

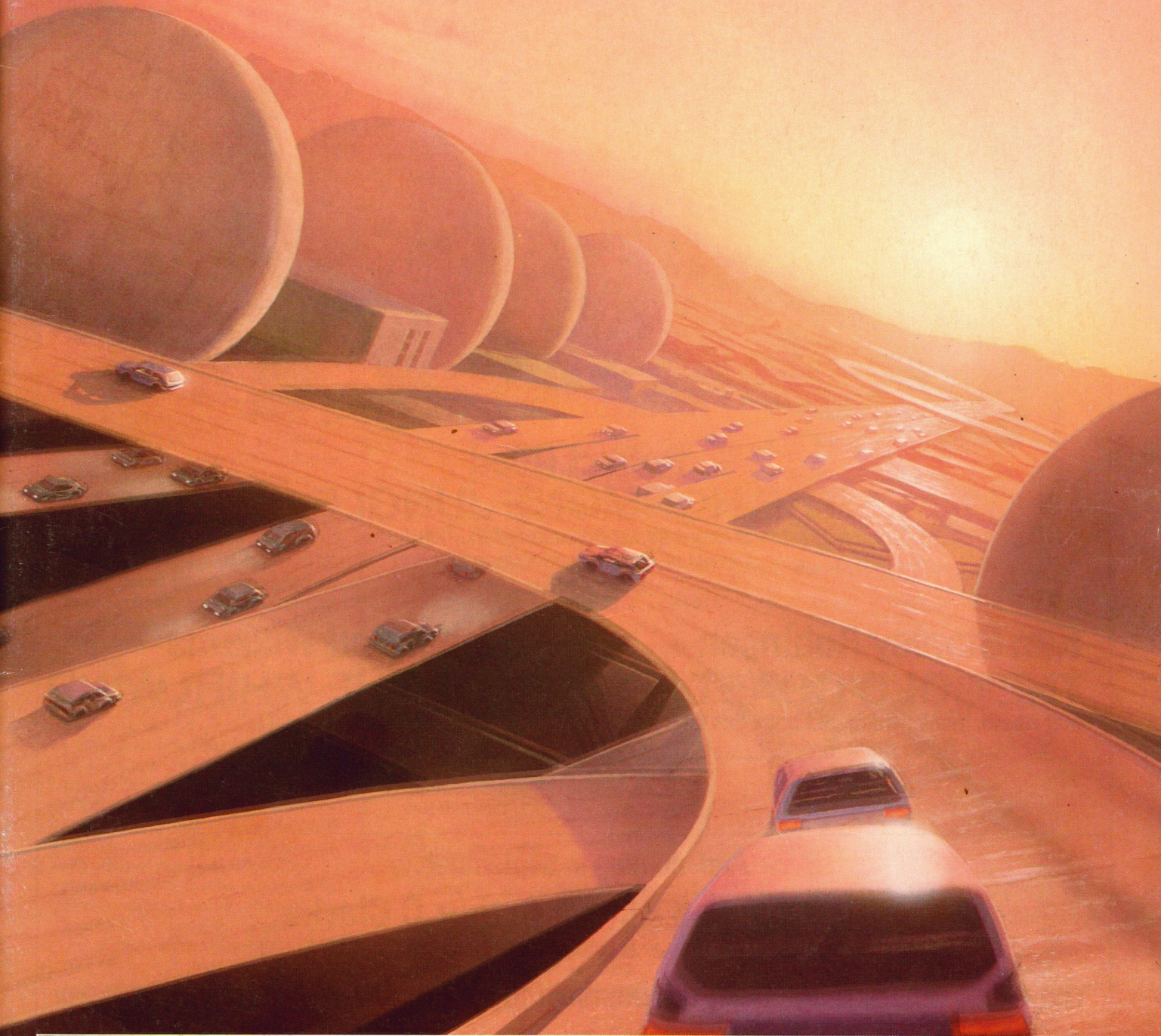
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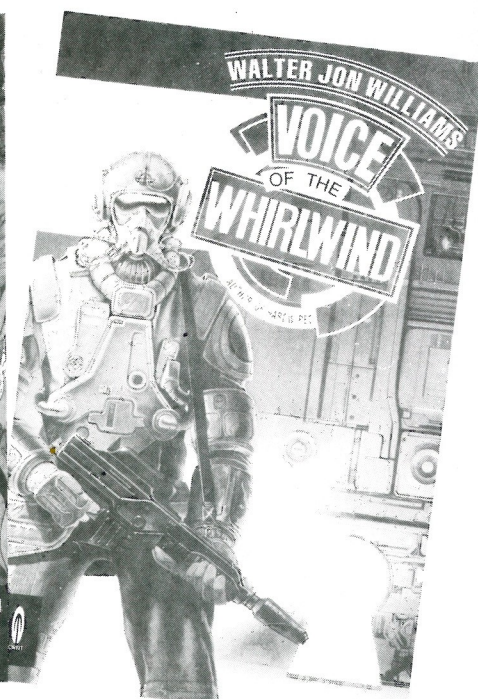
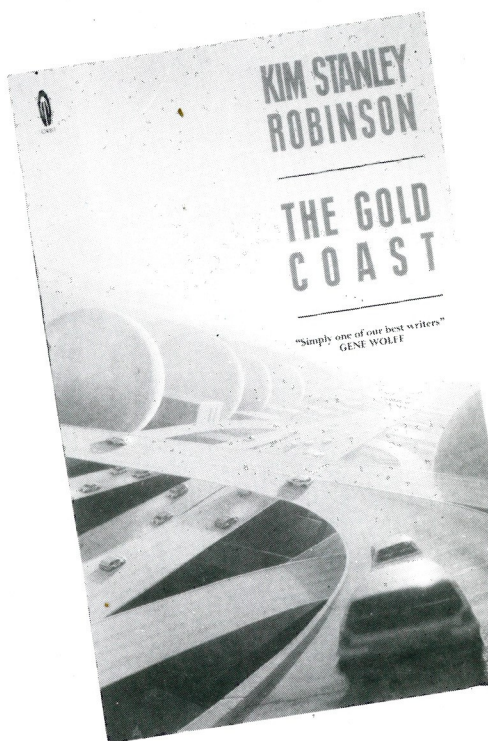
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**Subscriptions:** £11.00 for one year (six issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal orders should be crossed and made payable to *Interzone*. Overseas subscriptions are £12.50, payable by International Money Order. American subscribers may pay by US dollar check – \$22 (sea mail) or \$26 (air mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £100 (UK); \$200 or equivalent (overseas); \$250 or equivalent (overseas airmail).

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# interzone

## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 30

July/August 1989

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**Cover by Keith Scaife** for Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Gold Coast* (courtesy of Macdonald/Futura Ltd.)

Published six times a year.  
All material is © *Interzone*, 1989

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by Acorn Web Offset Ltd, Bradford

Trade distribution through Diamond-Europress  
Sales & Distribution, Unit 1,  
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,  
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR  
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,  
14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER  
(tel. 01 407 5447)



EDITORIAL & NEWS

# Interface

## David Pringle

Here they are, **The 1989 Interzone Annual Awards**, or, in other words, the results of our first "annualized" popularity poll – to be held henceforth at the end of each calendar year. Winner in the fiction category is **Eric Brown**, who has recently received £100 cash bonus from us; and winner in the artists' category is **SMS**, who has been given an additional £50. The most popular non-fiction contributor of last year is **Thomas M. Disch**, and the all-time favourite sf writer of a majority of *Interzone* readers is the late **Philip K. Dick**.

In December 1988 we sent questionnaires to all those readers whose subscriptions were due to lapse with issues 27 and 28, and 135 of them took the trouble to reply. We asked them to name their favourite stories in the four issues of *Interzone* which bore a 1988 cover date, and we also asked them to list the stories they disliked most. Likewise for the work of our illustrators, and for our non-fiction contributors. All negative mentions were subtracted from the total positive mentions to arrive at the point scores given below. Finally, we asked readers to list, in descending order, their top five "all-time best" sf authors. These are the detailed results:

### FICTION, ISSUES 23-26 INCLUSIVE

1)	"The Time-Lapsed Man" by Eric Brown	40
2)	"The Giving Plague" by David Brin	31
3)	"Big Trouble Upstairs" by Eric Brown	23
4)	"Dark Night in Toyland" by Bob Shaw	22
5)	"Stop Evolution in Its Tracks" by John Sladek	21
)	"The Growth of... Usher" by Brian Stableford	21
7)	"Our Lady of Springtime" by Peter T. Garratt	20
8)	"Blit" by David Langford	16
9)	"Scatter My Ashes" by Greg Egan	14
)	"Artefacts" by Christopher Evans	14
)	"Lux in Tenebris" by Phillip Mann	14
12)	"Agony of Suburban Knowledge" by Johnny Black	13
)	"Mirrors and Burnstone" by Nicola Griffith	13
14)	"Babel" by Christopher Burns	12
15)	"Famous Monsters" by Kim Newman	11
16)	"Something for Nothing" by S. M. Baxter	10
17)	"The Long Fall Home" by Paul Preuss	9
18)	"Karl and the Ogre" by Paul J. McAuley	7
19)	"Salvage" by Julio Buck Abrera	5
20)	"Face Lift" by Susan Beetlestone	3
)	"Wyrld Sisters" by Terry Pratchett	3
22)	"Lost Bodies" by Ian Watson	0
23)	"Heartland" by Karen Joy Fowler	-3
24)	"In the DreamTime" by Charles Stross	-4
25)	"Animator" by Alex Stewart	-27

### ARTISTS, ISSUES 23-26 INCLUSIVE

1)	SMS	51
2)	Duncan Fegredo	28
3)	Pete Lyon	16
4)	Barbara Hills	12
5)	Ferret	6
6)	Andrew Forrest	5
7)	David Hardy	5
8)	Russ Tudor	3
9)	Josh Kirby	-2
10)	Tina Horner	-8
11)	Emily English	-11

### NON-FICTION, ISSUES 23-26 INCLUSIVE

1)	Thomas M. Disch on Whitley Strieber	25
2)	Film reviews (Nick Lowe)	23
3)	Book reviews in general	18
4)	Terry Pratchett interview (Kincaid)	13
5)	Interface (Editorial/News)	12
6)	Christopher Priest's article	11
7)	Charles Platt's articles	9
8)	John Clute's reviews	8
9)	Paul McAuley's reviews	5
10)	Interaction (Readers' Letters)	4
)	Interviews in general	4
12)	Thomas M. Disch interview (Feeley)	2
)	Karen Joy Fowler interview (Kincaid)	2
14)	Comics reviews (Lilian Edwards)	1
15)	Leigh Kennedy interview (Kincaid)	0
16)	Books Received column	-6

Please bear in mind that all the above scores, for fiction, illustration and non-fiction, were derived by subtracting negative votes from positives. This method of scoring seems to us to be fair, but it does have the disadvantage of concealing the most controversial items. For instance, in the non-fiction category **Charles Platt** actually received more positive votes than anyone else – but he also received a great many negatives.

### ALL-TIME BEST SF AUTHORS

The top fifty or so writers, those who scored totals of ten points or more, are listed below. (Method of point scoring: 1st-place vote = 5 points; 2nd-place vote = 4 points; 3rd-place vote = 3 points; 4th-place vote = 2 points; and 5th-place vote = 1 point.)

1)	Philip K. Dick	128
2)	Arthur C. Clarke	114
3)	J. G. Ballard	95
4)	Isaac Asimov	87
5)	Robert A. Heinlein	79
6)	Brian Aldiss	76
7)	Frank Herbert	55
8)	Larry Niven	54
9)	Robert Silverberg	45
10)	Ursula Le Guin	42
11)	Gene Wolfe	41
12=)	Harlan Ellison; Michael Moorcock	36
14=)	Ray Bradbury; Bob Shaw; Harry Harrison	35
17=)	David Brin; H. G. Wells	30
19)	William Gibson	25
20=)	C. J. Cherryh; Roger Zelazny	24
22=)	Douglas Adams; Stephen R. Donaldson	21
24)	Samuel R. Delany	20
25=)	Alfred Bester; Christopher Priest; Keith Roberts	19
28=)	John Brunner; Alan Dean Foster; Terry Pratchett; Jack Vance	18
32)	Richard Cowper	16
33)	Clifford D. Simak	15
34=)	Joanna Russ; Kurt Vonnegut	14
36=)	Robert Sheckley; J. R. R. Tolkien	13
38=)	Michael Coney; John Crowley; James Tiptree, Jr.	12
41=)	Fredric Brown; Orson Scott Card; Ian Watson	11
44=)	Barrington Bayley; Joe Haldeman; Charles L. Harness; Lucius Shepard; Cordwainer Smith	10

For the record, the authors who scored nine points and hence just failed to make the above list were: Vonda McIntyre, Frederik Pohl, Jerry Pournelle, Bruce Sterling and John Varley. Everyone else scored less than nine points, I'm afraid, including such one-time favourites as Poul Anderson, James Blish, Leigh Brackett, Algis Budrys, Hal Clement, L. Sprague de Camp, Gordon R. Dickson, Philip José Farmer, Fritz Leiber, Anne McCaffrey, Eric Frank Russell, Olaf Stapledon, Theodore Sturgeon, Jules Verne and John Wyndham (not

Continued on page 74

# Ian Lee

## Once Upon a Time in the Park

Once upon a time in the Park there used to be quite a lot of equestrianism. And almost every day there was natation in the serpentine lake. On the paths and even on the grass itself there was perambulation of both a directed and an undirected kind. And bicyclists of different ages and levels of fitness were allowed to pedal to work along the road by the lake. On a handful of summer days, after noon and ices at the lakeside pagoda café, there was a display of human heliotropism. More often, there was scope for pluviometry. It was all very constitutional.

Athleticism was tolerated in its place, alongside a little ornithology or urban archaeology. Joggers who were guests at nearby hotels puffed and panted away the excesses of the night before or the night to come. There were team joggers too, running for rugby practices or, in the case of the posse of squaddies from the Royal barracks, sometimes even for punishment. The fattest and most unfit amongst them would pant red-faced and sweaty at a great distance behind the leaders. Tubby tubs of blubber rub-a-dubbing along. It was all very British.

On occasion I used to see Prince and Princess Malcolm out for a morning ride, he looking more and more like George V with each passing season, she remote like a snow-capped Alpine summit atop an eighteen-hand chestnut mare. They were always accompanied by some anonymous bodyguard and sometimes by a lesser royal; for instance, Lady Antonia Doesntmatter, daughter of Princess Margot or the Duke of Hargood or Avon or one of those other ones who tries to do an ordinary job in the City. Squadrons of cavalry too, some mornings. And on less auspicious days, I would see commoner mortals walking the face of the Earth. Lord Harrington, for instance, or Norman St John Paul Stevens or Sir Roy Geldhough out for a jog before a tough morning's creativity. I know how he must have been feeling. There was a wonderful absence of vehicles, save the odd Panda or a grocery delivery to the café or the restaurant.

When I used to cycle through the Park myself, I found all this uniquely reassuring. Everyone knew his place, you see. There was the illusion of democracy and freedom as the compartments were somehow orchestrated into a picturesque heterogeneity that carried no threat of republicanism.

For Ron, the chargehand gardener, however, the essence of the Park had always been to serve the King through the medium of horticulture. Although the public was allowed in, they were always there on

sufferance: they could pass through, they could even stay awhile for a picnic or other recreation but visitors they would remain. They were not encouraged to stay overnight. When horticulture was extended to include the new techniques of bioengineering, this was seen by Ron as a cause for rejoicing, as the scope for service was thereby increased. The area of the Park given over to "projects" could be increased and the public's access could be more tightly controlled. The notion grew within Ron that the real purpose of the Park could be pursued with increased efficiency and thoroughness and that extraneous activities of the Park could be reduced, curtailed, limited and finally eradicated.

At that time, when I was still a free agent, most things in the Park were still natural. The greatest exception was the deckchairs. These, in their bio-engineered form, so closely mimicked the look of their natural prototypes that at twenty paces one could not tell the difference. They grazed upon the sloping sward. But whereas one might once have taken such a description as metaphorical, even poetic, it was now no more than a slightly quaint description of reality. Indeed, they moved so very slowly, nibbled so minutely and collected payment with such delicacy and tact as would surely convert any but the most hardened naturetarian to the benefits of bio-improvement. The natural geese, on the other hand, still messed up the road with excrement of tourist breed and cheese. Ron had not yet perfected the Goose-guano beetle he was working on to clear up after them.

But Ron was not looking to introduce change precipitately. As a gardener, he took his cue from the pace of the natural world. While by no means a hay-stalk-chewer, he did nevertheless maintain a strong sense of the need for change to be evolutionary and for the strategic plan of the Park's development to include the timescales not only of the marigold and daffodil, but also those of the rhododendron, the camellia, the flowering cherry and the oak. And though he found to his satisfaction that he was extremely adept in all the new bioengineering techniques, he was not tempted to introduce too many new species too fast or to micromanage the lifestyles of all the plants and creatures in his charge.

Ron particularly loved his rose garden. The rose beds were set in an area of lawn fenced off behind low railings at the eastern end of the Park. They were meticulously tended and packed with such an exquisitely balanced stock that from June to September they presented a picture of loveliness that would bring

gasps of wonder and delight from all who looked upon them. In the early evening the sweet perfume of La Reine Victoria and the Duke of Windsor (for sentimental reasons Ron favoured the heavily fragrant old roses and floribundas with distinguished names) would hang so sweetly in the air that even the surliest jogger or transitting alcoholic would slow his pace to drink in the beneficent aroma.

**L**ooking back, I can fix the turning point of both my life and Ron's to the very second. The carriages from the Palace were making their fortnightly exercise along the main road through the Park and for once the Lord Chamberlain of the Household had decided to accompany them in order to take the air. It was a fine morning after heavy overnight rain and there was a slight breeze from the east. On passing the rose garden the Lord Chamberlain became aware of the heavenly aroma and called for his carriage to halt. The black horses stood stock still, plumes of breath visible in the cool morning air, the black shiny carriage with the Royal coat of arms standing behind them like a hearse.

As it happened, Ron was walking almost exactly alongside the carriage as it stopped and the whole following scene took place as neatly as though choreographed for a formula TV drama. The Lord Chamberlain addressed Ron directly, seeking to know who was responsible for the roses. Having discovered that the answer was standing before him, he immediately ordered that six dozen of the choicest and most scented blooms should be delivered to the Palace that very morning.

At that same moment I was cycling along, minding my own business (more or less) but had allowed my attention to become distracted by the sight of the Lord Chamberlain, who was tall, distinguished and wearing a black morning coat, in conversation with Ron, who was round-shouldered, shifty and had his overalls held up with a tie.

Some days in the Park, when the tarmac is wet and the sun is still low in the morning sky, the glare from the road is so intense that one cannot see where one is going at all. On this particular day, thus distracted and blinded from all normal sensory contact and control, and at the very moment the Lord Chamberlain was ordering the six dozen roses for His Majesty, I crashed into a Panificio Siciliano bakery lorry, which was intent on delivery to the lakeside restaurant and coming along on the wrong side of the road. I was killed outright.

The postillion of the royal landau, unfortunately, was listening to a personal stereo and remained unaware of my plight, which was beyond the scope of his peripheral vision. The Lord Chamberlain's senses were fully occupied with the roses and Ron's were fully occupied with the Lord Chamberlain. The bakery driver, who had a part-time job in the Paddington mafia and didn't want to get involved with the police, made an extraordinarily rapid assessment of this situation and then scooped up my body and my bicycle and threw it into the back of his lorry along with the big brown paper sacks of French sticks. An hour later, unobserved, he left my remains in some rhododendron bushes behind a statue dedicated to the cavalry of the Empire, which is where Ron found me late that afternoon.

One thing you have to admire about Ron is his farsightedness. He had already, within hours, realized that a special relationship with the Lord Chamberlain of the Household and a contract to supply roses could well be the opportunity of a lifetime. Somehow Ron knew that, like the inexorable burgeoning of a wigwam of sweet peas, this opportunity would grow and grow but would need food and attention if it was to survive. He knew that his empire was going to expand and that he would need more resources of all practical kinds. When he came across my body, still fresh, and the discarded bicycle, still oiled, he knew that an evening's work in the laboratory could produce something very useful at almost no cost.

I was never heard of again. Work thought I was ill, home thought I was just staying late at the office or had gone on somewhere for a drink or someone's leaving or birthday party. By the time I was reported missing – late the next morning – there was no evidence of where I had gone at all.

**F**or many weeks life in the Park showed no discernible change. As I went round with Ron about his business, helping him carry manure for the roses, I became more familiar with the range of life within the Park. Ron would talk to me about it; he knew that he had restored some sentience to my creaking frame, though to this day I cannot be sure whether he knew how much. He spoke as though he were speaking to himself and it was thus that I became aware of his deepest fears and longings. I also, of course, without volition and therefore without guilt, became his accomplice.

The mornings remained quiet, even stately, and very British, the riders, swimmers, walkers, tramps, soldiers and occasional celebrities acknowledging each other's presence with the barest nods of recognition, each wrapped in his or her own private communion with nature. Later in the day, the swarms of tourists would invade, running, littering, sprawling and trampling without thought beyond immediate gratification of base desires. The stench of decayed meat began to float from the franchised hot-dog and burger cabins. Ron would become more and more irritable as the day went on, as this scum formed on the surface of his beloved Park, as the deckchairs were abused, as people who were really no better than common peasants would use the rides for sand fights or even open defecation.

By the early evening on a warm summer day the scene by the serpentine lake would metamorphose again from the morning's Britishness into a Byzantine phantasmagoria. Half close your eyes and you could imagine yourself on the corniche at Abu Dhabi. Swarthy faces and flashing eyes and wrists patrolled the lakeside drag. There were sheikhs and princes (at least Ron said they were) and lofty Bedu, leavened with darker faces and crinkly hair from Zanzibar or the smaller, wirier shopkeeper class from Gujerat via Dubai. Ron had learned the distinctions of caste like a true phylum/species-trained horticulturalist. Away to the west and north-east the jewellery and perfume counters of Selfridges and Harrods lay in ruins. Back here men in white shoes and bracelets, neck chains and open-necked shirts would parade with the nonchalance of the very rich. Behind them, wrapped dolls

waddled in black, faces beaked. Other dolls adopted a different style, brightly coloured in silks and taffeta that fluoresced in the early evening sun. Perfume clouds trailed behind them like a fog.

On benches by the side of the road sat cabals of older men, their walking sticks propped beside them as they watched life unfold. The waves of young people would lap along the shore, linking arms, unlinking arms, turning in twos and threes, forming and unforming in smaller and longer lines like some vast slow Levantine parody of a chorus line. Small children in designer dungarees weaved in and out of the throng on brand new roller skates or bicycles. They would obstruct the innocent passers-by with the insolent contempt of the true believer for the infidel. The tables turned indeed. But for them the wheel was a toy, whereas for me it is now a way of life.

I've been wheeling through the Park for so long now and been having so many different thoughts about its features that I've come close to thinking I can adopt the identity of any of the normal features of the Park itself. Ask me to be a Canada goose and in the flap of a feather there I am on the end of that enormous wobbling V gliding through the heavens. Ask me to be a boathouse and I can stand at the water's edge decaying gracefully unnoticed. But deep down I know that these are only the idle fantasies of a creature who has been bioengineered once back from the dead and become morosely fascinated with both the potential of the techniques but also their terrible limitations.

Though a genius in many ways, Ron did not have a fully developed or balanced imagination. When he discovered my body and wrecked bicycle, he was preoccupied with thoughts of his new role as purveyor of blooms to the Royal Household and was thinking about all the extra fetching and carrying he was going to have to do. What he did therefore was turn these fortuitous remains into a self-propelling and partially self-loading wheelbarrow with some simple digging and raking capability. It is not really what I had planned for myself and I have not yet managed to convince myself that it is a noble calling.

But a wheelbarrow is what I now am.

Anyway, as I said, for some weeks in the Park nothing discernible changed. But gradually the Palace's requirements for flowers started to grow and in addition to roses they started to ask for irises, gloxinias, carnations, chrysanthemums, sweet peas, tiger lilies and many other varieties. Day by day, imperceptibly at first but then with an ineluctable momentum, Ron's pace of activity started to increase. He began to tell me how things were getting too much for him, though try as he might he didn't have it in him to complain. For Ron's devotion to the monarchy was as total as his craving for perfection in gardening and his suspicion of outsiders of any kind. The thought that he had now achieved a position of prominent service to the Royal Household filled him with an overwhelming pride and dedication that was close to fanaticism. There was no question of not responding to the challenge and Ron could not let the grass grow under his feet.

He could see that the requirements were set on an upward path and he could see that a plan was necessary. Ron's plan, arrived at in long conversations with



Illustrations by Russ Tudor

himself as he and I ferried horse manure from the gathering points along the rides to the original famous rose garden, had three parts.

First, there was a need to increase manpower and productivity. Second, it would be necessary to expand the area devoted to production and consequently reduce and control the deprivations of the so-called public. Third, he would have to find ways to bump up the yield from the earth itself.

Ron was not the only gardener, of course, but he was the chargehand and, I think, the only one still fully human. The other gardeners, once naturals too (though some of them perhaps not in the present generation) were now adapted into shadowy creeping figures, underlings who rooted for weeds in the undergrowth like vermin. They rarely came out into full sunlight except perhaps in the very early morning when there was still a fresh dew to lick from the grass. Ron would tease the school-leavers amongst them good-humouredly. "Mind where you're licking that grass, young Davey!" he would call. "That's where the dogwalkers let them do it!" Then he would wink at any curious passer-by and say, "It isn't really" and give a throaty chuckle.

As the first part of the plan, Ron made a bid to the Park authorities for more school-leavers and made arrangements in the laboratory to optimize their adaptation in favour of horticulture and play down the other park-keeper functions such as litter-collection and being friendly to the tourists. In fact, park-keeping was quite a popular option. Fashion was moving against the electronic adaptation which school-leavers who went into offices were forced to undergo; electronics were regarded as rather passé and being turned into a personal computer had come to be seen as nothing better than a rather macabre joke. On the other hand there was an upsurge of interest in the natural sector, including farming, reserve management and park-keeping. Guard-dog and horse characteristics were probably the most popular but there was no great difficulty over some of the more agricultural or artisanal adaptations either. The bulk of Ron's workforce ended up somewhere between an old-fashioned navy and a dog. It was hard to place them exactly on the social scale but somewhere close to the level of the pig/roadsweepers or the goat office cleaners wouldn't be far wrong, I suppose. Most of them were quite happy.

Once he had the extra manpower Ron set about extending the cultivated area. He had noticed one or two of the more ill-bred tourists picking flowers from beds that were only protected by low ornamental railings, so some of the new recruits were set to building high interwoven wood fences. Elsewhere, Ron planted thick pyracantha hedges on a plan which, within three or four years, was to reduce the open area of the Park to a quarter of its former extent. To protect the pyracantha in the meantime high wire screens were erected and the public were directed into an ever smaller sector by the lake's edge.

But always the bagladies, the messengers and the dogwalkers were trying to encroach. "I can deal with the ordinary public," Ron was fond of saying to me, as we trundled some fresh load of fenceposts to the latest enclosure, "but some of these bloody weirdo

groups are no better than terrorists." The bagladies were a strange bunch. Displaced from their traditional habitat on the Embankment by new development and hounded from the streets of the city by the new breeds of dog-police, they had started to try to colonize the outer fringes of the Park. They were naturals themselves of course, and in their unadapted state, ironically enough, were singularly ill-equipped to deal with the more natural conditions of the Park as it was. As the Park under Ron's supervision became more intensively organized, however, so it became a more attractive habitat to the bagladies. And when he (we) branched out into vegetables, the pressure of the bagladies' advance became a major preoccupation.

The messengers and the dogwalkers were a different problem, though both equally anarchic in their way. The messengers were young men and women who had been grafted into bicycles and whose job it was to make deliveries across the city. The Park lay on one of their main routes and they did not take kindly to some of the new restrictions being imposed by Ron. The dog-walkers were local residents, many of them influential: magistrates, justices of the peace, church wardens. They too, objected to the infringement of their freedom to wander in the Park. But deep down even they felt the sovereign mystery of ancient hereditary power and, trembling, shrank from the thought of choking the Royal nourishment.

The fences sometimes got pulled down nonetheless and sometimes tracks would be found in the new beds, or signs of paws having dug in search of bones. A few times the bagladies came at night and broke through into the greenhouses where it was warm and there was straw. Once a couple of them were found dead after eating something that might have looked like a tomato but was really only the halfway stage in an experiment of Ron's. But what's a baglady more or less in this city nowadays, said Ron. If they didn't die peacefully in here from eating a mutant tomato then they'd be out there getting mown down by the motorcycle delivery gangs or being forcibly rehabilitated by the caring constables.

The police called round for a chat, ostensibly just to pass the time of day. They seemed more interested in the state of Ron's nursery than they ever had before. Sergeant Bulstrode listened to Ron describing his plans for the future and his explanation of how the fatal tomato came to be in the greenhouse rather than a safe laboratory. Having considered the matter, the officer decided that, in the circumstances, there was insufficient evidence of foul play to warrant pursuing an investigation, especially as one of the certain consequences would be disruption of the supply of vegetables and flowers to the Royal Household. He didn't have the bottle.

As he was leaving, however, the worthy sergeant flexed his nostrils at the door of Ron's workshop (I was standing just outside) and said, almost as some sort of self-exculpatory joke,

"I think I smell a rat."

Ron looked startled for a moment and then looked down at a pile of dead *ratti norvegici* that had been rounded up from the margins of the lake that morning by a special sniffer squad of his own bioengineered spaniel/parkhands.

"Ah yes," said Ron, winking slyly at me. "We can't



have vermin eating the royal vegetables, can we?"

As the weeks went by, Ron became noticeably shiftier, sure evidence that he was working to his plan. As I said, the third part of the plan was to make the earth itself more fructiferous. I first noticed how he had become disappointed with his geraniums and had fretted for days over what he was going to do about them. "They really need bringing on a bit," he would say, half to himself, half to me, as he stood over the beds, letting a handful of soil trickle through his fingers like sand. He'd tried a whole lot of different remedies and all the bio-engineering tricks suggested by the Expert System but still they didn't really grow the way he liked to see them grow. He'd begun by getting the parkhands to start a premium compost heap, consisting entirely of natural organic vegetable matter. Then he had us all out on shit patrols. "Goose and dog, and try and get us a little bit of mallard, will you?" he'd say. "Them geraniums love a little bit of mallard in between their toes."

I suppose it was a natural progression from bread and compost to goose guano and then on to dead animals. Ron would have said it was the natural order of things, a question of hierarchy. His first move into the sentient field was a cull of the moorhen population on the lake. "Too many of them," he said imperiously, hitching up his overall trousers, then looking over his shoulder with a little duck of the head like a guilty schoolboy. "No-one's interested in bloody moorhen anyway." Tragic perhaps, but one could hardly deny that he was right.

But it didn't stop there. Before we knew where we were he was on to the mallard, then the tufted duck, then the pochard, then the Canada geese, then the great crested grebe, then the mute swans and finally the black. Ron had a finely developed sense of hierarchy indeed. If a cormorant or three were to happen by for a few days away from the coast, they would be lucky to escape the netting parties. He even took a heron one morning, which put a spring in his step for the rest of that day.

Ron had branched out into vegetables in a big way and he was doing really well. He had a contract with the Palace that was little short of phenomenal. They were really doing some entertaining down there these days, what with all the grandchildren and the parties. The Gay Prince was living up to his sobriquet in both the common and the archaic senses of the word. In the summer there were garden parties practically every day, leading to cucumber consumption on a scale unmatched anywhere in the Western world. And Ron, shifty old Ron, still given to shrugging and looking over his shoulder as though the cops were after him, had got an enormous piece of the action. One might even suspect that his simple devotion to the service of the monarchy could not help becoming tainted with simple greed.

Most of the Park was now under cultivation. The bagladies had been pushed back and there was high barbed wire to keep the dog-walkers out from where they weren't wanted. More security guards had been "developed" by crossing some of the old ones with stray policemen or soldiers,



especially some of the tubbiest stragglers from the morning runs. "Don't really matter about the fat," said Ron. "Let's be honest; the sedentary type of guarding duty don't really require athletes, now do it?"

Toll charges on the lakeside road together with turnstiles at either end had succeeded in eliminating the messengers. Only the Arabs could still afford to stroll there at teatime, which they did, imagining themselves by the Gulf, the rowing boats as dhows, the shoreside market selling produce and trinkets like the souk in far-off Muscat, fragrant, dangerous and eternal. They seemed oblivious of what was actually going on around them.

The royals still used what they could of the Park, of course. After all it was still their Park. The turnstiles were pulled aside in the mornings to allow them through with their bodyguards for their morning ride. They waved minimally at Ron and me if they saw us and looked in amazement at the acres of crop we were now superintending. Sometimes a lofty nostril might be seen to curl at the sight of a lowly parkhand forking something mushy and corrupted into the soil; for the Royals came to the Park now not for exercise but as on some kind of pilgrimage. Though goodness was not obvious at all stages of the wondrous plants' production, they had experience of its emergence in the final culinary sacrament. They looked upon their land and went home uplifted and content.

The fact was that Ron's vegetables were coming to have near-legendary taste and quality, and the Royal Family was growing strong upon them. Regular visitors to the Palace were clamouring, often in a quite unseemly fashion, to be invited back, as they too felt their strength and wealth increasing in direct proportion to the number of dinners and lunches they had. Ron was hard-pressed to keep up with demand. He set up subsidiary market gardens in other Parks throughout the capital; but the Palace responded by taking over more buildings and starting to host more dinners. In a very few weeks a spiralling metaphorical waterspout of horticultural activity and consumption could be seen tottering heavily above the city. Instead of the boats and fish and seaweed of Biblical memory, this twister was devouring cartloads of artichokes, asparagus, aristocrats and cut flowers.

And as court society thrived, so did the creation of new peerages, viscountcies and dukedoms. This novice aristocracy found itself surrounded with the sort of people it could do business with and what's more in such agreeable circumstances and at such delectable boards. The King became insulated from his people as the richness and power of Ron's produce was absorbed into the bloodstream of his body politic like a drug.

But Ron, both figuratively and then literally, ended up getting carried away. First, there were simply one or two reports of dogs not coming back to their owners. The dogwalkers, relegated to the periphery of the Park, began, in response, to form vigilante groups and walk their dogs in groups for safety. Bull mastiffs, Alsatians, Dobermanns became the most popular breeds. Dark satanic rumours started circulating among the bagladies and they began to stay well clear of the Parks.

**T**hen, one morning during a particularly hard gallop one of the royal bodyguards was found unconscious after having become separated from his charges. His horse had disappeared. Fortunately Ron was on hand to explain that it had thrown its rider and had broken a leg and had had to be destroyed on the spot and he had just been trying to be helpful by disposing of the body. The bodyguard himself had concussion and wasn't able to provide an explanation of how he had come to be thrown in the first place. No-one sought to question Ron's account of what happened because after all, didn't he have the big vegetable contract with the Palace? As far as I was concerned, the horse was the largest load I had wheeled and it was more than I would like to try again.

But Ron's inner zeal had begun to sprout and in the dark corners of his soul was beginning to grow strongly and head for the light. The leaves were falling and the tourists came and went. Not quite as many went as came but what the hell, said Ron (to me, when we were alone) who notices a little Japanese tourist more or less? Or an Arab. Or an African, don't get me wrong, or a Greek or a Yank, I'm no racist, or an Aussie. The hoteliers just think they've skipped without paying their bills and since they've been ripping them off anyway they don't bother to report anything. Their cousins and mothers and uncles and brothers in the desert or the outback just think they've gone native in the lucrative seductive West. More camels for us, they say, so why should we worry?

But when a minor royal went missing the authorities no longer found it possible to turn a blind eye. Lady Helen Somethingorother, quite well down the chain, not even rating a personal bodyguard, was the first to go. But the police were in the next day, sniffing around, trying to interrogate any parkhands with the power of speech. And although Ron managed to keep them off the scent, they spent a few awkward weeks asking lots of questions without ever really digging up anything they could use.

Ron lay low for a while but one day the Lord Chamberlain raised an eyebrow as if to convey the message that the quality of the courgettes was in detectable decline. It was enough for Ron to feel that he was on a slippery slope towards treason and that he had once more to devote himself with new zeal to his primary objective – the service of the King. Soon a few other minor nobles ceased to respond to dinner invitations – Lord Harrington, the 3rd Duchess of Grantham, whose great-grandmother had once been Prime Minister, Viscount Savile OBE – and though there was never any evidence, nevertheless eventually the rumours reached the King.

**R**on was summoned for an audience and the King asked all the right questions. Ron, in awe and wonder that he should actually be in his Sovereign's presence, found it hard to do more than shrug his shoulders and look shifty. But in the end his devotion reached down to release the catch on some deep trapdoor of honesty within him and Ron fell through. Yes, the success of his vegetables was due to the extra special quality of the compost he used and yes it did involve special organic matter all right higher organic matter all right all right human organic

matter yes noble human organic matter. Yes it had started with leaves and discarded sandwiches and had moved up the hierarchy through horse manure to dead pigeons to rats to dogs to horses yes and each time the fertilizer had moved up the evolutionary chain the flowers had become a little brighter and the vegetables had become a little more tasty and yes nutritious. But the need was there, your Majesty thrived; there is no higher honour than to serve your Majesty.

"Except, it seems, to be served to His Majesty," remarked the King, almost under his breath, appalled and delighted by this example of loyalty and allegiance he beheld. Then louder, so that the court could hear, he said,

"You, Ron, have a heart and spirit finer than that of any noble in our Kingdom. We will be forever in your debt for the bounty you have heaped on us and our family. You realize, however, that natural laws have been broken and that amends must be made. We must consider what is to be done."

The King paused for a long moment, his gaze steady on Ron's abject kneeling figure, then said,

"Leave us now."

Ron rose with a new steadiness in his shoulders, not shrugging or looking behind him. He came back to the Park and winked in sombre mood as he gave us our instructions.

So it was that, after the digitalis from his favourite patch of foxgloves had been administered and after some of the inner circle of parkhands had minced and pelletized his body, I had the honour and the sorrow – in accordance with his last wish – of wheeling Ron's body to the rose garden where his great career had begun. I tipped his remains into shallow trenches – at roughly nine-inch intervals – and with my rake hand that had once been a bicycle-chain wheel I spread the rich earth over his final act of devotion.

