dalí's painting "Metamorphosis of Narcissus." The face of the

crouching man belonged to Pinkerton.

As I watched, Pinkerton's mouth seemed to form the words "Help me." But it was too late.

Vivi walked out onto the porch of the now firm, lifeless house. A wave of solidity flowed from her and rippled out into the desert. Carmen stirred and sat up. "Where am I?"

"Safe," I said. "Safe, for now."

They finally found DALI, deep in the desert of the Lunae Planum. He had been transformed into a hundred-foot-tall replica of one of Salvador Dalí's earliest paintings, "Self-Portrait with Easel," and frozen there.

Vivi returned to Earth with me for the operation that replaced her mechanical organs with living organs of rheoprotein. Almost immediately she began to gain weight. It was a symbolic cure, but effective; my previous anorexic had been cured by a tonsilectomy.

She was willing to honour her grandfather's last wishes and marry Professor Isherwood, though she knew she didn't love him. Isherwood, however, had changed his mind. Maybe it was the fact that Vivi had asked him to turn away from her, there at the end of the madness on DALI's estate. Maybe it was something else. In any case, he had fallen in love with Carmen, and the last we heard, he was more like a bullfighter than a poet.

As for Vivi and myself, I learned to stop fighting my feelings. I completed my contract and selected myself as Vivi's bridegroom. The decision seemed to please everyone.

Someday, perhaps, we will have children, and one day we may take them to Mars to see the statue of their great grandfather. But for the moment we are in no hurry.

Translated by Kazuko Y. Behrens; edited by Lewis Shiner

Yoshio Aramaki was born in Otaru, Japan, in 1933. An architect by training, he runs an art gallery and has been writing science fiction since the 1960s. His story "The Writing on the White Wall Shines in the Setting Sun" won an award in 1972, and his novels include *The Journey Towards the End of End* (1973) and *The Planet of Bosch* (1978). The above is the first appearance of "Soft Clocks" in English. We are grateful to Takayuki Tatsumi and to Lewis Shiner for bringing the story to our attention.

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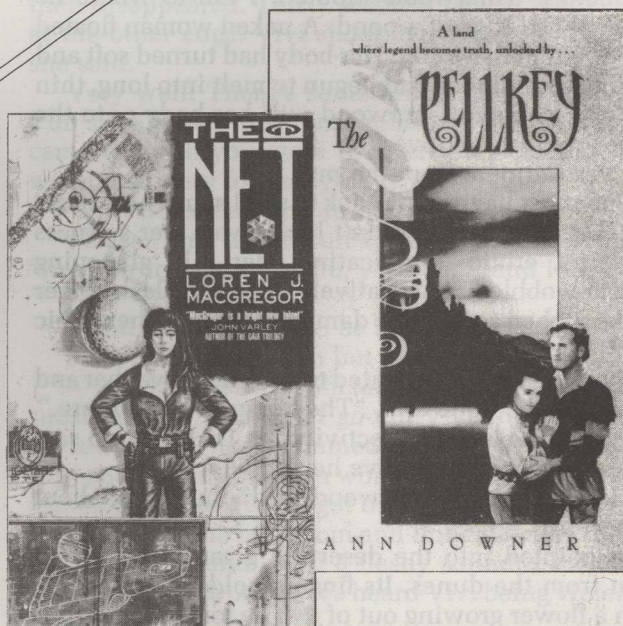
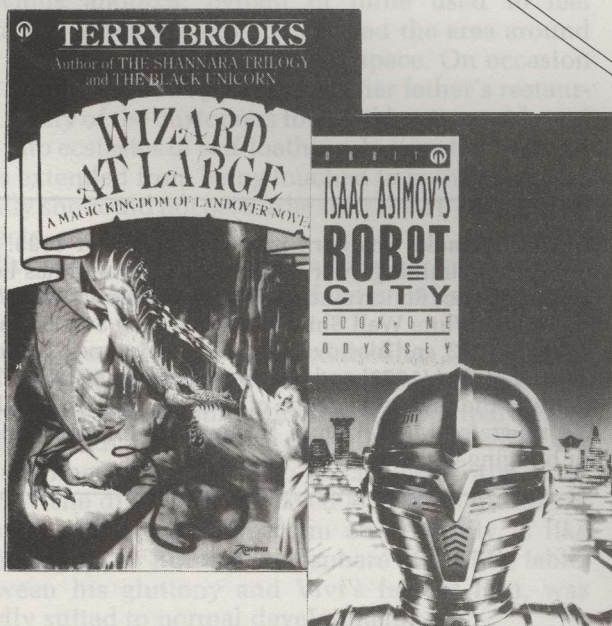
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Here is part of the last page of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. I have always taken it as a description of science fiction. "I now understand," says Marcel, "why the Duc de Guermantes...had tottered when he got up and wanted to stand erect...and had moved, trembling like a leaf on the hardly approachable summit of his eighty-three years, as though men were perched upon living stilts which keep on growing, until walking becomes difficult and dangerous and, at last, they fall. I was terrified that my own were already so high beneath me, and I did not think I was strong enough to retain for long a past that went back so far and that I bore within me so painfully." Every science fiction book perches upon living stilts which are the accumulated texts – the family of read books – that define the genre, and by 1988 these stilts of elective affinity have grown very tall.

Trembling like leaves on the hardly approachable summit of the end of a century that began with the death of Jules Verne, two big novels totter into view. The tales they tell are inherited (but not entirely), the wisdoms they endow us with are stilt-sap (but seem as fresh-minted as one could hope for), and the style and iconography of both books so deeply resound to earlier tunes that a kind of echolalia can bewitch the mind's internal ear (but melodies do emerge). David Zindell's *Neverness* (Donald I. Fine, Inc, 1988, appallingly proof-read, \$18.95; UK edition, Grafton Books, 1989, completely reset, £12.95, £7.95 pb) and Richard Grant's *Rumours of Spring* (Bantam Books, 1987, \$16.95; UK edition also from Bantam, 1988, £3.50) are both paradigm texts for the analysis of the late maturity of a genre literature. They tremble like leaves with the burden.

It is certainly a coincidence that both books are 458 large pages long, but it is no coincidence that both Zindell and Grant plump for amplitude, for both writers are swallows, and both need space to sort out the materials to which they have given rebirth. Zindell has not published a novel before, but Grant's *Saraband of Lost Time* (1985), which was of only moderate length, never quite managed fully to ingest M. John Harrison's Viriconium; in the end, it was like watching a rather small snake trying to eat a very crabby ferret. *Rumours of Spring*, on the other hand, has plenty of room to accommodate and to renew the disjecta membra amputated from Harrison's city aetherized upon a table at the end of time, including a street in the metropolis of Riverrun which Grant supinely dubs the Aleatory Strand; while hunting transatlantic prey for its main repast. But *Neverness* first. It is the confession of a man who becomes something of a god. It is told in the first person.

Romancing the Stilts

John Clute

The Home Galaxy is populous with homo sapiens, though Old Earth has long bitten the dust. FTL travel is possible through the spiderweb pathways or manifolds of thickspace, but only members of the Order of Pilots, housed in the city of Neverness on the planet Icefall for almost 3000 years, have the training required for anything but the simplest of transits; this training is primarily mathematical (or cantorial, for mathematicians are called cantors in *Neverness*) and pilots see their course through the manifold as an ongoing dance of ideoplasts for which it is their duty to supply solutions. True solutions create the way onward. As the novel begins, the Lord Pilot of the Order has just returned from one of the exploratory quests expected of Lord Pilots of the Order. Fenestering (which in *Neverness* has to do with traversing access windows in the manifold) inwards towards the galactic core, he has received a message from the heart of a singularity, home of the Ieldra (an elder race intermediary between mortals and what one might well call the Increate, though Zindell doesn't). The message is simple: To solve the mystery of the Vild (a sector of the galaxy whose stars are exploding) and to gain immortality for homo sapiens, man must examine his past and his future. Know thyself.

The young man whose autobiography (written down years later for the benefit of humanity) makes up the text of *Neverness* is himself, at the time of the Lord Pilot's return, a journeyman in the Order. Mallory Ringess tells his story in a style rich in speculative ponderings, labyrinthine exactitudes, and in a tone of profound recollective tranquillity, as though many decades had passed. He is prone to the making of distinctions of a markedly jesuitical fineness (his father is "the second most complicated man I have ever known"; actions can be measured as with calipers: "Then I made a mistake, the second worst mistake, I think, of my life."), and often stops in the middle of recounting an action or tumult to construct an epiphany of analysis on the implications of the scene. His style is mandarin, measured, haunting. The very first sentence of the book quotes Isaac Newton, secretly; and the play of metaphors whose terms bed deeply into the matter of the tale never ceases. Evenly and calmly, and with chill

assurance, he speaks to his readers as though they were children of his loins whom he never expected to meet.

Mallory very closely resembles the Lord Pilot, of whom he is indeed a mirror image, and suspects (rightly) that he may be his son. Like his father, he is tall, thin, dark, immensely strong, compelling; violent, vain, passionate, secretive and cruel. He cannot stand untruths, and will not tell them. He is in love with a woman called Katherine. Though at first he does not have a photographic memory, by page 364 he confesses that he "can't forget anything." By the end of the novel he has graduated from journeyman to Lord of the Order; his rise has seemed predestined. At the heart of *Neverness*, in a glittering clump, rather like long-abandoned spaceships (though Zindell does not say so) stand the spires of the Orders under his command – the cantors, the pilots, the eschatologists (i.e. genetic scientists), and so forth. In the course of his anguished rise to dominance, he has penetrated to the heart of a god-like mainbrain whose ganglia are the size of moons; he has lived with (and half-destroyed through the incontinent savagery of his rage) a primitive tribe of artifactual Neanderthals, and they have killed him; he has been reborn, subtly transformed at the hands of an aquatic civilization; he has been engaged in an interstellar war; he has solved the mystery of the Vild (a gross population explosion of primitive humans is blowing up stars to propel inefficient breeding ships hither and yon: just like now); and he has solved the mystery of DNA, which is that we are programmed to ride the universe as though it were our very skin and bones, which it is. A little later (if Zindell writes a second volume) Mallory will come to judge the quick and the dead.

Archaeologists of the stilt will detect in some of this, and in the dense impasto of local colour which unduly elongates and blurs some episodes, more than a hint of Jack Vance; and it is of course true that the prime influence on Zindell's long-breathed epic hard-sf fantasia, Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun*, also owes a debt to Vance. But *Neverness's* derivation from *The Book* is more than casual. Mallory and Severian look alike, talk alike, suffer alike, write the same kind of confessional alike, triumph alike.

(It might be mentioned at this point that in *The Book Wolfe* was the first science fiction author manifestly to make the confession mode work; and that the transformative dynamic he unleashed upon the mute inglorious tropes of space opera were by no means exhausted in *The Book of the New Sun*.) Mallory and Severian are siblings of an earned eminence; the novels they dominate have in common a kind of cosmogonic chill; *Neverness* differs from its model chiefly through bypassing the recursive closures of the plot of *The Book*. It is, in comparison, an open, relaxed, expansive tale, and Zindell's real interest in hardware further aerates his bid to walk upon the stilts. Once in a while a bit of hardware lingo – there is quite a bit of codswallop about the “programs” which shape our behaviour, and about how with one bound we'd all be free if we just learned how to deprogram ourselves – does rather diminish Mallory's urgent scrutinizing flow, but in the end *Neverness* is a victorious book, lingering and lithe and rich and taught.

About Richard Grant's *Rumours of Spring*, now more than a year old, less need be said. Colin Greenland's review of the American release in *Foundation* 39 does, in any case, cover most of the bases. He notes the influence of M. John Harrison, but correctly (I think) concentrates on John Crowley's *Little, Big* (1981), for the weight of that model comes dangerously close to crushing *Rumours* altogether. Once again we are in a land rather like America After the Rain, the balkanized entropy-ridden washed-out empyre of *Saraband of Lost Time*; but this time a prologue, which is set in a vague near future and an equally vague (an utterly unnamed) western United States, does generate a sense that *Rumours of Spring* has been fixed to the engine of time. There may (one feels) even be a plot. Or Story. And indeed there is. After suffering through the kind of ecological privations that in our own real world are beginning to close the book on Gaea, the one remaining forest in the land has, five hundred years later, begun savagely and intemperately to grow. Farms and villages are being eaten. So the Hardy Plant Society (almost as Crowleysque a formulation as the Silent Partners' Club of River-run, whose members hope to shape world history from within their sanctum, as it passes) funds an expedition called the First Biotic Crusade (which sounds Harrisonian, but which, at a venture, derives, I'd suggest, from Mark S. Geston's *Lords of the Starship*, 1967). Lord Tattersall (a dead ringer for Titus Groan's pa) takes indolent command, and the rickety land leviathan of the Crusade creaks northwards into the last forest with a crew from Peake.

It is here that Grant finds his stilts begin to do the splits. He is clearly at home in the Viriconium mode to which both his novels pay due homage, and build modestly from; but at the heart of any Harrison fantasy novel lies a deep refusal to accede to genre demands for answers couched in the old rigmarole of story. Crowley's very American books, on the other hand, not only tender an equally deep allegiance to the engendering power of Story, but actually tell tales. This is more than Grant can comfortably do in *Rumours of Spring*. Despite his desire to move his cast into proper confrontation with the mystery of the deep woods, he cannot stop himself, and in his hands entropy gnaws the Biotic Crusade into camp desuetude for huge desert stretches of text; its final arrival at the heart of the wood – the deep immersion of *Little, Big* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is quoted halfheartedly at this point – fails almost totally to move the reader. Once in the woods, though, some elegant answers do begin to find shape. As in *Neverness*, DNA can be spoken to from the heart's depths, and instructed. Long ago the researcher who was murdered in the prologue had done precisely this. Unfortunately (viz Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*) after her death the essence of the forest shaped itself into the heart-space and imago of her young son, Robin Goodfellow, not an easy allusion to miss, and Robin is now, after five hundred years, going through the ravenous solipsism of puberty; hence the inchoate growth of the woods, like pimples. In the nick of time, DNA and imago sort themselves out, and the novel ends in passages – it is no matter how laboriously they were achieved – of surefooted earned elation. After so many pages ill-at-ease at being told, the bootstrapping joy of this conclusion is almost unconfined. Puckish.

Cyberpunk vs. the SF Amoeba Paul J. McAuley

A few words about this cyberpunk thing, especially to those young aspiring writers who think that mohawks & modems are still cool, still out there on the cutting edge. Listen. Cyberpunk has been and gone. There's nothing left but bits and pieces of imagery that have been absorbed into the sf corpus (sometimes I think of it as being like some gigantic amoeba, pseudopods questing this way and that until one strikes a yeasty pocket of tropes; and then everything flows down it and suddenly what was an exploratory edge is just another blip in the shape-

less cytoplasm), and like all pop-cults the relevant momentum of cyberpunk was lost as soon as it was engulfed by the mainstream.

The original cyberpunks, the Movement, know this all too well. They have moved on. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling are collaborating on *The Difference Engine*, a kind of steampunk novel; Lewis Shiner is finishing *Slam*, a novel about skateboarders, thrash metal and the counterculture; John Shirley is working with Gibson on a screenplay. So it goes. Of course, publishing being what it is, the last genuine cyberpunk texts are just now reaching our shores. We have had *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Gibson's last word on the Sprawl; the *Mirrorshades* anthology will be published here later this year (and I worry, really I do, that too many people will mistake it for a *vade mecum* rather than a marker, a flag on the summit); and right now we have Richard Kadrey's *Metrophage* (Gollancz, £11.95), in which the by-now familiar mix of urban decay, street-subverted technology, pop-culture and hardboiled action is enlivened and subverted by a truly gonzo imagination and generous helpings of black humour. The plot, of course, is submerged well below the information-dense surface dazzle, which is just as well, as it is simply a variation on that traditional sf theme, the Magic Kid Makes Good. This particular Kid is called Jonny Qabbala, a small-time crook in a run-down crime-ridden third-world Los Angeles. Hardly your usual cyberpunk protagonist (far from being computer literate, he would have a hard time with a pocket calculator, and refuses to go along with the fashion for implanted chips and sockets), Jonny may have streetsuss, but his mouth keeps getting him in trouble as he tries to scratch a living. Meanwhile, there's a new, nasty plague spreading through the city, which may or may not have something to do with the Alpha Rats, aliens who have taken squatter rights on the Moon, and there's a power struggle between the incredibly old smuggler Lord for whom Jonny sometimes works, and an ambitious Colonel who once commanded Jonny when he worked as a bounty hunter for the Committee of Public Health, the mob who more or less run the city. Both men seem intent on involving Jonny in their plans, and the plot turns on Jonny's comprehension of his true nature, which he gains mostly through being doublecrossed and, pace Philip Marlowe, hit on the head a lot. The hectic joyride (replete with Meat Boys, Zombie Analytics, Croakers and Greenies, to mention but a few) occasionally gets bogged down while characters tell each other what's going on, but never for long, and it continually vibrates with Kadrey's virtuoso and (of course) streetwise imagery.

A highly recommended debut and an unashamed pop artifact. Treasure it while you can.

Philip Mann's *Pioneers* (Gollancz, £11.95) is traditional spacefaring sf located squarely in the sf amoeba's nucleus. A long time after a more-or-less unspecified catastrophe, the Earth has returned to its prelapsarian state and the human race is dying out. To replenish the muddy little human gene pool, teams of genetically-engineered artificial humans trawl the stars for the infinitely adaptable *Pioneers* who were sent out in a final wave of exploration before civilization's collapse. The novel takes the form of the journal of a member of one of these teams, a sterile ape-like creature called Angelo, who has been conditioned to care for all of humanity, and who, against his conditioning, is in love with his beautiful partner Ariadne. It tells of how they retrieve Pioneer Murray from the arctic storm-racked planet of La Plage, their return to an increasingly degenerate and hostile Earth, and a last desperate mission to save what is left of humanity.

In many ways it is a thoroughly pre-modern work, written as if the New Wave, let alone cyberpunk, never happened. Characters on spaceships drink orange juice out of cans and enjoy a good fry-up breakfast as soon as they get back to Earth, and much of the extraterrestrial scenery has been borrowed from old *Star Trek* and *Lost in Space* episodes, including an improbably dense belt of asteroids, and an Edenic world conjured up by a Pioneer who has transformed himself into a God. What saves it is Mann's gift for evoking the alien, put to good effect in describing the strange worlds and even stranger adaptations of the *Pioneers*, and the skilfully judged mixture of pathos and passion in Angelo's narrative which brings (for sf) an unusual and effective degree of *caritas* that resonates long after the more-or-less conventional post-catastrophe happy ending.