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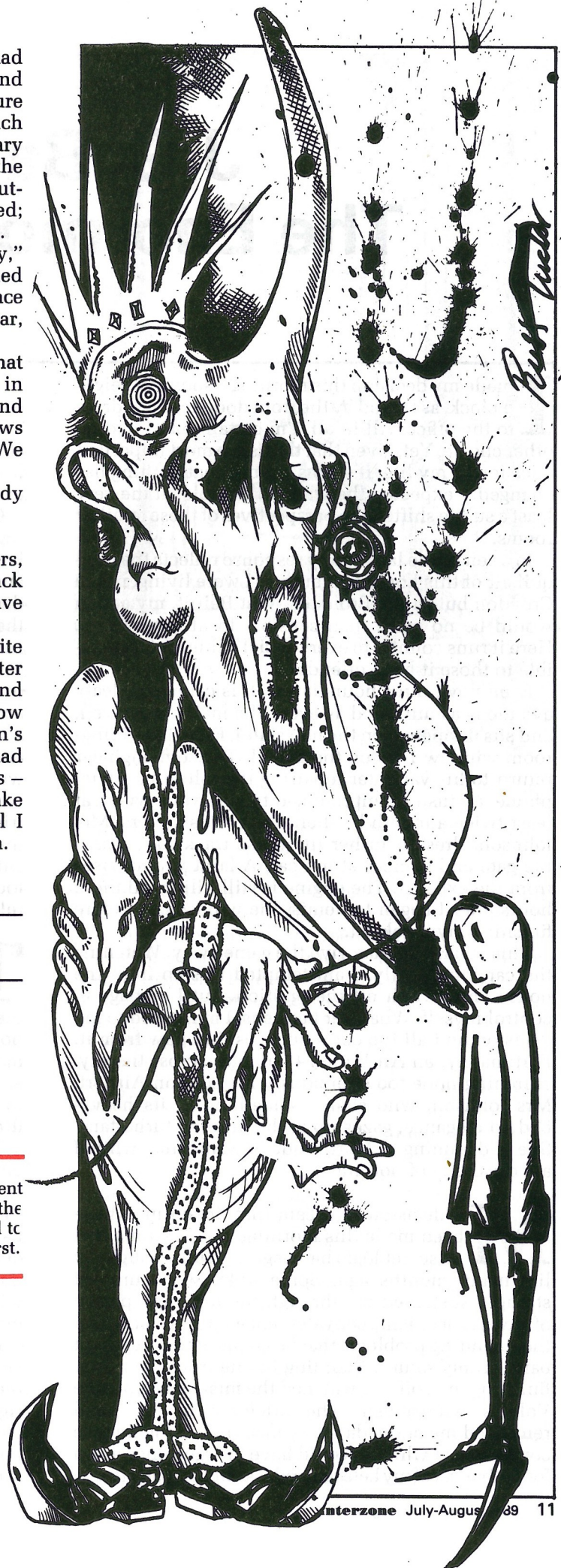
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**Ian Lee**, who was born in 1951, is one of *Interzone*'s recent British discoveries. He lives in London. The above is the second wayward and amusing story he has contributed to the magazine: "Driving Through Korea" (IZ 27) was the first.

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# J.G. Ballard

## The Enormous Space

I made my decision this morning – soon after eight o'clock, as I stood by the front door, ready to drive to the office. All in all, I'm certain that I had no other choice. Yet, given that this is the most important decision of my life, it seems strange that nothing has changed. I expected the walls to tremble, at the very least a subtle shift in the perspectives of these familiar rooms.

In a sense, the lack of any response reflects the tranquil air of this London suburb. If I were living, not in Croydon but in the Bronx or West Beirut, my action would be no more than sensible local camouflage. Here it runs counter to every social value, but is invisible to those it most offends.

Even now, three hours later, all is calm. The leafy avenue is as unruffled as ever. The mail has arrived, and sits unopened on the hall stand. From the dining-room window I watch the British Telecom engineer return to his van after repairing the Johnsons's telephone, an instrument reduced to a nervous wreck at least twice a month by their teenage daughters. Mrs Johnson, dressed in her turquoise track-suit, closes the gate and glances at my car. A faint vapour rises from the exhaust. The engine is still idling, all these hours after I began to demist the windscreen before finishing my breakfast.

This small slip may give the game away. Watching the car impatiently, I am tempted to step from the house and switch off the ignition, but I manage to control myself. Whatever happens, I must hold to my decision and all the consequences that flow from it. Fortunately, an Air India 747 ambles across the sky, searching none too strenuously for London Airport. Mrs Johnson, who shares something of its heavy-bodied elegance, gazes up at the droning turbo-fans. She is dreaming of Martinique or Mauritius, while I am dreaming of nothing.

My decision to dream that dream may have been made this morning, but I assume that its secret logic had begun to run through my life many months ago. Some unknown source of strength sustained me through the unhappy period of my car accident, convalescence and divorce, and the unending problems that faced me at the merchant bank on my return. Standing by the front door after finishing my coffee, I watched the mist clear from the Volvo's windscreen. The briefcase in my hand reminded me of the day-long meetings of the finance committee at which I would have to argue once again for the budget of my beleaguered research department.

Then, as I set the burglar alarm, I realized that I could change the course of my life by a single action. To shut out the world, and solve all my difficulties at a stroke, I had the simplest of weapons – my own front door. I needed only to close it, and decide never to leave my house again.

Of course, this decision involved more than becoming a mere stay-at-home. I remember walking into the kitchen, surprised by this sudden show of strength, and trying to work out the implications of what I had done. Still wearing my business suit and tie, I sat at the kitchen table, and tapped out my declaration of independence on the polished formica.

By closing the front door I intended to secede not only from the society around me. I was rejecting my friends and colleagues, my accountant, doctor and solicitor, and above all my ex-wife. I was breaking off all practical connections with the outside world. I would never again step through the front door. I would accept the air and the light, and whatever electric power and water that continued to flow through the meters. But otherwise I would depend on the outside world for nothing. I would eat only whatever food I could find within the house. After that I would rely on time and space to sustain me.

The Volvo's engine is still running. It is three pm., seven hours after I first switched on the ignition, but I can't remember when I last filled the tank. It's remarkable how few passers-by have noticed the pattering exhaust – only the retired headmaster who patrols the avenue morning and afternoon actually stopped to stare at it. I watched him mutter to himself and shake his walking-stick before shuffling away.

The murmur of the engine unsettles me, like the persistent ringing of the telephone. I can guess who is calling: Brenda, my secretary; the head of marketing, Dr Barnes; the personnel manager, Mr Austen (I have already been on sick-leave for three weeks); the dental receptionist (a tender root canal reminds me that I had an appointment yesterday); my wife's solicitor, insisting that the first of the separation payments is due in six months' time.

Finally I pick up the telephone cable and pull the jack on this persistent din. Calming myself, I accept that I will admit to the house anyone with a legitimate right to be there – the TV rental man, the gas and electricity meter-readers, even the local police. I cannot expect to be left completely on my own. At the same time, it will be months before my action arouses

any real suspicions, and I am confident that by then I will long since have moved into a different realm.

I feel tremendously buoyant, almost lightheaded. Nothing matters any more. Think only of essentials: the physics of the gyroscope, the flux of photons, the architecture of very large structures.

Five pm. Time to take stock and work out the exact resources of this house in which I have lived for seven years.

First, I carry my unopened mail into the dining-room, open a box of matches and start a small, satisfying fire in the grate. To the flames I add the contents of my briefcase, all the bank-notes in my wallet, credit cards, driving licence and cheque-book.

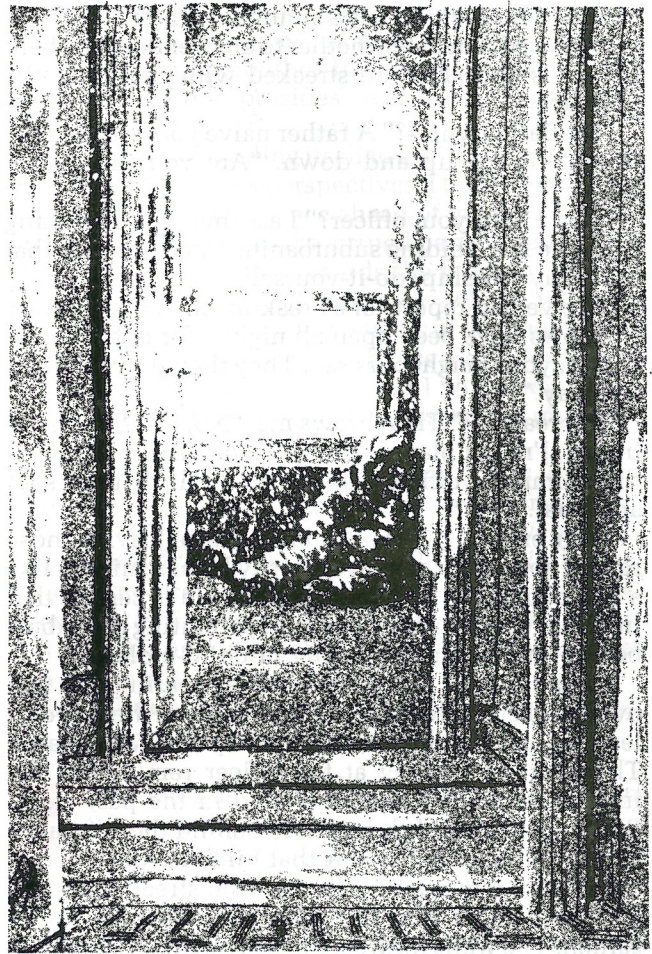
I inspect the kitchen and pantry shelves. Before leaving, Margaret had stocked the freezer and refrigerator with a fortnight's supply of eggs, ham and other bachelor staples – a pointed gesture, bearing in mind that she was about to sail off into the blue with her lover (a tedious sales manager). These basic rations fulfil the same role as the keg of fresh water and sack of flour left at the feet of a marooned sailor, a reminder of the world rejecting him.

I weigh the few cartons of pasta in my hand, the jars of lentils and rice, the tomatoes and courgettes, the rope of garlic. Along with the tinned anchovies and several sachets of smoked salmon in the freezer, there are enough calories and protein to keep me going for at least ten days, three times that period if I ration myself. After that I will have to boil the cardboard boxes into a nutritious broth and rely on the charity of the wind.

At 6.15 the car's engine falters and stops.

In every way I am marooned, but a reductive Crusoe paring away exactly those elements of bourgeois life which the original Robinson so dutifully reconstituted. Crusoe wished to bring the Croydons of his own day to life again on his island. I want to expel them, and find in their place a far richer realm formed from the elements of light, time and space.

**T**he first week has ended peacefully. All is well, and I have stabilized my regime most pleasantly. To my surprise, it has been remarkably easy to reject the world. Few people have bothered me. The postman has delivered several parcels, which I carry straight to the dining-room fireplace. On the third day my secretary, Brenda, called at the front door. I smiled winningly, reassured her that I was merely taking an extended sabbatical. She looked at me in her sweet but shrewd way – she had been strongly supportive during both my divorce and the crisis at the office – and then left with a promise to keep in touch. A succession of letters has arrived from Dr Barnes, but I warm my hands over them at the fireplace. The dining-room grate has become an efficient incinerator in which I have erased my entire past – passport; birth, degree and share certificates; uncashed traveller's cheques and 2000 French Francs left from our last unhappy holiday in Nice; letters from my broker and orthopaedic surgeon. Documents of a dead past, they come to life briefly in the flame, and then write themselves into the dust.



Illustrations by SMS

Eliminating this detritus has kept me busy. I have pulled down the heavy curtains that hung beside the windows. Light has flooded into the rooms, turning every wall and ceiling into a vivid tabula rasa. Margaret had taken with her most of the ornaments and knick-knacks, and the rest I have heaved into a cupboard. Suffused with light, the house can breathe. Upstairs the windows are open to the sky. The rooms seem larger and less confined, as if they too have found freedom. I sleep well, and when I wake in the morning I almost feel myself on some Swiss mountain-top, with half the sky below me.

Without doubt, I am very much better. I have put away the past, a zone that I regret ever entering. I enjoy the special ease that comes from no longer depending on anyone else, however well-intentioned.

Above all, I am no longer dependent on myself. I feel no obligation to that person who fed and groomed me, who provided me with expensive clothes, who drove me about in his motor-car, who furnished my mind with intelligent books and exposed me to interesting films and art exhibitions. Wanting none of these, I owe that person, myself, no debts. I am free at last to think only of the essential elements of existence – the visual continuum around me, and the play of air and light. The house begins to resemble an advanced mathematical surface, a three-dimensional chessboard. The pieces have yet to be placed, but I feel them forming in my mind.

A policeman is approaching the house. A uniformed constable, he has stepped from a patrol car parked by the gate. He looks up at the roof, watched by an elderly

couple who seem to have summoned him.

Confused, I debate whether to answer the door-bell. My arms and shirt are streaked with soot from the fireplace.

"Mr Ballantyne—?" A rather naive young constable is looking me up and down. "Are you the householder?"

"Can I help you, officer?" I assume the convincing pose of a law-abiding suburbanite, interrupted in that act of lay worship, do-it-yourself.

"We've had reports of a break-in, sir. Your upstairs windows have been open all night — for two or three nights, your neighbours say. They thought you might be away."

"A break-in?" This throws me. "No, I've been here. In fact, I'm not planning to go out at all. I'm cleaning the chimneys, officer, getting rid of all that old soot and dust."

"Fair enough..." He hesitates before leaving, nose roving about for some irregularity he has sniffed, like a dog convinced of a hidden treat. He is certain that in some reprehensible way I am exploiting the suburban norms, like a wife-beater or child-molester.

I wait until he drives away, disappearing into that over-worked hologram called reality. Afterwards I lean against the door, exhausted by this false alarm. The effort of smiling at the officer reminds of the interior distance I have travelled in the past week. But I must be careful, and hide behind those facades of conventional behaviour that I intend to subvert.

I close the windows that face the street, and then step with relief into the open bedrooms above the garden. The walls form sections of huge box-antennae tuned to the light. I think of the concrete inclines of the old racing track at Brooklands, and the giant chambers excavated from the bauxite cliffs at Les Baux, where Margaret first began to distance herself from me.

Of course a break-in has occurred, of a very special kind.

**A** month has passed, a period of many advances and a few setbacks. Resting in the kitchen beside the empty refrigerator, I eat the last of the anchovies and take stock of myself. I have embarked on a long internal migration, following a route partly inscribed within my head and partly within this house, which is a far more complex structure than I realized. I have a sense that there are more rooms than there appear to be at first sight. There is a richness of interior space of which I was totally unaware during the seven years I spent here with Margaret. Light floods everything, expanding the dimensions of walls and ceiling. These quiet streets were built on the site of the old Croydon aerodrome, and it is almost as if the perspectives of the former grass runways have returned to haunt these neat suburban lawns and the minds of those who tend them.

All this excitement has led me to neglect my rationing system. Scarcely anything is left in the pantry — a box of sugar cubes, a tube of tomato paste, and a few shrivelled asparagus tips. I lick my fingers and run them round the bottom of the empty bread bin. Already I find myself wishing that I had fully provisioned myself before embarking on this expedition. But everything I have achieved, the huge sense of free-

dom, of opened doors and of other doors yet to be opened, were contingent on my acting upon that decision of a moment.

Even so, I have to be careful not to give the game away. I maintain a reasonably kempt appearance, wave from the upstairs windows at Mrs Johnson and gesture apologetically at the overgrown lawn. She understands — I have been abandoned by my wife, condemned to the despair of a womanless world. I am hungry all the time, kept going by not much more than cups of sweetened tea. My weight has plunged; I have lost some 15 pounds and feel permanently lightheaded.

Meanwhile, the outside world continues to bombard me with its irrelevant messages — junk mail, giveaway newspapers, and a barrage of letters from Dr Barnes and the personnel department at the bank. They burn with heavy, solemn flames, and I assume that I have been sacked. Brenda called to see me three days ago, still puzzled by my cheerful demeanour. She told me that she had been reassigned, and that my office has been cleared of its files and furniture.

The letter-slot rattles. From the doormat I pick up two leaflets and a plastic envelope, a free sample of a new brand of chocolate. I rip it from the packing, and sink my teeth into the rubbery core, unable to control the saliva that swamps my mouth. I am so overwhelmed by the taste of food that I fail to hear the doorbell chiming. When I open the door I find a smartly dressed woman in tweed suit and hat, presumably some solicitor's wife working as a volunteer almoner for the local hospital.

"Yes? Can I —?" With an effort I recognize her, as I lick the last of the chocolate from my teeth. "Margaret...?"

"Of course." She shakes her head, as if this trivial social gaffe explains everything about me. "Who on earth did you think I was? Are you all right, Geoffrey?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I've been very busy. What are you looking for?" A frightening prospect crosses my mind. "You don't want to come back...?"

"Good heavens, no. Dr Barnes telephoned me. He said that you'd resigned. I'm surprised."

"No, I decided to leave. I'm working on a private project. It's what I've always wanted to do."

"I know." Her eyes search the hall and kitchen, convinced that something has changed. "By the way, I've paid the electricity bill, but this is the last time."

"Fair enough. Well, I must get back to work."

"Good." She is clearly surprised by my self-sufficiency. "You've lost weight. It suits you."

**T**he house relaxes its protective hold on me. When Margaret has gone I reflect on how quickly I have forgotten her. There are no tugs of old affection. I have changed, my senses tuned to all the wavelengths of the invisible. Margaret has remained in a more limited world, one of a huge cast of repertory players in that everlasting provincial melodrama called ordinary life.

Eager to erase her memory, I set off upstairs, and open the windows to enjoy the full play of afternoon sun. The west-facing rooms above the garden have become giant observatories. The dust cloaks everything with a mescalin haze of violet light, photons backing up as they strike the surface of window-sill



and dressing-table. Margaret has taken many pieces of furniture with her, leaving unexpected gaps and intervals, as if this is a reversed spatial universe, the template of the one we occupied together. I can almost sit down in her absent William Morris chair, nearly see myself reflected in the missing art deco mirror whose chromium rim has left a halo on the bathroom wall.

A curious discovery – the rooms *are* larger. At first I thought that this was an illusion brought about by the sparse furnishings, but the house has always been bigger than I realized. My eyes now see everything as it is, uncluttered by the paraphernalia of conventional life, as in those few precious moments when one returns from holiday and sees one's home in its true light.

Dazed by the vivid air, I blunder into Margaret's bedroom. The walls are strangely displaced, as if a team of scene-shifters have pulled them back to create a new stage set. There is no sign of the bed, and its bare mattress marked by the wine I spilled on the evening of her departure while commiserating over her dull lover. I have strayed into an unfamiliar area of the room, somewhere between Margaret's bathroom and the fitted cupboards. The remainder of the room sheers away from me, the walls pushed back by the light. For the first time I see the bed, but it seems as remote as an old divan at the rear of an empty warehouse.

Another door leads to a wide and silent corridor, clearly unentered for years. There is no staircase, but far away there are entrances to other rooms, filled with the sort of light that glows from X-ray viewing

screens. Here and there an isolated chair sits against a wall, in one immense room there is nothing but a dressing-table, in another the gleaming cabinet of a grandfather clock presides over the endlessly carpeted floor.

The house is revealing itself to me in the most subtle way. Surprised by its perspectives, I trip over my own feet and feel my heart race ahead of me. I find a wall and press my hands to the striped paper, then fumble through the overlit air towards the landing. At last I reach the top of a huge staircase, whose banisters shrink together as I race to the safety of the floor below.

The true dimensions of this house may be exhilarating to perceive, but from now on I will sleep downstairs. Time and space are not necessarily on my side.

I have trapped a cat. So unnerved was I by the experience of losing myself in my own home that it takes me half an hour to realize that I have a small companion, Mrs Johnson's white Persian. While I was blundering around the Marienbad Palace that now occupies the first floor the cat entered the sitting-room through the open French window, and was trapped when a gust of air closed the door.

She follows me around amiably, waiting to be fed, but for once I am in need of her charity.

**T**wo months have now passed. This conventional suburban villa is in fact the junction between our small illusory world and another larger and more real one. Miraculously, I have survived, though my last reserves of food were exhausted weeks ago. As I expected, Margaret paid a second and final visit. Still puzzled by my self-confidence and handsomely slimming figure, she told me that she would no longer be responsible for my mounting debts. I bade her farewell, and returned to my lunch of poodle pie.

The thought that I would never see Margaret again gave my modest meal an added relish, and afterwards I carefully set the dog-trap by the open door of the sitting-room. The untended garden with its knee-deep grass has attracted my neighbours' pets, trusting beasts who trundle happily towards me as I sit smiling in the armchair, clever concealed within an inviting cushion. By the time their ever-hopeful owners call round a few days later I have safely consigned the bones to the space below the dining-room floorboards, a substantial ossuary that is the last resting-place of Bonzo, Major, Yorky and Mr Fred.

These dogs and cats, and the few birds I have been able to trap, soon formed my sole fare. However, it became clear that my neighbours were keeping a more careful eye on their pets, and I resigned myself to a diet of air. Fortunately, the television rental company intervened to provide a generous source of extra rations.

I remember the dour young man with the tool-kit who arrived to dismantle the attic aerial. He had made several earlier calls in the avenue, and had parked his van a hundred yards away. I followed him up the stairs, concerned that he too might lose his way among those vast rooms.

Sadly, my attempt to warn him came to nothing. As he stepped into the first of those white chambers, as large as aircraft hangars carved in the roof of an



iceberg, he seemed to realize that he had entered a zone of danger. I grappled with him as we blundered through that white world, like arctic explorers losing all sense of distance within a few steps of their tent. An hour later, when I had calmed his fears and carried him down the staircase, he had sadly yielded to the terrors of light and space.

**T**hree months – a period of continued discovery and few interruptions. The outside world has at last decided to leave me alone. I no longer answer the door, and there has been scarcely a caller, though threatening letters arrive from the local council, and from the water and electricity companies. But an unshakable logic is at work, and I am confident that my project will be complete before the power and water supplies are disconnected.

The house enlarges itself around me. The invasion of light which revealed its true dimensions has now reached the ground floor. To keep my bearings I have been forced to retreat into the kitchen, where I have moved my mattress and blankets. Now and then I venture into the hall and search the looming perspectives. It amazes me that Margaret and I once lived in this vast pile and so reduced it in our minds.

Already I can feel the walls of the kitchen distancing themselves from me. I spend all day here, sitting on the floor against the freezer cabinet. The cooker, refrigerator and dishwasher have become anonymous objects in some remote department store display. How much longer can this expansion continue? Sooner or later the process will halt, at that moment revealing the true dimensions of the world we inhabit, and which the visual centres of our timid brains have concealed from us. I am on the verge of a unique revelation, the equal perhaps of Columbus's discovery of the new world. I can scarcely wait to bring the news to my neighbours – the modest villa which Mrs Johnson imagines herself to occupy is in fact an immense Versailles!

Nearby, the bones of the TV repairman lie on the yellow linoleum like the ribs and skull of a long-decayed desert traveller.

Somewhere a door is being forced. I listen to the grating of keys testing a lock, then the sound of heels on the patio steps before a second attempt to prise open the French window.

Rousing myself, I sway across the kitchen, trying to steady my arms against the faraway washing-machine. A key turns, and a door opens somewhere beyond the great carpeted perspectives of the sitting-room.

A young woman has entered the house. As she returns the keys to her handbag I recognize Brenda, my former secretary. She stares at the dismantled dog-traps beside the window and then peers around the room, at last seeing me as I watch her beside the door.

"Mr Ballantyne? I'm sorry to break in. I was worried that you might..." She smiles reassuringly and takes the keys from her handbag. "Mrs Ballantyne said I could use the spare set. You haven't answered the phone, and we wondered if you'd fallen ill..."

She is walking towards me, but so slowly that the immense room seems to carry her away from me in its expanding dimensions. She approaches and recedes



from me at the same time, and I am concerned that she will lose herself in the almost planetary vastness of this house.

Catching her as she swerves past me, I protect her from the outward rush of time and space.

I assume that we have entered the fourth month. I can no longer see the calendar on the kitchen door, so remote is it from me. I am sitting with my back to the freezer, which I have moved out of the kitchen into the pantry. But already the walls of this once tiny room constitute a universe of their own. The ceiling is so distant that clouds might form below it.

I have eaten nothing for the past week, but I no longer dare to leave the pantry and rarely venture more than a step from my position. I could easily lose my way crossing the kitchen and never be able to return to the only security and companionship that I know.

There is only one further retreat. So much space has receded from me that I must be close to the irreducible core where reality lies. This morning I gave in briefly to the sudden fear that all this has been taking place within my own head. By shutting out the world my mind may have drifted into a realm without yardsticks or sense of scale. For so many years I have longed for an empty world, and may unwittingly have constructed it within this house. Time and space have rushed in to fill the vacuum that I created. It even occurred to me to end the experiment, and I stood up and tried to reach the front door, a journey that seemed as doomed as Scott's return from the south

pole. Needless to say, I was forced to give up the attempt long before crossing the threshold of the hall.

Behind me Brenda lies comfortably, her face only a few inches from my own. But now she too is beginning to move away from me. Covered by a jewelled frost, she rests quietly in the compartment of the freezer, a queen waiting one day to be reborn from her cryogenic sleep.

The perspective lines flow from me, enlarging the interior of the compartment. Soon I will lie beside her, in a palace of ice that will crystallize around us, finding at last the still centre of the world which came to claim me.

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J. G. Ballard is the author of *Empire of the Sun* (1984), a work which has become accepted as a modern classic. His most recent books are the novel *The Day of Creation* (1987), the novella *Running Wild* (1988) and the collection *Memories of the Space Age* (1988). His latest short stories are "The Secret History of World War 3" (*Ambit*, November 1988), "Love in a Colder Climate" (*Interview* magazine, January 1989) and the above piece.

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**(David Pringle)**

# The Big Sellers, 1: Douglas Adams

by Brian Stableford

Shakespeare informs us that some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. The tripartite division does not apply with equal aptness to all kinds of greatness, but it has a rough-and-ready propriety in the case of best-selling writers. There are, indeed, ready-made best-sellers whose entry into the lists is automatic once they have deigned to set pen to paper – people whose fame has already been secured by the cinema, by TV, or by the accident of their having been born into the royal family; there are those whose best-selling status is hard-won, the result of building up a loyal following over the course of a long literary career; there are those upon whom best-sellerdom descends suddenly and unexpectedly, according to some mercurial whim of the reading public.

Douglas Adams, one of the few men capable of achieving consistent atypicality, fits neatly into none of these categories.

Adams' fame did precede his print debut in 1979, but that fame came from what is in this day and age an unusual source: the backwater of the mass media, radio (not, of course, Radio 1). Nor was it obvious that the popularity of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as a radio show could be translated into huge book sales, because the show had what is generally known as a "cult following" – which meant only that those people who did like it liked it a lot. Marketing the first of the three books which turned the Hitch-Hiker scripts into consecutive prose was not made any easier by the fact that it got so far and then just stopped, leaving the story to be continued in the second volume of the series, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980).

By 1982, when *Life, the Universe and Everything* was published, no doubts remained about its market potential. By then *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* had become an item of modern folklore. Its translation to the TV screen – and its subsequent plundering by TV ads – may have helped it to acquire this status, but it was the role which certain of its key images and throwaway lines began to play in everyday conversation which

actually signified its acceptance into the rhetoric of folk-wisdom.

A best-seller of the magnitude of *Life, the Universe and Everything* virtually guarantees the similar success of whatever follows, provided that it is in much the same vein. What actually followed was *The Meaning of Liff*, a book of silly definitions compiled in collaboration with John Lloyd. It sold well, as it was bound to do, but it failed conspicuously to make any significant contribution to the rhetoric of folk-wisdom. Adams retreated to safer ground, adding a fourth book to the Hitch-Hiker "trilogy": *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish* (1984) – the first such book to be composed as a novel, not an adaptation of radio scripts.

In the context of a continuing career, however, this was really only a delaying move. There was not much else actually to be done with the Hitch-Hiker scenario, and now the more interesting loose ends had been tidied up there was no point at all in continuing. Greatness once achieved can become a thing of the past, if no new successes are recorded. It was necessary to come up with something new, which would not need to live on borrowed charm, and what Adams came up with was *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (1987), whose spectacular success was quickly followed up by a sequel, *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* (1988).

Although they have not received universal critical acclaim – publication of the second volume of *Dirk Gently's* exploits called forth a particularly ruthless demolition job by a *Sunday Times* reviewer – these books do serve to demonstrate that Adams' career was by no means a flash in the pan, and that his humour is flexible enough to fit more than one literary template. This may be of vital importance to his future prospects because humour, as a species of creativity, is very difficult to sustain over long distances. Writers whose speciality is sentimentality or action-adventure may find it relatively easy to spin out their endeavours indefinitely, but humourists never do. Shakespeare (whose own abilities were multifarious) noted that

brevity is the soul of wit, and though he did not appear to regard this as a tragedy he was not in a position to appreciate the predicament of a man like Douglas Adams, who – at the ripe young age of 36 – must contemplate the prospect of spending half a lifetime being consistently funny. One can count on the fingers of one hand the number of writers who have actually managed that, and there would be at least a couple of fingers to spare.

As the expiring actor remarked, dying is easy; comedy is hard.

Douglas Adams' initial success was all the more surprising when one considers that it was for a long time considered axiomatic by publishers that funny science fiction didn't sell. This has little to do with any lack of clever humorists among writers of sf – who include such noted wits as Robert Shekley, Bob Shaw and David Langford – but much to do with the expectations of the sf audience. A sufficiently large fraction of the hard core of sf readers has always preferred a sense of wonder to a sense of humour, and has tended to regard irreverence as something vaguely sacrilegious. Funny sf has in the past seemed to many sf readers to be a send-up of the genre itself, and an implied criticism of their own interest in it.

To a considerable extent, of course, Adams' own following must lie outside the hard core of sf buyers, because best-selling status requires the loyalty of a broader public – but there is no question of his following lying entirely beyond the bounds of the sf community or consisting mainly of people who do find the projects and pretensions of sf essentially absurd. Although the Hitch-Hiker books can be read as a satire on sf, mocking its clichés and conventions, it would be silly to argue that they are no more than that, or that they are mainly interesting because that is what they do. They must have done far more than that to put their author where he is today.

There are certain hazards involved in analyzing comedy. Because analysis has to be done earnestly, there is something paradoxically comical about the analytical project itself, and whatever

conclusions one comes to are bound to seem dull and portentous by comparison with that which is to be explained. Comedy is fun; explanations of why jokes work are anything *but* funny. It is only natural that people who laugh at jokes should feel that investigation of why they have laughed is at best utterly irrelevant and at worst threatening – because once we become fully conscious of how and why we find things funny we might be prevented thereby from finding them funny in future.

There is in fact an odd circularity about bringing analysis to bear on the kind of humour in which Douglas Adams specializes, because one of the things he constantly makes fun of is the business of analysis and the dogged hunt for answers to awkward questions. The most famous sequence in the Hitch-Hiker books involves the ultimate supercomputer's quest for the answer to the ultimate question (of "life, the universe and everything"), which turns out, of course, to be 42. If there is anything which is ruthlessly and repeatedly asserted by Adams' anecdotes and vignettes it is that when you try to figure out what it all means, all you get is a poke in the ego. The final punchline of the series, credited as "God's Final Message to His Creation," is the last in a series of calculatedly extreme letdowns.

To become a commentator on Douglas Adams, therefore, is to play Krikkit on a very sticky wicket, and one can forecast with total confidence that the legions of American academics who make a living teaching sf will avoid him, on the grounds that their research work is much more comfortable when they stick to the less witty bits of Ursula Le Guin and Philip K. Dick. But fools rush in, as they say, where angels would not dirty their feet, and having long ago failed to qualify as an angel (I was okay on the theory but couldn't cope with the practical), I am inclined to say: what the hell...

**T**o be frankly pompous about it, the humour of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is fundamentally bathetic in character. It moves metronomically from the sublime to the ridiculous, continually dissolving the grandiose into the banal.

This movement has an undeniable propriety in the context of the scientific enlightenment, whose world-view has moved the Earth and the history of mankind from the very centre of Creation to a periphery so far out in the sticks that one could not possibly conclude otherwise than that in a hitch-hiker's guide to the galaxy it would be lucky to qualify for a one-word entry, and that would be only too likely to be a contemptuous putdown. The eponymous book, represented on radio and TV by the plummily laconic

voice of Peter Jones, continually reminds us of this harsh lesson, as in the famous "Space is big..." monologue. So does the plot, which begins with the demolition of Earth to make way for a new hyperspatial bypass. So much for the Apocalypse: humankind becomes a redundant punctuation mark in an inconsequential sentence, whose erasure only matters if and

many extant species of angst, this one could sensibly be reckoned a low scorer in the reasons-to-be-cheerful stakes, making Heideggerian preoccupations with the inevitability of death look rather weak at the knees. On the other hand, it does come ready-equipped with the appropriate existentialist strategy for coping ("DON'T PANIC"), which at least has the virtue of being

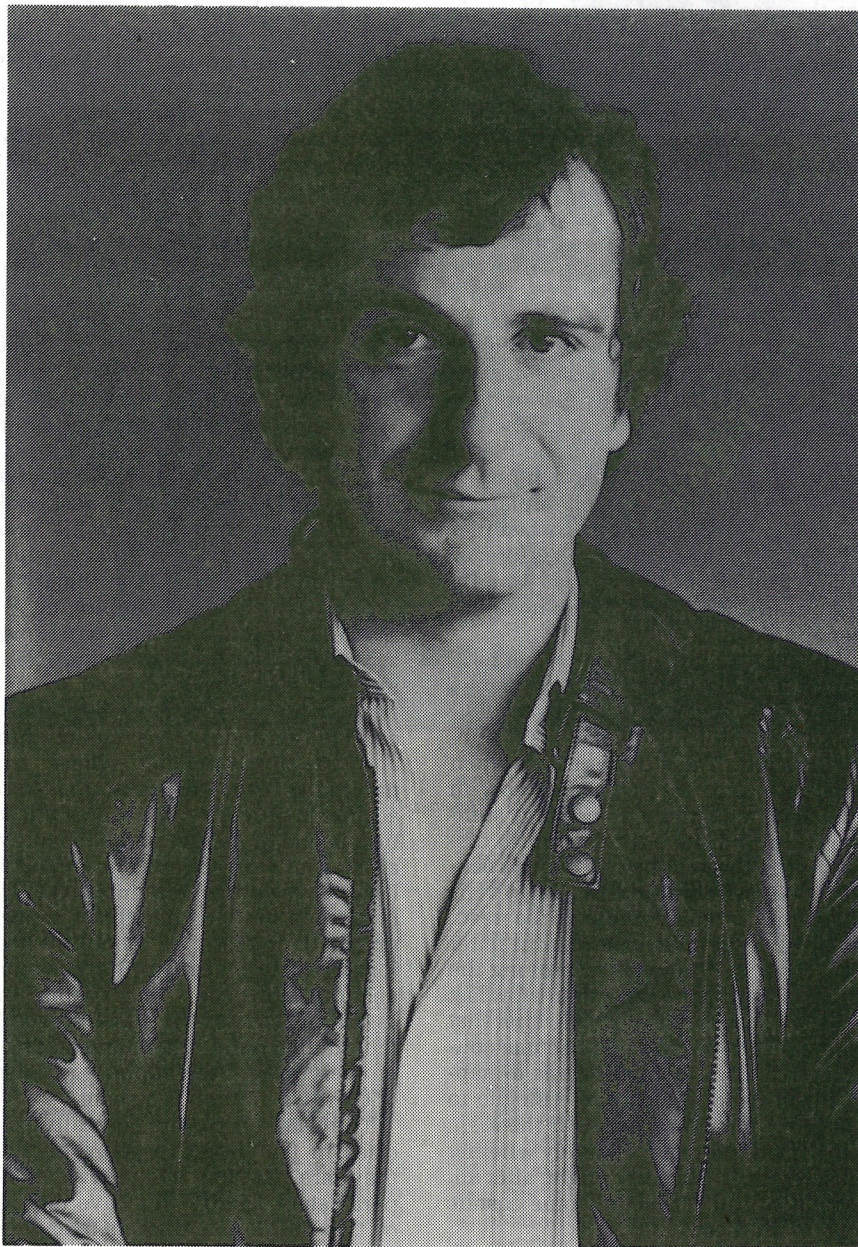


Photo of Douglas Adams courtesy of Pan Books Ltd

when we find out that the white mice who commissioned the planet had something much bigger in mind than human delusions of significance. In the Adamsian world-view the legendary four horsemen, were they to arrive at all, would be far more worried about whether they ought to stop off for a hamburger before getting on with the job than anything to do with their actual work of destruction.

It hardly needs to be observed that underneath the jokiness this is really a rather bleak view of things. Indeed, were we to tabulate and evaluate the

rather more succinct than any recipe for attaining the Age of Reason drawn up by Jean-Paul Sartre *et al*.

Given that the world-view of modern science provides such convincing back-up for Adams' assertions regarding our utter triviality it is perhaps surprising that sf in general (whose supposed mission is, after all, to explore what lies at and beyond the horizons of the scientific imagination) usually goes in the opposite direction.

Like the wild optimists of science who are trying to put us back in the centre of Creation with the aid of the

Anthropic Principle (which leaps in cavalier fashion from the observation that if the universe were other than it is we wouldn't be here to observe it to the supposition that it must be the way it is because we are its observers), the wild optimists of genre sf are always trying to make us feel better about ourselves. Sometimes they come clean and simply tell us straight out that we are the race destined to rule the seavgram, but they are characteristically more subtle in packaging their human chauvinism to look seductive. They tell us that after all, we can still do our best, and will discover if we do that remarkable achievements are open to us; the humanists among them remind us that even if we can't conquer the universe at least we can explore the possibility of being nice to one another.

Douglas Adams is infinitely more cynical than such speculators as these, which is why he sometimes appears to be ruthlessly taking the piss out of them. In fact, though, he is simply telling it like it is, and one reason that it is funny is that if it wasn't funny it would be too horrid to contemplate. It is made all the funnier by the fact that Marvin the paranoid android is forever trying to point out to us that it really isn't funny, and that it is too horrid to contemplate.

The main problem with bathetic humour is that every time you move from the sublime to the ridiculous it gets harder to scale the heights of sublimity again. There comes a time when you have shot the last sacred cow in the herd, and there is nothing sufficiently grandiose left to be worth dissolving in the acid-bath of callous banality. When God's Final Message to His Creation is finally there to be read, even spelling it out one painful letter at a time isn't enough to prolong the hilarious agony for more than a few last pages. There is nothing to do after that end but turn around and become constructive. This is what begins to happen (off-handedly) in the epilogue to *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*, which wonders speculatively whether absorption in triviality might, after all, be not so bad as the awesome cosmic vision implies.

Which brings us, as it brought Douglas Adams, to the fundamental interconnectedness of all things.

The bill which Dirk Gently, holistic detective, presents to a client who has hired him to find her cat is still basically bathetic in character, juxtaposing as it does the finding of the cat (deceased) with saving the human race from extinction (for which no charge is made) via "Detecting and triangulating vectors of interconnectedness of all things" and a consequent but seemingly-too-convenient trip to the Baha-

mas. But the absurdity of these juxtapositions is not the same nihilistic absurdity which underlies the Hitch-Hiker books – it is more like an inversion or mirror image of it, not dissimilar in spirit to the Anthropic principle in its confident assertion that contemplation of the apparently trivial may, in fact, be a hotline to the mind-bogglingly important.

The world-view of *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* is a much more cheerful one than the world-view of the Hitch-Hiker books, and despite his chaotic lifestyle Dirk Gently is here essentially a winner. An unwary sociologist of literature might put this *bouleversement* down to the simple fact that Douglas Adams had become rich, and hence more contented with his existential lot, but *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* would prove him wrong, because that book is much closer in tone to the later Hitch-Hiker books, and offers us a rather different Dirk Gently, a rather different universe, and a rather different fundamental interconnectedness of all things.