Equally resonant but more fully realized is James P. Blaylock's *Land of Dreams* (Grafton, £11.95), a beautifully crafted fantasy in which a stock plot – that of an evil carnival visiting a small town, changing the lives of its inhabitants – benefits from an individual, eccentric vision. From the first sentence, in which a giant shoe washes up on the beach near a turn-of-the-century Northern Californian town, Blaylock displays a delightfully bizarre inventiveness as he describes the efforts of three teenage orphans to thwart the evil designs of Dr Brown, the sinister owner of the carnival who can turn himself into a crow at will. They are aided by the ghostly Mrs Langely, who haunts the attic of their

orphanage, the eccentric Dr Jensen, and a mouse-sized man who leaves a little bottle of elixir which can transport them to the Land of Dreams where, possibly, mysteries of past and future can be unravelled. All these improbable elements are neatly fitted together into a comical, wise, and above all literate fantasy novel. Blaylock, one of a loose association of young Californian writers that includes Tim Powers and K.W. Jeter, has a fast-growing reputation in the States, and *Land of Dreams* is a strong introduction to his work for British readers.

Fantasy is all very well, but the real stuff, the seriously righteous stuff, is hard sf. Or it is according to Gregory Benford, a view propounded more than once in his unintentionally funny, pompous and accidentally informative postscripts to the stories collected in *In Alien Flesh* (Gollancz, £11.95). He would also have us compare his fictions with those of Salinger, Faulkner, Hemingway and all those other heavyweight American guys, but I'll do him the favour of not taking him up on that; his attempts at mimicking "literature" leave only a sticky purple aftertaste. Literary ambition aside, there is an impressive range of effective, original short sf stories collected here. The best manage to combine humanist sympathy with scientific rigour, as in "Relativistic Effects," which describes the point of view of ordinary mechanics serving on a runway ramscoop starship storming across the Universe at a fraction of the speed of light, or in "White Creatures" and "Exposures," which contrast the mayfly human lifespan with the slow, enormous processes of interstellar physics. A practicing physicist himself, Benford explodes the traditional hard-sf assumption that the Universe is a cosy place just waiting to be conquered, and his view of the alien has a distancing perspective that is a long way from the equally traditional *Star Wars* Cantina mindset. The title short story of the collection tells of the obsessions of humans directly tapping into almost incomprehensible flights of mathematical speculation downloaded by whale-like aliens during mating. First published in 1978, for goodness sake, it would not look out of place in the *Mirrorshades* anthology. Read the stories but take the afterwords with a large pinch of salt.

While Benford strains against genre strictures, a few of the stories in Christopher Burns's *About the Body* (Secker & Warburg, £10.95) straddle them with confident ease. Actually, the substance of most of the stories in this collection isn't in any way science-fictional, and they all exhibit mainstream miserabilist tendencies too. There is not much joy and

precious little light in any of them, let alone the blindly goofy optimism which characterizes so much sf. Still, wrought in pared down yet sinuous prose, they are as dense with possible meanings as any speculative fiction, their final sentences raising echoes that redefine what has gone before. In "Angelo's Passion," for instance, an Italian gigolo attempts to convince his latest paramour of the importance of the antiquarian past, while she wants only to try out the positions catalogued in a sex manual: only in the last paragraph does it become clear whose is the more dangerous obsession. Other stories, such as the post-holocaust tales "Fogged Plates" or "Babel," which first appeared in *Interzone*, tangentially brush genre themes, but are tightly focused on the individual rather than general consequences. Not everything works – "John's Return to Liverpool" is too steeped in the sentimentality of cult Lennonism to be wholly redeemed by its extraordinary last image – but nevertheless Burns's elegant diagrammed enigmas are lessons in concise effect to all engulfed by the shapeless mass of the sf amoeba.

Stableford's Magnum Opus Stan Nicholls

Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* (Simon & Schuster, £11.95) opens in an alternative 17th century where the European ruling elites are vampires. But these are no aristocratic Bela Lugosis – they can tolerate daylight for instance – although they drink blood, are impervious to pain, and almost immortal. And while their rule is far from benign, they are marginally more the object of envy than terror among the common folk, most of whom would happily join their ranks given the chance. Not so Edmund Cordery, mechanic to the court of Prince Richard, who is secretly opposed to this state of affairs and loses his life in an unsuccessful attempt to infect the vampires with the plague. The resulting hue and cry makes an outlaw of his son, Noell, who hides in a Benedictine monastery in Cardigan, where he begins lifelong relationships with a scholar, Quintus – who becomes his mentor – flamboyant pirate Langoisse, and the latter's mistress, Leilah.

Fleeing Richard's soldiers, the group settle in Africa, and undertake a hazardous journey to the mystical kingdom of Adamawara – a kind of macabre Shangri-la which may have been the cradle of vampirism – encountering the ancient civilization of the "undead" Elemi. To escape, and

survive the journey back, they need the strength and resistance to disease the vampires possess, and have to become vampires themselves. Noell discovers this can be done by combining vampire semen and human blood...

The current trend toward genre crossovers – symbiotic concoctions of sf, fantasy, horror, and even splatterpunk – is vindicated in this, possibly Stableford's most satisfying and fluent novel. Its setting, rich in detail with an adroit mix of imaginary and real historical characters, is intriguingly plausible. Nor is this alternate world the book's sole *raison d'être*, as so often in sf, but serves as a consistent backdrop to the concerns of its cast. Postulating a society run by vampires who use the mysteries of initiation into their clique as both reward and instrument of social control, a world where the majority of the uninitiated are resigned to their lot, where Vlad Dragulya (an apt reference to the traditions of the conventional vampire story) can rub shoulders with Richard the Lionheart – to make this a believable premise is a neat suspension of disbelief which the author pulls off very well.

The enduring and ambivalent attraction of the vampire myth – the power of blood, sex and death – is acknowledged in *Empire of Fear*. In fact, given that the strain is transmitted sexually (more accurately, genetically) these primeval fascinations can be said to be at the novel's heart. But the way Stableford deals with this well-worn theme is something different; as original in approach as Matheson's *I Am Legend*, and equally determined in rejecting the supernatural in favour of the rational – this is science fiction.

If I have any adverse criticism of the novel it's that its mid-section, concerned with the expedition into the African interior, is just a little too long and tends to slow down an otherwise pacy narrative. I might argue also with the necessity for the epilogue, set in the present day, which apparently seeks to justify the story's scientific basis. Minor quibbles in the face of an original, thoughtful and hugely entertaining read.

Devastated Earths

At Winter's End by Robert Silverberg (Gollancz, £11.95) is set in a far distant future and tells of the rebirth of the world after aeons of attack from the cataclysmic death-stars. The tribe, a people much like humans but with all-over body hair and a handy extra organ, emerges from its safe cocoon with hopes of inheriting the new world. Not the most original of concepts perhaps but the story is compulsively plotted with some strong, engaging characters. A sense of brooding

horror at the strange creatures which inhabit the new world as the tribe emerges and, later, a growing cosmic perspective on the lives and deaths of civilizations are skilfully evoked.

A few millennia closer to home, *IZ* writer John Brosnan's first sf novel, **The Sky Lords** (Gollancz, £11.95) depicts a devastated Earth in the aftermath of the Gene Wars, a struggle between multinational corporations using genetically engineered armies. Jan Dorvin, citizen of a right-on feminist democracy where men have been put in their place by some prudent genetic tampering, is captured by the decadent Sky Lords, who roam about in airships demanding tribute from the helpless land-dwellers. Here, Jan's unwelcome ally macho Milo subjects her to numerous history lessons (which are intriguing but have a dampening effect on the pace of the early part of the book) and seeks to show her that a mere woman is no match for a genetically enhanced man. Once the lectures are over, the novel regains momentum and develops into a lively adventure story backed with the authority of a well extrapolated future scenario. (Simon Ounsley)

Fantasy, Etc.

Windmaster's Bane by Tom Deitz (Futura, £3.50) is a first novel telling of encounters in the Appalachians with the Sidhe of Irish myth – refreshing to find a fantasy novel whose hero is a *Lord of the Rings* buff and who doesn't need reminding how tricky your faery can be. There are a couple of naff passages at the beginning but the story is strong, the writing has depth and the characters are real enough to make you look forward to the promised several more stories. Well worth a look; don't let the cover put you off.

Nemesis by Louise Cooper (Unwin, £2.95) has the opposite problem – out of the ordinary cover, run of the mill book. Sparky, trousered princess accidentally unleashes seven demons and then has to go and re-lease them, assisted only by a telepathic wolf. She doesn't get very far but then this is the first in a series of eight. OK if you have the stamina.

Michael Reaves' **The Burning Realm** (Futura, £3.50) is weirdly fascinating for all the wrong reasons. Set on a future Earth broken up into fragments, the maguffin is interesting enough but there are runestones to replace gravity and dragonboats to get you from one fragment to the next so why bother? Perhaps for the scene where the wizard idly looks out of a window and wonders if he really did see a naked woman and a werewolf tumbling through the sky as they fell off the fragment. I'm afraid so. Reaves has no sense of humour

and a wooden style so in places the book is very funny indeed, and I suspect he has either a well-thumbed thesaurus or a bad case of adjectival overload.