*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* is Douglas Adams' best book, and not just because it is his most cheerful. It has an intricacy which really does bind together the trivial and the apocalyptic, employing the aesthetic elegance of time paradoxes. When the inconsistently-sharp Dirk deduces from a second-hand account of a conjuring trick done to amuse a child the existence of the time-machine and the time-traveller whose true nature has been efficiently cloaked by academic obscurity, the reader's reaction is one of delight at the closing of an elegant connection. The import of Dirk's own subsequent time-travelling mission is similarly delightful, though unusually esoteric in a book written for a mass audience. Despite these connections however – and despite the assertion that what is being proved is the fundamental interconnectedness of everything – the supposed holism of Gently's method is a sham.

The Gently books are not really exercises in the detective genre because they are far too subversive of its parameters. Gently will have nothing of the Holmesian dictum that when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be true. The fact that we regard something as "improbable," he points out, reveals that we have some actual ground for assessing its unlikelihood; to reject something as "impossible" may only mean that it is something we cannot understand. There are, as he dutifully observes, *lots* of things we don't understand.

But the substitution of an holistic attitude for a reductionist one is only momentarily enlivening. Once we accommodate the impossible within our patterns of reasoning, as Gently

tries to do (following – despite his declared distaste for them – the many champions of astrology, alternative medicine and the paranormal), our criteria of investigation become aesthetic rather than logical. We cease to ask whether things make sense and must ask instead whether they make a neat pattern. In *Dirk Gently's Detective Agency* they do, but only because they are contrived so to do. In *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* they don't, because Douglas Adams (who remains a reductionist at heart) can't believe that in the final analysis they really do.

"The long dark teatime of the soul" is a phrase borrowed from *Life, the Universe and Everything*, where it is used to sum up the existential predicament of the immortal Wowbagger, whose efforts to avoid ennui prove ultimately fruitless. In the novel the phrase describes the similar predicament of the immortal gods of Asgard, whose efforts have likewise come to naught – indeed, Odin's attempt to cultivate eternal bliss by calculated obsession with the quality of his bed-linen is suspiciously similar to the tactics of mortals, whose attempts to combat angst are equally absurd. Adams's imaginative pendulum has swung back again to the outlook of the later and grimmer Hitch-Hiker books, and the fundamental interconnectedness of all things now looks just as bleak and silly as God's Final Message to His Creation. Holism, which briefly seemed in the first novel of the series to have a chance of holiness, turns out to be merely holey. The old gods have nothing at all to say to us, and if there are to be new ones we must look for their origins not to the blazing light of a star shining over Bethlehem, but rather in the unthinkable disgusting mess lurking in a discarded refrigerator. Advent has gone the way of the Apocalypse.

As Raymond Chandler once observed (I paraphrase in the interests of brevity), the unbiased onlooker is bound to conclude that the world is a pretty sick place. In an oft-quoted moment of rebellion Chandler insisted that "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean (etc.)," and he sent Philip Marlowe. Unfortunately (but inevitably) Marlowe's presence didn't make the streets any less mean, and despite his non-meanness he failed conspicuously to avoid the ravages of angst. Dirk Gently started off a good deal meaner than Marlowe ever was, and the fact that his mean streets quickly unfolded to reveal a much more complicated system of thoroughfares really didn't help very much. His inevitable regress from potential hero to actual victim has been much more rapid than Marlowe's, and it is difficult to imagine his prospects improving if he is ever entrusted with another case. His future adventures, if any, may well

When a passenger check-in desk at Terminal Two, Heathrow Airport, shot up through the roof engulfed in a ball of orange flame the usual people tried to claim responsibility. First the IRA, then the PLO and the Gas Board. Even British Nuclear Fuels rushed out a statement to the effect that the situation was completely under control, that it was a one in a million chance, that there was hardly any radioactive leakage at all and that the site of the explosion would make a nice location for a day out with the kids and a picnic, before finally having to admit that it wasn't actually anything to do with them at all.

No rational cause could be found for the explosion – it was simply designated an act of God. But, thinks Dirk Gently, which God? And why? What God would be hanging around Terminal Two of Heathrow Airport trying to catch the 15.37 to Oslo?

Funnier than *Psycho*... more chilling than *Jeeves Takes Charge*... shorter than *War and Peace*... the new Dirk Gently novel, *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*.



DOUGLAS  
ADAMS

DOUGLAS  
ADAMS

THE LONG DARK TEA-TIME  
OF THE SOUL

THE  
LONG DARK  
TEA-TIME OF  
THE SOUL

By the author of  
THE HITCH HIKER TRILOGY

Cover Illustration by Chris Moore

FICTION  
0 330 30955 2

ISBN 0-330-30955-2



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be funny, but one cannot escape the suspicion that they might turn out to be funny in exactly the same way as *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish* – the danger is that they will become nothing more than mordant comedies of ludicrous failure.

It is arguable that the only British humorist who nearly managed to sustain his form over the course of a long career as a novelist was P.G. Wodehouse. The prospect facing anyone who might attempt to emulate Wodehouse is not encouraging, because what Wodehouse did, essentially, was to subvert the pretensions of the upper classes by making them look absurd – and that project kept him in work for such a long time only because the upper classes stubbornly, heroically, and against all logic managed to preserve those pretensions to be further subverted. The anarchic comedians of today have found no order to assault which is anywhere near as resilient; nowadays subversion is usually too effective for its own good. If anything even looks as if it might become sacred it can be made to look stupid with consummate ease. There is little future in mocking pretentiousness when pretention itself has come to seem little more than a form of self-parody.

This puts humorists like Douglas Adams in a much more difficult predicament than most other writers who have fallen or fought their way into best-seller status. The writer of thud-and-blunder fantasy trilogies can produce more and more of the same, gaining in facility with practice, and can be confident not only of lasting as long as the boom but of cultivating habits which might be transferable to whichever kind of action adventure next inherits the mantle of fashionability. The literary humorist, alas, must forever be in search of something fresh to enliven his productions.

Unlike the screen humorist, who can in times of stress always fall back on sight gags, confident that slapstick will never lose its appeal, the witty novelist must rely on the world to provide him with a steady stream of new absurdities to expose ("the world," in this context, takes in the scientific worldview and the conventions of literary genres too). The man who is too adept at this kind of work might easily write himself out of a job, and there is a certain telling paradox in the fact that Douglas Adams, who got to be a best-seller because he is very good at his job, is continually making his job that much harder to do.

The direction in which Adams will probably have to go, if he is to survive

as a best-seller until it is time to hang up his word-processor and get deeply into bed-linen, is already mapped out in *Dirk Gently's Detective Agency*, though Gently's own career will have to get out of the doldrums of *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* if he is going to be Adams's long-term torch-bearer. It is in intricate and intriguing patterns of connection rather than continually crushing revelations of meaninglessness that the prospects of future delight will lie.

His legion of admirers must be hopeful that Douglas Adams may become a more whole-hearted holist than his latest book reveals him yet to be, and that his inventiveness will guide him to pleasant pastures which will not be so quickly blighted by the awfulness of apocalyptic angst. If he cannot, a long dark tea-time may be waiting to claim his own artistic soul.

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The above is the first of a series of essays in which Brian Stableford and other critics will discuss the works of bestselling science-fiction and fantasy authors.

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# Lisa Goldstein

## City of Peace

**“H**ey, Yusef!” Ben said, calling to him from across the room.

Yusef looked up. He'd been helping an elderly lady find a seat in the crowded Jerusalem of Gold restaurant and she was in the middle of telling him, once again, how much her feet pained her. He pretended he didn't hear Ben. Ben just wanted to pass along another complaint from the company, probably. He settled the old woman in a chair and looked around for her waiter.

“Hey, Yusef!” Ben said again. “Over here!”

Yusef signalled to a waiter and pushed his way through the crowded restaurant. He was fine-boned, with black hair as curly as a lamb's and a neatly-trimmed black beard. “Yeah,” he said. “What's new?”

“See that old lady dressed all in black?” Ben said quietly, nodding along one of the tables to a shadowed spot in the corner. “The one with the veil? Keep an eye on her. I don't think she's what she seems to be.”

“No?” Yusef said. “What is she?”

“An alien,” Ben said.

Yusef's first thought was that Ben was making some kind of joke at his expense. But Ben seemed uncharacteristically serious. And Yusef, like everyone else, had seen the pictures on television, the aliens addressing the crowded session of the United Nations. He remembered the small figure standing at the podium, saying in a deep voice, “We come in peace,” and how the roar of applause had cut off the rest of the sentence.

“Why do you think so?” Yusef said.

“Come on,” Ben said. “How many unchaperoned Arab women do you see wandering around the city? And how many of them take tour buses, for God's sake?”

“Maybe,” Yusef said slowly.

“No maybe about it,” Ben said. “She, or he, or whatever, she said ‘Shalom’ when she got on the bus, and her voice was about an octave deeper than mine.”

“Did she say anything else?” Yusef said.

“No,” Ben said. “She sat at the very back, by the window. I tell you, keep an eye on her.”

“But why would an alien want to tour Jerusalem?”

“To see what's going on here,” Ben said. “Maybe to help us out. I don't know.”

To help us out, Yusef thought. We come in peace. They had been speaking Hebrew because Ben insisted on it, even though Yusef, who had been born in the West Bank, spoke better Hebrew than Ben. Ben had come to Israel from the United States last year. A few months ago Ben had come up to Yusef and told him that his last name was no longer Goldberg but Har-

zahav, “gold mountain” translated into Hebrew. “This is where I belong,” Ben had said.

“Anyone else I should watch out for?” Yusef asked. He and Ben traded bus-loads at lunch. Ben had started in West Jerusalem and had already driven his group past the Hebrew University and the Knesset to the Jaffa Gate. They had gotten out at the gate and he had led them along the cobbled streets of Old Jerusalem to the Wailing Wall. After a long stop at the Wall, the high point of his tour, he had taken the tourists to the restaurant. In the afternoon Yusef would take Ben's group to the Dome of the Rock and the Via Dolorosa while Ben would retrace his steps with Yusef's tourists. They were forbidden to take their charges anywhere else for lunch; Yusef was sure the company got a large kickback from the restaurant.

“Not really,” Ben said. “How about your group?”

“A bunch of loud kids,” Yusef said. “Their parents want them to learn something but they don't care about that. Every time we stop they ask the soldiers for a bullet for a souvenir.”

Ben grinned. “I can handle that,” he said. He looked at his watch. “Time to get moving.”

“Hey, listen up!” Ben said loudly in English. Conversation slowly stopped. The few tourists still eating put down their knives and forks. “After lunch, in about ten minutes, we'll start the tour again. Remember when we told you to memorize the number of your bus? You didn't do that, did you?” He grinned at the tourists lazily, and most of them laughed back. It was the same joke he had used the last ten times, but he made it sound fresh. “Well, it doesn't really matter. Those of you who came with me go with my friend Yusef here in the afternoon. And those of you who came with Yusef have the great good fortune of being shown around by me this afternoon. We'll assemble outside the restaurant in ten minutes. See you then.”

**Y**usef went out into the hot sunlight and waited by the restaurant. In a few minutes the tourists began coming outside, blinking as their eyes got used to the light. A middle-aged couple walked up to Yusef and the woman smiled at him uncertainly. “Shalom,” she said. Her husband looked tired. “Is this where we meet? Are you Yusef?”

“Shalom,” Yusef said. “Yes, I am.”

More people came out of the restaurant and Yusef looked them over as they slowly assembled in front of him. A young woman wearing a t-shirt that read, “Jerusalem – They Shall Prosper That Love Thee,”

with the word "love" represented by a small red heart. A scowling young man with a beard. Three fashionably-dressed women giggling together, one of whom, Yusef saw, wore screens on her cheeks and the backs of her hands. The screens flashed exploding and coalescing pictures, news in English and Hebrew, advertisements, famous and unknown faces which appeared suddenly and then vanished down to pin-pricks. A man and a boy around eight years old joined them. The group looked like mostly American Jews and that was good, because if the tour ran late they could skip a few of the stations of the cross. He counted the crowd: thirty-nine, someone was missing.

Ben called to him to say good-bye. "Regards to your mother!" he said. One of the first things Ben had learned in Jerusalem had been Arabic swear words, and he had found it funny that so many of them were about mothers.

When Yusef looked back at his group he saw a small woman in a black dress hurry out of the restaurant. A veil covered the lower half of her face, and a black headdress jutted over her forehead, shadowing her eyes. There was something strange about the figure, Yusef thought, but maybe it was just that, as Ben had said, he had never seen a veiled Arab woman by herself. She was about the same height as the aliens on television, a little under five feet. "Good afternoon," he said in English as she joined the group, having decided that both Arabic and Hebrew were too risky. He felt disappointed when she didn't answer.

He counted the crowd again: forty, good. "Good afternoon," he said in English. "My name is Yusef, and I'll be taking you around for the rest of the day, until approximately four o'clock. Does anyone have any questions so far?"

"Yeah," the eight-year-old boy said.

"Davey," his father said. "Shush."

Wonderful, Yusef thought. Ben forgot to tell me about this kid.

"We were wondering," Davey said, undeterred, "how come the buses still use gasoline. How come they're not like the cars in America."

"Well, we're not as advanced as the United States," Yusef said. "Sooner or later we'll have those kinds of buses too."

"But the tanks here don't use gasoline," Davey said. "We saw them."

"Davey!" the father said. "That's enough!"

"But why?" Davey said.

"Because he's an Arab," the father said. "He doesn't want to hear about Israeli tanks."

"But why?" Davey said, whining on the last word.

"Because I say so, that's why," the father said. "Now be quiet."

Everyone was silent, an embarrassed silence, Yusef thought. What would Ben do? "Okay," he said. "I'm going to be taking you to the Dome of the Rock and then to the Via Dolorosa, and if we have time we'll stop at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As I'm sure Ben told you this morning, Jerusalem is unique in that it is sacred to three faiths, Jewish, Christian and Moslem." He began moving down the street, checking over his shoulder occasionally to make sure that they were following him. They passed tourists, beggars, merchants, Orthodox Jews with their fur hats and beards, Arab children. The small woman kept to the

middle of the group, almost hidden by the press of people. He stopped at the Gate of the Moroccans, the entrance to the Temple Mount.

"The Dome of the Rock is sometimes called a mosque, but that is incorrect," he said, facing the tourists and making sure that all of them had caught up. "It is the third holiest shrine to the Moslems, after Mecca and Medina, because it contains the Moriah rock. The Moslems think this rock marks the spot where Mohammed ascended into the seven heavens on the horse Burak. Jews think Abraham was ordered to sacrifice Isaac here."

They went through the gate into the open plaza of the Temple Mount, past tourists walking in groups of three and four. Yusef knew that some of these people would come over to listen as he explained the building to his charges. He led them up a small flight of steps to the facade and stopped, letting them become gradually overwhelmed by the huge walls, the ornate geometrical shapes of the coloured tiles, blue and white, green and red.

"The Dome of the Rock was built in the seventh century," he said. "Sultan Suleiman added these tiles which you see before you in the sixteenth century. The golden dome at the top was restored in the years 1958 through 1964."

They looked up, predictably, to see the dome, but it was not visible so close to the facade. "Any questions?" he asked.

The woman wearing the screens put her hand up to the facade. He liked the contrast between her bright flashing pictures and the colours of the tiles.

"Isn't this the place where Solomon's Temple stood?" the bearded man asked.

Did he sound hostile? "Yes, it is," Yusef said. "The Wailing Wall, which you saw this morning, forms part of the western wall of the Temple Mount. That was part of the Second Temple, built by Herod on the site of the Temple of Solomon."

He led them into the Dome of the Rock. The woman in black stayed in the centre of the group. For a moment he was tempted to change the afternoon's itinerary completely, to take the tourists to the neighbouring El Aqsa Mosque. If she was really a religious Moslem woman she could only go into the women's prayer rooms, not into the mosque itself. And she would have to wash her hands and feet before entering. He wondered what an alien's feet would look like. A shiver, half of horror and half of eager curiosity, went through him.

He said nothing in the quiet of the Dome of the Rock, letting the cavernous elaborately-decorated room speak for itself. His charges wandered around, looking at marble arches and stained-glass windows, Byzantine mosaics and lush Persian carpets. Even Davey was silent. The tired middle-aged man was tilting his head way back in order to see the sinuous red and gold deposits of the cupola.

After half an hour he began to round up his group. "Any questions?" he said again, once they were all together on the plaza.

"What's that other dome over there?" the woman in the t-shirt asked, and he began his standard talk about the silver El Aqsa Mosque, the moon to the Dome's golden sun. He had said the words so many



times he did not need to think about them, and he was free to concentrate on the woman in black. Was she an alien? She had done nothing out of the ordinary, but for some reason he was starting to think Ben was right.

After a few more questions he led them out of the Temple Mount through Bab el Atim, one of the northern gates. "We are going to go to the Via Dolorosa, the path that Jesus took to his crucifixion," he said. "Is anyone feeling tired?" He looked closely at his charges, especially at the middle-aged man and the veiled woman, but they all shook their heads. "Okay," he said. "It's not a long way, but we can stop if we must."

They started down the street. The middle-aged woman walked next to him and he turned to look for her husband, who was lagging in the back. "This is wonderful," she said, smiling at him. "I never thought I'd ever get to Jerusalem. All that history – it seems like every square foot has a story behind it."

"Yes, it does," he said.

"It was closed to the Jews for years, when the Jordanians occupied it," she said. "Oh, but I'm sure you know that. I'm being stupid."

He smiled at her, encouraging her to go on. Maybe if he was friendly enough she would say something favourable about him to the company. He could certainly use it.

"So I guess at the back of my mind I thought I'd never be able to see it," she said. "But then when my husband retired and asked me where I wanted to go for our vacation I realized there was nothing to stop us. It's been open for decades."

He nodded.

"Do you ever stop being amazed by it?" she said.

"No," he said, warming to her a little. At twilight, when the stones reflected back the soft light and seemed to shine, he could imagine Jerusalem as the centre of the world, a just city, a city of God. A city of light. He would not have thought the woman capable of such feeling.

"I felt it the most at the Wailing Wall," she said. "I just stood there and cried. I made a fool of myself, probably, but I couldn't help it. I thought of all those Jews wandering the world for two thousand years, and finally being gathered back here, to the temple. And in my lifetime. It's amazing."

He said nothing. He had seen this display of emotion from other tourists, American Jews mostly, and he did not doubt that it was genuine. But this is my place too, he thought. This is my country. My family has lived here for thousands of years. It seemed to him that the feeling of Jews and Arabs for the land had been weighed in some ultimate scale, and that the Arabs had been found wanting. But I love it here too, he thought.

They had to turn left and he was saved from having to answer. It was after two o'clock and very hot. The screens on the woman's hands flashed the temperature in Celsius: thirty-two degrees. A few of the tourists, though not the woman next to him, were panting slightly.

He led them down Lion Gate Street as it turned into the Via Dolorosa, pointing out the Stations of the Cross and the Ecce Homo Arch. They turned left onto King Solomon Street after the third station – "Here



Illustrations by Simon Russell

Jesus fell for the first time," he said – and right at the fourth – "This is where Jesus met his mother Mary." At the sixth station they crossed a crowded bazaar street. Vendors called to them, trying to sell them soft drinks, purses, postcards, religious articles. He managed to keep his group together, making a detour around two tourists haggling with an Arab merchant over the price of a wooden table inlaid with mother-of-pearl. As he approached the seventh station he looked at his watch. It was getting late, nearly three o'clock, and they would probably want to see the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to arrive at some destination after their long walk in the hot sun. He would have to skip the side-streets to the eighth and ninth stations and go straight to the last five stations at the church.

He stopped too quickly for his group and they continued on a little way without him. "Just a minute!" he said, calling to them. "Everyone, stay with me!" Something hit him hard and he nearly fell. He looked around. The woman in black had stumbled against him. He reached out automatically to steady her and nearly jerked away when his hand closed around her arm. She was hard, rock hard. And she had to weigh about twice what he did to have knocked him off balance the way she had. "Are you – are you all right?" he said automatically.

She nodded, backing away from him.

"I didn't hurt you, did I?" he said, trying to see past the headdress to her eyes.

She shook her head and moved toward the centre of the group. Why didn't she speak? He wanted to hear that deep voice, the voice that had been played over and over around the world: "We come in peace."

"Okay," he said, shaken. "Okay," he said louder to his group. "We don't have time to see the eighth and ninth Stations of the Cross. We'll turn left here and continue on to the church." No one seemed too disappointed. Anyway they were crazy to think that Jerusalem would yield all her secrets to them in just one day. If they wanted to see more they could always come back.

**T**hey started down the street. The middle-aged woman was next to him again. "You speak English very well," she said. "Where did you learn it?"

"Thank you," he said. He was too proud to tell her that when he had started as a tour guide he used to refer to the crucifixion as "when Jesus was crossed." "At Bir Zeit University, mostly."

"How long did you go there?" she asked.

"Only a year," he said.

She looked as if she wanted to ask him another question but had finally realized she was being untactful. And he could not tell her that he had not quit; he had been expelled for taking part in a demonstration. If the company ever found out that he had talked about his university days to one of his charges he would be disciplined for trying to sneak politics into his talks. Once he had told a tourist who had asked where he was from that he had been born in El Khalil, and he had been threatened with dismissal by the company for not calling it Hebron, its Hebrew name. And he was lucky to have this job. He never tired of walking through Jerusalem. And it was easier than picking

fruit or working in a factory, the only other things open to him.

The woman was nodding at him. Probably I've just confirmed her impression that all Arabs are lazy, he thought. We can't even stay in school long enough to graduate.

She started to say something else but he barely heard her. He was thinking about his sister Asiyah. She had always been far more political than he was, and had been the one to persuade him to take part in the demonstration. He had not seen her since then. Had she been arrested? Killed? No one could tell him. His mother had died a few years ago, and he had stayed home with his father after Asiyah was gone, wanting to speak to him but unable to. Only once did his father break the silence, to tell him about his mother's death for the first time.

"The Red Crescent came into town, and the doctors were trying to get everyone to have a check-up," his father said. "I got your mother to go. Neither of us had seen a doctor since the occupation. Well, I was all right, they said, but they said your mother's blood pressure was far too high. Take it easy, the doctor said. Don't worry so much. And she said – you know how she was – she said how could she take it easy with her country occupied and her children never having known freedom . . ." His father stopped speaking for a long time. Yusef wondered if he had finished. "And the doctor said if she didn't relax she would die of a heart attack. She laughed at him. And then – and then – six months later she was dead, just like the doctor said. A heart attack."

Yusef nodded, not knowing what to say. He remembered his mother as passionate, fiery, screaming at Israeli soldiers as his father tried to hold her back. Asiyah had taken after her. In almost his very first memory of his mother he was holding onto her skirts as they stood by the side of the road, watching without understanding as she stuck her tongue out at a bus filled with well-dressed people. The bus had to have been carrying tourists, and when Yusef realized that, a few months into his job as a tour guide, the irony was not lost on him.

Staying home in the silent house with his mother and sister gone and only his father for company had felt oppressive, especially since he was no longer taking classes or seeing his friends at the university. He had stuck it out for a few weeks and then drifted to Jerusalem to live with his cousin. By the time his cousin announced his plan to move to the United States and leave the crazy Middle East behind him forever he had fallen in love with Jerusalem as he had once fallen in love with a woman in Hebron, and he knew every arch, every cobbled street, every tunnel and dome and spire. A few weeks later he got the job with the tourist company. He had seen his father only a few times in the intervening years.

He led his group right, past the Church of the Redeemer. A group of women stumbled past them, laughing and nearly falling, the Daughters of Dionysus. All of them had probably been drunk since mid-morning. They were Jerusalem's latest cult, but, Yusef thought, they would certainly not be her last.

They turned right again, into the forecourt of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He had a speech about the last five stations of the cross and the history of the

church, but he said nothing and let his charges go on ahead. Like all his tour groups they looked vaguely disappointed, having expected something grander, of the size and majesty of the Dome of the Rock. A few looked at him as if they had questions but he pretended not to see them.

Usually the bad memories stayed buried, beneath his conscious thoughts. It was the woman who had brought them to the surface, the woman with her questions about his past and Bir Zeit University. His despair fed on itself, spiralled in on itself like a whirlpool, until he could barely move. How is my father doing? Where is my sister? What will finally become of us?

The woman in black, the alien, walked in front of him toward the staircase leading to Golgotha. Was there something he could say to her, to him, to change things? But what could he say that would not be perceived by the company as propaganda?

**H**e roused himself. He had better round everyone up or they would get lost among all the tombs and chapels and altars. He led them up the staircase to Golgotha – “Christians believe that this is the site of the crucifixion” – and into the Rotunda and to the Holy Sepulchre itself. There was not time for anything else. They walked back outside and he counted them silently. Forty, good. “Any questions?” he asked.

“When was the church built?” someone asked.

Yusef looked at his watch and decided there was enough time for the condensed version of the complex answer. He spoke briefly about Emperor Constantine, the Byzantines, the Crusaders. “Anyone else?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Davey said. “Which one do you believe?”

“What do you mean?” Yusef said. Behind Davey Yusef saw his father tense slightly, looking ready to clap his hand over Davey’s mouth if necessary.

“Well, we saw the Wailing Wall, and that’s for Jews like us,” Davey said. “And that Dome thing, that’s for the Moslems. And then we saw the church, and that’s for the Christians. So which one do you go to?”

“You mean what do I worship?” Yusef asked. Davey nodded. “I worship all of them.” He looked for the little alien and found it standing as usual in the centre of the group. “I think Jerusalem shows us that people who believe in the three religions can live together without hurting each other. I want to believe very much that that can happen.” The alien’s head was raised. He could not see the eyes under the headdress, but he thought that it was looking straight at him. “In my own city, in Hebron, I knew a man who had nowhere to live because the bulldozers came and pulled down his house. But Jerusalem – Jerusalem is a city that tells us that it is not necessary to act that way, that three religions can live together in peace. Some people think the name ‘Jerusalem’ comes from the Hebrew ‘Ir Shel Shalom’ – City of Peace.”

Davey had lost interest and was turning away. But a few people were talking among themselves. He had gone too far. Some of them must know that the Israelis punished suspected terrorists by bulldozing their houses. The young bearded man raised his hand and said, “Do you mean to say –”

“Oh, no!” the middle-aged woman said, looking



through her purse. Everyone turned away from the bearded man to look at her. "Oh, darn. I promised Lillian I'd leave her prayer at the Wall. And here it is, still in my purse. Oh, I'm so stupid."

"Can you – Can you come back tomorrow?" Yusef asked, grateful for the diversion.

"We're leaving tomorrow morning," she said. "This is our last day in Israel. Oh, Lillian'll be so mad at us."

"Well, we could – I'll tell you what we'll do," Yusef said. "We could go back to the Wall. It's not very far. And then when we get back to the bus I'll use the radio to tell the company that we'll be a little late so they won't worry. What do you think? Would you mind a little more walking?"

"Oh, thank you!" the woman said. "That would be wonderful." He wondered if she really believed that sticking Lillian's piece of paper into one of the cracks in the Wall would get the prayer to God faster.

"Okay," Yusef said. "Is that okay with everyone? Or does someone have somewhere they have to be?"

Yusef saw people in the group shaking their heads. They had united behind the woman and her mission at the Wall, surely not the craziest quest Jerusalem had seen over the centuries.

"Yes, I do."

At first Yusef thought a man had spoken. "I do," the voice said again, and he realized it had come from the alien. The voice wasn't an octave lower than Ben's, as Ben had claimed, but it was deep, even for a man. A few people in the group looked at the small figure in black with surprise.

"You – There is somewhere you have to be?" Yusef said.

"Yes," the alien said.

"It would take us only a half an hour, if we hurried," Yusef said. "I know a quick way there."

"No," the alien said.

"Well," Yusef said. He shrugged. "I am sorry," he said to the middle-aged woman.

"It's not your fault," she said. "Oh, Lillian's going to be so mad."

Yusef led his charges back toward David Street. He let the crowd pass in front of him until he was walking alone next to the alien. "Do you – do you need some sort of – of equipment?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" the alien said.

"To breathe," Yusef said. "Or to walk. Is that why you have to hurry back?" He was thinking of the aliens he had seen on television, on *Star Trek*, who had needed their own atmosphere to survive.

"No," the alien said, and turned its head away from him.

No. The word had been spoken with finality, and suddenly Yusef knew that the alien was not going to help him. A race that spanned the stars could only look with indifference at the squabbling millions on Earth. To the alien the woman's request to place her prayer in the cracks of the wall was just another quaint custom, as meaningless to it as everything else they had seen that day.

No, there would be no help forthcoming from the alien, whose promises of peace, Yusef was certain, would prove to be as hollow as those spoken by diplomats on Earth. The people of the West Bank would be dispersed to the ends of the Earth, would become the new Jews, and the irony would be lost on their

conquerors. They would wander for thousands of years, strangers in new and hostile lands, and at the end of two thousand years they would come back, ravaging, to take the land from whatever unimaginable people held it by then. The Dome of the Rock would lie in ruins, cracked and open to the sky like an observatory. The cycle would begin anew. He saw it all in a second, his people driven to the ends of the inhabited worlds and back by the mills of history, and he wanted to weep.

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Lisa Goldstein won the American Book Award for her first book, the children's fantasy novel *The Red Magician* (1982). Her other works include *The Dream Years* (1985) and *A Mask for the General* (1987). She lives in San Francisco. "City of Peace" is her first story for *Interzone*, and we're pleased to see her here.

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# Keith Brooke

## Adrenotropic Man

**T**hey assassinated me at about midday on 22nd June 1997. I was on my way for a working lunch with a regional director, in the city for a few days for what we called "consultations" – his private bank account was too fat for his salary and I was having him checked out. I paused in New Carnaby Street to look in a window at the closing down sale of the Macco Man's Boutique. I grinned. My shares in Macco had gone for a good price only weeks before; my little push had apparently sent their whole house of cards tumbling and I planned to pick up the pieces in a month or two at a knock-down price. But that was before my assassination.

My reflection grinned back at me from the window. Thirty-six, but I still looked mid-twenties; no sign of businessman's spread, I kept in good shape. Control your body and you can control your mind. Since early teens I had disciplined myself to a strict regime of exercise and healthy eating – I attribute much of my later success to the resulting strength of mind and body. I turned from the window and set out along the sidewalk. My reflection followed me, leaping from window to window.

A jolt, and someone had walked into me. A small guy in pin-stripes, ferret-faced, silvered hair held in place by a mixture of Brylcreem and natural grease. "What the fuck are you at?" I yelled, staggering away from the unexpected force of the little man. "Sorry, guvnor," he muttered and disappeared into the crowd of lunchtime shoppers. Our eyes met for an instant during his mumbled apology and I knew. I just knew. This was the guy they had sent to kill me. Mow me down with an automatic from a black Cadillac, blow up my apartment. Do it with style. But no, they send a small aging Cockney, more at home on a market stall than as an assassin. My exposed forearm tingled momentarily and I rubbed at it anxiously.

Max Riesling, young American entrepreneur, founder and managing director of GenGen. I knew they were after me, they put a notice on me in late May, and still I let them at me in the open. Not even any muscle to look after my interests. No, I let them right at me.

I must stay cool, all this excitement will do me no good at all. Yeah, all this excitement. Relax. Slow the pace.

They sent my notice by old-fashioned mail. No vid-phone, no 'lecmail, just a piece of paper in an envelope delivered by Pronto Postal Co. Second class.

Mr Riesling,

Your actions leave us no alternative. Discussion is pointless with you people. You won't live to speak at the Inquiry. Details are attached.

Love and best wishes,  
Green Action Group

Details were not attached, but a paper clip was. I looked in the envelope and found the detached document, an old advertising circular for one of our more lucrative ventures. The leaflet had been altered to fit the present situation.

**I** spent most of my youth in the States, mainly in the cities of Washington and New York, but then Rick, my father, landed a big industrial job and we moved to Chicago. The Windy City can be a tough place to grow up. Our apartment was in a glitzy condo development on the Southside, a rough neighbourhood to grow up in but the streets provided some good schooling. I had a few jobs in the States working my way up the corporations, but when the opportunity came I moved to London. I had spent two years here as a boy, while Rick was on the diplomatic staff at the Embassy. I liked it and always tried to keep up with happenings in England. In early '89 the *Evening Standard*, which I had mailed to me from London, ran a story on Biobuilders, a small biotech firm close to bankruptcy.

I called my bank but they didn't want to know. I visited Rick's bank in person. "Maxwell Riesling. Son of Mister Riesling? Why, of course we'll help you, sir." I bought Biobuilders, secured the lease of an apartment in Chelsea, and moved the firm from Ealing out to rural Dorset, picking up several government development grants on the way. New staff, new location, new management, all I had really bought was some obsolete equipment and a company name. I changed the name.

General Genetics Research had humble beginnings but we soon shrugged them off. Biobuilders had specialized in mass production of medical products, their engineered microrgs produced blood plasma, insulin, all the basic medical products. Minimum effort, minimum skill, zero innovation. They were a second rate outfit. GenGen clung onto the medical contracts at first but we quickly dropped them for more adventurous schemes. We extended ourselves to medical research rather than just production, we

entered agricultural development, we created a new range of degradable cosmetics that dissolve overnight.

What pushed us to the top of the field was a product of our times. AIDS was still rife at the turn of the decade and we cashed in on the accompanying commercial boom. It was a simple matter with the available technology to splice up a few microrgs with the appropriate gene complex and select the best latex producers. Further manipulations produced a reliable neol latex. A few alterations to the traditional aerosol can, rigorous testing and GenGen held patents to the world's first spray-on condom, trade-named the Come On. Organic, usually non-allergic, just spray it on and peel it off when your passion is spent. We sealed our success by booking Anita Alveaux for the commercials. Anita, pouting out of the screen and saying, "Give him the Come On and see what he gives you," was just too much for the punters and the sales secured GenGen's future for years to come. To say "Come On," carefully stressing the capitals became the joke-cliché of the early '90s.

GenGen's only commercial failure was next off the production line. The mindless masses just didn't like the idea of microrgs built for personal hygiene. No more hair washing, no more brushing of the teeth, the microrgs would do it all. But it didn't sell.

No-Cee foods, our next major produce, were a massive success. Again, they weren't a great technological innovation — all it took was the idea and then development and production was relatively straightforward. All organic molecules have a certain bias. Simple sugars, for example, tend to be right-handed or dextrorotatory; most amino acids, on the other hand, are left-handed or laevorotatory; it's all a matter of three dimensional molecular structure. As digestive enzymes work on a structural basis they cannot latch onto wrong-handed molecules: left-handed sugars, right-handed proteins, anything that doesn't fit goes right through the system, undigested. Zero calories.

**I**n '96 Mel Slaney, one of our Bright Young Brains at the new Buxton plant, started a whole new line of development. Infusers had been around for a while but they had never been practical for large-scale use. Mel changed all that. Her version was a bit like a ballpoint pen with a pad, about one cee-em square, at one end. The drug cartridge was inserted at the other end and the pad was pressed against the appropriate body surface; a minor electric jolt transferred the drug across the skin and into the body. Injections became a thing of the past and the Third World.

Mel and her newly allocated team followed up this success with a variety of infusible drugs. Perhaps appropriately, after GenGen's earlier success with the Come On, we began to market an infusible female contraceptive, Ovoidance, which cornered the market, now growing again after the demise of AIDS.

Another of our infusibles was produced under government contract, although it also found a large market overseas. The Disciplinfuser is a masterpiece of biotechnology. It infuses adrobate, an adrenotropic drug developed by Mel and her team. Adrobate lies dormant in the blood until adrenalin reaches a certain level, then the drug steps in, negates the effects of the adrenalin and returns the body to a normal, calm state. National Prisons Incorporated were quick to see the

potential of the Disciplinfuser and their clients were soon unable to have violent outbursts. The Disciplinfuser also became a standard part of the psychiatric ward's medical cabinet. Pressure groups caused a few problems when the use of the Disciplinfuser was publicized. They argued that adrenalin surges were not only the result of anger; a valid, although irrelevant, point. These groups had little influence; some of the more vociferous protestors were arrested and given a first-hand taste of the Disciplinfuser. The protests died down.

The advertising circular the Green Action Group sent me was for the Disciplinfuser. Their alterations to the leaflet made the point that it was me who was to be infused. But they had removed all references to adrobate. They did not name the substance that they would use, they just described it in scrawled handwriting in the top margin:

Our drug will kill you. Adrenalin above a Fulvian concentration of 0.36 will trigger a chain reaction. Adrenalin production will increase at an exponential rate. You will overdose on Adrenalin. Stay cool, brother.

All because of that time-wasting length of red tape, the Public Inquiry. Actually, I know that sentence to be untrue. My situation is the inevitable result of years of battle between industry and the eco-freaks. Eco-fascists, I've heard them called: they have The Answer and we must all do as they say. Fuck. They just don't like change, don't like progress.

Cool it. Will you just fucking cool it?

This is no good. I must not get excited. I must stay calm. Control of the body is control of the mind. That's been my mantra since the 22nd. *Control of the body is control of the mind.*

That's better. I'm not going to let them beat me. It's now 27 hours since my assassination and I have stayed in control. My mind is relaxed. My adrenalin has not reached that fatal level. I am in command.

My first reaction was that I must get revenge, but I now know that would be fatal. Too much excitement. My first taste of revenge was enough to warn me against such a course of action. I missed my meeting with the regional director, but later I was informed that his bank balance had been fattened by a certain wealthy individual known to have strong connections with environmental groups. My ex-employee has been disciplined. Or perhaps I should say *disciplinfused*. But the stimulation of instigating such action was too much for me. My pulse quickened, my scalp tightened, my adrenalin was flowing. It took me several minutes to regain full control, the problem exacerbated by the fear that I had gone too far. But I stayed within the limit. I live.

That experience taught me that a level of 0.36 is high. They didn't want me to drop dead in the street from the adrenalin flow caused by bumping into the assassin. I have some leeway.

I now plan the sweetest form of revenge. I am going to defeat them. I am going to survive until the Inquiry and I am going to win at the Inquiry. I'm lucky that my attendance is only required for one short session. I can make it.

The Inquiry is only a testing ground. They've been

after it for a long time. Confrontation. The Inquiry itself is only a standard release-of-genetically-engineered-organisms-into-the-environment case. It has an amusing irony that our engineered algae are intended to process sewage and then be harvested and turned into paper. This one is to clean up the environment. But the greens don't see it like that. They claim that the algae may take a fancy to other things; we may be releasing some unstoppable menace into our fragile world. The end is nigh! (*Cool it, just cool it.*)

But there's more to it than just the GenGen algae. If they can stop this one they can stop anything. They have been building up to this one for a long time. They will take some stopping. But I can do it. The judge told me so.

All the pressure groups may be lining up against me but I have some very powerful people on my side. People with connections. We are too big for the greens. All the judge wants is for there to be good reason to decide in our favour. That is understandable. All he is asking for is that there must be a strong speech from the GenGen camp. One to put the people – or at least some of them – behind us. That duty has fallen on my shoulders. I am the obvious choice. Apart from being managing director I am good at what I do. I have been advised to go into politics, they say I have the sort of charisma that comes across on TV. In all honesty I must agree. I can talk the pants off anyone and I spent my teens doing just that. My speech at the Inquiry will be recorded and transmitted into millions of homes, prime-time news bulletins, everything in my favour. All I have to do is sell GenGen to the public and I have been doing that for years. The greens don't stand a chance.

All I have to do is survive. I stay indoors, in my apartment. No one can get to me. I have always had good security, but now I have the added comfort of hired muscle at the entrance to my apartment and at the entrance of the building. I have set Mel and her team to work on a remedy and they've multiplied samples of my blood so they can test their potions. Mel told me that I should just infuse some adrobate to keep the levels down, but I said, "No." I don't play hunches *per se*, but I *always* check them out. This time I was right. Adrobate produced bubbles of nitrogen in my contaminated blood. I saw the sample: it fizzed. The prospects are not bright for a cure. Certainly nothing before the Inquiry.

I stay here. I am learning to meditate. It is easy when you have as much control over your body as I do over mine. Control the body and you control the mind.

**I** have now been in my apartment for five days. I am getting good at this meditating business. Control the body and you control the mind.

My existence has changed remarkably since the 22nd. I used to be the classical high-powered businessman: sleep five hours, working breakfast, work, business lunch, more work, evening meal with clients and then catch up on my schedule before my next five hours sleep. Now I cannot risk such activities. The stimulation might be too much for me, too much adrenalin. And I would be leaving myself exposed to the Green Action Group. There is a lot of work I could do by computer, my console is before me. But some-

how it would be wrong, I can't only work part-time. I am too isolated to fiddle about at my computer, knowing that the real world of GenGen is beyond my grasp.

Still little prospect of a cure for my condition. I must stay calm. Breathe deeply. Sometimes I find it getting too much for me. Constant relaxation can cause a great deal of tension. I find my pulse racing, sweat prickling the surface of my skin; I have to relax.

I read a lot. Call them up on the console and run off a hard copy, fuck the expense. Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy – I like the old Russians, they're so heavy, so distant from my experience. I listen to music, too, called up on the console again. I'm working my way through the classics, something I'd never have done before. Mozart's the best so far, I find his melodies strangely haunting for some reason, eerie. As though they are calling to me. Softly.

Sometimes I am struck by moods of blackness. Once I called up a medical encyclopedia. *Adrenalin*. Stimulant hormone secreted by the adrenal glands, sympathomimetic action. Also known as epinephrine. Quickens the heart, dilates the blood vessels of the heart and muscles, constricts all others; hence the increased blood pressure. Raises blood sugar, produces heat (*calorigenic* is the term), dilates the pupils. Increased sweat and saliva production, the smooth muscle of the skin contracts. That's enough, I must stay calm.

What would be the result of an overdose? Overheating, oversweating, would I drown in my own saliva? Would my skin tighten too much and strangle me to death? High blood pressure, increasing exponentially. Visions of bursting veins, popping capillaries. Or would the strain be too much for me, a simple heart attack as my exit from life? *Relax*. Pulse quickening, skin tight, such thoughts come close to self-fulfilment. I worry too much.

**“O**m mane padme hum.” A phrase I have picked up from my reading. Used in meditation, it helps focus the mind on nothingness. It is good. It relaxes me.

*Om mane padme hum.*

I see birds through my bullet-proof glass. There's one in particular with a mud-nest near to my window, under an overhang. Hard blue-black with crisp white underparts, dashing about in the late June sky. My console tells me it's a House Martin. Dull name for such a striking creature. I sit and watch.

A knock on my door and one of the muscles comes in with a piece of paper. I easily stifle the upsurge of anger at his lack of manners. He cannot be using my condition to exert power over me, none of them know of my condition. That is a well kept secret. He hands me the paper – I now see it's an envelope – and says, "Pronto Postal delivered this." Then he turns and walks out. The letter was sent second class.

*Om mane padme hum. Control the body and you control the mind. All the mantras at my command. Relax.*

Forcing calmness to wash over my actions I open the envelope and unfold the single sheet of paper that is inside.

Mr Riesling

Congratulations. You are still alive. You must

have a strong will. But the excitement of the Inquiry will kill you. If we don't get there first.

Love and best wishes,  
Green Action Group.

No attached details this time. I am scaring them. I am winning.

The Inquiry starts tomorrow, but that's just the introductory stuff. My speech is the following day. I am looking forward to it. Until then, I wait.

Om mane padme hum.

**T**omorrow I give my speech. I am thoroughly rehearsed. My adrenalin flow is increasing, as would be expected. But I am learning to control it. I meditate, let the world just spin while I focus on nothing. Om mane padme hum. The essence of meditation is to let yourself be at one with the world. With the cosmos. You just let things be. Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream. It is not dying. My range of music has expanded. Lennon knew what it was all about. Lay down all thoughts, surrender to the void. It is shining. Man, I've found it and I tell you it shines.

It all seems meaningless. All these people running around as if it all means something. I used to think I had everything. But I had nothing. All you can do is go with the drift, let things go as they will. My meditations have revealed the void that was once my life. It is a truly transcendental experience. Om mane padme hum.

Time is irrelevant in meditation. I look up and it's dark outside. Tomorrow. Tomorrow I have to...to what?

The darkness is a curious pattern of shadow upon shadow. It wasn't dark a minute ago.

Must have been a long minute.

Noises outside disturb me. The sky is shading itself a delicate early-morning blue. Muscle comes in and he is followed by a smaller man. Ferret. Still in his pin-stripes, and carrying – of all things – a plastic bag from Harrods. I smile. "This gentleman says he has some unfinished business with you, Mr Riesling." Muscle cannot resist a grin of achievement, power. He leaves. I pity him.

The world keeps spinning.

"You received our letter?"

I smile at Ferret and he seems unsettled. I am happy, content. I am at peace with the world for the first time. I am ready for the shining void. Om mane padme hum.

Ferret settles on one knee and fumbles in his green plastic bag. I wonder how he'll kill me this time.

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**Keith Brooke** was born in 1966. A graduate of the University of East Anglia, he has been attempting to write seriously for the past three years and has sold a couple of stories to the semi-professional *Dream* magazine. "Adrenotropic Man" is his first piece for *Interzone* (we actually accepted it over a year ago: shame, shame) and we have another story by him coming up soon.

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## COMING NEXT ISSUE

We've sometimes been accused of not publishing enough stories which deal in the perennial sf themes: space travel and life on other planets. So we're pleased to announce that the 31st *Interzone*, due out in August 1989, will be an All Space-Story issue – every story is guaranteed to contain off-Earth scenes! There will be new fiction by S.M. Baxter, Eric Brown,

Gwyneth Jones and others, including a long piece by a talented new Palestinian-American writer, Jamil Nasir. Plus an author interview, the Charles Platt column and all our usual features.



# Mutant Popcorn

## Film reviews by Nick Lowe

Well, here they all come, belching back from the depths: all your old favourites marching out the eighties in shambolic step, as the decade goes into uncontrollable fast-flashback and spills out sequels to practically everything that ever made any money at all. From the already-dated (*Indiana Jones III*) to the wildly premature (*Batman II*), a vast clutch of erratically-timed followups line the exit to a unique decade of studio fantasy blockbusters. All the old gang's here: *Back to the Future*, *Aliens*, *Highlander*, *Star Trek*, *Ghostbusters*, *Roger Rabbit*, &c. &c. &c... It has to be the last gasp of something. Costs rise and takings fall on sequels, and the bigger the movie the slower and costlier it becomes to reassemble stars, compromise on a script, and remind the audiences why they might want to see this stuff again. A five-year gap is no longer uncommon, and it's easier than ever for public interest to glide on and die while the studio shuffles feet, papers, names, and banknotes.

But here, a season ahead of the pack, is the surprising vanguard, **Cocoon: The Return**. Yes, the wrinklies from outer space return five years on to check on members of the cast left behind when Brian Dennehy beamed Don Ameche and chums up to that great rest home beyond the stars. There's a very perfunctory plot about rescuing a larval alien whose cocoon has been dislodged from the seabed by seismic activity and repoed by the military, but most of the screentime is taken up with leisurely loose ends from the previous movie — particularly the emigrant oldsters' relations with their terrestrial kin, and Steve Guttenberg's two-way quest for (i) further extraterrestrial knee-tremblers with Tahnee Welch and (ii) a successful breeding relationship with somebody who maybe isn't a luminous makeup effect in a rubber suit.

The entertainment value of all this is pretty slight, and it doesn't help that the script picks heavily up on details of plot and personality from what, let's face it, was a fairly forgettable original. (Can anyone remember what those wretched cocoons were doing on the seabed in the first place? I'm bugged if I can.) It's an oddly-conceived project, whose dim Christmas performance at the US boxoffice confirmed

that, whatever it was that made the first *Cocoon* relatively successful, this one hasn't got the mix. In particular, the attempt to sustain youth interest through the Guttenberg-Welch relationship simply flounders into slapstick, with a very dumb episode in a fancy restaurant where she causes a frightfully embarrassing scene by throwing a space orgasm in her enthusiasm for haute cuisine.

All the same, a lot of things about this often-slapdash movie improve markedly on the original, though not (I fear) in ways that'll yank in the punters. The old *Cocoon* was a particularly horrid example of Hollywood subversion of unpleasant human realities by cosy American myths: death is optional, old age is just a state of mind, and elderly persons have only them-

undesirable; and that there can be rewards on earth worth giving up immortality for. It's giving nothing away to say that of the six who come back only two will return to the stars at the end of the movie; and though their reasons may be pretty homespun and tacky, heavily compromised by sentiment, absurdity, and further wishful mythologizing of the great American family, it's still a major advance on the sensibility of the original. It's nice, too, to see all those wonderful Hollywood elders like Ameche, Tandy, and Stapleton strut their stuff in ensemble again and make the most appalling guff sound like real movie drama. Somebody's obviously worked hard on getting the whole cast back together (though Dennehy is sadly reduced to a matte-lined cameo at the



From 'Cocoon: The Return'

selves to blame if they're miserable and infirm, neglected by their families, and ghettoized in conditions that would drive Mr Happy to pop his cork from institutionalized depression. What would be really great would be if you could just herd all the aging persons into unmarked flying saucers and deport them to a happy happy land in the sky where nobody ever gets old or dies or has any deeply negative type experiences ever again.

And all credit to *The Return* for kicking this stuff straight back up where it belongs. Here, the oldsters come home to find that neither they nor terrestrial society are terribly well served by this solution; that degeneration and death aren't necessarily unthinkable or even

end); and the big-band score is sweet, courageous, and disarming.

**Cocoon's** is the first of the authentic big-studio followups to arrive; but while long-delayed sequels to *The Terminator* and *Highlander* lumber into gear, sneaky little New World have beaten both to the punch with their modest, amiably preposterous **Warlock**. From the spec alone, you can work out that this is one in which two seventeenth-century Scotsmen are dropped into present-day L.A. to battle for the future of the planet and settle a centuries-long feud. In an inspired attempt to rival the wacky casting of *Highlander*, both are played by rising English actors with ludicrous put-on

accents, presumably on the grounds that European unknowns are just as cheap as American unknowns and more likely to fool the home audience. Jaunty Julian Sands, not content to costar with Jody Foster in the gossip sheets, makes a campy Hollywood debut as the colonial Massachusetts devil's disciple who gets rescued from the executioner by a satanic time-warp, and sets out to recover the three scattered sections of a grimoire containing easy-to-follow instructions on destroying the universe. Ubiquitous Richard E. Withnail Grant enjoys himself hugely as the uncouth avenger despatched through the warp to track the warlock down, save creation, and get off with contemporary romantic interest Lori Singer.

But for the casting, there wouldn't be much to note about this agreeable piece of hokey, especially after gales of test-audience laughter drove the makers to cut the scene where Mary Woronov's nipples turn into the devil. But there's plenty of the knowing play with genre rules that's become something of a New World trademark: nothing on the scale of the vampire and the holy-water-pistol gag from *The Lost Boys*, but the movie has fun with witchcraft lore about hex signs, running water, and consecrated ground. (When Singer turns out early in the film to be diabetic, you're just waiting

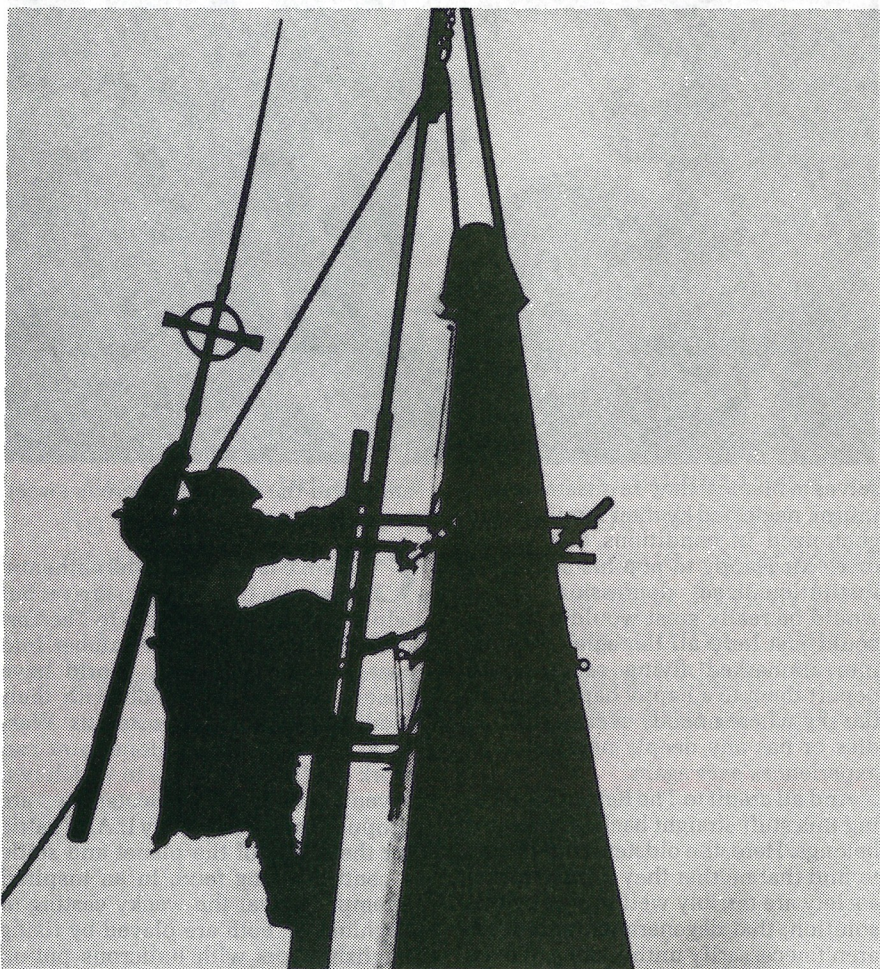
in a suspended cringe for the guaranteed plot gag to arrive.) Still, it's the sublime hamming of Sands and Grant that lifts this characteristic exercise in New World's snip'n'graft exploitation technique into a superior category — that, and the fact the showdown takes place in this terrific Boston cemetery where I once did something I'd rather not talk about. Next, I'd like to see a mix-matched clone of *Fatal Attraction* and *RoboCop*, in which (say) Helena Bonham-Carter has an ill-considered one-night stand with an undead cyborg.

It's Warlock's bad luck to pull into town just when something far more astonishing on the man-out-of-time theme is drawing in on the adjacent platform. Vincent Ward's "medieval odyssey" *The Navigator* swept like a cyclone through the 1988 fantasy film festivals, plucking up awards like matchsticks. It's the exquisitely strange story of a tiny Cumbrian mountain village in the year of the Black Death, who attempt to turn the plague aside by following the visions of the prophetic child Griffin and erecting a spire on a church the other side of the world. To reach it, they send an expedition on a hallucinatory journey through the earth, to emerge in a city that happens to be twentieth-century Auckland — though none of the charac-

ters have the least inkling of this, or even the conceptual vocabulary to understand what it would mean. There, with only Griffin's fragmented dreams to guide them, they set about the impossible quest of casting the spire from raw Cumbrian copper, locating the church, and raising the spire before sunrise...

You've only got to watch these two films back-to-back to appreciate what makes *The Navigator* different, not just from a piece of likable fluff like *Warlock* but from any other time-travel fantasy. There aren't too many films about medieval Cumbrian peasants transplanted to urban New Zealand, but that's incidental; the city happens to be Auckland for the same reasons of production convenience as *Warlock* uses L.A., but any other twentieth-century metropolis would have served. In all other films of this lively subgenre, the time-travellers get fairly swiftly to grips with their new environment. In *The Navigator*, nothing is understood — more than that, the film is founded on the basic impossibility of the medieval peasant mind's making any kind of sense of the twentieth century. And as things turn out, it's paradoxically this very inability to grasp complexity that helps the bizarre quest to succeed.

The magic is, everything in the film is seen through medieval eyes, even down to the narrative structure — so that crossing a road becomes a major crisis recounted at length, while other accidents far more miraculous to the audience's awareness (like finding a horse to kidnap in the middle of Auckland at dead of night) are accepted in the movie with scarcely a blink. The night setting heightens the sense of estrangement and menace, as the city turns into a stamping-ground for figures and machines surreal even by kiwi standards. Even the Cumbrian scenes have a dreamlike edge, with the odd tints that black-and-white acquires when printed on colour stock, and with actual Cumbrian locations rejected (as too tame) in favour of an extraordinary Southern Alps snowscape that places volcanoes unabashedly in the background. The whole thing's beautifully played by a cast of unknowns (save for an unrecognizable one-handed Chris Haywood), and scored and photographed in deliberately medieval textures. A single sly AIDS reference (through a bizarre-but-genuine antipodean TV ad full of medieval imagery and starring the angel of death) hints, rather meretriciously, at an equivalence of plague experience across the barrier of centuries, but nothing's laboured; and though it looks for a while as though the use of colour for the modern sequences is just an Ozzie conceit, a neat twist at the climax reveals what we've been watching, and what the quest



From Vincent Ward's 'The Navigator'



From 'The Navigator'

really means. Tarkovskian in vision but not, mercifully, in pace, it's packed to the gills with images of haunting weirdness, yet cemented together by a coherent and compelling way of seeing the world through alien eyes. And we all thought those nice kiwi persons were so normal.

**B**ut what, now the dust seems to have settled, of *Munchausen*? What amazes me about this whole imbroglio is how quickly it all seems to have passed into history. The verdict seems to be that Gilliam is innocent and pretty well everyone else is guilty of terminal incompetence: this also, to judge from hints so far, is the assessment of the upcoming making-of book. As far as the industry's bothered, this means Gilliam gets to work again providing he's prepared to prove himself a good chap and direct someone else's project for his next one; and if this really does put him at the helm of *Watchmen*, it could be happy endings for everyone. On the budget fiasco, early estimates of writeoff now look exaggerated: as of writing, the picture's opened cautiously to fair business in the US, and despite its vast costs looks after all to lose Columbia less pocket money overall than the disastrous, virtually-unreleased Goldblum/Lauper psychic comedy *Vibes*. On the by now almost-forgotten ownership suit, an insistent declaration in the credits that this isn't a remake of Baky's Nazi version (to which, it must be said, a couple

of scenes owe a rather visible debt of inspiration) seems to have quietened the legal guns. As for the movie, the verdict of consensus is that it's a very pretty family entertainment hamstrung by a feeble script, so haul out the kids and hope they don't find it too long. They certainly didn't at the packed-out weekend matinée I saw.

Well, I'd be the first to agree the script doesn't crackle. The episodic structure worked in *Time Bandits* in part from its innocent novelty, in part from a strong feel of structure and escalation across the segments. Here, we just sprawl from set-piece to grandiose set-piece through a lot of rather frightful cameos and kindergarten jokes that wouldn't raise a hurk from a laughing bag. There's an awful lot of overfamiliar material, not just from Raspe, Burger, Dore, Baky, and Zeman, but also from T. Gilliam and especially from *Time Bandits*: Napoleon's matinée, the giant's ship, the cage sequence all turn up here in rather weakly reupholstered guises. John Neville's Baron and Sarah Polley's Sally get away with murder, but of the support cast only Bill Paterson's showman gets much life out of his role, and some (Oliver Reed, Robin Williams, Jonathan Pryce) are bad beyond the power of experience to conceive. As for all the huffing and puffing about the value of lying and the bankruptcy of scientific reason, the best of it is embarrassingly banal and the worst is objectionable cant.

But actually, I don't mind this at all. What all this does is, paradoxically, to strip away the fluffy coat and lay bare the twisted bones beneath. What really astonishes me about *Munchausen* is what an extraordinarily dark, angry, even paranoiac movie it's turned out to be. Gilliam's always been pretty upfront about the personal elements in the film, though the media have tended to bend it into glib meditations on the ironic coincidence between the film's inner and outer stories. But in fact, the autobiographical element in the Baron clearly goes back way before things started to go hideously wrong with this particular production. The script was written during the struggle over the US release of *Brazil*, and no doubt a lot of it came in there; no doubt, the events of filming tended to bring out precisely the side of Gilliam's personality that the Baron's story expresses. But I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of it was sown away back in the late sixties and the first tussles between *Python* and the BBC programme controllers. In interviews, he tends to smokescreen with stuff about the ages of man, the truth of lies, and the trilogic links with *Time Bandits* and *Brazil*. This is all there, but frankly peripheral. *Munchausen* is basically a film about death to all those evil bastards who get between fantasists and their audience, daughters and fathers, imagination and money: a film on the innocence of

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# Josef Nesvadba

## The Storeroom of Lost Desire

Everything was ready. Our drive checks all flashed up Green Two and the mechanicals were perfect. Our course and ballistic analogs were registering FINAL CHOICE. I set the cybers at go and called for the crew members to confirm their readings. The panels winked and muttered with familiar intimacy and the rocket began to tremble as she always does immediately before launching. All I had to do now was punch a simple code into the console.

But I could not bear to touch the keys. It was clear to me at that moment that I lacked the strength of mind to perform the final action. My gauntleted hand was paralyzed, as though our gravitationals had suddenly ceased to function. I did not look at the console, refused to listen to the crew's voices as my people made their responses, and instead scrutinized the landscape through my autolens. There are many reasons why this action is strictly prohibited during launching. It was the sort of stupidity even a novice would not tolerate.

I was sure she would come. Our First Rank Mathematician, Clea had served with me for several years, never missing a trip. But I hadn't realized how much I was in love with her until this moment when I could not summon the will to leave the planet. I took another illegal look through the lens. She must come to me. I imagined her running down that odd, alien avenue of low shrubs, between houses which shimmered, crystal rainbows in the silver sunshine, the faint mist adding to the impression that this was nothing but an illusion.

The lens, however, showed me nothing but blood and chaos. It was like some costly circorama depicting the end of civilization. And it was of our creation. Indeed, only one of us bore the moral responsibility for what was happening here.

Landing on this planet in the Hair of Berenice a few days ago, we had expected to find an intelligent human community. All reports at our disposal bore this out. On Earth and the other inhabited planets our trip to the Hair of Berenice had been anticipated for several generations. Articles, treatises, whole books were written on the subject. Speculation about the appearance of the local inhabitants, questions as to their character, whether they would be as friendly as other creatures we had contacted in space, whether they would make the first approach to us, all had been discussed ad infinitum. There is so little life in the universe that relief and joy are the predominant

feelings any such newly discovered community inspires. We are inclined to feel increasingly lonely as our venturings go further abroad. New life is an antidote to fear, the justification for all our sacrifices.

Our joy was not, however, to be reciprocated. The inhabitants of this world were physically little different from ourselves, only far better and more diversely endowed. We discovered this as soon as we landed. Since each member of our crew represented a particular branch of learning and the climate here was the same as Earth's, we were able to accumulate more than half the data we needed in the first twenty-four hours, which locally was about a third of a day. Our data included samples of air, minerals, liquids, specimens of the flora, holoroids of the fauna and the sentient inhabitants. Our vids recorded a great deal of useful detail and provided plenty of material for future research. What we lacked, however, was any record of direct contact. The behaviour of the inhabitants who congregated in a single but heavily populated community near the equator was neither friendly nor unfriendly, they showed neither pleasure nor dismay at our presence. Riding by in their various vehicles, flying overhead, resting on the terraces of their dwellings, they took not the slightest notice of us. Yet this was not the central mystery which confounded us.

We tried communicating with these incurious beings by means of our sophisticated contact-making equipment, but they refused to respond; though our apparatus has never failed us whenever we have landed on some new planet. Even on Earth it is capable of conveying human thoughts to such creatures as ants and dolphins and in turn receiving their thought patterns. Our technicians swore the equipment was functioning perfectly but that it simply had nothing to record. The local inhabitants did not speak any kind of language. This offered a contradiction, of course. If it were true, how had they learned to think? Their complex civilization could only have been created by beings capable of abstract intelligence. We tried to barter with them, but whatever we offered they casually produced a replica of local manufacture, which, to crown it all, seemed much finer than our own product. Rocket monocells, holoroids, cyberia, articles of clothing, and even the most sophisticated instruments were conjured up before our eyes. In our spacecraft we also had a number of works of art. Only these produced no improvement from their mysterious underground manufacturing sources. Our cast of the Samothracian Aphrodite remained a solitary

original among the vast multitude of imitations. It evoked no more interest than our other artefacts. It seemed that these people could satisfy every material need yet did not understand art. That, we felt, was a significant discovery.

Yet what good did it do us? Generations of our ancestors had not worked to make this expedition possible only to be rewarded with such superficial information. It should not be forgotten that, in order to mount our expedition, people had been required to work harder in all the key fields. Thousands of scientists and laboratory workers had been prepared to abandon their own particular research to devote themselves to this project. Every citizen had contributed labour and skill to it. It was our duty to repay such a prodigious investment with the very best research and information.

"We have to get inside their houses," said Clea resolutely at our crew conference. I agreed. It was the obvious solution. And a potentially dangerous one, of course. I need hardly explain why. This people evidently had a sophisticated technology and would almost certainly possess efficient weapons. Consequently I decided to send only volunteers on what might become a highly dangerous experiment. Three came forward at once: two junior anthropologists and Clea. Clea was the only member of the trio experienced enough for the work, though the other two were technically better qualified, so in the end she went alone. You can guess my feelings after I had seen her vanish inside the nearest house, waited the agreed time, and she had not emerged, even after a whole seventy-two hours day during which Berenice, the star that rises in our West and sets in our East, traversed the sky. We waited another ten hours, and then I gave orders for a podule to be made ready for me. I set out after Clea, constantly covered by our protection centre, by now quite ready to defend me against this queer civilization if need be.

I left the podule at the roof-top opening of the oddly shaped dwelling. As I entered, the thing undulated like soap-bubbles yet was clearly as strong as any steel. Half-blinded, I proceeded down through a series of womb-like chambers, calling for Clea both on my radio and through the air. It seemed the waves of my voice bounced on the walls and spread a radiance wherever I passed; this radiance in turn opened new doorways in the walls until I stood in a large chamber whose crystalline sides glowed a warm silver traced with ruby, giving the impression of wonderful calm, safety and comfort. She was there, her arms curled around her legs, smiling at me as I entered. "This has to stop," she said. "It's killing us. Them. It's killing them. But what can I do? Have you the will? Please? To free them. I wanted to come back, but I needed help."

I reached out to her. I helped her to her feet. She had the expression of a happy child yet there was a shadow of alarm in her eyes.

My presence seemed to restore her to something resembling normality. "You've got to do it!"

I did not understand her at all. I experienced such absolute well-being here. The house I was in made me feel I was a child on holiday at the water edges. All I wanted to do was to relax and do nothing. This,

Clea told me, was exactly what the local inhabitants had been feeling for generations past. Their perfect cyberfactories, located in the depths of their planet, were capable of fulfilling their every wish. They had become captives of this holiday-time happiness which never ceased and which I had already begun to experience. All their lives were spent in a kind of unconscious bliss. Even while Clea related all this, a glass of iced fruit juice came from the wall to refresh her voice and when she tried to hurl it to the floor, the glass remained hovering in the air, only the colour of the beverage changing, as if the invisible cybernetics that had produced it wished to amend the error and offer her a still more delicious drink. I could smell an unusual, pleasant scent, and felt like tasting it myself.

"Free them?" I remember laughing. "Clea, why should I? They're evidently happy."

"Not happy," she said. "Mindless. Believe me."

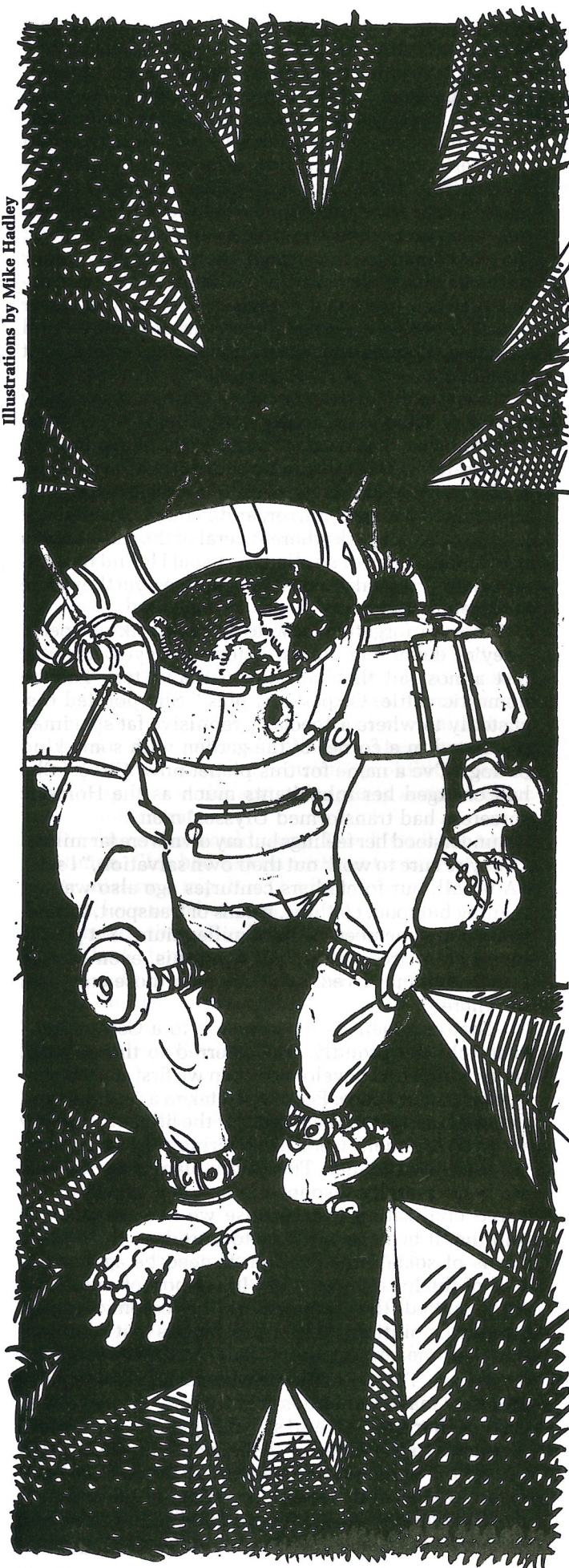
"Surely that's a question of interpretation?"

She moved against the wall in a certain way, as if she cleared a fogged mirror, and I could see a kind of garden or small park where several of the settlement's inhabitants lazed or strolled. As usual I found remarkable their physical likeness to ourselves, yet they were strangely listless.

"They've forgotten how to work, think or speak. They're devolving almost before our eyes. They've lost almost all their animal instincts, too. They're domestic cattle. Or perhaps pigs." She pointed disgustedly to where a specially repulsive fat specimen copulated in a corner of the garden with some kind of dog. "I've a name for this planet now. Circé." She had changed her inhabitants much as the Homeric sorceress had transformed Ulysses' men.

I understood her feelings but my own were far milder. "They're sure to work out their own salvation," I said. "After all, our forefathers centuries ago also wanted nothing but food, clothing, means of transport, leisure. Don't you remember the third millennium? Yet people managed to free themselves from this, even though they sometimes lived far worse than those creatures out there."

"That argument is meaningless to a Columbian," Clea told me proudly. She referred to the political party which had developed when we first started conquering outer space. People had taken a renewed and detailed interest in the history of the fifteenth century when Westerners were discovering new continents on their own planet. The Columbians asserted that we were morally responsible for each newly discovered civilization just because we had contacted it and that it became our duty to introduce the highest forms of social organization, if need be against the will of the local population. In support of their view they quoted the instance of the colonization of America, pointing out how prosperous that continent had become. Its inhabitants never threatened with starvation. The Columbians were an aggressive party and they made numerous grave errors, in my view. I, on the other hand, like all sensible people, was a Montezuman. In the name of that Aztec king we showed our fellow humans how many civilizations had been exterminated in the fifteenth century alone and how terrible had been the crimes committed in the name of progress. Consequently we advocated gradual



observation and non-interference in our contacts with newly discovered planets and naturally abhorred all violence. This difference of viewpoint was never settled in my lifetime and every new discovery resulted in fierce arguments at the Supreme Council. In these Clea had invariably taken my side.

"You're a Columbian now?" She could not miss my sarcasm. "That's the first I've heard of it. Exactly when did this conversion occur?"

She ignored my tone. "Since we discovered Circé. Actually, since I came here. What are we if we can't change our minds in the light of fresh experience?"

I offered to call a staff conference once we got back to our ship, to put her wishes to a vote, but she refused to come. She had to carry out more observations, she said. She wanted to prevent the inhabitants of this particular dwelling – she used the term "nest" – committing further "crimes." She spoke like a child. Not even the Columbians had ever suggested we take over the policing or the judicature of new planets. Her morbid fascination was transparent: she was slandering the inhabitants of a house which she had no intention of leaving. She herself was intoxicated by that queer feeling of blissful lassitude. But her response was most confused. I was sure she was inventing excuses in order to stay there.

"You're unwell, Clea," I said. "I'll get you back to the ship at once. It's this environment, believe me. You're not making sense." I was reminded of the experiences of explorers in Sirius, where the local people had the knack of assuming the shape of any visitor they met. I looked round for the real Clea, hoping to find the woman I had worked side by side with for so long. She smiled at me, as if she were party to secrets of such immense profundity I would never understand. She made a noise within her throat and a further room blossomed into the other. Together we went in.

**E**ntering this room was like entering a dream. Suddenly I stood inside a storeroom full of everything I had ever desired in my life. There was even a little doll with which I had forced myself to stop playing as I grew up. I lifted the little princess in my hands and she was more beautiful now than thirty years ago. No one had ever known of this secret desire. I had never confided it to anyone.

I had the strangest feeling that I was slipping back down into my own vanished memories, into a past in which every disappointment became a fulfilment. It was an astonishing feeling of completeness. I was at one with myself. I had never felt closer to Clea. There was absolutely everything here – the small aerocycle I was not allowed to fly at eleven because my tutor thought I was not strong enough to keep myself in the air thirty feet above ground, the experimental rocket in which I had one Saturday wanted to circle the Moon, the bottle of wine I had denied myself prior to my fourth launching when I was twenty. There were things there I cannot bring myself to mention even now, they are so deeply secret. I found that I was shaking with an unprecedented violence of emotion. Everything I had ever desired, even where I had suppressed the desire or the memory of it, had come into being. Clea's expression as she watched me was mysterious. After a while, she left, returning to the other chamber.

With her absence the sense of fulfilment slowly dissipated. My desire for her was the strongest thing in me. I followed her back into the next room. She stood looking at a large, flat cold box crammed with delicacies no cook at home would remember existed.

"Did you ever experience real hunger?" she asked me. "When I was a child I went through a terrible polar winter with my father during his archaeological excavation work."

"You mentioned some hardship. But you always minimized it."

She nodded. "I doubt if you know what it means to be hungry." Evidently the experience had been so terrible she had resisted reviving it, even in our most intimate exchanges. Now it was clear that all her life she had dreamed of just such a plethora of delicacies, as I had yearned for that little princess doll. It was also obvious that she had lost the courage or the will to tear herself from that wonderful place where wishes came true. Yet her ordinary sense of survival still informed her, translated as her demand that we interfere with the life of this planet, that we somehow save the inhabitants from themselves.

"You must return to the ship with me, Clea."

"No," she said simply and made another sound, passing through a further wall, leaving the cold box behind her.

"Clea!"

But she was gone. I was desperate. Unless we saved her from herself, by force if necessary, she would inevitably come to resemble the local barely sentient beasts. I myself had to exert all my mental energy to fight the lure of the place. My love for her was what gave me the strength. It did not comfort me to know that her love for me might not be as intense.

"Clea!"

She returned, passing through the wall overhead. "I have lost my will," she said. "But you will not take me back. Not until the job is over."

Again I was baffled. "You must realize this system is not meant to assuage hunger," I said urgently. "This is the most pernicious deception, the most monstrous trap I've experienced in any of our ventures. All the dark stars' electroids, even the flesh-eating plasmatics of Aldebaran or the neurovores of Kaspar 2 are harmless nuisances compared to this. This is like the temptation prepared by some prehistoric Satan. You must come with me to the ship. Now."

"Oh, you are right," she said. "It has conquered me. It has certainly conquered me. Can you not feel it? You must destroy the source. Only then will I be restored."

I reached for her. I seized her and tried to make her come with me. She struggled furiously. It was at this point, I think, that I realized how much I needed her. It was not in my nature to use violence. As I hurried back to our ship without the pod, which took time to discover and follow me, all the presents I had ever given her appeared before me: the pictures I had chosen for her after my second trip, the ring I brought her from Pluto, the antique fur I got for her on Mars by digging in those quaking pits... Maybe it was my imagination, but I suspected it was the work of the local cybermatics, intending to remind me there was, after all, one emotion I would never give up, that there was something I had to have if I was not to perish on

my journeys, if I was to live. This was my love for Clea. And that I swore I would not sacrifice to this planet. A madness only different in degree had taken possession of me as thoroughly as it had taken possession of her.

"We must attack them at once." At the staff conference I was barely in control of myself. It was a contention I found most difficult to justify. I could not admit that my only concern was for Clea. So I spoke of the humiliating condition of the local inhabitants, completely deprived of their powers of cognition and creation. They had been turned into creatures which almost certainly no longer even realized what they were, spending all their energy on the process of feeding, digestion and copulation, on a vegetative existence pure and simple. My people did not want to take the initiative without a decision by the Council. They knew the rules as well as I did. After all they were also Montezumans. Very few Columbians were ever selected for these ventures. Now it was my crew's turn to wonder if some local chameleon had come aboard our ship in my place.

Yet ultimately I had the power to make any decision. They did not dare oppose an authority entrusted to me by our entire species.

We had to rescue Clea. Effectively, I argued, the natives had taken her prisoner. By that act they had therefore declared war on us. Since we were at war it made tactical sense to strike at their nerve centre. I would not take lives, I said, but I was prepared to destroy some of their machines in the hope that this would help us recover our First Rank Mathematician and also set the inhabitants on the road to self-help.

Against many objections, I gave the necessary commands. All the while I was fighting a strong urge to return to that storeroom of lost memories, of forgotten longings. The pain in me became physical. I had never experienced such terrible reactions.

In a cold dream of spurious clarity, I began the appropriate preparations.

After two hours of aerial reconnaissance we managed to locate their coordination control high up in the hills. It was clear from the tone of my crew's voices that they disapproved completely of my decision, yet there was nothing for them to do but obey. I gave the order to attack the control with intensive rays. We were astonishingly successful. The control had obviously not been designed with attack in mind and had absolutely no defences. I was in the leading battlepod. When we hit their control a terrific explosion sent us all veering off course. One of our pods was lost in the gushing energies pouring from the centre and even our mother ship had certain instruments and her cooling apparatus slightly damaged. I returned to the ship to reports that repairs would take several days. None of the crew spoke to me, even when I issued orders. They were prepared to obey me but gave me nothing else. That same false clarity remained with me. My whole attention was on saving Clea from Circé's lure.