Tanith Lee, in **Night's Sorceries** (Legend, £2.99), shows how elevated language can be carried off – all it takes is wit, style and a sense of humour. This series of tales is set on the periphery of her "Flat Earth" novels and focuses on some minor characters. Worth £2.99 of anyone's money but still vaguely disappointing. This is good, but Lee has "great" to offer and this isn't it.

Lawrence Watt-Evans' **With a Single Spell** (Grafton, £2.99) follows an apprentice wizard whose master dies after only teaching him one spell, for starting fires. With this unlikely talent and a good line in manic depressive dialogue he sets out to make his fortune and gets entangled in a badly-organized dragonslaying and a private alternate reality with a rather nice lady trapped inside it. The plot takes a long time to get going but if you can stick with it it follows its own internal logic to a satisfyingly happy ending.

The Road and the Hills by the laconically named "Spedding" (Unwin, £3.50) acknowledges its debts to Mary Renault's Alexander books. Spedding's "Alixond" is straight, though, so it's handy that the "mysterious young vagabond" who joins his army and rises to his right hand turns out to be a woman in disguise. Nice idea but leaden plotting, dialogue and characterization, plus four hundred pages of teeny tiny print with two sequels advertised on the back. Only for the institutionalized.

(Wendy Bradley)

In **The Demon Lord of Karanda** by David Eddings (Bantam Press, £11.95), Garion and his friends continue the search for his missing son. They are taken as prisoners to Kal Zakath, "Emperor of Boundless Mallorean," with fairly predictable results, and then continue across Mallorean and into the kingdoms of Karanda. I wish the publishers of Eddings' books would follow Tolkien's example and have one large fold-out map at the back showing all the countries and main cities. The occasional detailed maps are good, but which one should you turn back to when suddenly confused about the locations of Cthol Mishrak and Mal Zeth? It is also a shame that, despite the size of the book, Eddings appears to forget about some of the characters he spent time developing in previous volumes.

Daggerspell by Katherine Kerr (Grafton, £3.95) is set in a world akin to early medieval Wales (the author describes the language as P-Celtic) with no marauding English in the offing. It is claimed that the Celts believed in rein-

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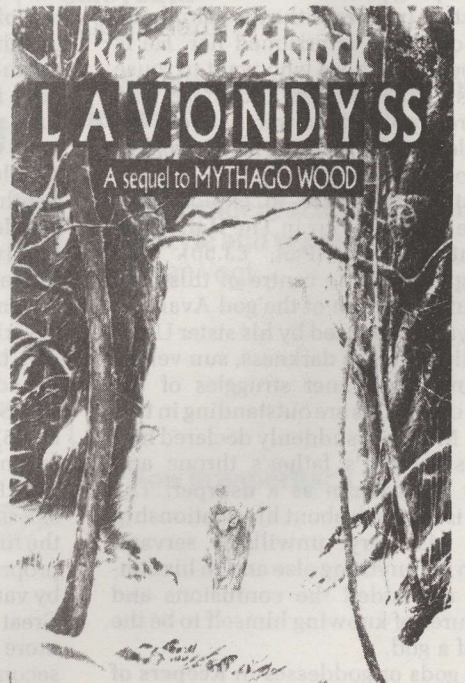
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carnation, and Kerr develops this idea as three men and a woman seek to fulfill their fates through successive regenerations. She handles the narrative skilfully, using flashback to develop previous lives without detracting from the main plot. Moreover the characters are not puppets in the hands of fate. If their "souls" are the same, the changed situations develop their personalities in different ways and so the choices which they make are very real.

Perhaps the central character of **The Call of the Sword** by Roger Taylor (Headline, £2.99) is a reincarnation. Hawklan has no memory of his past before he arrives at the castle of Anderas Darion, and no explanation for how he had the key to open its long-closed gates. Everyone appears to accept him and only the evil Dan Tor, and the reader, can guess the obvious and wait for his flashes of memory to become permanent.

A lot of writers are fond of mixing the battle between good and evil with the battle of the sexes. In **The Wrath of Ashar** by Angus Wells (Sphere, £3.99) another man with no past comes to lead the barbarian horde in its attack on the "Three Kingdoms," and a young man, Kedryn, has to save his country. The male god, Ashar, represents destruction, and Kedryn serves "The Lady" who stands for peace and love.

In **The Winged Assassin** by Catherine Cooke (Orbit, £3.50) another young man, Arris, is caught between the sleeping power of the Goddess and the active powers of the Five Brothers: the Gods who imprisoned her. He is torn between those who want to rouse dark spiritual powers and those who have real political power, between his own desires for revenge, for friendship and for freedom.

Best of the three to explore this theme is Judith Tarr in **The Hall of the Mountain King** (Pan, £3.50). The young man at the centre of this tale, Mirain, is the son of the god Avaryan. Avaryan is opposed by his sister Uveryen, light versus darkness, sun versus shadow. The inner struggles of the main characters are outstanding in this book. Mirain is suddenly declared heir to his mother's father's throne and many regard him as a usurper. The story is as much about his relationship with his very unwilling servant, Vadin, as anything else and to his conflicts are added the confusions and pressures of knowing himself to be the son of a god.

No gods or goddesses in **Keepers of Edanvant** by Carole Nelson Douglas (Corgi, £2.99), but a more impersonal evil power. However, the battle between the sexes is there as the men seek to find their own powers without recourse to the sorceresses who have traditionally wielded them.

Fantasy novels these days are full of

powerful young women. In **To the Haunted Mountains** by Ru Emerson (Headline, £2.99) as well as being heir to the defeated kingdom and having magical gifts, Ylia is also a notable swordswoman, well able to lead a group of survivors to safety.

I found **Dervish Daughter** by Sherri S. Tepper (Corgi, £2.75) too confusing, possibly because it is the middle volume of a series and there was no introduction. Not only was I unclear about who the people were, but "what" they were! This was disappointing because I enjoyed the last book I read by this writer.

Among all these incomplete works, with everyone leaving loose ends for the next novel in the series, it was a pleasure to read **Hawk in Silver** by Mary Gentle (Beaver, £1.99). Aimed at the teenage market, it is a very satisfying fusion of fantasy and reality: "Faery" meets "Grange Hill," a cross between Susan Cooper and Judy Blume. As two young girls get caught up in the battle between two faery kingdoms they still have other normal problems: conflicts at school, relationships with each other and with the boy in the story, and moral decisions to take.

(Phyllis McDonald)

Improving Sagas

I was a bit churlish over Volume One of "The Videssos Cycle" by Harry Turtledove. Number three is **The Legion of Videssos** (Legend, £3.99). The imaginary world resembles eleventh-century Byzantium, on which Turtledove is an expert, but this adds discipline, which a pure fantasy world can lack while being equally derivative. The length of the epic here provides depth rather than tedium, the hero's problems get more involved and involving, and I find myself looking forward eagerly to the next instalment.

Tanith, Fantasy's Mistress, is described as "one of the world's finest and best-known fantasy writers," on the cover of **The Book of the Damned: The Secret Book of Paradys 1** (Unwin, £6.95). I only differ from this hype in feeling that Tanith Lee is not sufficiently well-known, and is even finer as a science-fiction writer. In this book, the first of a pair, the streets of the inappropriately eponymous city are stalked by vampires, supernatural rippers, etc. Great stuff, but the presentation is more original than the conception. The second volume, **The Book of the Beast** (also Unwin, £6.95) shows an improvement. Though presented in an episodic form, there is a more unifying theme than is sometimes found in Lee's demonic writings. As often happens, one wonders if she can wring any more from the format, surprise one again – and she does. (But the appearance of a

certain animal will give true Leefans a clue to the ending.) Recommended.

I am not sure if **Unicorn and Dragon** by Lynn Abbey (Headline, £2.99) is the start of a series but I think it must be: too many ends are left loose for a one-off. A familiar theme, the old cult of the Goddess, is given a new background – the last days of Saxon England, an age well-worked by straight historical fiction, less so by fantasy. Probably the timescale involved in this sort of saga does not allow for the rehabilitation of the Saxons, after their stock appearance as wreckers in Arthurian material. The novel is better than its rather soppy packaging might suggest.

The Bones of God by Stephen Leigh (Headline, £2.95) is a competent but over-ambitious saga of future religious intolerance and conflict. It starts with the hero's face being burnt off and replaced by a transparent mask: his girlfriend remarks that he looks young for his age! This can only get better, and in fact it does.

Dawn--Xenogenesis: 1 by Octavia Butler (VGSF, £2.95) is far better. Human survivors of Nuclear Winter are rescued by aliens, whose price is human submission to genetic engineering and sharing. This they describe as trade, while assuming that neither side has any choice. (These aliens are alien, though sadly they get less so as the story progresses.) The heroine is selected to break this news to a group of survivors who like it even less than she does. Recommended.

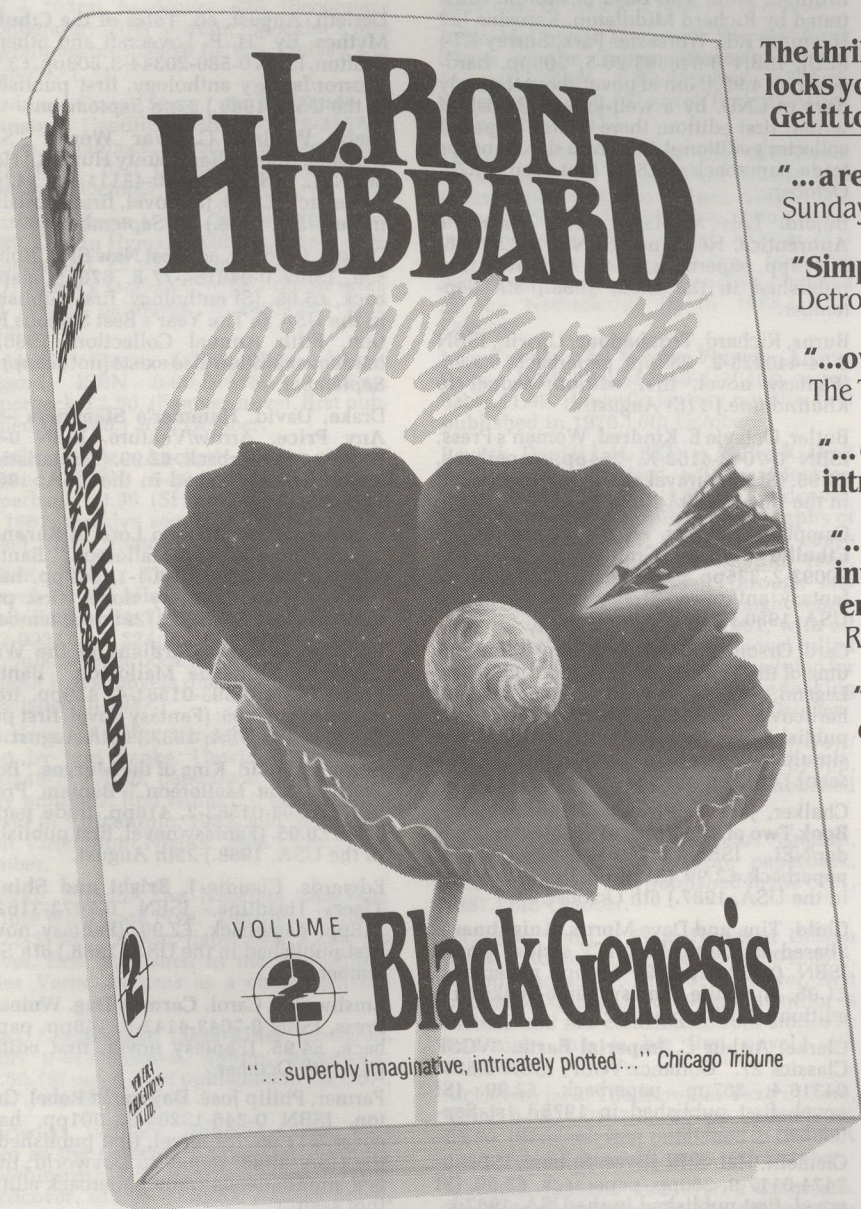
(Peter T. Garratt)

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Books Received, August-September 1988

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the period specified above. They were not necessarily all on sale during these months: official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. This should not be regarded as a complete account of British sf and fantasy publishing during the period in question – but we hope this “Books Received” will grow over the coming months until it becomes a genuinely useful bibliographical record. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian W., ed. **Galactic Empires**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-952150-4, 650pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf anthology, first published in two volumes, 1976.)

Aldiss, Brian W., with David Wingrove. **Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction**. Grafton/Paladin, ISBN 0-586-08684-6, 688pp, paperback, £6.95. (Critical study, first published in 1986; this edition has been slightly revised.)

Anderson, Michael Falconer. **The Covenant**. Hale, ISBN 0-7090-3191-2, 208pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Horror novel, first edition.)

Anthony, Piers. **Vale of the Vole**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-49062-9, 287pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; a hardcover edition also exists [not seen]; latest in the “Magic of Xanth” series.) 20th October.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Short Horror Novels**. Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-82-4, 518pp, paperback, £4.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains novellas by authors ranging from Conan Doyle to Lucius Shepard.) 1st September.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Big Sun of Mercury**. “The fourth Space Ranger novel.” Hodder/Lightning, ISBN 0-340-48497-7, 143pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA as *Lucky Starr and the Big Sun of Mercury* by “Paul French”, 1956.) 20th October.

Asimov, Isaac. **Prelude to Foundation**. “The magnificent overture to his classic Foundation Saga.” Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13048-2, 461pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a new “prequel” to books which were written 40 years ago.) 6th October.

Baker, Scott. **Drink the Fire From the Flames**. “The First Book of the Ashlu Cycle.” Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-962510-5, 343pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 20th October.

Barnes, John. **The Man Who Pulled Down the Sky**. “An Isaac Asimov Recommendation.” Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42896-6, 256pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 1st September.

Blaylock, James P. **Homunculus**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20176-9, 301pp, paperback, £3.50. (“Steampunk” sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; winner of the Philip K. Dick Award.) 18th August.

Blish, James. **Spock Must Die!** “Star Trek – Inspired by the characters Gene Roddenberry created for the famous television series.” Corgi, ISBN 0-552-09498-6, 118pp,

paperback, £1.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1970.) 23rd September.

Bova, Ben. **Kinsman**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-18650-4, 269pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; an earlier version appeared in 1979.) 4th August.

Bradfield, Scott. **The Secret Life of Houses**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440241-4, 166pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf/fantasy collection with a large dash of the unclassifiable; first edition; contains “The Dream of the Wolf” and others which first appeared in *Interzone*.) 22nd September.

Brosnan, John. **The Sky Lords**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-03986-8, 318pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 4th August.

Brunner, John. **The Days of March**. Illustrated by Richard Middleton. Kerosina [27 Hampton Rd., Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 8EU], ISBN 0-948893-26-5, 309pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Non-sf novel about the early days of CND, by a well-known British sf writer; first edition; there is also a special collector’s edition at £30, and a simultaneous trade paperback at £5.95 [not seen].) 27th October.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **The Warrior’s Apprentice**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3126-5, 315pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 8th September.

Burns, Richard. **Troubadour**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440225-2, 250pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Khalindaine*.) 11th August.

Butler, Octavia E. **Kindred**. Women’s Press, ISBN 0-7043-4162-X, 264pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf time-travel novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) 13th October.

Campbell, Ramsey, ed. **New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20093-2, 335pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1980.) 22nd September.

Card, Orson Scott. **Seventh Son**. “First Volume of the Tales of Alvin Maker.” Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2320-5, 241pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 8th September.

Chalker, Jack L. **Pirates of the Thunder: Book Two of The Rings of the Master**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-43118-5, 306pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 6th October.

Child, Tim, and Dave Morris. **Knightmare**. “Based on the thrilling ITV series.” Corgi, ISBN 0-552-52540-5, 144pp, paperback, £1.95. (Juvenile fantasy game-book; first edition.) 23rd September.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Imperial Earth**. “VGSF Classics 27.” Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04316-4, 287pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1975.) 1st September.

Clement, Hal. **Still River**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0117-9, 280pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Clute, John, David Pringle and Simon Ounsley, eds. **Interzone: The 3rd Anthology**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-69944-X, viii + 184pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Sf anthology, first edition.) 29th September.

Cooper, Louise. **Nemesis: Book 1 of Indigo**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440156-6, 246pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th August.

Crowley, John. **Aegypt**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04325-3, 390pp, paperback, £3.95. (Novel, part mainstream, part fantasy, part “alchemical sf,” and first of a

promised tetralogy; first published in the USA, 1987.) 4th August.

Darby, Lynda. **Bloodseed: Book 2 of The Eye of Time Trilogy**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440161-2, 262pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th August.

Davis, Courtney. **Celtic Art Source Book**. Blandford Press, ISBN 0-7137-1982-6, 128pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Heavily illustrated design book, with a foreword on Celtic symbology; first edition.) 1st September.

De Haan, Tom. **A Mirror for Princes**. Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-958170-1, 419pp, paperback, £3.99. (Pseudo-historical novel, “a sustained meditation on power and love” which has been compared to the work of Hermann Hesse; first published in 1987.) 1st September.

Derleth, August, ed. **Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos**. By “H. P. Lovecraft and others.” Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20344-3, 508pp, £3.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1969.) 22nd September.

Dietz, William C. **War World**. “Sam McCade, Interstellar Bounty Hunter.” Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-43111-8, 247pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 1st September.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **Best New SF 2**. Robinson, ISBN 0-948164-77-8, 678pp, paperback, £5.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year’s Best Science Fiction*, Fifth Annual Collection, 1988; a hardcover edition also exists [not seen].) 1st September.

Drake, David. **Hammer’s Slammers – At Any Price**. Arrow/Venture, ISBN 0-09-957690-2, paperback, £2.99. (Militaristic sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 18th August.

Eddings, David. **Demon Lord of Karanda**. “Book Three of The Malloreon.” Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01201-1, 377pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 22nd September.

Eddings, David. **Guardians of the West**. “Book One of The Malloreon.” Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01561-4, 429pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 25th August.

Eddings, David. **King of the Murgos**. “Book Two of The Malloreon.” Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01562-2, 416pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 25th August.

Edwards, Claudia J. **Bright and Shining Tiger**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3162-1, 218pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 8th September.