"It was our plain duty," I explained to each of them in turn. "After all, they're human beings like us. They'll start working again, they'll learn to use tools, and they'll help one another. They can start from scratch, building their civilization anew. We've saved them."

Privately I hoped at least that we had saved Clea. As soon as I could I returned to the section of the settlement where I had originally found her. The building was nothing more than a few filaments, strands of wire waving in a fierce wind from the mountains. The whole cybernetwork had been demolished in the explosion. There was hardly anything left but naked circuitry.

I think I had been certain she would be there, perhaps a little baffled but returned to her old sanity. But I could not find her anywhere nearby. All that remained of the great miracle that had been Circé's only city were faintly glowing threads tracing the exquisite, almost metaphysical geometry of a sophisticated impulse-operated cybernetic system our own scientists could scarcely imagine possible, let alone create. It was appalling to see it destroyed. Yet it was so clearly an example of virtue turned to vice I still felt no pangs of conscience at ordering its destruction. Those would come later.

I had not planned so complete a destruction.

I reached out between strands of conductive fibres as if I could personally complete the circuit which would bring back that storeroom of fulfilled desires, of desires unrealized, of desires unadmitted, of desires which were again impossible, even in dreams. What great solace to my own soul, to the souls of my fellows, had I destroyed in my madness?

I cast amongst the fused ground of the foundations, but all I discovered was what I thought might be dried blood. I remained in that place for hours, perhaps believing that my hunger and longing alone would restore it to what it had been, would bring Clea back to me.

**T**he inhabitants were running amok through the shallow avenues. All that was left of the place was the vegetation, marking borders which were now meaningless. Any checks on the bestiality of these creatures were gone for good. Howling like dogs they attacked one another, fighting for the last remnants of their provisions. They fought with bare hands and with teeth. It had not occurred to any of them to arm themselves. They were no longer even primitive tool-users. Before my eyes several females fell on the fat fellow I had seen earlier. He squealed and grunted exactly like a real pig as he was slaughtered. I was horrified by now. This had not been my intention at all. I had merely wished to stimulate them into helping themselves and to rescue Clea from their spell. I grew desperate, running for miles through those electronic ruins. Had Clea died like the fat man? Now I realized these creatures could never hope to become human again. They were utterly devolved. As their science had grown more subtle, they had grown cruder. Their excessively protected existence had doomed them to die out like the dinosaurs. Yet we had not become extinct in the same fashion – what had saved us back there at the end of the third millennium?

I had run in a circle. I was on the site of the storeroom. My feet now slipped on blood and little bits of flesh and entrails. To one side of me, amongst the shrubs, the females snored, still clutching half-eaten bones. The fat creature's skull had been cracked and its brain and eyes both eaten. It was then that I began,

uncontrollably, to vomit. Yet even as my stomach heaved, I remember how I longed for my little princess doll.

I sat in my cabin and waited, delaying our take-off as much as I could. It did not matter that I returned to our home world in disgrace. I had forsaken any interest in my own fate. But I still harboured the hope that Clea would return to the ship. I made my crew take further copies of the material we had collected. I had them check and re-check our energizers, I even gave orders to freeze a few of the local inhabitants to take home with us. Everything I had ever believed in was destroyed. Everything I had ever desired was now denied to me. But I refused this truth.

As the days went by and still Clea did not come back I sat alone in my cabin, holding my head in my hands, ready to sacrifice everything, to delay the expedition to mar all our existing research and perhaps not even return home for my own selfish ends, because of my own desires. I was the last victim of this planet. I was probably the only victim conscious of its fate. I knew this and I tried in vain to fight that knowledge.

**E**verything was ready. Our drive checks all flashed up Green Two and the mechanicals were perfect. Our course and ballistic analogs were registering FINAL CHOICE. I set the cybers at go and called for the crew members to confirm their readings. The panels winked and muttered with familiar intimacy and the rocket began to tremble as she always does immediately before launching. All I had to do now was punch a simple code into the console...

The lens showed me nothing but blood and chaos. I thought I saw in the distance some of the local creatures climb clumsily on to the rocks where their dwellings had been and there were several in the trees. Still Clea did not come. I had to make my decision. At any moment the catastrophe that had overtaken an entire planet might sweep us away as well. Was I to sacrifice the chance of Clea's being alive or risk the failure of our mission in the Hair of Berenice? It was against all my training and habit to consider my own feelings. But having already succumbed to the lure of Circé, to the temptations of the storeroom of lost desire, I had abandoned all confidence in myself, in the value of my decisions.

All I had to do now was punch a simple code into the console.

And suddenly I was not thinking merely of quantum propulsion but the real energy of this machine, of the sacrifice made by entire generations of our ancestors, who gave up comfort and pleasure, even love, to learn to know the universe they lived in, to solve the mysteries of existence, to honour their forefathers and their descendants, to show a profound respect both for themselves and for everything which existed.

That, of course, was what had saved them from the fate of this people. That was why they had not reverted to the animal state once technology had solved all their production problems.

With this understanding came sanity. That false clarity disappeared and I became fully aware of my moral responsibility, of what I must now do.





Slowly, I raised a heavy, lifeless hand. It was as if I had been paralyzed in the spacesuit. Without realizing what I had done I punched the starting code and saved my friends, the whole expedition, just as a bizarre wave of energy poured like water from a wrecked dam into the streets of that ruined paradise. The stuff roiled and writhed, a crazy rainbow. I thought I saw Clea high above, poised like some ancient Martian dust-rider, wild ecstasy on her face, her hair like the golden radiance which had filled the house where I had found her. Was it the last promise of that treacherous planet? I would never know.

We got away just in time. Our engines yelled. The ship lifted. Suddenly there was nothing to be seen in the lens but streaming clouds. I collapsed in my couch, afraid I would faint with the pain of that separation.

I had lost my Clea. I would never set eyes on her again. Everything came back to me now with renewed force. How happy I had been in that crystal house. How well I had felt there! What perfection it had been. No human beings had ever known such a sensation of complete fulfilment. And in the madness which such fulfilment brought me I had destroyed all the dreams of my life. Worse – I had destroyed the one reality which was worth as much as any dream. What a stupid, unnecessary sacrifice!

I had been wounded a dozen times during my expeditions. But this was worse than any physical injury. Flesh tore from flesh. Soul was torn from soul. It was an agony beyond agony.

"Clea!" I cried. "Clea!"

Only at that point did I understand the extent of my love for her. I would have remained on Circé if she could have left in my place. I would have sent my ship back and stayed to seek her out. I would have done anything but what I actually did and destroy that subtle and delicately maintained paradise.

Yet perhaps she had a reason for staying behind? Maybe she had hidden from us deliberately, planning to build something fresh and better on Circé? What had she learned? Had the destruction itself been no more than an illusion?

"Clea!"

My emotions again gained the better of me. Now we were leaving Circé's gravity I screamed with the agony of it, alone, so utterly alone with the consequences of my actions. What might we have achieved if we had marshalled the energies of that storeroom and used it for the benefit of ourselves, Circé's inhabitants, perhaps all intelligent life throughout the universe?

I told myself that this, too, was a delusion. I congratulated myself that I had conquered Circé's insidious spell. At the last moment I had shown an appropriate strength of character, proving the trust that my people had placed in me.

Clea rode the rainbow wave for eternity.

I was returning to the planet of my birth but I was not going home.

Home was an illusion I had destroyed.

I wept.

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Translated from the Czech and prepared for English publication by Georges Theiner and Michael Moorcock.

# John Sladek

## Interview by Gregory Feeley

Born and raised in the American Midwest, John Thomas Sladek was nevertheless first published in *New Worlds* in 1966, and resided in London for the next 17 years. His disturbingly logical forebodings of the coming cybernetic revolution began with "The Happy Breed" in *Dangerous Visions* in 1967, and with his memorable novel *The Reproductive System* the next year. Since then Sladek has published five more science-fiction novels, including the picaresque *Roderick* (1980) and *Roderick at Random* (1983), as well as two mysteries, several volumes of highly regarded short stories, an acerbic survey of modern pseudoscience, *The New Apocrypha* (1973), and several sly pseudonymous tomes.

Sladek has recently returned to Minnesota, while publishers on both sides of the Atlantic are scrambling to catch up with his work. Kerosina has announced plans to bring out hardcover editions of Sladek's early collections *The Steam-Driven Boy* and *Keep the Giraffe Burning* as well as *Roderick at Random*, while Carroll & Graf has recently published the first complete American editions of the two-ply *Roderick* saga. Gollancz meanwhile has reissued *The Reproductive System* as part of its "Classic SF" series. Despite the appearance this spring of his latest novel, *Bugs*, from Macmillan, Sladek remains phlegmatic regarding such harbingers of fame, in which mood he recently discussed his science fiction career.

**After publishing no science-fiction novel for a decade, you returned in the Eighties to the theme of robots, self-reproducing engines, and recorded personalities. Yet your short stories, which have continued unabated throughout this period, have been virtually robot-free. Is there something about robots that calls for full-length treatment, or do sf's other grand old themes interest you less?**

Believe me, robot addiction is no fun. I sent off for a tape cassette that's supposed to help me quit. It contains subliminal hypnotic messages — you know, "Robots make you gag," "Robots equal cancer" and so on. Only they probably sent me the wrong tape, because now I have an uncontrollable desire to invest in real estate.

I certainly had no intention of playing on one string so long. But there always seem to be a few variations left. I keep hoping to say all I want to say about it before moving on. I have even included a robot of sorts in my non-sf novel *Bugs*, but at least I'm tapering off.

Thinking about robots brings up a number of rich philosophical questions such as these: Do other people have thoughts and feelings as I do? Is free will possible? How can we tell a human being from anything else? Is the past real, or is it a trick of memory? Is the world around us real, or only a trick of perception? Some time before I wrote any science fiction myself I noticed how sf plunges in and grapples with such questions. It's as though no one told sf writers that it isn't in good taste to wrestle with epistemological issues.

That's what I like about it. Philip K. Dick in particular was, and remains, one of my literary loves. The guy was a terrible writer! And yet, in the midst of his worst *Ace Double* hack novel, he would do something grand and absurd — demonstrate that the whole world was nothing but the dream of a left-handed dyslexic dwarf or something.

It was that kind of lunacy that attracted me to sf and that keeps me still hanging around the fringes. However, there are some sf subjects that do not interest me. Space travel to me is just travel. I may never write a post-disaster novel, and does the world really need any more of those? Though I am tempted to tell the story of a barren world in which all the trees have been destroyed to print post-disaster novels.

**One theme you have treated at both short-story and novel length is that of literary pastiche. Yet your parodic novels *Arachne Rising* and *The Judgment of Jupiter* were published under pseudonyms and solemnly presented as species of the pseudoscience they in fact sent up. Was this a marketing ploy, or wit too dry for most readers to notice?**

A marketing ploy. I was pissed off about the reception of my non-fiction book *The New Apocrypha*. It began to look to me as though people were only too willing to buy any book which said Yes to any silly wish.

So the market was (and continues to be) flooded with books saying Yes, we're receiving visits from extraterrestrial aliens; yes, you can cure cancer by rubbing feet or shining coloured lights or eating brown rice; yes, you can leave your body or communicate with the dead or bend spoons by mental effort only. Often, the gurus seemed to be doing no more than lifting science-fiction stories (without attribution) and presenting them as reality. But it was all supremely successful.

On the other hand, a book which suggested looking at any case more closely was clearly doomed; it attracted only hate mail and lawsuits. I resented the disparity, and decided to test for myself just how much the public can take. So in *Arachne Rising* I invented a thirteenth sign of the zodiac. I used the same kind of febrile arguments that many New Age archaeologists use (Robert Graves used it lots) wherein anything can be a symbol for anything else — a tree is a stag is a month is a castrated priest who represents the horned moon which is the White Goddess and so on.

**I'm glad to see your are getting your American idioms back, though it may confuse *Interzone* readers. "I read that Sladek pissed off after the reception to *The New Apocrypha*." I am surprised to hear you describe *Bugs* as non-sf. As a contemporary novel with a just-futuristic research setting, it seems kin to *The Reproductive System*, *The Müller-Fokker Effect*, even *Roderick*. Does its satiric cast simply feel closer to home?**

I see *Bugs* primarily as a comic novel of the subspecies Englishmen-in-America. There have been plenty of these, by everyone from Dickens to Malcolm Bradbury, Martin Amis, and William Boyd. The odd thing is, most of them are terrible. Comic writers who otherwise have no trouble striking the right voice seem to go to pieces when they get to an Englishman-in-America. They end up churning out catalogues of oddities. To Americans, their books look merely snobbish.

The very funny exception is Waugh's *The Loved One*. Americans — those who tell strangers to have a nice day, who sign their names with little smiling faces — ought to be able to

recognize themselves in his grotesques. I don't think Bugs manages anything like this, but it aims in that direction. I also felt that, as an American, I could put some Englishmen on the ball, if that makes any sense. In a sense, the robot is almost incidental – just one more high-tech enterprise.

**How well did these "Zodiac" books do? As someone who has written under at least four pseudonyms, you must have noticed how variously these personae sell. Do you feel such commercial factors exert an influence over your work?**

They didn't do all that well, considering the work that went into them. This is one reason why I'm no longer writing them. Then too, I found I could not just crank them out the way a hack journalist might. I further doubt if I enjoyed producing them as much as a self-deceiving guru might. And finally, yes, I did feel some guilt about contributing to the dumps of intellectual hazardous waste. Not much, though.

**Your Roderick books had a rocky initial reception in America: their publisher decided to bring them out as three rather than two volumes, then went bust after the first book went out. So for several years American readers had only two-thirds of the first volume ("Part One of the Roderick the Robot Trilogy"), which cannot have made it easy to bring out the rest. What did you think of Timescape's plan to reslice the Roderick story, like cookie dough? (And what would the middle volume's title have been?)**

I found the resectioning of the Roderick books unnecessary but not upsetting. I had, after all, turned out the initial cookie dough (thanks for that image) that could be sliced in different ways. I meant Roderick to be a saga, that is, a soap opera. Indeed, so elastic was this narrative, I felt I might do more adventures (*Roderick Redux*, *Rod the God*, or whatever).

The incident did give me to think about American publishing, however. That a publisher can believe "Three volumes good, two volumes bad" speaks – well – volumes about that industry. Among other things, it means that packaging is paramount – the contents are an unimportant commodity that can be sold by the yard, pound, or page. Companies have to think like this when they are selling cheap bulk products that don't differ much (detergent, cereals). The boxed trilogy strangely resembles the stack of bars of soap, banded together as a special offer item: buy six, get one free. And those commodity products will be produced in factories staffed by minimum-wage workers listening to salsa as they toast the flakes all day.

The trouble with treating fiction like a commodity is, it becomes exactly that. The shelves of any B. Dalton science-fiction department today are filled

with the equivalent of junk-food cereals. Titles like *The Ice-Sword of Lady Moonwolf* (Part IX of the *Darksword Jewelfire Chronicles*). And of course these products end up being produced by minimum wage workers (first time authors are very welcome in the industry today) who might as well be listening to salsa as they ply their word processors all day.

**Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers** quotes you as saying that "My work is usually called satire or black humour, but it also reflects my preoccupation with certain themes." Who are "they," and does your work in fact contain veiled attempts to tell us?

For "themes" read "themes." Either I or *Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers* seem to have misspelled my pontification here. Or her.

**What do you think of Whitley Strieber, whose million-dollar revelations of aliens among us were recently examined by Thomas M. Disch? Your last**

**collaboration with Disch, I recall, was another spoof, "Mystery Diet of the Gods: A Revelation."**

Strieber is one of the gurus I mentioned earlier, who present sf as reality. I enjoyed Tom's skewering of him.

**Your first published story was "The Poets of Millgrove, Iowa," and you have now returned to the American Midwest and settled in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, not far one presumes from Bugs's Paradise Valley. Do you write of the Midwest – as you continued to do throughout your years in England – simply because you know it best, or is there something beguiling in the names of this flatland arcadia?**

As Fats Waller almost said, one writes what one knows, don't one? So I always feel I ought to know the Midwest best, but in another sense, I don't know it at all. It continues to amaze me. When I first got back here from Britain, I thought "Gosh, culture shock, I've really been away a long time, this

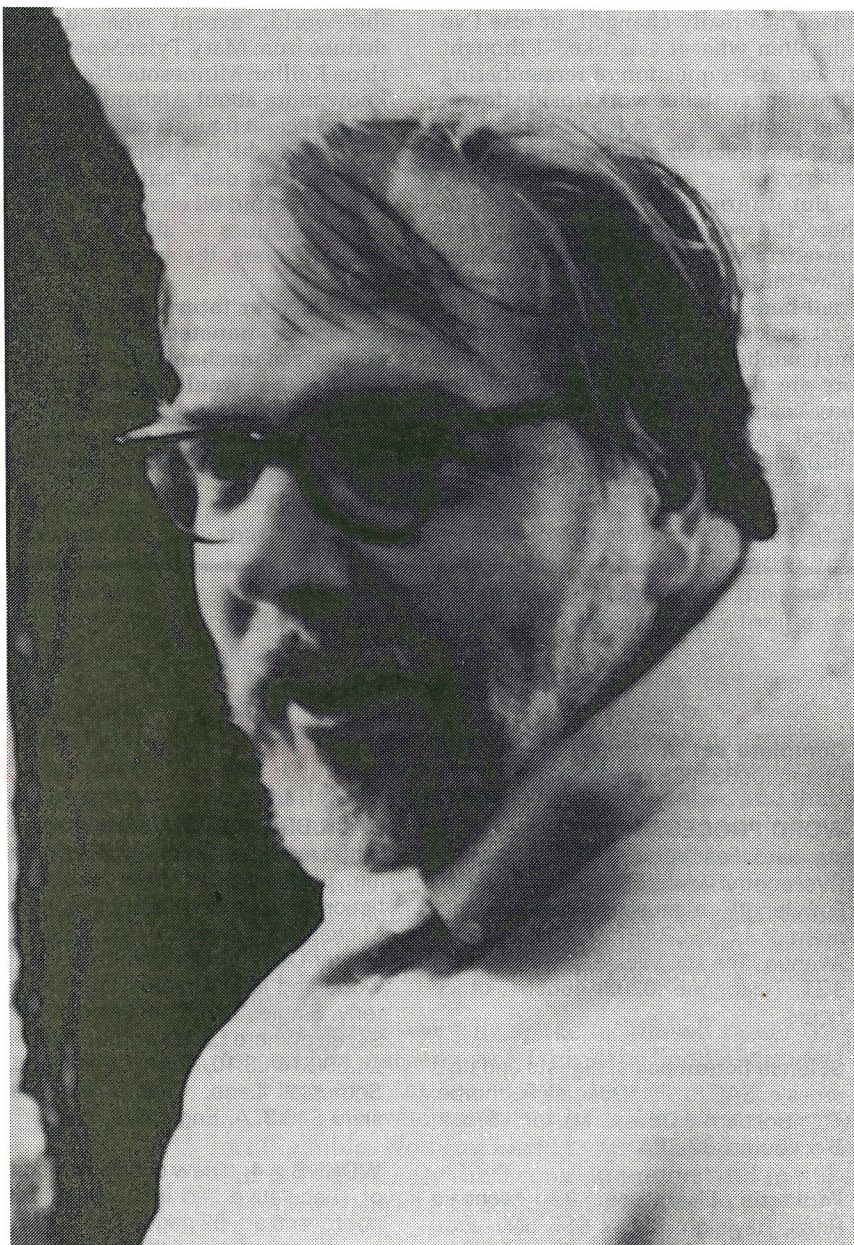


Photo of John Sladek courtesy of Macmillan London Ltd

place has really changed, or else I've forgotten what it was like." I thought it was just a question of remembering that light switches work upside down, that people say "Go for it!" and nuptial and nucular and barbiturate and liberry.

But it turns out that the longer I'm here, the weirder the place gets. It's so unselfconsciously American. I'm told they built the first indoor shopping mall here in Minnesota. No doubt the first sock store, too, and the first "gourmet hamburgers." All the TV advertisers are directing their high-intensity buy-beams directly at this Midwest target. At the same time, it's terra incognita for them and for the rest of

the world, except what they can deduce from Mary Tyler Moore or Garrison Keillor. Minnesota? New Yorkers know more about Afghanistan.

And I can't figure it out, either. I live in an area which still has beaver dams and herds of deer, but also has pizza delivery, rapid oil changes and instant cash machines – all the American dreams in one. It's endlessly fascinating.

**What of your future projects? Proponents of nanotechnology foresee virus-sized mechanisms – robots, basically – that would float through the bloodstream and dismantle fat deposits and cancer cells protein by protein. Do such frontiers interest you,**

**or will you continue to follow *Bugs's* lead into the here and now?**

Yes, the nanomachine fascinates me. Suppose those cancer-dismantling devices began having labour disputes, forming unions, warring for control of sectors? But I haven't so far any real ideas for this subject; it's just fascinating.

I haven't yet settled on a new project. More comic novels would be fun. There's plenty of America to go around. Or maybe I'll finally get down to my novel on Albania.

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# Sylvia M. Siddall

## Kingfisher

I have a clear memory of my first meeting with Ambrose and his people. Until then I believe that I wandered, ragged and starving, surviving on scraps, wild plants and crusts begged from the camps. I was too poor to rob, too foolish to be of any use. Some instinct kept me away from the dragon pits and the sickness that hung invisibly round them; the giant black skeletons twisting there were a warning even to me.

They were an unusually clean and well-fed crowd. I was led to the centre of the village where Ambrose kept his camp; to the house where, in fine weather, everyone ate together in a yard open to the sky. My mouth filled with saliva at the smell of fresh bread and roast potatoes. The man who had been on watch at the gate took me to the centre of the tables.

"Look what just crawled in – crawled is the word!" He released my arm and wiped his hand down his thigh, amid laughter.

"What's your name?" someone asked me.

"I don't remember." I said, confused.

"Don't you remember your name?"

"He's lying."

"Go on, he's simple! Look at him!"

"What do you remember?"

"Nothing." I stared at the ground.

"Nothing at all?"

"Shock, d'you think?"

"We ought to keep 'im," a small boy called out. "We can teach 'im to muck out the pigs an' then I wouldn't 'ave to!"

Someone cuffed the lad lightly and he pretended to duck and weave.

"Yes, we'll keep him." A man came to me from the back of the crowd. I looked up into grey eyes, although I did not see kindness there. He was a hard-looking man, stern and deliberate. "What'll we call you, then, person with no name?"

I opened my mouth then shut it again and shrugged. He looked around at his people. "Care for him. He's my guest." He did not ask for any approval. "I'm Niall Ambrose," he told me. The name came like a bullet, even though unfamiliar, hitting me in the chest. I caught my breath and hugged my ribs at the sharpness of the pain.

"Yes," I said to myself, as he turned away and called for a man to bring me food.

I heard that there was a joke among the youngsters, that no-one had ever seen Ambrose kneel. I told that, and he smiled his rare and charming smile.

"No, I won't kneel to anyone. Maybe I'm too proud. I'll probably be brought to my knees before the end."

"There's no end to it, Ambrose." I often said things that I did not understand until later, one of the tricks of returning memory. "We're at a new beginning, not an end. It only ends for us as individuals, the whole goes on. I can promise your name'll live long after you."

"Hasn't anyone else realized you can see the future?"

"I don't." I was sharp with him; the pain in my head was centred between my eyes like an intolerably bright light or a migraine. "I only remember, and that's in bits and pieces."

"What do you remember?" He leaned towards me. "Do you recall the war? Your childhood?"

"War?" I squinted at him through the pain. Sometimes each word I heard brought back vivid pictures. What war? Wait till your own. I'm sorry, my head's splitting."

"I've feared war," he spoke to himself rather than to me. "Not just gang-war, I think the flood's coming."

"From over the sea," I said thickly.

"Yes." He watched me, chin on fist, elbows resting on the table. Nothing I said came as a shock to him but only gradually did I come to understand that the memories worked as strongly in him as in me.

"It was bigger than cow," the girl told us breathlessly. "Much taller, with long legs and it was reddish all over. It had a neck like this." Her hands sketched a curve in the air.

"Horse," Ambrose said, "the horses are coming back."

"They're extinct. They were all eaten after the war." His brother, Anthony, had brought the girl in and stood watching her.

"The land remembers them," I told him but he pulled a face and his eyes did not leave the girl's tight blouse. "This land's been hit so hard, knocked sideways, now it remembers what it was."

Only Niall Ambrose's presence prevented Anthony from being rude to me. We never liked each other. Niall was always just Ambrose, while Anthony, younger and short-tempered, was just Anthony.

"I think the land remembered you," Ambrose told me. "You're a memory yourself."

I did not laugh. He was secure in his past, he knew his parents, his brother and his birthplace.

"Perhaps I am." I went out, while Anthony went to the girl and her welcoming smile.

A cuckoo called. Its doubled echo rang through the woods and the hills. Why should the return of that parasitic bird fill me with joy, bringing tears to my eyes? Every year he returns, from who knows where, some other land that survived as our land did, battered but defiant. The birds have come back, and the flowers. Trees grow out from where we can trace old hedgerows and gardens, the fields are closing in, many roads are impassable, their hedges meeting and tangling, roots humping the old surfaces. The land remembers the primeval forest and, slowly, so do I.

Ambrose's hair had turned iron grey, his face weathered and lined. I had watched him grow sterner over the years, more like himself. Sometimes it was with an effort that I saw him, not another dark and dangerous man.

"We're returning to the middle ages," he remarked. "Little gangs all hugging our rifles and our patch of land, glowering at each other."

I shook my head.

"No. Look at you – how many men, women and children owe their allegiance to you? It must be thousands by now, you've brought them together."

"Sometimes you sound most peculiar. I thought you were just a tramp at first, or one of the last gypsies. Don't you remember anything from the time before we met?"

"Barely anything," but in a way, I lied to him.

He was in an unusually pensive mood. He walked across the room, still with that long, loose stride and quick turn, a mixture of patience and energy, a man who curbed himself while working towards his own goals.

"I've no children," he said suddenly. "There've been women but I've never fathered children. I don't know anyone I can train to take my place. When I die, all the trade, all the alliances I've worked for, will collapse unless someone works at them as I have. What'll happen then, when Europe or America or Russia remembers us and comes back? I'm sure they will."

"There's Anthony."

We looked at each other and smiled.

"That's a very short-term answer, don't you agree?" He paced again. "He's too interested in his own future, the trouble is, that's usually in someone else's bed. I expect his son'll grow up to be the same."

"His son?" I licked my lips, finding that my fingernails dug into the palms of my hands. I did not need the catfeet that ran down my spine, my own conviction was enough. Here was his future.

"That must have been before you arrived. I forget you haven't always been here. Some of the Southern Left travelled up to discuss the Welsh question, and my very helpful little brother ran off with their leader's woman, Elaine. It was just like him, losing his head over some girl with eyes only for him."

Ambrose made a quick gesture, waving away an irritating memory. "Yes, she was very beautiful and must have been bored, locked away in Gellis's lair waiting for him to get her pregnant. I cooled Gellis down, got her to see sense and Anthony to apologize – which took some doing – and patched it all up only for Gellis to demand compensation three months later. Our Anthony had succeeded in a night where he'd failed in a year. I told him to make the best of it.

The child was a boy, normal as far as I know.

"Where is he now?"

"Who knows? She sent him away. Anyway she had another child the next year by Gellis. The boy must be seven or eight."

"Don't you see?" I sucked the palm of my hand, tasting blood. This cuckoo-call from the past sent my heart slamming in slow, heavy strokes that shook my ribs. "That's the future."

"Anthony's bastard?"

"It all fits, Ambrosius. The woman from the west, the hidden boy, the king with no heir."

"How odd," he whispered, "I'm sure I remember someone else calling me Ambrosius, but for the life of me, I don't remember who."

I left him, to look for the boy. I travelled alone, on one of the horses Anthony had trapped and trained. The fuel was all gone, engines rusting away. Our carefully hoarded rifles and ammunition were all we had left from the technological past. What a world we have inherited!

At night, the dragon lights flicker on the horizon, dancing over the pit that was once a city. I have seen the fiery beasts dance slowly in the glow, revolving and bowing to each other on a light breeze. I left in a hurry, fearing the deathly sickness that accompanied them.

I was welcomed as a messenger from Ambrose, fed and entertained in exchange for the latest news. We are dependent on travellers' tales for our knowledge of the world. I even tried out an old legend on them, the tale of the Fisher King who lives in the Isle of Glass, floating off the west coast of Britain. They thought it an odd sort of poetry but they seemed to like it.

Elaine was still beautiful, with her dark hair twisted on the crown of her head. I could see the proud grace that had attracted the young Anthony. I spoke with her as we ate.

"Am I right that you have a son?" I asked. She had a little girl with her, a grave child who watched in silence.

"I do." Elaine's chin came up. "My first was a boy. Why d'you want to know?"

"I was making conversation."

She smoothed her dress with her slender, ringed hands, pulling the fabric tighter across her abdomen; ensuring that, even if I had not noticed before, I saw the swell of her stomach.

"I've heard of you, Mister No-name, you're Ambrose's spy – or else his lover. You don't make idle conversation. Why do you want to know about my son?"

"Ambrose has no children," I said mildly.

"So? That's his problem. Why does he suddenly want to know about his kid brother's son after all these years?" She turned her head away to watch Gellis, who was joking with a couple of girls.

"Why did you send him away?"

She did not appear to hear, but the rings flashed on her fingers.

"Ambrose is prepared to give him a chance that you won't. Why should you object to that?"

"This's what matters now, No-name." She patted herself, a smug little gesture.

"Yes." I smiled at her, forcing my lips to curve. "Of course. That's the future. I'd like to give your son the future too, Elaine."

"My son's in here."

I very nearly told her that she was carrying another girl, but I waited. Eventually, she looked at me, a hurt, angry expression on her lovely face. "That's all in the past, over and gone. Why can't you leave us alone? You're hardly trying to tell me that my little boy can take on the mantle of the great Niall Ambrose."

"He should have a fighting spirit," I remarked, trying to lighten her anger.

"Are you telling me he'll take over from Ambrose?"

There was something desperate in her voice. I truly meant to say "yes" when I opened my mouth.

"No." I turned from her and from the room. The pain in my head was a sudden dragon-fire, scorching my brain. I gritted my teeth and my voice grated out of my throat. "He'll follow Anthony. Ambrose will be dead within the week."

**W**hat devil was it, that led Ambrose to try to speak to the band of foreigners himself? Was it his need to be fair and just, to ignore (yet not forget) the fact that they had looted a fishing community; to ask their explanation before allowing his eager men to attack? Or was it a deeper need, a requirement of the land and of the past, for a sacrifice? Did he have to die? Was that the only way in which we could be shown that they, too, had returned to their roots? Maybe it was just one youth more drunk than the rest, who could not comprehend the enormity of his action.

I learned later that no-one had seen who loosed the arrow that pierced Ambrose's side. It did not really matter. Anthony dragged his stricken brother up onto his horse, galloped out of range of the bows and signalled his men to retreat. The crowd of youths surged onwards, yelling, until they caught sight of the fate they had called upon themselves.

I can imagine their first sight of the Britons. Ambrose had arranged them along the sides of a wooded valley, hidden among the trees, with a picked troop of horsemen at the far end. They closed in, and the raiders discovered that they were outnumbered, their enemies armed with crossbows and rifles. Those horsemen (but horses are extinct) waiting, silent, with the sun of late evening behind them, blurring them, those horsemen had rifles in their hands. Or perhaps, as they raised their hands and the sun glimmered on bright metal, their enemies saw something else. I know for a fact that some of the bodies were hacked, yet the only blades carried were small knives. I wonder what some of those men saw, as they died.

Ambrose died from peritonitis. His people only had drugs to save him the worst of the pain. Anthony took command of the people, a suddenly subdued and serious Anthony. I did not return.

**M**y wanderings had a purpose now. I had a trail to follow, even though it was long cold. I was well clothed, on horseback, and I earned my supper at the camps or villages by carrying news. At first, I was anxious not for my own safety but for that of the boy I was hunting. I realized that I was being followed almost immediately after leaving

Gellis's lands. I thought that they were his men, but now I wonder if Anthony himself sent them. They were content to ride behind me. Allowing my horse to amble in the sunshine, I glimpsed them on an open hillside. It was the way in which they dropped back, instead of overtaking me, that alerted me; that, and the wind falling still and the gentle touch of a leaf on my face.

I did not know what to do; I had not yet learned to trust to the time and the past. I had intended to go north, where Elaine's sister was reported to live, but now I feared to bring danger to the boy. I turned aside, the sun on my right, and immediately the path descended into marshland.

I think that I lost two or three men in the area of reedbeds and marsh. How, I do not know. My horse did not flounder above his knees. The river ran sluggish and green among tall banks of wild iris and reeds. Ducks rose quacking and splashing in alarm at our approach. Something brilliant and tiny glittered as it flew past my face, going north, a bright blue bird.

"Kingfisher." The name popped out of my memory, although I did not recall seeing one before, not in this life. For no reason other than that, I took the next path north.

**T**hat night, I camped amid ruins, a great building reduced to dark caves and broken walls of masonry. The ground was littered with coloured glass, faint smears of ash showed where the wood of the roof had fallen and burned. The graveyard was still quite open, and there was enough grass amid the shrubs and conifers for the horse to graze. After my frugal supper of bread I watched the sun ease itself into a lake of crimson and gold, wrapped myself in my blanket and fell asleep.

When I woke, the west still bore a streak of colour. The horse stood nearby, head drooping, undisturbed by the voices that had woken me. I crawled to the low wall and stared nervously around. There were neither lights nor human figures to be seen, but the voices still sang, high and sweet. I listened and slowly the bloodless chant became clearer, forming a tune, and odd words came to me. They were words that I once knew, in another time. "Kyrie eleison" and the strange wandering chant, as high as the call of a bat, nerveless, bodiless, carrying me to a great cathedral, filled with light and people. Once, my half-dream was interrupted by a distant sound. Maybe it was an animal that screamed, between the jaws of a fox, or maybe a man, as the ground swallowed him. The voices rose and fell, rose and fell, sinking gradually towards silence. Nothing disturbed my sleep for the remainder of the night; neither was I followed, the next day.

There was a skein of geese, their wings hammering down the gale in a sky of storm, the pointing arrow of a flowerhead of enchanter's nightshade and a deer, a mighty stag whose antlers traced a pattern in the moonlight, blurring in my sight like a reflection in a still pool; all these signs led me, safely and truly. I followed them as easily as I might have followed a familiar track to my home, or drifted on a tide. All paths would have led me in time to the settlement among the lakes and hills of that wild northern region. The hand of man had never been heavy in these parts, and it was from places such as this that the ravens,

hawks and deer had spread to the rest of the land.

My placid horse quickened his step, sensing that food and rest lay before us. There was a faint wood-smoke on the breeze and the path was well-used. As we approached the camp, a boy came out to meet us.

He was dark, as Ambrose had been dark. He moved like a fighter or a sportsman, for all his youth, already well-coordinated. He faced me with his hands on his hips, feet planted, as if he drew strength from the earth, and perhaps he did.

"What do you want here?" He was not being rude; he wanted to know.

"I'm looking for someone." I slid down from the horse and saw how he watched the animal with longing.

"Who? There's only me and my aunt here at the moment. The others have gone out hunting."

"For what?"

He did not look sulky, just resigned.

"Deer, the big red ones. They're trying to shoot one for meat."

"Not you? You're old enough, surely? You look almost ten."

A flash of gratitude lightened his grim expression.

"I'm not quite nine, but I'm tall. Someone had to stay – usually I have to. I haven't got a father to speak for me, I live with my aunt." His look dared me to ask further, but I understood the emptiness of not knowing my own past.

"I see. Do you have horses here?"

"No. I wish we did. Who are you looking for?"

"You."

A cool, level scrutiny, as dark eyes considered me in a way that I knew well.

"Who're you?"

"I don't have a name. I lost my memory a long time ago, and I'm finding it again bit by bit. I've come to take you home, although it might be a long way."

He turned to walk beside me, frowning in thought. He reached up with a gentle hand to stroke the horse's head.

"It's odd, you remind me of my aunt's cat. He looks at me just like you do, as if he knows all about me and isn't going to tell me any of it. Will you tell me?"

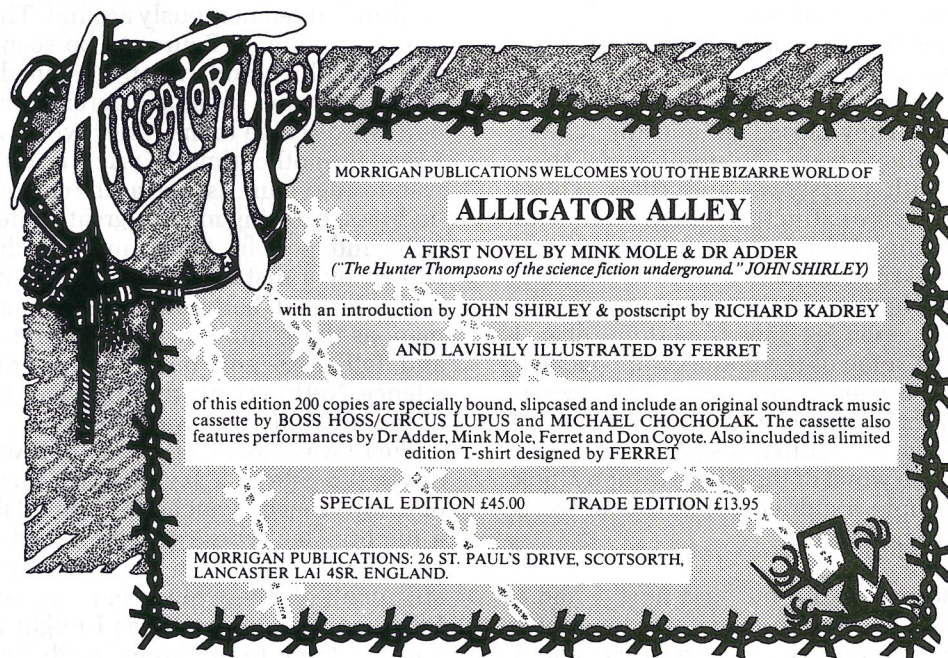
"I hope so." I smiled. "What's his name?"

"Merlin."

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**Sylvia Siddall** was born in 1954 and brought up in deepest Wiltshire. She works for a multinational company as a food research scientist, and is a member of the Cassandra sf workshop. Married, with no children, she now lives in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. "Kingfisher" is her first professionally-published story.

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# In Purely Commercial Terms

## Charles Platt

Here's a simple test. See if you can guess the American author of the following quote:

*When dawn broke over the capital city of Walden, the sight was appropriately glamorous. There were shining towers and curving tree-bordered ways, above which innumerable small birds flew tumultuously. The dawn, in fact, was heralded by high-pitched chirpings everywhere.*

Not much to go on, is it? But it does contain some clues. First, the name of the city is a literary reference. This is relatively unusual; most science-fiction writers still show little or no interest in literature outside their field. We can presume, for instance, that Isaac Asimov didn't write this quote; nor Lin Carter; nor Gordon R. Dickson; nor any others of their age and ilk.

Second, the quote shows a reasonably broad vocabulary. The word "tumultuously," for instance, wouldn't be used this way in the work of a bread-and-butter author turning out prose as fast as possible. Thus, we can safely assume the quote wasn't written by a high-volume wordsmith at the low end of the literary scale.

Third, there's ironic detachment. The sight being described isn't just glamorous, it's "appropriately" glamorous, and the climactic sentence — talking about "high-pitched chirpings" — is a sardonically contrived stylistic pratfall. The author is describing a lyrically beautiful scene, but he isn't being lyrical. He's stylistically self-aware. He thinks straight lyricism is a bit corny.

This really narrows things down. Very little American science fiction is written with ironic detachment, and stylistic self-awareness is generally the preserve of a few "literary" types such as Thomas M. Disch or Gene Wolfe, or maybe Philip K. Dick or Robert Silverberg.

But the author of the above paragraph isn't any of those people. Here's another quote from the same source:

*He'd been a misfit at home on Zan because he was not contented with the humdrum and monotonous life of a member of a space-pirate community. Piracy was a matter of*

*dangerous take-offs in cranky rocketships, to be followed by weeks or months of tedious and uncomfortable boredom in highly unhealthy re-breathed air...*

Now we've gone beyond irony, into satire. The rest of the paragraph (too much text to include here) goes into specific details explaining why space piracy, as depicted in thousands of old science-fiction sagas, is a silly idea that wouldn't work. This sounds modern — a bit like Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett, except that as I said at the beginning, the author is American. So could it be Harry Harrison? No; the light irony of the previous quote isn't characteristic of Harrison. He didn't do it.

One last extract, before I reveal the author's name:

*"There's no question about the crime," observed the ambassador. "... You proposed to improve a technical procedure in a society which considers itself beyond improvement. If you'd succeeded, the idea of change would have spread, people now poor would have gotten rich, people now rich would have gotten poor, and you'd have done what all governments are established to prevent. So you'll never be able to walk the streets of this planet again in safety. You've scared people.*

*"Do you realize... that a culture in which nothing unexpected ever happens is in what is called its Golden Age? That when nobody can even imagine anything happening unexpectedly, they later fondly refer to that period as the Good Old Days?"*

This is beyond satire. The tone is light, yet there's an undercurrent of anger. Could it be written by a libertarian? Unlikely; few libertarian science-fiction writers show the humour or detachment of the earlier quotes. Someone like Keith Laumer? No, Laumer is verbose, and although this quote is unpretentiously written, it's succinct in a way that suggests some feeling for economical prose.

In fact, all three quotes are unusually literate compared with most modern American science fiction. They seem nicely balanced between satire and

seriousness, light entertainment and wordplay.

You may be surprised, then, to learn that they were written by Murray Leinster. They came from his novel *The Pirates of Ersatz*, serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction* issues dated February, March and April 1959 — just over thirty years ago.

Some people reading this will have never heard of Leinster (whose real name was William F. Jenkins). He started selling science fiction in 1919, was a regular contributor to *Astounding Science Fiction* in the 1950s and 1960s, and died in 1975. Not much of his work remains in print, because he wasn't highly regarded compared with other writers of his time. If we look him up in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, we find he rates a rather disparaging entry (written by John Clute) which uses phrases such as "a juvenile series ... told in melodramatic terms that have not worn well." The best that Clute can find to say about poor old Leinster is that his work showed "craftsmanship and consistency."

Well, fair enough; Leinster wasn't at the bottom of the barrel, but he wasn't at the top, either. He could turn out fluent, readable stories with interesting ideas, but he never produced a classic. His books are gone and forgotten.

Why, then, am I quoting him? Because today, thirty years after the above extracts were first published, they look so surprisingly good. The novel that they are taken from is full of ideas, is compulsively readable, has little twists of irony, and manages to make gentle fun of adventure fiction while telling a strong, fast adventure story. Overall, it's surprisingly, impressively competent.

How can it be that a writer who was thought of as mediocre, in his time, now seems so much better than average? The answer must be that "average" has changed its meaning over the past thirty years. Fairly-decent writers of the 1950s now look like grand masters compared with their modern equivalents. Even their prose (which some of us used to criticize as being glib and trite and shallow) looks better. A modern writer such as Jack Chalker, who works at a level of ambition roughly equivalent to Leinster's level in the 1950s, is abysmally clumsy and shal-

low by comparison. Chalker shows no detachment from his own work — hence, no self-criticism. His use of the English language is rudimentary. His stories exist on one level only: as simplistic mass entertainment.

I'm not suggesting that all science fiction of the 1950s was better written than science fiction of the 1980s. That would be foolish, and wrong. Our best modern writers, such as William Gibson or Lucius Shepard, have mastered a broader range of techniques and are considerably more sophisticated than anyone writing science fiction thirty years ago. Back then, Ray Bradbury was considered a "literary stylist," but by today's standards, his work seems clumsy and over-done.

I'm not saying, either, that the crudest science fiction is worse now than it was then. Juvenile adventures are probably much the same as they ever were. The techniques in Flash Gordon and Perry Rhodan are, no doubt, eternal.

It's middlebrow, unpretentiously entertaining science fiction that has deteriorated. In a previous column, lamenting the decline of "mid-list" fiction, I pointed out that American writers are finding it harder to sell challenging, unusual books, and American publishers are finding it harder to make money out of them. But in this column I'm focusing on fiction that isn't especially unusual or challenging. The stories and novels that Murray Leinster wrote didn't break new ground, weren't nonconformist, and had a broad appeal. Yet work written at a similar level of ambition today is crude, junky, and dumb by comparison.

It's easy to blame the readership for this. We can say — oh, kids these days don't know any better. They just want cheap thrills. TV has ruined their ability to appreciate subtlety in form or content. They don't get a decent education in the English language. They don't even want to read.

Maybe there's a little truth in these clichés. But according to a recent Gallup poll, less than a quarter of the American science-fiction audience is aged under 25. We can't blame "wasted youth" for the deterioration of a literature that is mostly consumed by their parents.

Who, then, can we blame? Personally, I pick the editors. Maybe this sounds too simplistic; but in the past thirty years, there has been a radical shift in the way that science fiction is edited and published in the United States.

In the 1950s, magazines were the focus of science fiction, and their editors defined it in a way that is unknown today. John W. Campbell, who edited *Astounding Science Fiction*, literally told his writers what to

do and how to do it. He insisted on original ideas, rigorous plausibility, and science that made sense — or at least, seemed to. Likewise, Horace Gold of *Galaxy* magazine played an active role in the development of science fiction that used the "soft" sciences. Anthony Boucher of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* moulded writers of yet another school. And so on.

Today, with all due respect to *Interzone* (which I do regard as a unique and valuable resource for readers and writers alike), magazines aren't very important. More and more novels are being published, and book editors are the arbiters of taste.

Unfortunately, in America (and to some extent in England, too) book editors don't have time to make demands on their authors. They may ask for a small rewrite here and there, but editing, say, 48 novel-length manuscripts a year is much more time-consuming than editing a monthly magazine — especially since science-fiction editors may have to deal with other categories of fiction as well, and they spend at least half their time going to meetings or grappling with the art department or going over figures from the sales department.

Worse still, many modern book editors aren't even interested in getting their writers to try harder, when it comes to plausibility and accurate science. Someone like Jack Chalker can use simplistic ideas that don't make much sense because there's no one telling him to do otherwise. Likewise, he's free to write sloppy prose because no one has time to edit him. And if his work sells well (which, in Chalker's case, it certainly does), an editor will actually be reluctant to mess with it in any way. In purely commercial terms, why should anyone want to mess with a winning formula?

In fact, from this perspective, in purely commercial terms, editors of the 1950s were wasting their time trying to make science fiction better than it really needed to be. Most of the readers wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between authentic science and pseudoscience. Most of them were deaf to nuances of ironic detachment. I myself, as a wide-eyed teenager looking for escapist kicks, might have been just as happy in the 1950s if someone had given me Jack Chalker instead of Murray Leinster.

Today, I can see the difference very clearly between these two writers and the periods they represent. I find Leinster subtler, funnier, more readable, and more thought-provoking. He tries harder, he has a broader range of knowledge, and he has integrity.

But my taste isn't typical. In purely commercial terms, therefore, publishers should ignore cantankerous old critics like me and give the majority

of readers what they want — or at least, what they'll put up with.

This is exactly what publishers seem to be doing, and as a result, I find middle-range adventure fiction has become unreadable. Well, that's my hard luck; if I don't like it, I can always go back and re-read some more stuff by Murray Leinster. After all, he did write a lot of books. And in purely commercial terms, as I'm quite well aware, my opinion is completely irrelevant anyway.

— Charles Platt

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## Film Reviews

Continued from page 35

the storyteller and the guilt of everyone else in the universe who is out to get him. It's extraordinary to find these half-fermented preoccupations grafted on to the matter of Münchhausen, of all sources, when both the written and filmed versions have sought to charm in dark times through the assumption of naivety. But even the awkwardly postmodern *Brazilian* ending, which alone should kill the kiddie audience stone dead, has a kind of sanction in the Baron's literary tradition of knowing, nudging flirtation with the happily incredible. I'm not sure this Münchhausen seriously displaces Zeman's great animated version as the definitive screen Baron, and it certainly misses a lot of its marks as a work of straight entertainment. But I very much doubt it could ever have been just that. More than ever now, I'm watching the Watchmen.

— Nick Lowe

# Ian R. MacLeod

## Through

**A** Thursday morning in damp November. As I walked down Church Street, Tidmington, the little market with its sagging plastic awnings and the shops round about seemed absurdly quiet. It was almost like the set of some expensive film after the cast and technicians had gone home for the day. I tried to calm myself by imagining that it really was a set. All that was missing was the smell of sweat, fresh paint and bacon baps.

I saw the shop windows from the corner of my eye. "Next" was Closed for Staff Training. It didn't matter; I couldn't afford to stop and look. Not if I wanted to get back Through in one piece. Even the slightest pause was out of the question. I could only walk on at an even pace through the thin drift of pram-pushing mothers and trolley-dragging OAPs who make up the weekday population here.

I passed under the echo of the dripping railway bridge, then went left up Walker Street. The brown Vauxhall Cavalier 1.6 GL was waiting. I already had the keys in my hand. Ignoring the one-way sign, I reversed it the fifty yards down into Church Street. I drove back under the railway bridge and past the shops, braking courteously at the zebra to let the fat old lady across. Driving smoothly in a strange car and with the uncomfortable high heels I'd been instructed to wear took a lot of care.

Further up Church Street by the half-finished DHSS office, white smoke billowed. I knew what was happening; I'd read about it in the local newspaper at the time and later on in my briefing for going Through. A section of road had dissolved in a deep and sticky lake. As I arrived, the Escort I remembered from the back page photograph had already tilted upright and all of the bonnet and half the windscreen had sunk from sight. The rest of the car was splattered with black and was beginning to look more like one of those logs that periodically emerge from the peat bogs.

A couple of police cars were angled by the pavement on either side, their lights circling through the smoke and the dull morning across the faces of the few people who had gathered to gawk at the deep bubbling pool. They looked disappointed;; they'd obviously hoped for something more interesting.

As I'd been briefed, I kept going – there was still a clear half of the road for me to drive by on. Unexpectedly, a sergeant with a neat black beard held up his hand for me to stop. I went cold, but unless I was to run him down I had no alternative but to obey.

I wound down the window and the sergeant leaned in. Even with the reek of tar, I could smell his rubber-

ized cotton overjacket. None of this was in the briefing. I had no idea what he was going to say or do. My heart was hammering panic. The feeling was awful but quite familiar.

In Act One, Scene One of my first night in *Lear*, my big break at the Bristol Studio, the old king had turned to me saying –

"How, how, Cordelia! Mend your speech a little  
Least you mar your own fortunes."

The stage lights were every bit as hot and bright as people say they are. Out in the darkness, it seemed that the whole world was watching. And I froze. And the words were nowhere.

The sergeant smiled. "I notice there's a crack in your offside headlight, madam. Better get it fixed."

"Thank you," I said, grinning with fear. "I certainly will."

The sergeant withdrew from my window. My hands were almost too slippery to grip the knob as I wound it back up.

The rest was easy. I performed my duties as directed, parking the Cavalier up on a bank on a narrow road two miles out of town. East across the flat fields the A93 hummed like a grey wire. I unlocked all the doors and lifted up the tail hatch, but for one giddy moment I almost forgot to pick up the handbag from the passenger seat. I walked slowly along the road, carefully counting the drains. When I reached the sixth, I stooped down and dropped the car keys into the grating.

And then I went

Through.

**O**wen Twine was waiting for me in the reception room at Weldrake House, Hush Puppies up on the desk terminal as he re-read – for at least the fourth time to my knowledge – his Penguin *Madame Bovary*. He looked up, wings of what remained of his grey hair drooping from behind his ears.

He shifted his feet down and folded back the corner of his page. "How did it go?"

"Fine," I said, forcing a smile. It gets worse every time I go Through. I didn't want to talk about it, not even with Owen.

He nodded. His blue eyes in their deep, lined sockets registered concern, but he didn't push it. Good old Owen. Kind Owen. Any kindness at that moment and I'd have either yelled at him or started to cry.

"Go and have a lie down back at your flat, Jenny."

"I will."

"You'll need to be awake this evening..." Owen

stretched in his swivel chair, the arms of his tweedy jacket riding up over frayed cuffs. "... for Rutherford's party."

"The party? ... Oh, I wish you hadn't reminded me."

"You've got to come, Jenny. Three-line whip." His eyes said, I Need You There.

I knew he was right. I couldn't say no.

Back in my office along the corridor, I changed out of the woollen outfit with the dreadful high heels I'd been told to wear back into my own clothes. I left the stuff on the chair for Props to collect and took the stairs the three storeys down to the car park, down past Admin and Finance and Stores. The floor above mine was mostly taken up by Owen's computers and on the top, far away from where anyone would bother them, John Rutherford and the rest of the senior managers dwelt with their tasteful cork tiles, out-of-date critical path charts and rubber plants.

I revved my old Mini up the ramp and along the side road into Church Street. Coincidentally, it was still Thursday, and still late morning. For March, it was almost spring-like. I turned off the rather fierce heater and opened the windows to let in some air. The DHSS office – a nondescript thing of red brick obviously from the same stable as Weldrake House – was finished and open for customers. There was a neat new path of tarmac outside where the Escort had been swallowed up. "Next" had a sale sign in the window. Deciding I might look in tomorrow, I slowed the car to let the same fat old lady across at the zebra. She glanced at me and smiled; maybe she remembered. Five months isn't such a long time when you're old.

I had a Barrett's studio flat on the new estate on the outskirts of Tidmington. It was on the ground floor, overlooked the car park and I could hear people coming and going all the day and most of the night. But at that moment I wasn't bothered. I wasn't even bothered by the extraordinary mess that such a tiny space had managed to get itself into. I showered, made coffee, flopped on the crumpled bed – which legend had it was supposed to convert into a two-seater settee every day – and burrowed into the duvet for the remote control to switch on the telly.

Before sleep grabbed hold of me, I balanced my diary sheet pad on my knees and noted down the times and events of the day so far. Going Through required a special mention. The diary sheets were required for everyone involved in going Through, even non-operatives like Owen. No need for personal thoughts or feelings, of course – although I'd heard that one or two wags included these and no doubt they were processed through the computer with the rest of the information. The simple object was to provide a record of your movements. Otherwise, for example, I might have been stopping courteously to wave myself across the zebra on Church Street last November instead of that fat old lady. Such events were universally regarded as A Bad Thing.

When I'd brought myself up to date I snuggled deeper into the duvet and gazed at the telly, willing it to bore me to sleep. But now that it had my attention I found that I was watching a newscaster in a shiny pink suit gabbling away in some oriental language. That was bad enough – I should have been tuned to BBC 1 – but the clock behind the newscaster had the day and the date in standard arabic numerals. It was

a week old. I lay patiently and watched; these minor events normally don't last too long. Sure enough, in about two minutes the screen snowed and, after a brief and even more inexplicable flash of a car in flames, we were back to the sort of quiz programme that the Beeb ran in the afternoon for those who found the evening ones too demanding.

I soon nodded off. It was dark when I awoke and Martyn Lewis was reading the headlines on the Nine O'Clock News.

Nine o'clock.

I flailed my way out from under the duvet, pulled on some fresh clothes and, in too much of a hurry to think about putting a proper light on, combed my hair and sorted out my face in front of the flickering TV. Poor old Owen would be upset, he'd think I was late on purpose. I didn't care about Rutherford's party, but I did care about Owen. I felt that he sort of depended on me.

Perhaps I should explain.

I started working at Weldrake House about four years ago. That was after I'd given up on acting – or rather acting had given up on me. The whole thing was my big bid for respectability. I was living with someone called James. James was a mineral valuer – no, don't laugh; it's the closest I'm ever likely to get to marrying someone. We had a joint back account, a decent sized flat, a shared GTi car. He even used to leave the plug in the bath after he'd finished so that I could get in after and save water.

I was late twenties and Owen was a child of fifty as he always will be. He was a fixture at Weldrake House; he'd been doing his work with computers for years in various offices even before he arrived here and had been regularly passed over for promotion because he was too good at his job, and also because he was simply too good. I liked him in the same vague way most of us, if we are honest, generally like those sort of people. A few jagged edges normally help a friendship along. But we shared the same corridor and he was usually waiting at reception when I came Through. Sometimes he would look at me in that certain way middle-aged men have. I took no particular notice; being female and possessing the right number of arms and legs often guarantees that sort of response.

We had a drink together a couple of times at the Dog and Partridge down the road after work. I liked him well enough. He was amusing, kind, polite; the sort of politeness that can set people's nerves on edge. For example, when he came into my office he would always remain standing until I asked him to sit down. But I didn't mind a bit of extra politeness. As I say, I liked him. Then, on exactly our third time together over at the Dog and Partridge, he told me that he loved me.

How can I express it? I felt wanted, flattered. I knew that he needed me.

I reached the Rutherford house at quarter to ten. It was big and Victorian; Rutherford had bought it for a song when he moved out of London on promotion three years before. Everything had been restored to its original glory. The plaster coving and rosettes, the little stained glass panels. And, of course, he'd had all the doors dipped to get rid of those ugly layers

of gloss. It was a pity nothing could do the same for him.

"Ah, the last of the Mohicans." He jerked my coat from my shoulders and shoved me into the wide lounge with a drink. All the familiar faces from Wel-drake House were there in their familiar groups. It was all so predictable that it took me a moment to realize that there was something distinctly odd going on. The ceiling was festooned with Christmas ribbons and streamers. In March. And there was a big Christmas tree sparkling with fairy lights and baubles in the corner. It was Dubonnet, but I swallowed it anyway. Worst of all was the fact that the record player in the big bay window was squarking out "I Saw Mummy Kissing Santa Claus."

I'd never come across anything remotely like this before. I could cope with the odd Chinese newscast and sudden pools of tar in the road like anyone else, but this event was in a different league. And the whole office was chatting away as though nothing was out of the ordinary. A horrible thought; maybe it really was Christmas.

Someone grabbed my arm. I found to my relief that it was Owen.

"What date is it?"

He laughed. "You shouldn't have come late, Jenny."

"Please, just tell me."

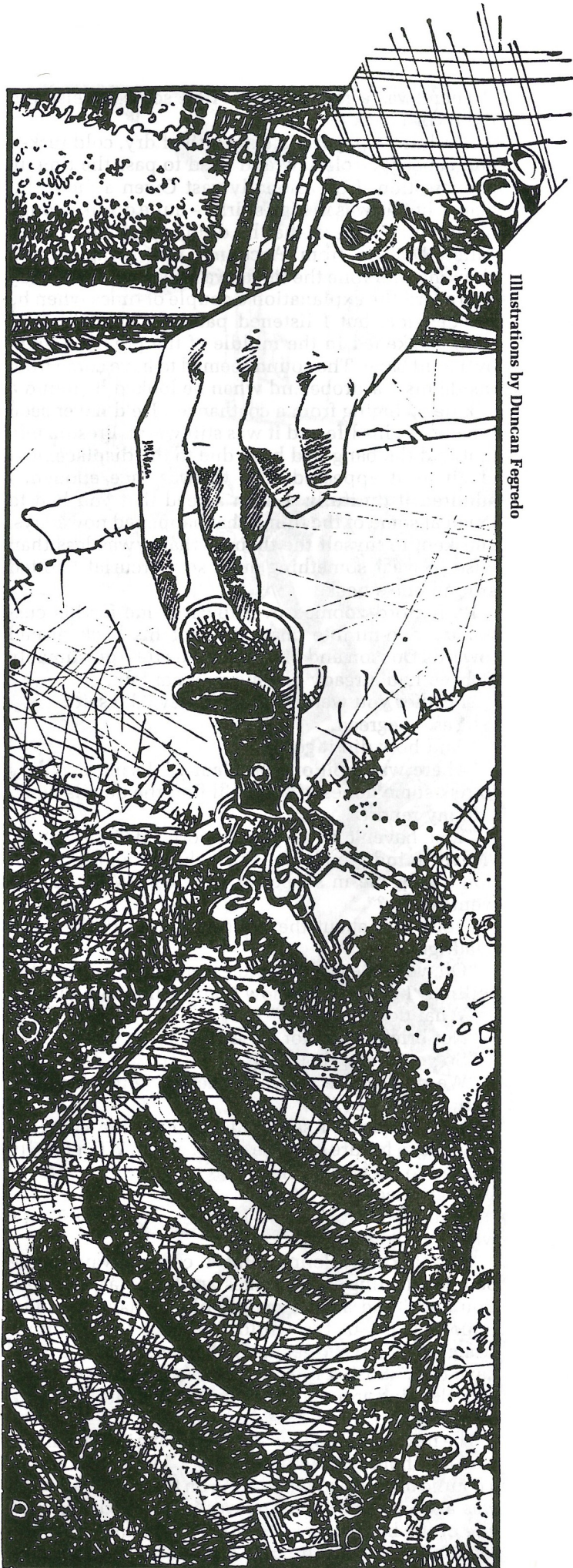
"March the twenty-somethingth." He laughed again and I could tell even without the smell on his breath that he was already far from sober. He looked ten years younger; his face was almost happy. He never got this way without the help of some drink. "Really, Jenny. It's March."

"What the hell is Rutherford playing at?"

"You'll see." He briefly squeezed my elbow before tootling back into the melée. Owen and I were careful to keep things secret, at least from the High-Ups. Fraternization amongst the ranks added unnecessary complications to the time lines.

I mingled, as they say, with the various office cliques, but my journey Through and my long afternoon snooze had left me weary and bitter. I was standing by the record player reading the copyright notices on K-Tel's Twenty Christmas Greats when Rutherford banged on the drinks table to get silence. He made an obscene looking gesture towards me through the smoky air. After a moment's puzzlement I realized that he wanted me to lift the needle off the record. I did so, scraping it across to the label in the process.

Rutherford glowered at me for a second, then switched on a glossy smile. "Well, thank you all so much for coming. Ros and I were away at Christmas but we didn't want to spoil the tradition of holding a Christmas party here in our humble little home. Things have been busy since then, what with the staff inspection and my involvement on the working party. But now here we all are! Let's forget it's March for one night and enjoy ourselves. There's turkey and Christmas pudding next door. All that's missing is Santa Claus, but then..." His smile faltered and he glanced towards Ros, his surprisingly charming wife. "...but then..." She dutifully mouthed the forgotten conclusion of his little speech and he finished with an unembarrassed flourish. "But then if we all help ourselves to the excellent punch even that could be remedied."



Illustrations by Duncan Fegredo

There was a muted cheer. I let someone else put the record back on.

I grabbed a paper plate's worth of dry, cold turkey and cabbagey coleslaw and tried to pass the time in conversation. I occasionally cast Owen a mournful glance but he was in high spirits – quite drunk enough to convince himself that he didn't need me. A chap called Dobson from Accounts was going around showing everyone the tie he was wearing. I'd already overheard the explanation a couple of times when he reached me, but I listened patiently enough. He'd been awakened in the middle of the previous night by a loud bang. The sound seemed to have come from inside his wardrobe and when he looked he found a silk tie swinging from a coathanger. He'd never seen it before in his life and it was still warm. Presumably that and the bang had been due to the displacement of air as it appeared. The tie was nice enough; I admired it dutifully. I even agreed that you had to laugh at some of the things that happened nowadays, and kept to myself the thought that it was less than wise to wear something quite so mercurial knotted around one's neck.

Rutherford zoomed over towards me for his customary five-minute chat. He kept his back turned towards Dobson and his miraculous tie – presumably Dobson had already had his quota of talk.

"I gather you went Through today," he said.

"Yes," I agreed.

"And how did it go?"

"There was a bit of a problem..." I said, deciding to risk some honesty "...you'll find the details when I do my report."

"You haven't done your report yet?" He tutted. "Never mind, you'll do it first thing tomorrow. But don't keep me in suspense, my dear. What exactly went wrong?"

I told him about the policeman and the cracked headlight.

"Oh, yes." He nodded and gazed up at the tinselled ceiling. "I did wonder how that would work out."

"What do you mean?"

"Not briefing you for a reaction."

"So you knew about it?"

"We don't leave things to chance, Jenny. You did well, by the way."

"You bastard," I said, but I spoiled the effect by laughing; a failure of nerve, not of anger. What I really wanted to do was hit him.

He grinned.

"If you'd just told me. I – I can act, you know. That's what I'm paid for."

"Oh, I know, Jenny. But I can't always spare people's feelings. The stakes are high, far too high. You and I and all the people like us have the most important job in the world. We have to put things straight. We have to get the time lines sorted out... we have to..." Losing interest in his speech, Rutherford was glancing around the room. My five minutes were obviously up.

The next couple of hours limped along in that painful way that hours at bad parties have. I stumbled across a couple of colleagues snogging on the stairs and there was a strong smell of dope wafting predictably from one of the bedrooms as I waited in the queue for the loo. Owen was putting on a more than convincing

performance as an amiable drunk. He cornered me in the kitchen and gave me a whisky-tinged apology; he knew that if he hadn't insisted I probably wouldn't have come. Although I knew he was genuinely sorry, contriteness is always difficult to take from a drunk. I laughed and gaily told him he was a bastard, just like Rutherford. He fumbled a kiss at me and staggered back into the throng.

When no one was looking, I grabbed my coat and drove back to my flat.

**F**riday morning. Waking when I hadn't slept was sometimes as bad as going Through. I fell out of bed, showered, fixed coffee and cleared a space to attempt breakfast on the thin ledge that Barrett's called a dining table. I opened up the new pack of cornflakes I bought the weekend before and tipped them into a cleanish bowl. There was supposed to be a free deep sea diver in every pack. Instead, my bowl filled up with a whole mass of little green plastic arms and legs and fins and, quite literally, one cornflake. I peered into the packet: more deep sea divers. Sometimes you have to laugh.

I was in my office by nine; early for me, but then I knew that Rutherford would get someone to check that I handed in my report of yesterday's journey Through. A great one for reports, was Rutherford. Like any bureaucracy, ours relied on a throughput of information, but the problem here in Weldrake House was that no one knew what was relevant and what wasn't. It all went into the computers, they chewed it up, tumbled it around and eventually spat out another task for some poor operative to perform.

The tealady rang her bell down the corridor at ten. I grabbed a polystyrene beaker and a jam doughnut to make up for the absence of breakfast and stood at the window, sipping and chomping, granules of greasy sugar showering the carpet at my feet. Two starts at the report lay curled together cosily in the bin, but the view of the air conditioning fans, the carpark and the roof of the new DHSS office beyond were hardly likely to provide inspiration, even if inspiration had been what I needed.

One question – a question most of us who are lucky enough to have a pay packet regularly ask ourselves with varying degrees of anguish – filled my mind like a dull headache. Why the hell do I keep doing this lousy job? As usual, the straightforward answer – because you want the money – didn't bring any sense of relief. There had to be more to it. Okay, so some fool invents time travel. Okay, so the timelines get messed up. So does that mean I have to go around dropping car keys into drains?

My mind, already more familiar with this line of argument, split easily into two camps. In the blue corner we had Patient Teacher, who always took the time to explain things slowly and carefully so that Stupid Pupil in the red corner would understand. But Stupid Pupil wriggled and squirmed and despite all the arguments never accepted that things really were quite as they should be. I withdrew as far as I could from the ringside and watched disinterestedly as they battled it out, knowing that neither would ever score the knockout punch. Just as the fight was hotting up, I took a big bite out of the middle of my doughnut, squirting a gout of red jam down the front of my blouse.

Stupid Pupil and Patient Teacher broke to stare over the ropes, their mouths dropping in amazement at this messy creature in the audience. I could tell from their expressions that they both wanted to disown me.

I did my best to clean up and went back to work. I managed to finish the report at half twelve, by which time the grey designer shelves of "Next"'s sale beckoned. I was in exactly the right mood to give my Barclaycard a hammering.

I ended up buying a whole new outfit. A loose grey jacket, longish flared corduroy skirt with deep pockets, a warm cotton shirt with a matching scarf, grey court shoes, even a pair of nice if rather overpriced stockings. To be honest, most of the stuff wasn't in the sale, but I purchased it all quite merrily with my Flexible Friend.

I returned to the office with two big carrier bags. Just as I was settling down with a can of Coke and round of tuna sandwiches from the takeaway to read a vacuous article in *Options* about How The Weather Can Affect Your Health, Owen breezed in, closing the door behind him.

"I'm sorry I was late last night," I said, following my usual habit of apologizing to people when I really want them to apologize to me. "Why don't you sit down?"

He plonked himself on my desk, swinging his legs. The splayed pages of *Madame Bovary* poked out of his jacket. By the look of the folded-over corner, he was about half way through. "Dreadful, wasn't it?"

"You didn't seem to find the experience too painful," I snapped.

"I hate myself when I have to get drunk and jolly."

"You must hate yourself a lot then."

He smiled. Good old Owen; never rises to the bait. "I sometimes do. Not when I'm with you, though. Can you spare a sandwich? I'm famished." He reached over and grabbed one. "I love you," he said, and took a bite.

I believed him. "I love you," I said back, wondering if he believed me, wondering if it mattered.

When he'd finished, he took a fresh white handkerchief out and fastidiously dabbed his mouth and hands. Then he gave me a tuna-flavoured kiss. His lips felt rough and dry, like old rubber. I glanced uneasily at the door. It was part of our agreement that we never went even this far in the office.

He nodded towards the "Next" bags. "Been spending money?"

"Why spend your own money when you can spend the bank's? I got a whole new outfit."

"I'm glad you're treating yourself." He glanced down at the jam stain on my blouse. "You're looking tired, Jenny."

"I'm sorry. I just wish I knew what I was tired of."

"I'd love to see you in that outfit..." He gave a theatrical leer. "I'd love to see you without it even more."

I smiled gamely back. Owen seemed to think it was necessary to make those kind of remarks. But I knew that sex wasn't important to him. Or me. Or us. well, not very.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "let's go away this weekend... No, I'm not kidding. You and me, a dirty weekend."

"And what do I say in my diary sheets?"

"Say you had a bad cold, spent the weekend in bed."



Another leer. "Won't be that far from the truth."

I nodded. We'd probably make love about one and a half times. Or maybe just the half. Still, I did need a break. I firmly pushed down the uneasiness I always felt when Owen and I were forced to fiddle our diary sheets. "And what will you say?"

"I'll have a cold as well. It must be contagious."

I laughed. Good old Owen. It was just what I needed, to get away from going Through.

**T**he gothic pink and white Alhambra Palace Hotel spread along the seafront at Golby Sands like a melting neapolitan ice cream. It was three-star but good value and surprisingly busy for the time of year. Of course, most of the boarding houses further up the front were still closed for the winter, but the larger hotels were almost full; full, it seemed to me, of couples too attentive to each other to be married.

The lights strung between the lamp posts bobbed in the wind as we walked along the front beside the grey wash of the sea that Friday evening after we'd driven down the A93 in Owen's battered Audi. Amusement arcades beeped and barked and flashed at us across the wet road. The whole atmosphere of slightly disreputable charm appealed to me as it did to Owen. He was always very good at digging things out for me to enjoy; sights, places, restaurants, sometimes even people. These were the fruits, I supposed, of two marriages and a scatter of relationships, but I never spoiled the fun by asking.

We played darts against the locals and got quite drunk on the yeasty ale in a smoky pub before weaving our way back towards the Alhambra along the shore. Our big blue room had a bathroom en-suite and a blockprint of "Premonition Of A Civil War" hanging incongruously above the flowering candlewick bedspread and velour headboard. The only disappointment was that it overlooked the car park and the kitchen. But I put that down to me – like my office and my flat, I always seemed to get the room overlooking the car park.

Saturday morning, we made love quite satisfactorily, had a high cholesterol breakfast and drove up to a place called Messenger Point for a wander along the cliffs; another nice surprise Owen had saved up for me. The wind hurried low and heavy clouds almost through the teeth of the rocks, but the rain held off and just occasionally the sun would break through out to sea. It was extraordinarily beautiful, like a searchlight from God. We didn't see another person until we wandered down through the gorse for lunch at a little pub by the shingle.

The afternoon rained and rained. We swished along with the Audi's fan rattling hot air as the hedges and coastline jelled and reformed with each sweep of the wiper blades. It didn't spoil things. The only hitch was when the Audi wouldn't start after we'd run through the puddles to look inside an old church. And even then, our luck held. Just as Owen was releasing the bonnet catch, the old car started of its own accord.

Sitting over a good dinner at the Alhambra, I felt warm and mellow even before the second bottle of wine. Of course, one or two of the other diners peered a little oddly at us through the mist of candlelight.

Owen was, after all, quite old enough to be my father. But I felt I was well into my old theatrical tradition. Just pretend, I thought, that I'm still an actress and this is my latest producer.

Over coffee and brandy, I felt relaxed enough to tell Owen just how sick I was of working at Weldrake House.

"So what?" he said. "You could leave."

"I need a job."

"You're an actress, aren't you?"

"That's the same as being unemployed. And I'm over thirty now, Owen. That's a grey time, I'd be too old soon for the main roles and too young for the character parts." How art imitates life, I thought.

"You got some good reviews, Jenny. I wish I'd seen you."

I stared into my coffee, wishing I hadn't said anything. It had been a lovely day. Now I could feel it sliding from my hands. "A few nice words in the local rag don't mean anything. What do they know? I only ever had a couple of decent roles. And then dressed up as a Munchkin in *The Wizard of bloody Oz*. And then nothing apart from that dreadful advert."

"Now, I did see that." Owen swirled his brandy. "The Girl With The Flyaway Hair. I thought how pretty you looked."

I glowered at him. Shut up, Owen.

But he didn't shut up. For once the drink – his or mine – made him misjudge the sudden plunge in my mood. "There's got to be a way out," he said. "There always is."

He gave a serene smile. I felt like hitting him.

**W**hen I awoke at about nine on Sunday morning, that smile was the first thing I remembered. And I was angry all over again. Owen was lying with his mouth open, snoring gently, a trickle of saliva running down the creases from his open mouth to form a damp patch on the pillow. I shuffled around on my side of the bed until he woke up.

His rheumy eyes immediately recognized my bad mood and he propped himself up on his elbow and made a special effort to smile and be kind. That only made things worse.

"Shall I see about a paper?" he asked, climbing out of the sheets and pulling on a pair of baggy Y-fronts. I looked away, hating the sight of his old man's body.

"All right," he said, his voice suddenly creaky with hurt. As usual, Owen had guessed exactly what I was thinking. Some actress you are, Jenny. "I'll get out of the way for a while, okay? That's what you want, isn't it?"

I shrugged. He pulled on a pair of ludicrously fashionable old turn-ups, a shirt and jumper, snatched up the car keys and left, slamming the door hard enough to make the bedside telephone rattle. Some people go for a walk when they're upset. Owen goes for a drive. To be honest, I have a similar instinct, although I felt no sympathy at the time. I heard the questioning squeak of the Audi's door in the car park below. The engine started second time and he drove off.

I turned on the pillow, preparing myself for a good sob. Owen's *Madame Bovary* paperback lay curled on the bedside table by the phone. I gazed at it with loathing and something



dreadful happened. The book began to flatten, the crinkles and creases dissolving as if by magic. In a few moments, the paperback was crisp and unthumbed; brand new. I could even smell the bookshop scent of fresh new solvents in the paper.

I jumped up and ran to the window. Owen's Audi had turned from sight, but I heard the muffled crump of the explosion on the promenade road clearly enough. I even saw the brief orange flash that glittered like sunlight over the rooftops.

My actions were precise and unhurried. It was like watching someone else in a film. I got dressed in my new "Next" outfit, right down to the court shoes and stockings. I had no idea why; I suppose I simply copied a series of decisions I'd already made. I combed my hair, then searched through Owen's dented Samsonite for his bunch of office keys. I don't know how, but from my actions I suppose I must have already had some understanding of what had happened, and what I needed to do.

A ragged pillar of smoke was rising into the low Sunday sky. The seagulls were wheeling and mewing in disturbed circles. I was almost run over by the fire engine when I crossed the road. A crowd had already gathered, muttering and pointing as such crowds always do. For them, it was just another odd occurrence, like divers in a cornflake packet. Elbowing myself forward to get a view around their heads, I saw that the heat had been fierce enough to melt the tarmac surface into a filmy pool. And what remained of the Audi's charred wheels had sunk down to the sub-base of the road. The windows had melted into crystal shapes down the blackened body. And leaning forward out of what had been the windscreen was something that looked like a spent match-head.

I pushed my way out and was sick leaning against the side of a closed souvenir shop around the corner. This isn't happening, I told myself, taking in great sobbing gouts of sea air. This won't happen. Owen will live. I cleaned up my face in the window, blew my nose, hitched my handbag onto my shoulder and set to work.

I found an unvandalized phone box along the front and called for a radio cab. An old Granada came quickly and took me the sixty miles back along the A94 to Tidmington. Just to be on the safe side, I asked to be dropped off by the DHSS office and walked the last few hundred yards to Weldrake House. The streets were Sunday empty. Nothing had happened here to attract the crowds. I crossed the brick forecourt to the glass doors, Owen's keys already jingling in my hand.

It was so easy. The big key turned in the big steel lock. The whole building was powered up, even the lifts and the air conditioning. Still, I took the stairs to be on the safe side, up past Admin and Finance and Stores to the third floor. There, the steel reinforced door with its combination timelock should have barred my way. It was open. The intruder defence system should have set off bells here and at the police station as well as bringing other doors crashing around me. It was turned off. I reached Owen's console. I knew it would be on-line; he had a theory that you saved wear on the circuitry if you avoided switching things on and off. He'd bored me often enough with theoretical demonstrations of

complexities the machine was capable of but no one dared to try. I hadn't paid that much attention, but what I wanted to do was straightforward enough. I moved the cursor to late Saturday evening. Then the default location flashed at me. Weldrake House? I prodded Return; that will do nicely, thank you.

Remembering at the last moment to pick up my handbag with the keys, I went

Through.

A clock said eleven-five and it was dark outside; not bad for a dumb actress. I smiled and changed the time on my numberless blue and white Swatch. On my way out, everything was locked, of course, as I had yet to arrive. I patiently worked through Owen's keys to find the ones that turned the alarm panels off. Fortunately, whoever had designed the security system had allowed for the fact that someone might get locked in. Opening the big steel door from the inside was a piece of cake. I left that and every other door open for tomorrow. The one exception was the main entrance door, which I had the key for in any case. That I locked, just to make sure that someone else didn't get in before me.