Emshwiller, Carol. **Carmen Dog**. Women’s Press, ISBN 0-7043-4142-5, 148pp, paperback, £4.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?].) 13th October.

Farmer, Philip José. **Dayworld Rebel**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13266-3, 301pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Dayworld*; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].)

Feist, Raymond E. **Faerie Tale**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13074-1, 393pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 6th October.

Feist, Raymond E., and Janny Wurts. **Daughter of the Empire**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07481-3, 528pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 6th October.

Fergusson, Bruce. **The Shadow of His Wings**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20070-3,

333pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 8th September.

Flint, Kenneth C. **The Dark Druid**. "The breathtaking conclusion to the Celtic epic begun in *Challenge of the Clans and Storm Shield*." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17588-2, 326pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Forde, R. A. **Wise-Woman**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-42302-6, 352pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Historical novel based on Celtic legend, first edition; the author is Welsh and this appears to be his first novel.) 15th September.

Frank, Frederick S. **Gothic Fiction: A Master List of Twentieth Century Criticism and Research**. Meckler, ISBN 0-88736-218-4, XV + 193pp, hardcover, £25. (Secondary bibliography, first edition; "Meckler's bibliographies on science fiction, fantasy and horror 3.")

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Multitude of Monsters**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3157-5, 201pp, paperback, £2.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 6th October.

[Garland, Roger.] **The Tolkien Calendar 1989**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440180-9, paperbound, £5.95. (Large calendar based on Tolkien's fantasies, with a dozen original colour paintings by Garland.) 25th August.

Gemmell, David. **Ghost King**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-956550-1, 266pp, paperback, £2.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988.) 20th October.

Gentle, Mary. **Ancient Light**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-934940-X, 732pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; massive sequel to *Golden Witchbreed*.) 18th August.

Gribbin, John. **The Omega Point: The Search for the Missing Mass and the Ultimate Fate of the Universe**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-99317-4, 224pp, paperback, £4.95. (Popular science book by an author who has at least two sf novels due imminently; first published in 1987.)

Harrison, M. John. **Viriconium**. Introduction by Iain Banks. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440245-7, 276pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; it contains the novel *In Viriconium*, 1982, and the collection *Viriconium Nights*, 1985.) 22nd September.

Hawke, Simon. **The Nautilus Sanction**. "Time Wars Book Five." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3156-7, 196pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; Jules Verne features as a character.) 6th October.

Hinz, Christopher. **Liege-Killer**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-16900-6, 458pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 8th September.

Horwood, William. **Duncton Quest: Part Two of the Duncton Chronicles**. Century Hutchinson, ISBN 0-7126-1695-0, 717pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Animal fantasy novel, first edition.) 8th September.

Jones, Gwyneth. **The Hidden Ones**. Women's Press/Livewire, ISBN 0-7043-4910-8, 151pp, paperback, £3.50. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition.) 13th October.

[Kane, Bob.] **Batman and Robin**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-091-X, unpaginated, paperback, £2.95. (Black-and-white strips from the 1940s and 50s; first published in the USA, 1966.)

[Kane, Bob.] **Batman Versus The Joker**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-092-8, unpaginated, paperback, £2.95. (Black-and-white strips

from the 1950s; first published in the USA, 1966.)

King, Stephen. **The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger**. Illustrated by Michael Whelan. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0099-7, 224pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first in a projected series; originally published in the USA, 1982.) 1st September.

King, Stephen, "writing as Richard Bachman." **The Running Man**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-05642-2, 219pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1982; movie tie-in edition; also available in the omnibus volume *The Bachman Books*.) 1st September.

Kingsbury, Donald. **The Moon Goddess and the Son**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20042-8, 544pp, paperback, £3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 18th August.

Kube-McDowell, Michael P. **Empery: Book Three of the Trigon Disunity**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-953860-1, 325pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Lampo, Hubert. **Arthur and the Grail**. Photographs by Pieter Paul Koster and introduction by Colin Wilson. Sidgwick & Jackson, ISBN 0-283-99705-2, 160pp, hardcover, £15.95. (First British edition of a luxuriously produced picture book on Arthurian mythology, originally published in the Netherlands [?] in 1985.) 13th October.

Lee, Tanith. **The Winter Players**. Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-957140-4, 104pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile fantasy novella, first published in 1976.) 6th October.

Levack, Daniel J. H. **PKD: A Philip K. Dick Bibliography**. Revised edition. Meckler, ISBN 0-88736-096-3, 156pp, hardcover, £27.50. (Illustrated primary bibliography of a major author; alas, this one will cause some head-scratching: published in 1988, it claims to be complete "through late 1984," yet it appears to be a straight reproduction of the first edition, 1981, with all the original ghost entries [e.g. a novel called "Bishop Timothy Archer" is "scheduled for release in Spring 1982"]; it's a fine-looking volume, but what a cock-up!) 26th October.

Longyear, Barry B. **Sea of Glass**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-958970-2, 375pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.)

Lupoff, Richard. **Countersolar!** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07096-6, 319pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 6th October.

McAuley, Paul J. **Four Hundred Billion Stars**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04260-5, 256pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the author is British, and has contributed four stories to *Interzone*; this is his first novel.) 4th August.

McDevitt, Jack. **The Hercules Text**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0157-8, 307pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as an "Ace SF Special", 1986.) 6th October.

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath. **The Fate of the Phoenix**. "An original Star Trek adventure." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-27191-1, 262pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1979; this is a 1985 US printing with a UK price label.)

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath, eds. **Star Trek: The New Voyages**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-27195-4, 237pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1976; this is a 1985 US printing with a UK price label.)

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath, eds. **Star Trek: The New Voyages 2**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-27242-X, 252pp, paper-

back, £2.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1978; this is a 1985 US printing with a UK price label.)

Matheson, Richard. **The Incredible Shrinking Man**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0233-7, 217pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA as *The Shrinking Man*, 1956.) 15th September.

Matthews, John, and Bob Stewart. **Tales of Arthur: Adventure Stories from the Arthurian Legend**. Cassell/Javelin, ISBN 0-7137-2059-X, 92pp, paperback, £2.99. (Annotated retellings of familiar tales, extracted from the book *Warriors of Arthur*, 1987.)

May, Julian. **Intervention: a root tale to The Galactic Milieu and a vinculum between it and The Saga of Pliocene Exile**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30309-0, 668pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 21st October.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Dragon in the Sword: Being the Third and Final Story in the History of John Daker, the Eternal Champion**. Grafton, ISBN 0-583-13433-5, 283pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 18th August.

Moorcock, Michael. **Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04324-5, 237pp, paperback, £2.95. (Non-fiction; first published in 1987; this edition is slightly updated.) 4th August.

Neiderman, Andrew. **Playmates**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-955160-8, 312pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 18th August.

Niles, Douglas. **Black Wizards**. "Book Two of the Moonshae Trilogy. A Forgotten Realms Novel." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011138-7, 347pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 5th September.

Norton, Andre. **Spell of the Witch World**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04365-2, 220pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1972.) 4th August.

Paxson, Diana L. **White Mare, Red Stallion**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-43054-5, 242pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical novel set in early Celtic Scotland, apparently not a fantasy; first published in the USA, 1986.) 6th October.

Powers, Tim. **On Stranger Tides**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13152-7, 352pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].)

Preuss, Paul. **Starfire**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-69960-1, 310pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 6th October.

Pringle, David. **Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels - An English-Language Selection, 1946-1987**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-1321-0 and 0-24613420-8, 278pp, hardcover and simultaneous trade paperback, £14.95 and £7.95. (Critical study, first edition.) 20th October.

Robertson, Bruce. **Techniques of Fantasy Art**. Macdonald/Orbis, ISBN 0-356-15324-X, 144pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Heavily illustrated "how-to" book, first edition.) 4th August.

Rosenberg, Joel. **The Sleeping Dragon: Book One of Guardians of the Flame**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20128-9, 303pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983.) 22nd September.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Berserker Man**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04349-0, 219pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published

in the USA, 1979; it has an afterword by Sandra Miesel.) 1st September.

Sargent, Pamela. **The Shore of Women**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30116-0, 456pp, paperback, £3.99. (Post-nuclear holocaust sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 7th October.

Saunders, David. **Encyclopedia of the Worlds of Dr Who: A-D**. Illustrated by Tony Clark. Hodder/Knight Books, ISBN 0-340-42842-2, 160pp, paperback, £2.99. (Reference book, first published in 1987.) 20th October.

Schmitz, James. **The Witches of Karres**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04309-1, 344pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, a genial space opera, first published in the USA, 1966; can this really be the first ever British edition?) 4th August.

Shaw, Bob. **Ship of Strangers**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04331-8, 234pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1978.) 1st September.

Shwartz, Susan. **Queensblade: Volume Three in the Heirs to Byzantium Trilogy**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30401-1, 275pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 2nd September.

Silke, James. **Prisoner of the Horned Helmet**. "Frank Frazetta's Death Dealer Book 1." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07017-6, 303pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 6th October.

Simak, Clifford D. **City**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-14630-8, 255pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1952; this is advertised as the "world first complete edition," since it contains a concluding story, "Epilog," which originally appeared in a 1973 anthology.) 11th August.

Simak, Clifford D. **Off-Planet**. Collected and edited by Francis Lyall. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-18500-1, 223pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Sf collection, first world edition; seven stories, ranging from "Ogre" [1943] to "Construction Shack" [1972].) 4th August.

Skipp, John, and Craig Spector. **The Scream**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17584-X, 420pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988; this is the US edition with a UK price label.)

Smith, Cordwainer. **The Rediscovery of Man**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04352-0, 377pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA as *The Best of Cordwainer Smith*, 1975; this is probably the first world hardcover edition.) 15th September.

Smith, Guy N. **Throwback**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-956450-5, 256pp, paperback, £2.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1985.) 15th September.

Spedding, [Alison]. **A Cloud Over Water: Book Two of A Walk in the Dark**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440160-4, 348pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 22nd September.

Spedding, [Alison]. **The Road and the Hills**. "A Walk in the Dark, Book One." Unwin, ISBN 0-04-823365-X, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1986; it's dedicated to Alexander the Great.) 11th August.

Stableford, Brian. **The Empire of Fear**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-69945-8, 388pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) 20th October.

Sterling, Bruce. **Involution Ocean**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-958920-6, 175pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977.)

Taylor, Charles D. **Silent Hunter**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-957480-2, 339pp, paperback,

£2.99. (Near-future thriller about super-submarines; first published in the USA, 1987.) 18th August.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Jinian Star-Eye**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13191-1, 239pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 14th October.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Return of the Shadow: The History of The Lord of the Rings Part One**. "The History of Middle-Earth 6," edited by Christopher Tolkien. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440162-0, 497pp, hardcover, £17.95. (Collection of early drafts of Tolkien's masterpiece, with copious notes; first edition.) 25th August.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Shaping of Middle Earth: The Quenta, The Ambarkanta and The Annals**. "The History of Middle-Earth IV," edited by Christopher Tolkien. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440150-7, 380pp, paperback, £4.95. (Collection of early writings, first published in 1986.) 22nd September.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **Tree and Leaf, including the poem Mythopoeia**. 2nd edition, with an introduction by Christopher Tolkien. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440254-6, 101pp, hardcover, £7.95. (Essay and story, first published in 1964.) 25th August.

Tubb, E. C. **Melome and Angado: Dumarest Saga 28 and 29**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-9957230-3, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novels, first published in the USA, 1983 and 1984.) 18th August.

Vance, Jack. **The Book of Dreams: Volume Five of the Demon Princes Series**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20023-1, 268pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1981.) 22nd September.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Darksword Trilogy Volume One: Forging the Darksword**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17586-6, 391pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 14th October.

Wilson, Colin. **Spider World: The Delta**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06371-4, 352pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; sequel to *Spider World: The Tower*.) 8th September.

Wright, Helen. **A Matter of Oaths**. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-18040-9, 283pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first edition; a first novel by a new British writer.) 13th October.

Mutant Popcorn

Continued from p.28

sic *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Plus ça change, eh, readers?

Oh, and film of the year 1988. No contest. In a year already strong on fantasy comedies, one stood out even above the hype and overkill surrounding its release: a technically dazzling big-budget reworking of a classic Hollywood tradition by one of the hottest writer-director teams in the industry, with some hilarious special effects, amusingly-characterized talking animals, inspired comic casting, great songs, and some of the most rib-busting dialogue ever heard on the screen. No, you silly, not that wabbit picture: I'm talking about *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Yeah, that cheap. Sorry.

(Nick Lowe)

Inter-Action

Dear Editors:

After reading my first three issues of *Interzone*, (23-25), I shall not hesitate to renew my subscription (eleven pounds dutifully enclosed). *IZ* has renewed my faith in sf at a time when it had reached an all time low. Consider; those of us not fortunate enough to have a specialist sf bookshop close at hand have had rather a rough time of it in recent years. The size of the sf shelf in "normal" bookshops has grown in recent years. This sounds encouraging: inspection of the titles actually there reveal a more depressing picture. Adorned with arches, suggesting gateways into more exciting worlds, fantasy titles crowd out almost all but the bestselling Asimov/Clarke/Heinlein dinosaurs. The problem lies not with the fact the books are fantasy, but that they are patently conceived from the start as moneymaking series. My heart sinks when I see the cover notes telling me that the book is "The second in a..." (series, sequence etc.); experience has led me to two conclusions:

(a) The first book in the series is never to be found.

(b) The others are often not worth reading anyway.

Why should they be so popular? The answer is that a nice, long series removes from the reader the tiring necessity of choosing a materially different book by the same author or, even worse, a book by an unfamiliar author. There is an honourable tradition of sequels and even some trilogies in the sf genre; these are in a different category from the hept(and greater)ologies. I believe that the best of these two- or three-member series arise from a genuine desire by authors to explore further possibilities of a world they have created, rather than a genuine desire by the author to mint money. The extended series are designed to appeal to the conservatism of the sf buying public, having the same type of appeal and level of content as a ghost-written romance. A unique opportunity is offered by sf and fantasy to present challenging ideas, and to examine aspects of human nature in the light of future successes or in the shadow of unprecedented disasters. These opportunities are lost when the prime

motivation for writing a book is as an advertisement for the next member of the series.

Thank the stars for *Interzone*!

Robert Phippen
Romsey, Hampshire

Dear Editors:

Having read Whitley Strieber's *Communion* in anticipation of Thomas M. Disch's essay in *IZ* 25 I was a little disappointed to find no real challenge to the scientific validity of Strieber's claims by Disch. Can Strieber's claims be so easily dismissed (less sceptical readers may ask) when the psychiatrist who hypnotized him testifies in his favour, when a lie detector backs up his story, and when a research physicist and research psychologist are happy to endorse this book? Actually, yes. These last two scientists can be dismissed because their endorsements amount to no more than statements of *belief* regarding Strieber's story and scientists can be as gullible as anyone else. The matter of the hypnosis and the lie detector are something else. Hypnosis is widely used and probably regarded by most as a genuine, if mysterious, phenomenon. In fact, the nature and usefulness of hypnosis is still a matter of debate among psychologists. Many subjects, it seems, are simply responding to a relaxed situation with a skilled, sympathetic interviewer rather than entering a trance state in which hidden memories may be elicited. This might explain how a cunning author could bamboozle a psychiatrist with too much faith in his hypnotic technique. But if Strieber is lying then what about his successful polygraph test? Strieber tells us that in order to test the effectiveness of the polygraph he lied in his answers to two control questions and was evaluated as answering falsely. However, here he is caught in a trap of his own making. He does not notice that in Question 2 when asked "Do you intend to answer truthfully?" his reply of "Yes" is evaluated as truthful, yet he has already told us of his intention to lie! With this demonstration of the inadequacy of the polygraph test any faith we have placed in the hands of the "experts" to judge the truth of Strieber's story must disappear.

May I finish by congratulating you on the overall standard of *IZ* 25. An excellent balance of fiction and non-fiction was achieved, the stories by Peter Garratt and Nicola Griffith being particularly poignant and relevant.

Dave Hardman
Welling, Kent



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Dear Editors:

I just returned from NOLA CON (the World SF Convention) at New Orleans, having picked up a couple of issues of your magazine (I, of course, was aware of your existence prior to this, but never held it in the flesh). I sought it out after attending a talk by Kim Stanley Robinson on "The New British SF"

- which was informative and refreshing (he's a great speaker who went on - interestingly - without notes). I felt like I'd learned a few things... and he praised *Interzone* no end.

Walter A Smart
Manistee, Michigan

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).

since the bulk of our circulation is in Britain, not America. As far as the big US market is concerned, perhaps we'll remain a mere "semi-pro" mag.

THE 1988 HUGO AWARDS

Since 1953 the members of the World Science Fiction Convention have voted on the preceding year's best works of science fiction, and these "SF Achievement" awards, or "Hugos," are regarded as the field's premier honours. The latest Hugo Award winners, announced at the World SF Con in New Orleans in September 1988, are as follows:

Novel: *The Uplift War* by **David Brin**
Novella: "Eye for Eye" by **Orson Scott Card**

Novellette: "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight" by **Ursula Le Guin**

Short Story: "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers" by **Lawrence Watt-Evans**

Other Forms: *Watchmen*, text by **Alan Moore** and art by **Dave Gibbons**

Non-Fiction: *Michael Whelan's Works of Wonder* by **Michael Whelan**

Dramatic or Media Presentation: *The Princess Bride*, script by **William Goldman**

Professional Editor: **Gardner Dozois** (*Asimov's SF Magazine*)

Professional Artist: **Michael Whelan**
Semi-Professional Magazine: *Locus* edited by **Charles N. Brown**

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: **Judith Moffett**

This is David Brin's third Hugo – and Orson Scott Card's. The popularity of both writers was underlined by quite separate poll results published in the September issue of the news magazine *Locus*, where Brin's *The Uplift War* was named best sf novel and Card's *Seventh Son* best fantasy novel. Moreover, in a listing of "Favourite 1980s Authors" Brin came first by a large margin, with Card a firm second. **William Gibson**, surely the decade's trendiest sf author if not the most popular, came fifth in the *Locus* poll, with **Lucius Shepard** and **Gene Wolfe** in third and fourth places. Very interesting. The highest-ranking female was **C.J. Cherryh**, in sixth place, and the highest-ranking British author was **Clive Barker**, in twenty-seventh.