Saturday night on Church Street was normally a time and a place to avoid unless you happened to be under twenty and wore a lot of gel in your hair. The pubs were just closing and the youths around the kebab takeaway were competing to see who could shout the worst profanities at the trembling Asians serving inside. Two policemen stood a little way off, obviously wondering whether intervening would make things worse or better.

I joined the rowdy queue at the bus stop, feeling old and conspicuous. Almost immediately, a Green-stripe number 33 rumbled under the railway bridge; the answer to my prayers. I piled in with the others. Even though she reeked of Smitty, cigarettes and Babycham, I was very relieved that a girl took the seat beside me. There was a great deal of singing and shouting from the boys at the back. Every time the bus braked, a torrent of empty beer cans clattered up the aisle. Harmless lads really, I told myself, but I was grateful to get off at the stop opposite my flat, and even more grateful that I was the only one to do so.

I felt lucky. The Mini started first time and its tank was three-quarters full. Now that I was on my own, there wasn't any of the usual tension of being Through. After all, there were no instructions to follow – I was completely my own boss. Driving back towards Golby Sands along the A93, everything seemed so ordinary. I suppose if I'd found out the racing results or something I might have felt different, but the fact was that I hadn't. It was just another Saturday night, one or two big French lorries heading up from the ports, Henry Mancini on the car radio, cats eyes twinkling out of the black road.

I reached the roundabout that led into Golby Sands at about two o'clock. It was still far too early to risk going close to the Alhambra, so I continued right along the A93 instead of left into town and found the neon of a transport café flickering through the night a mile down the road. My body thought it was about two in the afternoon and, having missed breakfast, was impatient for lunch. The place was virtually empty. Freshly washed lino gleamed under bright fluorescent

lights. A largish woman with a white face and jet black hair was serving behind the formica counter. I felt ridiculously out of place, but neither she nor the equally plump lorry drivers who waddled in and out to take the half-hour breaks their tachometers required seemed at all surprised by my presence. I guessed afterwards that they probably imagined I was a prostitute waiting for a client. Thankfully, the thought didn't cross my mind at the time. I ordered sausage, egg and chips, but I found that the hunger left me as soon as the plate was plonked in front of me. After picking it into a greasy mess for a few minutes, I felt sick again. When I came back from the loo, the large lady took the plate away and I sat drinking mug after mug of soupy tea, killing time and staring at the tomato-shaped sauce bottle in the middle of the table as though it was some sort of icon. I could have done with a magazine or something – a book would have been too demanding – but my *Options* was, if I remembered correctly, in the back of Owen's Audi...

By now, the enormity of what I was doing had not so much crept up on me as trampled me like a stampede of wild horses. I was breaking every possible rule. I will never, I promised myself as I lifted the mug with both hands to stop it shaking, never go Through again. Not ever.

But I wasn't going to turn back. At that moment, as I sat drinking thick tea and gazing at the crust around the top of the sauce bottle, Owen was still alive. I wasn't going to let some bizarre kink in the time lines take him away from me. It wasn't that I loved him. I knew now with a sense of distanced clarity that I didn't. But I cared. About him. About me. I wouldn't have been able to live with the knowledge that I could have done something and hadn't. And there was no sense of wrongness; the rules had already been broken by the Audi's implausible fate. I felt that most strongly. God or Mother Nature or whoever had already played cheat. I was simply going one better.

The night sky beyond the windows began to pale. At seven, a thin little man took over behind the counter from the large lady. I guessed he was her husband and wondered how much they ever saw of each other. I got up and went outside into the cold.

The town was quiet. Neat pebbledash bungalows returned to shades of stucco as the street lamps dulled and morning reluctantly took over. Brownish foam was drifting over the sea wall into the front road and the red No Bathing flag snapped irritably in the wind. It was an unnecessary risk, but I knew I had to drive past the Alhambra.

The high pink walls looked soft and fleshy in the growing light. I slowed to a crawl as I passed the car-park entrance, leaning across the Mini's passenger seat to get a look at the old Audi.

It sat there in the shadows, bland and inanimate. Things were just as they should be. I even saw the familiar patches of rust and the long scrape across the front panels where Owen had recently had an argument with a wall at the back of Weldrake House. The hotel Transit was parked beside it, and beyond, the smell of kippers wafted and the lights were on in the kitchen as work started on Sunday breakfast. I glanced up at the windows along the side of the hotel, but I couldn't work out which room Owen and I were sleeping in.

I drove on. There had been, I admit, a faint impulse to simply have a go at the Audi, let its tyres down, smash the windscreen – or take out the rotor arm, whatever that is. But the implications of these actions were far too complex for me to work through. I didn't have a whole fourth floor of Owen's hardware to help me through with this particular conundrum. All I had was my own intellect and my knowledge of the way Owen and I would react to things. Of the two of us, Owen was far easier to judge, but I was reasonably confident that my plan would work. Call it intuition. In any case, I didn't feel I had much to lose.

I parked the Mini out of sight on a side street. The wind hit me with chilly force as I crossed the promenade road and walked towards the same unvandalized telephone box by the sea wall that I had used later on that day to phone for a radio cab. The clouds churning out to sea looked heavy enough for snow. I buttoned up my jacket but it didn't stop me shivering; I hadn't bought this outfit with the intention of wearing it for an early morning walk by the sea in March.

I pulled my hand out of my pocket to check the time. My fingers were whitening with the cold. It was, as far as I could make out from my Swatch, just after eight. I soldiered on, the wind alternately pulling me back and buffeting me forwards. The phone box was empty. Just outside, the horrible thought crossed my mind that I might have mis-read the hands of my Swatch and it could already be past nine. I quickly checked again; no, it was still definitely eight-something. I heaved the phone box door open and went inside.

The box was as draughty as a sieve but stank of urine and stale cigarettes for all the freezing lances of fresh air. Still, it was a rarity in that it not only worked but also possessed a reasonably undamaged copy of the local directory. As they no doubt said in the municipal leaflet, visiting Golby Sands was like going back to a more gracious age.

It rang at the Alhambra for about two minutes. I held on grimly, staring out through the scratched glass at the waves. Eventually, a grumpy male voice answered and condescended to put me through to room 17. The internal phone system had a higher and somehow rather smug-sounding ringing tone. It warbled twice. The phone was on Owen's side of the bed. I prayed that he would answer. It warbled again.

"Yes?"

"Owen..."

"Is that room service?"

"I..."

"Who is that?"

I chewed my lip, feeling that old familiar panic come over me. I deliberately hadn't rehearsed what I was going to say – this was one set of lines I'd imagined I could manage ad lib. A seagull wheeled, screeching close by. Owen would probably hear the sound; maybe he could even guess that I was ringing from just along the front.

I fed in another ten-pence piece and gripped the phone harder with my freezing hands. "Owen," I said. "This is very important." I doubted whether he would recognize my voice. It certainly sounded very strange to me.

"Who is it?" he persisted, then added, "Please tell me who you are if you want me to speak to you," remembering his usual good manners.

I heard a voice in the background muttering about what the hell was going on. A woman's voice. Faint. Persistent. It sounded like the voice I heard when I played back the tinny office dictaphone.

"Just don't get in the car today, Owen..." I said. "Take a train or a walk or something, but don't get in that Audi."

I could picture them clearly enough now. Both wide awake, puzzled, and sitting up in bed with the velour headboard and "Premonition Of A Civil War" behind them. Jenny trying to catch the words, hearing a voice, the voice of a youngish woman. And not believing Owen's show of ignorance.

"Do you understand?" I said, my voice and body shivering. "Just say yes. Don't get in the Audi. Just say yes."

I heard the clatter of the handset at the other end of the line, then the beeps began to go. A woman's voice, sleepy but angry, said –

"Just who the hell are you?"

– and the line went dead.

I sat down on the promenade wall up from the phone box. The salty wind whipped my hair painfully into my eyes. I hugged myself. And shivered. And waited.

Five minutes. Because I'd been listening for it so acutely, I somehow heard the questioning squeak of the Audi's door even over the sea and the wind and the distance. And its angry slam. An old couple with a tartan-jacketed terrier walked past along the front, glancing at me uneasily. I heard the engine start second time. A rusty bonnet nosed out around the side of the Alhambra, paused, then swerved right along the front with a screech of rubber. Towards me.

I stood up from the wall, brushing the worst of the folds from my new outfit and trying to flatten my hair. I walked to the edge of the kerb.

The Audi was the only car on the road, but you can never see someone inside a car as clearly as they can see you. And in the greyish light, as the familiar rattle of the Audi's tired engine approached, the most I could make out was that the driver didn't look like Owen and was probably female. But I knew it had to be Jenny. Jenny, who could only believe that a mysterious voice on the phone could be Another Woman. Jenny, who, just as Owen might have done, snatched up the keys to go for an angry drive.

The Audi was close now. My skin began to tingle. I raised my hand in a half-hearted wave. The feeling of cold was gone, but bigger and bigger goosebumps were rising on my skin. It was similar to – but much stronger than – the sense of waiting that comes before an electrical storm. The whole

universe was bearing down on me, its weight balanced for an instant over my head.

The air crackled and flexed like plastic sheeting. The Audi seemed to slow and blur. And then, in an instant, it flowered like a bright chrysanthemum. A rush of oxygen flew past me and heat clapped against my face.

I stood dazed, blinking a green splodge from my sight. The heat was so great that the flames soon died.



People appeared from nowhere, running past me to get a good look. Time passed, the smoke stung my eyes. The police and a fire engine arrived. The seagulls wheeled and mewed in agitated circles. I walked forward to get a view around the heads of the crowd. The heat had been fierce enough to melt the tarmac surface into a filmy pool. And what remained of the Audi's charred wheels had sunk down to the sub-base of the road. The windows had melted into crystal shapes down the blackened body. And leaning forward out of what had been the windscreen was something that looked like a spent match-head.

I pushed my way out and was sick leaning against the side of a closed souvenir shop around the corner. I'm alive, I told myself, taking in great sobbing bouts of sea air, this hasn't happened. I cleaned up my face in the window, blew my nose, hitched my handbag onto my shoulder and went to look for Owen.

He was standing on the seafront pavement at the edge of the thinning crowd, watching as the firemen and police waited for the ticking wreck to cool. He had his hands in the pockets of his baggy trousers and the crumpled pages of *Madame Bovary* poked from his tweedy jacket. He turned when he heard my footsteps. He seemed unsurprised to see me.

"Hello." I put my arm around his. "Let's pay the bill and quit. I'll drive us home in the Mini."

He nodded and gave me a kiss. I could smell that he'd just brushed his teeth. Funny how you notice those little things.

**W**e did manage to get back to Tidmington, but it was hard work. The A93 had vanished. Owen and I live together now in what used to be my Barrett's flat. It's become quite a lot bigger since we came back from Golby Sands, and it's still growing. Sometimes, we can lose each other for days on end in its dim halls and corridors.

We've only been into the centre of Tidmington a couple of times. It's even quieter than it used to be and reminds me more than ever of a film set. Of course, there are still one or two people about. There's the fat old lady, for example. She's always there, crossing the zebra one way, crossing back, crossing again. And we bumped into John Rutherford on Church Street as we searched for a door into any one of the shops. He looked a little wild and asked if we were filling in our diary sheets. Owen and I didn't know what to say, but we had a good laugh about it afterwards. That was a nice feeling, because we don't laugh about things as much as we used to.

I can understand Rutherford's concern. Weldrake House seems to have disappeared entirely, but then I'm not sure that I can remember exactly where it was. And I think my memory is probably playing tricks with me. Take Rutherford's party. I find it hard to believe that even he would be idiotic enough to put up Christmas decorations in March. But I could be wrong. All I'm saying is that I don't know.

Owen and I haven't talked much about what happened. I suppose he has his reasons. What bothers me – perversely, I know – is that he seemed to understand what was going on: maybe all those years of fiddling with probabilities on his computers rubbed off. But my inescapable conclusion is that he let me take the Audi that Sunday morning in the full know-

ledge that something bad was certain to happen. As I say, it's perverse of me. After all, I told him. And, as I say, we don't talk about it. Owen spends most of his time wrapped up in himself. He's probably hidden away at the moment somewhere re-reading *Madame Bovary*. He says it's a book that changes every time you come back to it.

The estate road outside the flat has now become a mud track and beyond over a grassy wasteland a big and dark forest seems to be growing closer every day. And I could have sworn that I heard wolves howling last night as I lay on the dusty acres of my bed.

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**Ian R. MacLeod** is 32 and has been writing for about eight years. The above is his first published short story. Resident in Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, he works in the civil service and is married to a solicitor: "we have no children and anyone with a grudge against us would probably say we are Yuppies." He adds: "I never buy the *Sunday Times* and do not own a CD player. Like most writers, I travel a lot without actually leaving home."

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# New Found Lands

## John Clute

In the beginning was the Word. The rest is syntax. Of the Word that made us, we hear nothing but echoes of the surf, for we are deafened by the noise of our genes, and the stories we tell are wakes of the dead, after Eden. Turn your eyes (our tales may tell us) turn your eyes to the sea; but we do not, we stare into a desert storm, the scales are on our eyes. Thalassa! Thalassa! Or so I read the novels and stories of Gene Wolfe to claim. Like Severian in *The Book of the New Sun*, who is a thesis of the Increate, the protagonists of his book-length fictions are usually cloned or dead, creatures fallen from the Word; and their abode is the sands of the desert of the world. But always they search for some transformation, some code to unlock the gates of perception, some seawards turn. Severian finally reaches his Ocean, and bathes Urth in it. Adam Green, the terribly damaged protagonist of *There Are Doors* (Gollancz, £12.95), Wolfe's new alternate-universe fantasy, falls in love with Lara, a woman who also bears the name of Leucothea, a goddess of the sea. She may be Cybele. She may be the White Goddess. But she does not come from this Earth, and her domain draws him from this one as the sea draws things of earth. "Heavy things belong to the sea," she tells him. "You may be able to draw them out... but if ever they come near the sea again, they will eventually fall in." She is the Word. "I am the storm," she says.

She is also a transcendental bimbo out of Thorne Smith, or Edward Hopper; or both. She lights upon Green as blithely as Marian Kirby lights upon Topper; but the places they meet and romance together are cityscapes furtive with solitude. The alternate world into which Green's crippled psyche falls – back and forth through any door or door-like opening which seems "significant" – is a frozen America caught in an unending Depression, rather like Green's own psychiatric state; it also resembles Prague, but of this more in a moment. Green, who has had electroshock treatments before the novel begins, may have arrived in the world of the Goddess, who is the sea we long for, but he is too deeply wounded to embrace a dream of plenitude. His turn towards her is a tropism, not a choice. The alternate America he perceives, bleak and snowbound and empty, haunted by tramlines and great deserted hotels, is a nightmare of romance turned against itself, where women are literally *femmes fatales*. In this world men, like certain insects, die after mating. It is possible, however, to long for an Oz-like sanctuary or Heaven called Overwood, where She may dwell; there are even maps to show the way.

Green himself mates with Lara only at the beginning of *There Are Doors*, and his subsequent mole-like quest for her has something of the coffin close-

ness of tone that makes *Peace* perhaps the chilliest posthumous fantasy ever written. But unlike almost anything else Wolfe has ever written, *There Are Doors* seems reluctant to respond to any particular decoding strategy on the part of the reader; it is, in fact, a text of quite extraordinary looseness of ascription. No doubt a topology of doors within the text can and should be established, and the pattern of Green's "moves" from Her world to this and back again properly charted; and it may be the case that the references Wolfe makes to Kafka are as much a snare as a pointer. But the references do exist, and perhaps we have indeed been pointed in the right direction. Significantly, Kafka never ties his reader to any fixed interpretation of his text, and it is certainly the case that the nightmare world Green enters does refuse – in the same way that Kafka's worlds refuse – to deliver any ontological security whatsoever. The America he enters certainly resembles the land discovered by Karl Rossmann in *America*. The hallucinated bareness of *There Are Doors* is reminiscent of Kafka's short fables. And Green's turns in search of what we have called the sea are certainly thwarted and mimicked by the bureaucracies of incertitude so definitively dreamt of in *The Castle*.

But Wolfe manages to end his book; unlike Kafka, for whom reading the world was interminable. Having no life to abandon, Green's soul turns to Overwood. Once he is there, She may allow him to worship in her sight, thalassotropic, beestung. Out of the stymied melancholia of his life, which *There Are Doors* replicates with weird jocosities and wintery skill, Green may find the Word that wrote him. And be blessed.

There is also a certain amount of death in Stephen Gallagher's new novel, as well as a great deal of depression. *Down River* (New English Library, £10.95) comes bearing some of the regalia of horror fantasy – chiefly a cover illustration designed to market the book as cod demonology – but once unpacked proves to be the extremely modest this-worldly tale of a good cop and a bad cop, and how the bad cop got that way. Emulous sociopath Johnny Mays has haunted somewhat sensitive non-tearaway Nick Frazier

from childhood, but things only come to a head after both have become plain-clothes policemen in a rain-sodden city west of the Pennines, perhaps Manchester. In a little black book, Johnny records the names of those who offend his pathological amour propre, and afterwards takes his revenge on them, finally involving Nick in an illicit car chase into the hills which ends in Mays's death, or so it seems. But Mays survives, though his mind and memory begin to flicker alarmingly, and generates a series of horrors which climax in an unnamed Hull. Nick survives. The novel ends in a state of routine bleakness, too many pages after it began. Two aspects of the book seemed of interest. (One) the title releases assonances of a depression unto death – "Death fascinated Johnny, always had. Some of his better dreams were of death, as a river dreamed of the sea" – that seem more than merely personal, for between Manchester and Hull there is nothing in the face of the land that bears smiling about. (Two) *Down River* reads very much like the orchestration of a supernatural horror novel, with only the voice missing. Add a line of narrative tying Mays's glowing eyes and infernal crypto-posthumousness to genuine possession à la genre, and the opera would be complete. So one does wonder: Since Mays has been given everything but the Devil's voice, why did Gallagher not give him full tongue?

As Ann Halam, Gwyneth Jones continues in *Transformations* (Orchard Books, £7.95) the series of books about Inland that began, quite auspiciously, with *The Daymaker* (1987). Zanne, the pig-headed heroine of that book, is now four years older, but continues to lack the ability to listen, and once again comes very close to disaster through her stiff-necked deafness to those around her. As she is now a covener – a woman charged with the task of maintaining through "magic" the harmonies of the living world – this refusal to listen may begin to seem a less than plausible device, given one's sense that in Inland coveners are, in essence, listeners. But Zanne also remains fascinated by the old Makers, the machines and forces of the old defunct male-dominated civilization whose relics Inland has inherited, and her deafness is clearly linked to that

fascination. She remains at the moment a necessary cripple, and in any case Jones clearly intends her Inland books to depict the growth and transformation of a soul. In Zanne she has created a protagonist with much to learn.

She arrives at the mining community of Minith with a task to perform; an ancient Maker, reportedly sited somewhere in the dour mountains that surround the hardscrabble valley farms, must be dismantled or put to death. She is not made welcome, except by a young girl. Failing to detect the complexities of the lives she has encountered, she erects an injurious hypothesis to explain the rigid inturmed puritanism of the Minithers; and only at the last moment does her psychic static cease to block her from the truths that lie before her. Her perceptions transformed, she sees the valley and its inhabitants in an entirely new light; she puts the Maker to sleep at last; and Minith is sea-changed into a state of harmony. The only real problem readers of *Transformations* may encounter is a certain impatience awaiting Zanne's comprehension of matters Halam/Jones has taken great pains to make clear – from very early on – to the rest of us.

**L**ike Rip van Winkle in Beatle gear, John Shirley tries desperately in *Heatseeker* (Scream/Press, \$25), a collection of bad and sad science-fiction stories, to drag his 1950s sensibility into the present, but only makes it halfway. Minus the drug talk and the rock rhythms and the sexual power-plays and the cyberpunk rouge, the parched ranting voice of these stories brings us right back to the suburban solipsisms of the early *Galaxy*, or to any magazine of that time which published bad early Ellison. Good early Ellison Shirley aspires to emulate, but cannot. Solitary characters shout and snarl at a world almost totally undefined, and arrive at punitive comeuppances their author licks his lips over. Once in a while, as in "What Cindy Saw" from *Interzone*, or "Ticket to Heaven" from *F & SF*, the voice takes on a calcined cloacal rasp that reminds one of Barry Malzberg, and, as in these two stories, metaphors of a painful urgency can emerge; in the latter, a conspiratorial model of the oppressions of power/scarcity does saliently take shape, and one wishes Shirley had restricted himself to tales he had an idea about. But mostly he does organ-grinder riffs out of the dead past of the genre and the bottom of his drawer. Not strongly recommended.

**I**n the past, John Sladek's problem was just the reverse of Shirley's. His stories were all world and no body, and as a consequence his novels tended to tail off halfway through into things-of-the-world riffs, mathematically couched, hilarious but paralyzed with

a kind of terror, perhaps through the absence of any live human character to bear the burden. But finally, in *Bugs* (Macmillan, £12.95), which is his first novel since *Tik-Tok* (1983), Sladek has written a novel with a full human consciousness at its heart, which motors its obsessive tabling of the wares of the absurd in a consumed America, and passes the terror on to us. Fred Jones, a British writer in early middle age, finds himself forced to look for work in America, and goes to Minneapolis, where he figures he might find some. Applying to a computer firm as a technical writer, he is hired in error as a software engineer. The team he joins is involved – we return here to *Roderick* (1980) – in the creation of a sentient robot, which is soon kidnapped by a demented ex-employee. But *Robinson Robot* – so named to allay the fears of the American public – has bugs, and follows the murderous orders of the episteme. But so does everyone. Everyone is eaten by what they consume, from junk food to television. Everyone is eaten from the inside out. America is a land of skulls. The woman Fred Jones falls in love with is murdered by a serial killer. He dreams of what we have all become, in the land of the dreams that consume us. He then dreams of a girl who wears a cap. "On closer inspection, the glistening cap was a tight cluster of killer bees. The girl was not calm; she was frozen with fear, terrified of making the slightest movement.

"Keep still," he said. "I'll draw them away." Then the girl lifted her eyes and looked at Fred.

"Keep still? I'm dead." Her voice hummed like a swarm. "Can't you see I'm dead. They have built their hive in my skull." After twenty years in England, Sladek returned to his native America in the 1980s. He has since been working as a technical writer in a computer firm in Minneapolis. Hilarious, deft, dense with terror, compact and crepuscular, *Bugs* is his message in a bottle from the new found land. Eat me (says the message in the bottle) if you dare. But I warn you. They have built their hive in my skull.

## Of Semiosis, Hard SF and Subtle Horrors

**E**very decade, it seems, turns up a couple of writers who infuse traditional sf concerns with something new and unexpected, and thereby initiate a prignogenic leap in the state of the art. In the 80's it was William Gibson and Lucius Shepard; in the 70's, John Varley and probably Ursula Le Guin. And in the sixties, there were

the glimmer twins, Delany and Zelazny. So whatever happened to Samuel R. Delany?

Of course, he never went away – although after *Dhalgren* he retreated more and more into academic criticism, hanging out with Hegel rather than Heinlein. But he was still producing heavyweight sf, of which *Stars In My Pocket Like Grains Of Sand* was simply the latest instalment, not, as it seemed in Britain, the abrupt resumption of an abandoned career. For until recently in Britain, virtually all of Delany's work, seminal stuff like *Nova* and *Babel-17*, prize-winning stuff, was out of print. But Gollancz have reprinted some of Delany's early work, and now Grafton are, at three-monthly intervals, publishing a uniform and definitive paperback edition of his *Neveryon* fantasy series, of which we have to hand the first two volumes (*Tales of Neveryon* and *Neveryóna*, £3.50 and £4.50 respectively).

One of the things that Delany did for the language of sf was to show how strange, compelling and complex worlds and equally strange characters could be evoked through the telling detail, a kind of poetic compression which by now has become so thoroughly incorporated into the corpus of the sf amoeba that it is occasionally necessary to point out that it was invented once upon a time, and by whom (for a more complete description of the technique and its evolution, see Delany's essay "About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words," reprinted in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* [out of print in the States, never in print here]).

Delany can still work his magic, but what makes these tales hard on the reader is that often he does not select details but heaps them on instead, which just about works when dealing with the strange, but is exhaustive when interminably describing the mundane. Read as straightforward fantasy, the books simply don't work at all: they are overwritten, nothing much happens, and what most of the characters do is talk, at great and unrealistic length, and usually with the same voice, which of course is the author's own. There are no heroes, and no quest plots to save the world. In the first volume, a series of individual tales (in which nothing conclusive happens except in the first, a tour-de-force compressive narrative of a mine-slave's redemption through palace intrigue) present us with several characters who then cross paths in the final tale (where quite a bit happens). In the second volume, a young girl runs away to the city, talks at great length with various characters (some from the first volume, some not) and has various inconclusive adventures in which she learns just how hard it is for a woman to escape from her original social context,

# PIERS ANTHONY

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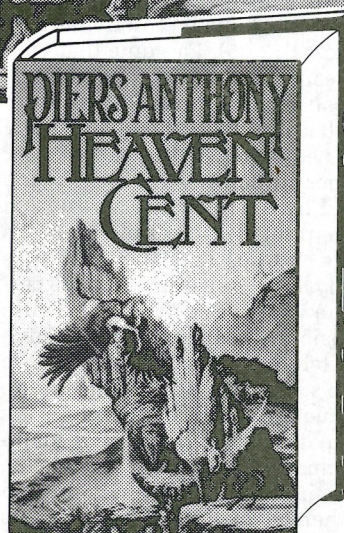
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but finally succeeds in doing so by the only acceptable route, which is to say, Art.

But the books are not really about sword& sorcery and clear-cut high-heroic quest plots.

And despite the morass of details, often brilliantly evocative, often maddeningly stilted and deliberately artificial, fictive recreation of a fabled barbaric era is not really what the books are about either (just as well, considering the number of bloopers, such as the presence of potatoes in a prehistoric Eurasian/African – it's never made clear – civilization).

What they are really about, is an examination of the origins of the multivalent emblematic signs through which meanings filter from one system to another. They are semiotic fantasies, in short, set in a time when the emblems of modern society were freshly minted – money, markets, prostitution, corridors, fountains, slavery, paved roads, writing (which one of the characters transforms from a system of signs standing for things, to signs standing for words), and much more. A fantasy, then, about the evolution of ideas, and their effect on society and the individual, so that an iron collar is not only the general sign for slavery, but (for at least one character) the personal emblem of sexual desire.

The first volume was published ten years ago. Nevèryon has not changed the grammar of fantasy, nor is it likely to. Nevertheless, it is a bold experiment even if it is an exhausting (in the every sense of the word) reading experience.

**G**reg Bear is the very model of a modern hard science-fiction writer, fusing the style lessons of Delany et al with convincing extrapolations at the cutting edge of current science to create visions the like of which have never been known. I do not exaggerate, for we are considering the sequel to *Eon*, the ambitiously titled *Eternity* (Gollancz, £12.95). I assume that you, gentle reader, have read *Eon* (an inter-linear pause while those who have not do so), because Bear shows no mercy for the neophyte. At the end of *Eon*, remember, nuclear war had been triggered by the arrival of an asteroid starship piloted by people from an alternate future, and the starship's infinitely long transdimensional corridor, the Way, was closed off because of intrusion by the alien Jarts. Which closure left inside the Way some of the starship's crew and some of those who had come from Earth to explore the starship, including Patricia, a mathematician who, trying to return via the Way to the time before the war, had found herself instead in an alternate history where Alexander the Great's Empire had persisted for two thousand years.

At the beginning of *Eternity*, the people of the starship are engaged with the reconstruction of post-holocaust Earth, mostly with the cooperation of its grateful populace, when some of those trapped in the Way return. Transfigured into near-divinities by their journey beyond the end of the Way and their attempts to influence the birth of a new universe (all this in a couple of pages of anecdotal flashback, to give you an idea of the staggering scales Bear deploys here), they bring the message that the Way must be closed because it is interfering with God's ultimate plans. (God being a Stapledonian summation of all sapient beings, not the usual gent in white beard and robes.) To close the Way it is necessary to first open it and risk war with the Jarts, and meanwhile Patricia's granddaughter is trying to find her own passage into the Way, and inadvertently lets the Jarts loose on the Alexandrian Earth. As I said, Bear thinks Big. And despite a degree of what appears to be hasty or at least careless writing, and a leavening of soap-opera elements to give semblance of plot to what is really (ahem) a Scientific Romance, and especially despite structural problems which reduce the most fully realized character, the granddaughter, to a mute prize in need of rescue about halfway through (the same problem which almost broke *Eon's* back), the whole glorious enterprise gets off the ground. The Jarts, offstage menace in the first novel, are here fully realized as truly alien beings with a truly alien but wholly consistent worldview; and the complex interplay of highly advanced starship crew and mere Earthlings is deftly handled. But above all else, Bear is a powerful and vivid imagarist, and his set pieces, including the final demolition of the Way, are what linger in the mind.

**W**hat to say about K.W. Jeter which does not at some point mention Philip K. Dick? Impossible, as better reviewers than me have discovered. So I will merely note the relationship and move on to *Death Arms* (Grafton, £2.99), a nifty piece of hardboiled sf noir which starts off in a future L.A. deserted after a psychic event known as the Fear, and finishes, literally and metaphorically, in the desert. It's a road novel in which the son of an assassin (who had the power to lay a death-wish compulsion on his victims) finds himself on the run from the cops in general and a slow bullet in particular, a weapon which once fired remorselessly tracks down its victim. He falls in with a couple of punks and a girl who has the power to reanimate dead creatures, and finally lives up to his father's inheritance, uncovering a sinister corporate plot to deprive everyone in the world of freewill along

the way. It is brief, fast, bleak and intense, over before you know it but leaving a curious resonance.

To hand is another book by Jeter (who threatens to become as prolific as D\*ck) set in California, and what's more also featuring a girl who can reanimate the dead. But *In the Land of the Dead* (Morrigan, £11.95) is horror, not sf, and its California is that of the Okies, detailed in suffocatingly textured fidelity. Cooper, a drifter down on his luck, has been indentured to a bullying, miserly citrus grower, who has taken the aforementioned corpse-animator from the madhouse to be his unwilling concubine. Soon, Cooper and the girl are plotting to kill the grower and have his corpse open the combination safe, so that they can escape with the money. It's a black morality tale straight out of James M. Cain (but bled of passion), ending on a sombre, unsettlingly ambiguous note. There's not much hope in it, and absolutely no joy, but as a realistic work of horror it is utterly compelling. Along with Tim Powers and James P. Blaylock, Jeter is part of an axis of original and convincing Californian fabulists. Watch out for him.

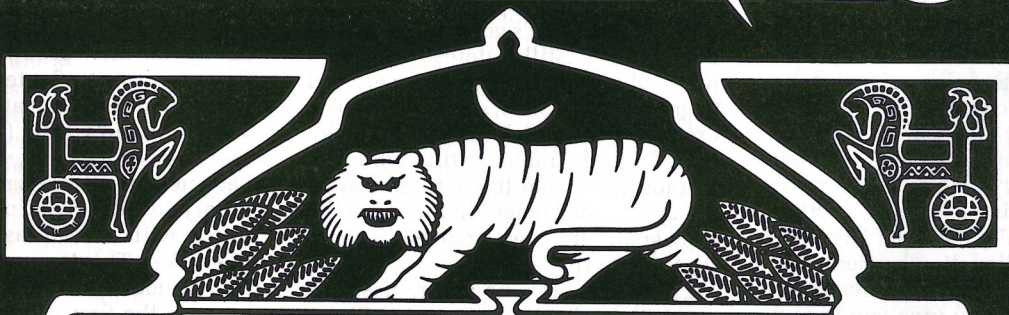
**R**amsey Campbell's latest offering, *Ancient Images* (Legend, £12.95), follows the English tradition of horror erupting from beneath the calm, quotidian surface of everyday life. It turns on a Karloff and Lugosi horror film so thoroughly suppressed that no one alive has seen it. When her film restorer friend apparently kills himself after his newly-discovered print of the film is stolen, Sandy Allen determines to root out the mystery behind it. A gutsy, determined young woman, her investigations gradually lead her to the town of Redfield, its fertile soil and unusually satisfying bread, the tower which dominates it and the ancient secret of the Lord of the Manor's family. It's a pot pourri of Hammer horror ingredients, skilfully stirred and spiced with Campbell's talent for evoking unease by misdirection and subtle hints in the contemporary world of motorways, shabby blocks of flats, fly-blown seaside resorts and littered subways. Yet despite some terrifically scary setpieces and a well-drawn likeable heroine, it doesn't quite transcend its origins, and the well-paced narrative is slightly spoiled by a hasty ending amid the collapse of cardboard sets and the sense of money running out in the final reel. It almost doesn't matter, because Campbell is more interested in atmosphere than outright apocalypse, and there are enough genuine frissons here to keep the reader's nerves horribly aquiver. Sometimes, subtlety is more than enough.

(Paul J. McAuley)



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## Heroes and Heroines

I know how you think. How do I know? Because Rick Deckard, Bill Mason, Louis Wu and James DiGriz have told me (taking a clutch of heroes at random). And what's going on inside my head? I identify with the Stainless Steel Rat, not Angelina, Louis, not Teela. So, begins alienation. Look, I even address you as "you" – women readers have got this far, if at all, by automatically contextualizing the pronouns.

But one of the things sf is about is dealing with the alien other and that's hard to do when you are the alien other. Tanith Lee addresses the issue in a collection of stories called **Women as Demons** (Women's Press, £4.95) – sixteen stories without a dud between them and with two, "The Squire's Tale" and "Northern Chess," that make you long for the complete novel. Lee's protagonist may be male or female; whatever we may prefer we all know it doesn't really matter in the great work, but feminist science fiction doesn't perpetually throw half its readers against the alienation barrier. How the book might affect male readers I can't predict but I do urge you to buy it – it's a great book and I can like great books that want me to think like a man so the same should work in reverse, no?

Women's Press's other offering, Joanna Russ's **The Hidden Side of the Moon** (WP, £4.95) contains more but shorter pieces, some of them quite old. Even so the only piece I had actually seen before was the very funny "Cliché from Outer Space" which is well worth another look in any event. However, much as I enjoyed all the pieces, especially "The View from this Window" where the middle-aged female college lecturer gets the beautiful boy student (sigh), I am still doubtful about the collection as a whole. It's fiction – good, first class, beautiful, personal, involving fiction – but is it science fiction? It all depends on your definitions of course, but it seems to me the stories don't explore alternate realities so much as the fantasies and longings of the alienated half of the population of this reality. I enjoyed it but I doubt the male sf readership will consider it part of the genre.

Sheri S. Tepper's **The Gate to Women's Country** (Bantam, £6.95) is a "splendid but –" sort of a novel. In a post-holocaust society the women in their walled cities have civilization, science, learning, art, craft, medicine, and the men live outside the walls in barracks and play their war games with bronze-age weapons. And there's a Great Secret to the way the society works but you won't take very long to

work out what it might be when you notice the gentle, despised, pacific twenty per cent of the men who choose to forswear macho and return through the Gate to the Women's Country. It's a shame these wonderful women need to do quite so much pandering to the old testosterone here and there. Shame the cover illustrator didn't trouble to read the book, too!

**Salvage Rites** by Ian Watson (Gollancz, £11.95) is a collection of "proper" science-fiction stories – strange backgrounds and a twist – that contains some classics. "The Moon and Michelangelo" for example has a group of earth observers trying to puzzle out a strange rock city and the answer to the puzzle is satisfying, consistent and strange. There are stories, though, where Watson is trying so hard to surprise us, to twist the twist, that he ends up merely being perverse. When it works he's good and even if it doesn't he's still interesting – and reasonably right-on too! I scarcely had to grit my teeth once, although in "The Emir's Clock" which hinges on a visionary flash of Arabic writing I found it extraordinary that the heroine waited for a years-long maguffin to tell her the answer and it never occurred to her to try to learn the language!

Piers Anthony, however, uses his two female characters in **Out of Phase** (New English Library, £6.95) as the maguffins, the device that hinges the plot. This man is to sf what the Care Bears are to children's literature. I found it deeply irritating adolescent-male fantasy stuff – visit new realities! meet interesting new creatures! and fuck them! – mingled with irritating twee coyness...the robot with the magician's body (golly I wonder how all these dangly bits work) and vice versa (you mean it goes up and down voluntarily?). As the blurb says, he has "his own special brand of humour" – quite! and it's the beginning of a trilogy. Stick with the bears. Although to be fair the plot, such as it was, did begin to get to me right at the end – in the way the quick crossword does when you can't get that last four-letter word...

And finally **Fireshaper's Doom** (Futura, £3.50), Tom Deitz's sequel to *Windmaster's Bane*. Yes, I'm afraid the title says it all – this is a Sequel. No, not a second book about the same characters with new developments and a logical progression in plot and characterization that makes you want to read more as it spirals upwards like the Dorsai books or the Pleiocene series, but a Sequel, a "this one sold so let's do another one" downwards spiral like (gulp) the latter Dune books. David Sullivan and friends go back to Tir Nan Og and meet more of the Sidhe and in case you're tempted by the first few chapters and start wondering why there are all these redundant characters

literally just along for the ride let me put you out of your misery. We're going to raise what'sname from the dead at the end so we'll need a random assortment of characters to form the three aspects of the goddess, Maiden, Matron and Crone, and her threefold consort, Youth, Warrior and Sage, so we don't actually need them for the plot up till the last chapter but let's have them wandering the hillside...I liked *Windmaster's Bane* quite a lot and this is a substandard follow up. Mr Deitz can do better and I very much hope in his next one he does. I suppose it isn't actually his fault that the female of "Sage" is "Crone"!

(Wendy Bradley)

## Economic Forces

Eventually, in a London threatened by terrorist groups like the Red Brigade, Black September and the Inner London Education Authority, Trevor Hoyle's **Vail** (Abacus, £3.99) casts away its sf trappings and becomes an all-out satire of contemporary Britain, rivalling TV's *Spitting Image* with its bad taste and hit-and-miss jokes. This is entertaining enough but something of a disappointment because the first part of the novel, in which the impoverished Vail heads for the capital along a nightmare version of the M6 in the hope of getting treatment for his dying daughter, has a real atmosphere of menace to counterpoint the black humour. Here there are service stations choked with starving masses, hostile gangs of pop star lookalikes who are surgically attached to their motorbikes, and terrorists lurking on the hard shoulder, while the likes of Jimmy Tarbuck and Bob Monkhouse glide safely by, secure in their polished limousines. And there's a hint of the desperation felt by those at the bottom of the pile who don't get to make TV satire shows but have to suffer in the real-life equivalent of such a Britain.

Northern Irish writer Ian McDonald's short story collection *Empire Dreams* has appeared in the US along with his first novel **Desolation Road** (now published in the UK by Bantam, £3.99) which illustrates more of his skill at the shorter form. Many chapters of the novel work nicely as self-contained vignettes (an elderly couple get lost in the infinite space of their own back garden; a baby growing in a jar is stolen and replaced by a mango), but the central plot, concerning the bloodthirsty struggles of various political and economic forces for control of the planet Mars, is rather dull and the vast cast of characters bewildering. Parts of the book will linger in the memory: an enchanted forest scattered with the wreckage of high-tech warfare; a man

whose sarcastic wit can literally rend flesh... Savour these, speed read the rest, and bear in mind there's the talent here for a better novel next time.