Locus also ran another of their "Best All-Time Author" polls in September. First by a million miles was **Robert A. Heinlein** (and this survey of reader's opinions was conducted before his recent death). Second and third, as ever, were **Isaac Asimov** and **Arthur C. Clarke**. The late **Philip K. Dick** did very well to come in fifth, and **Ursula Le Guin** was the highest-rated woman, at sixth place. **H.G. Wells** came fif-

teenth, **J.G. Ballard** twenty-eighth, **Brian Aldiss** thirty-second and **Olaf Stapledon** thirty-ninth. This year's conquering hero, David Brin, came forty-second in the "All-Time" poll, just ahead of E. E. "Doc" Smith.

OTHER AWARDS

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award for the best sf novel of 1987 (not to be confused with the Campbell Award for Best New Writer – see above) went to **Connie Willis** for her *Lincoln's Dreams* (available in Britain from Grafton Books). Runners-up were *The Sea and Summer* by **George Turner** (already the recipient of the Arthur C. Clarke Award) and *The Unconquered Country* by **Geoff Ryman** (already the recipient of a World Fantasy Award for its original appearance in *Interzone*).

The Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for best sf short story went to **Pat Murphy** for her "Rachel in Love" (already the recipient of a Nebula Award). Runners-up were **Ursula Le Guin** for her "Buffalo Gals..." and **Octavia E. Butler** for "The Evening and the Morning and the Night." Both the Campbell and the Sturgeon Memorial Awards, decided by expert panels, were announced at the University of Kansas by coordinator James Gunn.

Are these awards getting out of hand? In the American sf and fantasy fields we have the Hugos, the Nebulas, the World Fantasy Awards, the John W. Campbell, the Theodore Sturgeon, the Philip K. Dick – not to mention the *Locus* popularity polls and sundry other things. Will there be yet another annual prize named after Robert A. Heinlein? Somebody is probably working on that right now. Meanwhile in Britain we have the BSFA Awards and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for best novel (the last is worth £1,000 at present).

I feel rather guilty about this, but *IZ* is about to institute yet another prize (perhaps we're justified by the fact that there are comparatively few British awards). Now that we have gone bi-monthly, we want to "annualize" our readers' popularity polls, along the following lines.

INTERZONE ANNUAL AWARDS

People whose subscriptions lapse with issues 27 and 28 should find a small questionnaire form enclosed herein. These are much the same as the questionnaires we used to send out with every fourth issue when we were on a quarterly schedule. Our intention now is to send them out in December each year, along with the magazine issue dated "January/February." We're ask-

ing people to vote on the best stories, and the best artwork and non-fiction, published in *Interzone* in the calendar year just ending. In this case we're talking about those issues of the magazine which carry 1988 cover dates – i.e. issues 23 to 26 inclusive. The contents of the present issue, number 27, are not eligible this time around: they will be considered next year. Non-subscribers, and subscribers who are not about to lapse, are also welcome to join in. Just send us your opinions on any old scrap of paper – to reach us by 1st March 1989, please. The questions we're asking are as follows:

- 1) Which stories in issues 23-26 have you particularly liked?
- 2) Which stories in issues 23-26 have you disliked (if any)?
- 3) Which artists' illustrations in issues 23-26 have you particularly liked?
- 4) Which artists' illustrations in issues 23-26 have you disliked?
- 5) Which non-fiction items in issues 23-26 have you particularly liked?
- 6) Which non-fiction items in issues 23-26 have you disliked?
- 7) Who are your top five "all-time best" sf authors? (Please list in descending numerical order, 1-5.)

That last question is of course an unashamed filch from *Locus*. I think it will be very interesting to compare a British-biased "Best All-Time Author" poll with the American-biased one reported on above. But our many overseas readers are encouraged to vote too.

With questions 1-6 we shall subtract the negative mentions from the positives to arrive at final results. And the winning authors and artists will receive modest cash prizes, exact amounts to be announced next spring. We'll publish the results in the summer, and, if possible, we'll arrange to announce them in advance at the British Easter SF Convention (where the results of the BSFA Awards and the Arthur C. Clarke Award are also made public). So please use your votes wisely.

(David Pringle)

Interzone has new distributors – though specialist sf and fantasy dealers can still obtain the magazine through Titan Distributors, PO Box 250, London E3 3LT (tel. 01-538 8300), with whom we have a long-standing relationship.

The new distributors are Diamond-Europress (for the news trade) and Central Books (for general bookshops). Their addresses and phone numbers are given on page 3. Readers could help us greatly by passing this information to newsagents or booksellers who do not already stock *Interzone*. Thanks!

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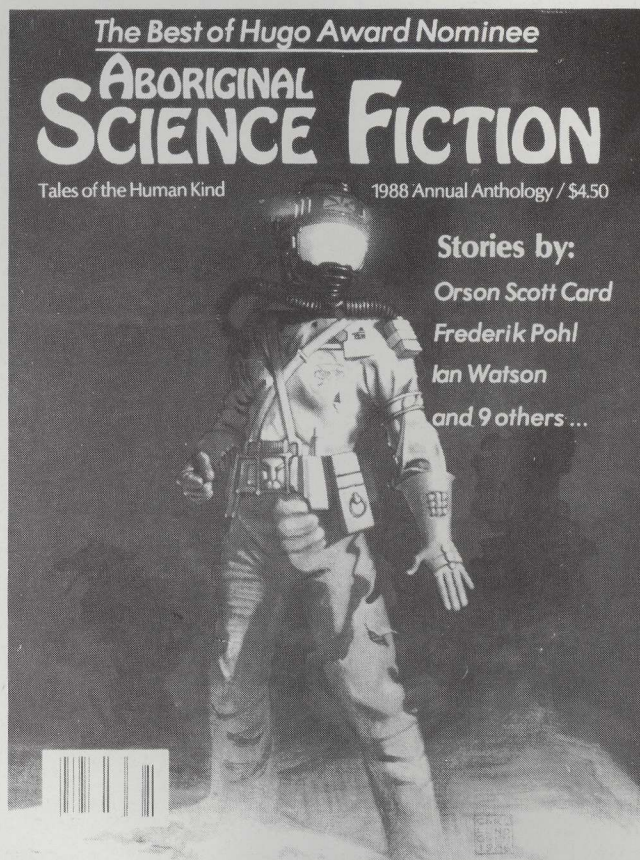
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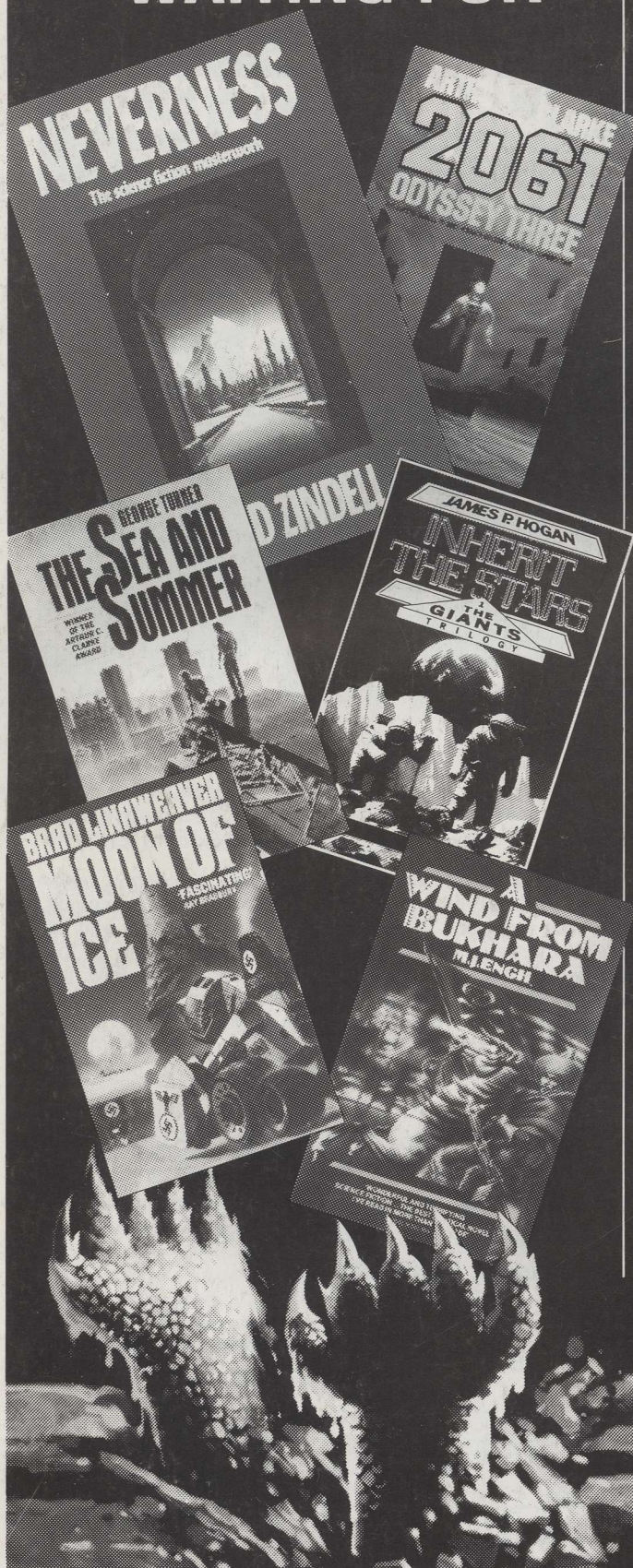
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