(Simon Ounsley)

## A Detailed Look

**Z**enith (Sphere, £3.50) offers twelve British sf and fantasy stories, all of which are appearing for the first time. According to editor David Garnett, they represent "The best new sf anywhere," and are "Stories for the next millennium." What you actually get for your money is the perhaps more familiar anthology phenomenon of fair-to-middling work leavened by some strong individual stories.

The longest story in the book is also one of the best. Although "The Bridge" by Christopher Evans can be read independently, it is one of a series of stories (which includes "Artefacts," *IZ* 23) set in a world where intangible creatures known as chimeras can be given physical form by a few master artists. The background is solid and well-evoked, but never dominates the characters in a clear, compelling tale. From the author of *How to Write Science Fiction*, "The Bridge" is an exercise in how to do just that.

Barrington Bayley's "Death Ship" sets a time-travel paradox story within a 1984-style European dictatorship. Despite an old-fashioned, almost Van Vogtian feel, this is one of the better reads in the book. "White Noise," by the equally reliable Garry Kilworth, blends electronic engineering with some (very) old-time religion. The story grabs the reader with both hands, but can't quite deliver the ending it builds so powerfully towards.

"The Traveller" is elegant and atmospheric, but Colin Greenland's tale remains frustratingly opaque, whilst a different literary ailment – overwriting – sometimes threatens to overwhelm Andrew Stephenson's "Cinema Altere." The story ultimately repays some demanding reading, and offers a genuinely original – and frightening – method of achieving special effects. Let's hope Hollywood never gets its hands on it.

By contrast, Ian McDonald's theme is all too familiar; urban ennui amongst the offspring of the elite. "Gardenias" overstays its welcome, but the quality of the prose lends some distinction. In "Time of the Tree" Robert (Mythago Wood) Holdstock makes a determined effort to re-cycle his enduring passions for prehistory, mysticism and (yes) trees as well as splicing in a nod towards Dylan Thomas's "Map of Love." It's well written, but probably a bit of a strain for all but the committed tree-lover.

It's hard to imagine anyone commit-

ted to "The Pleasure Giver Taken," by Storm Constantine, wherein the Pleasure Giver of the title, hired to solve a rather humdrum problem, simply calls in another expert. There might be possibilities here for the opening of a novel, but for a short story it's about twice the length that the content can sustain.

Brian Aldiss, from whom we can surely expect better, reworks the Grand Old Galactic Empire theme again in the imaginatively titled "Days in the Life of a Galactice Empire." Better things, too, should be (and usually are) on offer from Lisa Tuttle; "In Translation" is a rather pale shadow of her other explorations of male/female relationships. In addition to having a main character that never really escapes the authorial leash, it parallels Tiptree's "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" too closely to be really fresh.

Garnett also introduces two new writers, and here, as elsewhere, the results are mixed. In "Feminipolis," Elisabeth Sourbut has a potentially interesting idea: an alternative timeline where men are non-sentient. But her female-only society seems bland, and the characters, particularly the men arriving from our world, are wooden. No such problems for William King, appearing here in only his second professionally published story (his first being in *IZ* 28). "Skyrider" strides into the cyberbleak territory of Sterling and Gibson with a poise and confidence that bodes very well indeed for his future. Expect to hear more from this man.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

## Programmers' Dreams

**A**t least half of the new sf I see deliberately places itself in one or another sub-genre, sharing assumptions, style, stereotypes and plot elements at a very fine-grained level with other books in the same niche. It's sometimes hard to know whether to take such works at face value or to consider them in the context of the better-known (if not always better) writing that they seem to imitate.

For example, in W. T. Quick's *Dreams of Flesh and Sand* (Orbit, £3.50) Nakamura-Norton, a multinational grown rich on revolutionary biochips, is torn in two by the feud between Nakamura the money man and Norton, the alcoholic genius who seems to have (surprise, surprise) infected the world's computer systems with his recorded personality from the vat in which his dead body floats. The protagonists are a computer security expert (nicknamed "Icebreaker") and

a hacker, once married now divorced, who are hired by both sides to stick wires in their heads and do various unexplained things inside the memory of the NN computers.

This is obviously a book whose view of the future closely parallels that of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* series. The problem with this similarity is that the background, in reminding the reader of other books, draws attention to itself and I end up trying to pick holes. For example, some Israeli mercenaries attack the company HQ in Chicago in an aircraft that came over the pole, using bombs and powerful lasers. Where is everybody? If there is still a US government; does it no longer have an early warning system? Even if the state has somehow withered away, surely there would still be police? Or Mafia? Surely the neighbours will notice a pocket-size war? A lot of the talk about computers is plain nonsense. Both Quick and Gibson have computers defended by programs that can kill you if you interface with them through what they both call the matrix. About half way through the action of *Dreams of Flesh and Sand* someone has the idea of using another computer to monitor the hacker's vital signs and what's going on, and to pull the plug as soon as there is any trouble. Well, that's the plot of *Count Zero* blown for a start. And will someone tell me why all these hot-shot programmers have never heard of backups? As in Gibson there is a thread of racial stereotyping: Germans are efficient, Orientals dedicated, calm and occasionally treacherous. Flexible American can-do get-up-and-go know-how wins the day. Even on stimulants.

I enjoyed *The Enigma Score* by Sherri S. Tepper (Corgi, £3.50), a skilful visit to a territory already familiar from Anne McCaffrey and others. A simple if far-fetched set of scientific assumptions allow the surface of the planet Jubal to be dominated by crystalline pinnacles which shatter and kill whenever people walk by. However, they can be placated by specially composed songs, so there is an Order of Tripsingers, scholarly and noble persons who wander the wilderness escorting caravans of travellers from citadel to citadel. This gives the author ample opportunity to sneak in weird rituals and strange formalities. Of course the planet is also the home of a much-in-demand drug crop, of course the administrators in the port city don't really understand what life up-country is like, and of course – you can plot this yourself, can't you? – there is a Planetary Exploitation Council which will cast out the industrialists if ever it becomes known that there is native sentient life on Jubal. Throw in some torture and rape to make us hate the rulers even more and allow us to feel good about their inevitable, final,

messy destruction, and the stage is set for a race to get proof of sentience to the PEC before the army starts demolishing the Crystal Presences with bombs.

Now all this is hardly original. Indeed, far from being struck down by that famous sense of wonder I was on familiar territory from about page 10, clocking in the double moons, the PEC, the local substitute for coffee and above all the Small Furry Animals Who Turn Out To Be Not Only Sentient But Also Telepathic And Brave Warriors To Boot, as they presented themselves for work in their turn. My problem is that I liked the book. It's not hard to see the attraction of *Dreams of Flesh and Sand* to my childish imagination. Real-life genuine computer experts mostly have all the style of a train-spotter, the grace of M. Hulot and the snake-like predatoriness of a well-fed frog. I should know—I am one. All this cyberpunk stuff feeds our egos, and allows us into a world where it's not who you know but what you know that gets you ahead, where the magic words and rituals that give one control over computer systems can be put to work on a larger stage. There's plenty in W. T. Quick's novel to feed the dreams of a system programmer with a leather jacket and a borrowed pair of mirrorshades. The Sheri Tepper is a much better book, but I find it hard to say why. It's very well done, and it's always nice to see the proud scattered in the imagination of their hearts, but the real reason is simply that it's well written. You learn something new about yourself every day.

(Ken Brown)

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## Fantasy, Etc.

**Sleeping in Flame** by Jonathan Carroll (Legend, £10.95) is an unusual and skilfully written book. At the beginning it reads like a thriller: an American scriptwriter, living in Vienna, rescues a woman from her violent lover. Then the weird, inexplicable incidents and the disturbing dreams increase until the hero finally confronts his father and the truth about himself. The slightly alien, middle-European setting adds to the credibility, but what is most impressive is the almost cinematic way in which the author moves the narrative between dreams, memories and reality. An original.

Also very well written is **The Influence** by Ramsey Campbell (Legend, £3.50). The family, their lives, the old house, all still dominated by the old woman after her death, are fully developed. The setting, North Wales and Liverpool, is described with an attention to detail which makes the supernatural events all the more dis-

turbing. This is particularly effective during the child, Rowan's, return journey from Wales, through an environment which shifts between the recognizably, reassuringly real and the nightmarish.

The publishers describe **Greenbriar Queen** by Sheila Gilluly (Headline, £6.95) as a "glorious fantasy epic." This is rather overstating the case. It is however an enjoyable story, full of Tolkienish echoes. A group of heroes, each representing a different race (men, dwarfs, etc.), follows the instructions of a wizard to find the lost heir to the kingdom. They travel through an enchanted forest realm, visit an island of wizards, and raise the kingdom against the usurper. There is little that is new but much that is enjoyable in this reworking of old themes.

**The Lady of Han-Gilen** by Judith Tarr (Pan £3.99) is a sequel to *The Hall of the Mountain King* which I reviewed last year. Mirain now leads conquering army in the Hundred Realms. Opposition is not only political but emotional (his childhood friend, Elian, is now grown to be a beautiful woman). His enemies use not only military but dark spiritual powers to stop him. The story is enlivened by the relationship between Mirain and Elian, although it is not as complex as the one between Vadin and Mirain in the previous novel.

**Dreams of Stone** by Jonathan Wylie (Corgi, £2.99) is the beginning of a new series. Unfortunately it is full of allusions to the previous "Servants of the Ark" trilogy, and without the benefit of an introductory recap. Magic has disappeared from the world and Gemma is determined to search for it. She is rescued from death in the desert and sets out to help her rescuer save the inhabitants of a beautiful valley from starvation and extinction.

In **The Spellkey** by Ann Downer (Futura, £2.99) there is another journey as a stableboy escorts a witch to a distant convent. There is a *Through-the-Looking-Glass* quality to the various lands they travel, though these are totally unrelated to each other, entry proving as simple as crossing a ditch or a stile. The events of the middle sections of the book are unconvincing because of this, but the disjointedness does not totally detract from the story of the young couple's flight from their ambiguous pursuers.

Unfortunately the flaws in **A Far Magic Shore** by Keith Timson (Futura, £4.99) do detract completely from any virtues it may have. Heavy, wordy prose prevents the characters from escaping from cardboard, and a banal metaphysics prevents the world itself from achieving reality. I had to force myself to finish it.

(Phyllis McDonald)

Dave Duncan is a new Scottish/Canadian writer, and **A Rose Red City**

(Legend, £2.99) seems to be his first novel. It is an unusually intelligent fantasy, skilfully weaving mythic and realistic elements; set in an otherworldly city, neither Heaven nor Hell, not quite Valhalla or Purgatory: in fact, as far as I am concerned, an original. The characters have more to them than usual, and if difficult situations end easily, and a few characters get off lightly, it is still an excellent start.

**Strange Bedfellows** by Herbert Burkholtz (Headline, £2.99) lives up to its title by mixing various elements, not very successfully. The sf element comes from paranormal powers possessed by "sensitives" who work for intelligence agencies. This is not handled in an sf manner: the powers are taken for granted, nothing new emerges about them, and they aren't like the elusive, unreliable abilities studied by parapsychologists. It works better as an oddball political thriller, with a cast including M. Gorbachov, weirdly nicknamed "Iron Mike."

Two more segments of Poul and Karen Anderson's "King of Ys" saga have emerged (both Grafton, £3.99). **Gallicenae** is a bridging sector, in which the background and characters take shape, but relatively little actually happens. **Dahut** (the third book) regains the level of the opening part: approaching greatness, though perhaps too familiar in its approach to mythic events. More could be made of the background of the last years of Rome; nevertheless the main story, about the decline of a mysterious secret city, fascinates even if the ending is predictable.

(Peter T. Garratt)

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## Non-Fiction

**The big Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Annual 1988** edited by Robert A. Collins and Robert Latham (Meckler, £37) is the first in what should prove to be a useful series of yearbooks. Despite the date so prominent in its title, it deals with sf and fantasy published in the year 1987. The fiction coverage consists of a 300-page sequence of short reviews, alphabetically arranged by subject author. There is also a substantial section devoted to non-fiction (70 pages) and a complete title index. There are surveys of the year by Neil Barron, Charles de Lint and others; lists of all award winners; and an "Author of the Year" profile, in this case an interview with Orson Scott Card. I'm sure I shall refer to my copy of this book frequently. However, be warned: the *Book Review Annual* is intended to replace the old *Fantasy Review*, which was a monthly magazine. In magazines the standard of reviewing can vary enormously, and that is also the case with this yearbook despite its acid-free paper and sewn binding. There are

good, intelligent reviews by Judith Catton (I particularly appreciated her comments on *Interzone: The 2nd Anthology* – thanks) and Brian Stableford among others, but not all of the words here are as worthy of permanence.

Another big one, available in Britain at last, is James Gunn's *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Viking, £17.95). I'm afraid I must make the obvious comparison here (Gunn's title invites it) and state that this book is not a patch on the original *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by Peter Nicholls and John Clute in 1979. It's a decade more up-to-date, and it has an entry on "Cyberpunk," but in every other way it's inferior to the older book. At a rough guess Gunn's volume contains just half the wordage of Nicholls/Clute, and an inordinate amount of its space is devoted to poor sf movies rather than the written stuff. Moreover, much of the text is so conventional in its judgments: to pick the inevitable example, see the completely naff entry on J. G. Ballard. I wouldn't go so far as to say you should avoid this book like the plague – it's worth having for the entries on the newer writers who have emerged in the past ten years – but when a second edition of the Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia* comes out, as I fervently hope will happen, you will be able to throw the Gunn away without a qualm.

**Bare Bones**, edited by Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller (NEL, £10.95), is a solid collection of interviews with Stephen King. These entertaining "conversations on terror" are taken from dozens of magazines, and were originally published between 1979 and 1987. Here they are arranged with care into seven thematic chapters. The publishers claim in their blurb that "most of the interviews have never been widely circulated before," which seems to be stretching the truth a little when you consider that the original sources include *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and the airline magazine *High Times*. The value of a book like this is that it brings all this widely scattered (and circulated) material together into one readable volume.

Finally, here's an item I'm unable to read, but I feel I ought to let you know of its existence. **Cyberpunk America** by Takayuki Tatsumi (Keiso Shobo, 1,700 yen or \$15) is the first book-length study of its subject, and it's completely written in Japanese. Basically a history of those guys in mirror-shades, it contains material on Shirley, Sterling, Gibson, Shiner, Delany and sundry others – including Ellen Datlow, fiction editor of *Omni*. There are photographs, a "Cyberpunk Bibliography" and even a few mentions of *Interzone*. It's 310 pages long, and I'd love to see an English translation of it.

(David Pringle)

## UK Books Received

### February-March 1989

*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. 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. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.*

Abbey, Lynn. **The Green Man: Unicorn and Dragon Volume II**. A Byron Preiss Visual Publication, illustrated by Robert Gould. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3212-1, 262pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the title "The Green Man" has been used before [Treece, 1966; Amis, 1969, etc.] but nobody seems to mind.) 23rd March.

Aldiss, Brian. **Cryptozoic!** "VGSF Classics 30." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04179-X, 187pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published as *An Age* in 1967.) 16th February.

Aron, Elaine. **Samraj**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-48799-7, 500pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Historical novel based on *The Mahabharata*; first edition [?]; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous trade paperback edition.) 1st June.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Relativity of Wrong**. "Essays on the solar system and beyond." Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-282632-8, 225pp, paperback, £5.95. (Popular science book, first published in the USA, 1988.) 9th March.

Attanasio, A. A. **Wyvern**. "A spellbinding saga of pirates and sorcery, love and revenge." Grafton, ISBN 0-246-12860-7, 422pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 9th March.

Banks, Iain. **The Bridge**. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-8303-6, 288pp, paperback, £4.99. (Psychological fantasy novel, first published in 1986; there was a Pan paperback edition in 1987.) March.

Benford, Gregory. **In Alien Flesh**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04489-6, 280pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1986.) 16th March.

Blaylock, James P. **The Disappearing Dwarf**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20173-4, 319pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983; sequel to *The Elfin Ship*.) 23rd February.

Bradbury, Ray. **The Toynbee Convector: Stories**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13430-5, 277pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1988; Bradbury's first "proper" new collection in a dozen years; it seems none of the 23 stories has been collected before.) 23rd March.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **The Colours of Space**. Hodder/Lighting, ISBN 0-340-49685-1, 186pp, paperback, £2.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1963.) 20th April.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **Ethan of Athos**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3127-3, 237pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 23rd February.

Cadigan, Pat. **Mindplayers**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04488-8, 276pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 16th March.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Ancient Images**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2414-7, 299pp,

hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) February.

Collins, Robert A., and Robert Latham, eds. **Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review Annual 1988**. Meckler, ISBN 0-88736-249-4, 486pp, hardcover, £37. (Criticism of the year in sf [1987]; first edition; "over 600 in-depth reviews by over 100 authors"; it has a 1988 copyright date, so presumably it was released in the USA a few months earlier.) 1st March.

Cook, Hugh. **The Wicked and the Witless**. "Chronicles of an Age in Darkness: Volume 5." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13439-2, 459pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel; there appears to be a near-simultaneous hardcover first edition from Colin Smythe [not seen].) 17th March.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **Demons and Dreams: The Best Fantasy and Horror 1**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3420-7, 482pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Fantasy: First Annual Collection*, 1988; massive volume of over 200,000 words; a simultaneous hardcover edition exists [not seen].) 13th April.

Delany, Samuel R. **Flight from Neveryon**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20272-2, 480pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1985; this edition appears to be revised.) 13th April.

Dick, Philip K. **Second Variety: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Two**. Introduction by Norman Spinrad. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04460-8, 395pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987; all 27 stories were written in an eight-month period in 1952-53.) 13th April.

Donaldson, Stephen. **Mordant's Need Volume Two: A Man Rides Through**. Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00617654-2, 661pp, paperback, £4.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 23rd February.

Duane, Diane. **The Wounded Sky**. "Star Trek 19." Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-097-9, 255pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1983) Late entry: January publication, received in February.

Eddings, David. **King of the Murgos: Book Two of the Mallorcon**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13018-4, 444pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 21st April.

Emerson, Ru. **On the Seas of Destiny: The Third Tale of Nedao**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3209-1, 280pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 20th April.

Engh, M. J. **A Wind from Bukhara**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20360-5, 365pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Arslan*, 1976.) 30th March.

Erickson, Steve. **Tours of the Black Clock**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-70000-6, 320pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Alternative-history novel, "a journey through another twentieth century"; first published in the USA, 1989.) 20th February.

Fairley, John, and Simon Welfare. **Arthur C. Clarke's Chronicles of the Strange and Mysterious**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06972-0, 189pp, paperback, £5.99. (Non-fiction about yetis, lake monsters, fairies and more; first published in 1987.) 13th April.

Friesner, Esther M. **Elf Defence**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3243-1, 234pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 20th April.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Difficulty with Dwarves**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3213-X, 250pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy

novel, first published in the USA, 1987; another "Ebenezum" book.) 23rd March.

Good, Timothy. **Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-up.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20361-3, 591pp, paperback, £5.99. (Ufology book which attempts to be the last word on its subject; first published in 1987; the publishers classify it as "non-fiction/cosmology"; hmm...) 23rd February.

Gunn, James, ed. **The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction.** Viking, ISBN 0-670-81041-X, 524pp, hardcover, £17.95. (Critical tome, first published in the USA, 1988.) 23rd March.

Harris, Thomas. **The Silence of the Lambs.** Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-31346-7, 295pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Psychological horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988; by the author of *Red Dragon*, it comes with advance raves from Clive Barker, Roald Dahl, James Herbert and others.) 24th April.

Harrison, Harry. **The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17396-0, 158pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novel, first published in 1973; third of the Slippery Jim diGriz series; first Bantam printing following at least seven Sphere Books printings.) 21st April.

Hawke, Simon. **The Khyber Connection.** "Time Wars Book Six." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3197-4, 195pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986; "Simon Hawke" is a pseudonym for Nicholas Yermakov.) 23rd February.

Herbert, Kathleen. **Bride of the Spear.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13331-0, 297pp, paperback, £3.50. (Historical novel, first published in 1988; sequel to *Queen of the Lightning and Ghost in the Sunlight*.) 21st April.

Hill, Douglas. **Blade of the Poisoner.** Pan/Piper, ISBN 0-330-30692-8, 192pp, paperback, £2.25. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1987.) 14th April.

Hill, Douglas. **Master of Fiends.** Pan/Piper, ISBN 0-330-30691-X, 184pp, paperback, £2.25. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1987; sequel to *Blade of the Poisoner*.) 14th April.

Hogan, James P. **Inherit the Stars: Book One of The Giants' Trilogy.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20487-3, 239pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977; this was Hogan's first novel.) 16th March.

Howard, Robert E. **Robert E. Howard's World of Heroes.** Edited by Mike Ashley. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-001-7, 424pp, paperback, £3.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition; all the stories were first published in magazines prior to the author's death in 1936.) 20th April.

Hoyle, Trevor. **Vail.** Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10039-X, 188pp, paperback, £3.99. (Near-future satirical novel, first published in 1984.) 16th February.

Hyde, Christopher. **Crestwood Heights.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-69942-3, 311pp, hardcover, £11.95. (High-tech thriller/mystery/horror novel, "secret underground laboratories... monstrous conspiracy of evil"; first published in the USA [?], 1988.) 28th March.

Hyde, Christopher. **Jericho Falls.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3191-5, 501pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/mystery/horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1986; the author has incorporated himself as "Ripping Yarns Inc.") 20th April.

Jones, Diana Wynne, ed. **Hidden Turnings.** "A Collection of Stories Through Space and Time." Methuen, ISBN 0-416-11272-2, 183pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; contains original stories by Douglas Hill, Garry Kilworth,

Tanith Lee, Terry Pratchett, Lisa Tuttle and the editor, among others.) 13th March.

Kerr, Katherine. **DawnsPELL: The Bristling Wood.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13530-1, 372pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; third in the "Deverry" series; a simultaneous trade paperback edition exists [not seen].) 20th April.

Kilworth, Garry. **Hunter's Moon: A Story of Foxes.** Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440301-1, 330pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Animal-fantasy novel, first edition.) 23rd March.

Koontz, Dean R. **Lightning.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3164-8, 439pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 6th March.

Lee, Tanith. **Women as Demons: The Male Perception of Women Through Space and Time.** Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4132-8, 272pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition.) 9th March.

Lem, Stanislaw. **Fiasco.** Translated from the Polish by Michael Kandel. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4226-7, 322pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in Poland [?], 1986.) March.

Linaweaver, Brad. **Moon of Ice.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20359-1, 319pp, paperback, £3.99. (Alternative-history sf novel about a Nazi-dominated world; first published in the USA, 1988.) 23rd February.

Lorrah, Jean. **Survivors.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation 4." Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-095-2, 253pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987-?) Late entry: January publication, received in February.

McCallum, Chriss. **How to Write for Publication.** Northcote House, ISBN 0-7463-0538-9, 188pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Authors' guide, first edition; not specifically concerned with sf and fantasy writing, it nevertheless contains references to Interzone, the British Fantasy Society, etc.) 9th February.

McCammon, Robert R. **Blue World and Other Stories.** Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13455-0, 306pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 6th April.

McQuay, Mike. **Isaac Asimov's Robot City Book Two: Suspicion.** A Byron Preiss Visual Publication, illustrated by Paul Rivoche. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8288-9, 177pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) March.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Bull and the Spear: Volume the Fourth of the Books of Corum.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20717-1, 158pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1973; fourth Grafton printing.) 30th March.

Moorcock, Michael. **The King of the Swords.** "The Third Book of Corum." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20716-3, 142pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1971; ninth Grafton printing.) 30th March.

Murphy, Gloria. **Nightshade.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13277-2, 240pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 21st April.

Nighbert, David F. **Timelapse.** "Reminiscent of the best work of Poul Anderson and A. E. van Vogt." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3254-7, 294pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1984; a first novel.) 23rd March.

Norton, Andre, and others. **Tales of the Witch World.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-30674-X,

343pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1987; Norton is not actually credited as editor; contains original stories set in the "Witch World" by Norton, Robert Bloch [!] and about 15 fairly obscure American fantasy authors.) 14th April.

Novak, Kate, and Jeff Grubb. **Azure Bonds.** "Forgotten Realms Fantasy Adventure." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012130-7, 380pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 30th March.

Randles, Jenny. **Abduction: Scientific Exploration of Alleged Kidnaps by Alien Beings.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3244-, 240pp, paperback, £2.99. (Non-fiction critique of UFO phenomena, first published in 1988.) 23rd March.

Rhodes, Daniel. **Adversary.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-50195-7, 354pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a sequel to *Next, After Lucifer*.) 20th April.

Rhodes, Daniel. **Next, After Lucifer.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-49479-9, 258pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it's dedicated to the memory of M. R. James.) 30th March.

Rosenberg, Joel. **The Heir Apparent: Book Four of Guardians of the Flame.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20131-9, 348pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 30th March.

Rubinstein, Gillian. **Space Demons.** Methuen/Magnet, ISBN 0-416-13792-X, 213pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in Australia in 1986.) 6th April.

Rucker, Rudy. **Wetware.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-49476-4, 183pp, paperback, £2.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 30th March.

Russ, Joanna. **The Hidden Side of the Moon: Stories.** Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4185-9, 229pp, paperback, £4.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1988.) 9th March.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Brother Berserker.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04449-7, 233pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Brother Assassin*, 1969.) 16th February.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Second Book of Lost Swords: Sightblinder's Story.** Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4225-9, 248pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) March.

Shaw, Bob. **Dark Night in Toyland.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04448-9, 190pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf and fantasy collection, first edition; contains two stories from *Interzone* plus thirteen others from *Amazing*, *Asimov's*, *Galaxy*, *F&SF*, etc.) 16th March.

Silverberg, Robert. **Dying Inside.** "VGSF Classics 31." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04437-3, 188pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1972.) 16th March.

Smith, Cordwainer. **The Instrumentality of Mankind.** Introduction by Frederik Pohl. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04459-4, 238pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1979; this is probably the first world hardcover edition.) 2nd March.

Spinrad, Norman. **The Men in the Jungle.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20420-2, 316pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1967.) 13th April.

Staig, Laurence. **Dark Toys and Consumer Goods: Tales of a Consumer Society.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-47561-5, 151pp, hardcover, £6.95. (Juvenile sf/fantasy col-

lection, first edition; Ramsey Campbell is mentioned in the acknowledgments, and it's dedicated to Ray Bradbury.) 28th April.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Anne Inez McCaffrey: A Working Bibliography**. 3rd edition. Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-10-6, 30pp, paperback, £1.50. (Bibliography; the first edition was published in 1984.) April.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Frederik Pohl: A Working Bibliography**. Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-09-2, 104pp, paperback, £3.75. (Bibliography, first edition; recommended — one of the fullest and fattest yet from this small press.) March.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Philip Kindred Dick: A Working Bibliography**. 2nd edition. Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-08-4, 75pp, paperback, £3. (Bibliography; the first edition was published in 1986.) February.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Theodore Sturgeon: A Working Bibliography**. Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-07-6, 66pp, paperback, £2.75. (Bibliography, first edition.) Late entry: January publication received in February.

Swanwick, Michael. **In the Drift**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3431-2, 214pp, trade paperback, £4.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; Swanwick's first novel; a simultaneous hardcover edition exists [not seen].) 13th April.

Taylor, Roger. **The Fall of Fyorlund: The Second Chronicle of Hawklan**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3118-4, 467pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 23rd February.

Thomas, Roy. **The Dragonlance Saga: Book Three**. Illustrated by Tony DeZuniga. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011857-8, 74pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (Graphic novel based on the fantasies of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; first published in the USA, 1988.) 23rd February.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Annotated Hobbit**. Introduction and notes by Douglas A. Anderson. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440337-2, 336pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Scholarly large-format edition of the classic children's fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1988.) 23rd March.

Tolstoy, Nikolai. **The Coming of the King**. "The First Book of Merlin." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13221-7, 848pp, paperback, £4.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in 1988.) 17th March.

Underwood, Tim, and Chuck Miller, eds. **Bare Bones: Conversations on Terror with Stephen King**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-49992-8, 217pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Interview collection, first published in the USA, 1988.) March.

Vance, Jack. **Araminta Station: The Cadwal Chronicles Book One**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-49733-X, 480pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 30th March.

Watson, Ian. **Salvage Rites and Other Stories**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04447-0, 223pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf collection, first edition; two stories from *Interzone*, three from Asimov's, two from *F & SF*, etc., etc.) 16th February.

Webster, Ken. **The Vertical Plane**. "The Mystery of the Daddleson Messages." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20476-8, 351pp, paperback, £3.99. (Occult "non-fiction" about communication through time; first edition.) 30th March.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Doom of the Darkword: The Darkword Trilogy Volume Two**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17535-1, 383pp, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 17th March.

Westall, Robert. **The Cats of Seroster**. Pan/Piper, ISBN 0-330-29239-0, 278pp, paperback, £2.25. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1984.) 14th April.

Wilson, Colin, with Damon Wilson. **The Encyclopedia of Unsolved Mysteries**. Blandford, ISBN 0-7137-2076-X, 318pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Reference book, with entries ranging from Atlantis to Velikovsky, first published in 1987.) Late entry: January publication received in March.

Womack, Jack. **Terraplaine**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440302-X, 227pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a second novel by the author of *Ambient*, it has a jacket commendation from William Gibson.) 23rd March.

Wurts, Janny. **Stormwarden**. "Book One of the Cycle of Fire." Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13414-3, 378pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 23rd March.

## Magazines Received January-March 1989

The following is a list of all sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by *Interzone* during the period specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us very late if they have been posted seamail.)

**Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series)** no. 17-18, November 1988-January 1989. 44pp. Eds. Jenny and Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau and Janeen Webb, c/o Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294K, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Double issue of this normally bimonthly critical fanzine. Contributors: Cherry Wilder, George Turner, Douglas Barbour, Sheila Finch, etc. \$15 Australian per annum, inland; £10 (seamail) or £15 (airmail), UK (the latter payable to Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, London, SW1V 2ER).

**Back Brain Recluse** no. 12, undated [February 1989]. 55pp. Ed. Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3LA. Irregular semi-professional fiction magazine. Illustrated, A5 format. Contributors: Steve Sneyd, D. F. Lewis, Don Webb, Michael Cobley, etc. £4.50 for four issues, UK; £5.40, Europe; \$14 USA.

**Critical Wave** no. 9, undated [March 1989]. 20pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Irregular (allegedly bimonthly) news fanzine, now appearing in new, improved format — which means it has risen to about the production standard of the BSFA's *Matrix*. This issue features a brief interview with Raymond E. Feist, plus letters from Brian Aldiss, Bruce Sterling, etc. Contains useful information and gossip, but it still has a long way to go if it wishes to become the UK equivalent of *Locus*. Above all it needs greater frequency and regularity. £5 for six issues, UK; \$10 USA.

**Dagon** no. 24, January-March 1989. 60pp. Ed. Carl T. Ford, 11 Warwick Rd., Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 6SW. Well-produced quarterly fanzine devoted to dark fantasy. Illustrated, A5 format. Contributors: Randy M. Wadkins, Peter F. Jeffrey, Will Murray,

etc. £7 for six issues, inland; \$20 (seamail) or \$30 (airmail), USA.

**Fear** no. 5, March-April 1989. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, c/o Newsfield Publications, PO Box 20, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Glossy bimonthly fantasy-and-horror magazine (with the emphasis firmly on horror). Only two pieces of fiction in this issue, plus numerous interviews and movie-related articles. Contributors: Ramsey Campbell, Steve Rasnic Tem, Kim Newman, etc. £2.50 per issue. Note: subscription rates do not appear to be shown; perhaps they're trying to discourage subs?

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 336, January 1989. 80pp. "13-time Hugo winner." Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine of fully professional status (despite the fact that it persistently wins the "semi-prozine" Hugo). Full-colour cover, heavy with advertising inserts. Not highly rated for its criticism, it is nevertheless indispensable for news and reference. Contributors: Richard Curtis, Fritz Leiber, Frank M. Robinson, Faren Miller, Dan Chow, etc. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, UK and Europe. Note: in UK enquire of agents Fantast (Medway) Ltd., PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU.

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 337, February 1989. 68pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. This issue contains "Recommended Reading" for 1988, and useful book, magazine and cinema summaries for the year. Contributors: Richard Curtis, Fritz Leiber, Frank M. Robinson, Faren Miller, Carolyn Cushman, etc. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, UK and Europe.

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 338, March 1989. 68pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. Contributors: Richard Curtis, Fritz Leiber, Frank M. Robinson, Tom Whitmore, Mark Kelly, etc. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamail or \$50 airmail, UK and Europe.

**New Pathways into SF and Fantasy** no. 13, Winter 1988-89. 48pp. Ed. Michael G. Adkisson, MGA Services, PO Box 863994, Plano, TX 75086-3994, USA. Semi-professional quarterly fiction magazine of good quality. Contributors: Paul Di Filippo, Matt Howarth, Don Webb, Scott Edelman, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, etc. \$10 per annum, USA and Canada; \$15, UK and Europe.

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 5, January 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell and Susan Palwick, c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Impressive new monthly review magazine, professionally produced though sans illustrations of any kind. Contributors: Ursula K. Le Guin, Gwyneth Jones, Michael Swanwick, L. W. Currey, etc. \$24, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 6, February 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell and Susan Palwick, c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly review magazine. Contributors: Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Paul Preuss, etc. \$24, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 7, March 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell and Susan Palwick, c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly review magazine. Contributors: Brian Stableford, Gwyneth Jones, Richard Lupoff, etc. \$24, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**Science Fiction Chronicle** no. 113, February 1989. 46pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine, the East Coast rival to the West Coast *Locus* (some would say, though, that it's the "poor man's *Locus*"). Full-colour cover, with much of the same advertising that *Locus* carries. Has "Market Reports" of use to writers. Contributors: Ed Naha, Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Don D'Amassa, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

**Science Fiction Chronicle** no. 114, March 1989. 46pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. Contributors: Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Don D'Amassa, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

**Science Fiction Guide** no. 13, February 1989. 20pp. Ed. Charles Platt, 594 Broadway (Room 1208), New York, NY 10012, USA. Quarterly (approx.) fanzine of sf comment and scandal. Contributors: Marc Laidlaw, Paul Di Filippo, Gregory Feeley, etc. \$1.50 per issue, USA and Canada; \$2.50 overseas. Note: although Charles has moved to California, his old New York address remains valid for this fanzine.

**Science-Fiction Studies** no. 47, March 1989. 121pp. Eds. Robert M. Philmus and Charles Elkins, c/o Arts Building, McGill University, 853 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2T6, Canada. Thrice-yearly critical journal. The leading heavyweight periodical in its field. Contributors: George E. Slusser, Rafaël Nudelman, Vladimir Gakov, etc. \$12.50 per annum, USA; \$14.50 overseas (payable to "SFS Publications").

**Soliton** no. 1, undated (January 1989?). 20pp. Eds. Charles Stross and Simon Ings, 10 Marlowe Court, Lymer Ave., London SE19 1LP. Much-delayed new critical fanzine, poorly produced (word-processor printout). Contributors: Joseph Weizenbaum, Gwyneth Jones, Dave Langford, etc. Note: contains some good text, but is a disappointment in every other respect. No price or subscription rates shown, so it seems unlikely to last.

**Thrust: SF & Fantasy Review** no. 32, Winter 1989. 32pp. Ed. D. Douglas Fratz, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, MD 20877, USA. Quarterly review magazine of semi-professional status. Contributors: David Bischoff, John Shirley, Richard E. Geis, Darrell Schweitzer, Gregory Benford, Michael Bishop, etc. \$8 per annum, USA; \$10 overseas (payable to "Thrust Publications").

**2AM Magazine** no. 11, Spring 1989. 66pp. Ed. Gretta M. Anderson, PO Box 6754, Rockford, IL 61125-1754, USA. Quarterly semi-professional magazine of horror, fantasy and sf. Illustrated, nicely produced. Contributors: Leonard Carpenter, Scott Edelman, J. N. Williamson, etc. \$19 per annum, USA; \$23 overseas.

**Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association** no. 148, February-March 1989. 24pp. Ed. David V. Barrett, 23 Oakfield Rd., Croydon, Surrey CR0 2UD. Bimonthly critical fanzine produced for members of the British SF Assoc. Contributors: K. V. Bailey, Edward James, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Porter, L. J. Hurst, etc. Membership of the BSFA: £10 per annum, inland; \$20 (seamail), \$35 (airmail), USA (write to Joanne Raine, Membership Secretary, 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW). Note: this issue of *Vector* came with *Matrix* no. 80, a 20pp newsletter (ed. Maureen Porter), and *Paperback Inferno* no. 76, a 16pp review of sf/fantasy paperbacks (ed. Andy Sawyer).

**Editor's note:** we had hoped to be able to list the first issue of *The Gate*, the new British sf and fantasy quarterly. Unfortunately, we had not received a copy by the end of March 1989. However, an advance copy was shown around at the *Eastercon in Jersey*: it is tiny in format (approximately the same size as the old "Compact" *New Worlds* of the mid-1960s), with a full-colour cover and no interior illustrations. It contains several blank pages, along with what looks like a goodish line-up of fiction by Bayley, Stableford, etc. We wait with interest to see whether this long-awaited new magazine will live.

# Inter-action

Dear Editors:

In your editorial survey of the current magazine scene (*IZ 27*), you manage to slight no less than four professional magazines:

The opinion that *Amazing* is always at the bottom is just an opinion. True, the circulation remains low because the publisher will not make the necessary direct-mail promotional campaigns, but newstand sales are actually as good for *Amazing* as for, say, *Asimov's*. And the magazine maintains a good level of quality and pays competitive rates.

*Aboriginal SF* is a fully professional magazine and has been for some time. It has a circulation around 18,000. Its payment rates are competitive.

*Weird Tales* also has a professional circulation – about 14,000 for the first issue – and also pays good professional rates.

*The Horror Show* reportedly has a print-run of 50,000, and it certainly has extensive newstand distribution. I don't know, but I would guess its circulation in the 10-15,000 range. This one doesn't pay as much as the other professional magazines, but still maintains a good standard.

There are more actual semi-professional magazines than one can keep track of: *Nocturne*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine* (which may soon attain professional status), *Grue*, *Haunted*, *Critical Mass*, etc. Interestingly, most of the real grassroots activity seems to be in the horror end of the spectrum.

In any case, my advice to new British writers is that for science fiction their best bets are *Amazing* and *Aboriginal*, for fantasy, *MZB's*, *Weird Tales*, and

(to a much lesser extent) *Amazing* again, for horror, *The Horror Show*. Beyond that, there are anthologies, semi-prozines, etc. etc. I've never known an editor who wasn't receptive to foreign writers. The British writer's only disadvantages are higher postage costs and longer waits for replies.

**Darrell Schweitzer**  
Strafford, PA

Dear Editors:

Nick Lowe asks in his *IZ 27* film column if anyone has "actually seen" *Slave Girls From Beyond Infinity*. Well, I have. The film was released in the US in late 1987 on a double bill with *Creepozoids* for the delectation of inner-city audiences across America.

A remake of *The Most Dangerous Game*, *Slave Girls From Beyond Infinity* features amply-endowed slave girls being chased by a brutal warlord on a prison planet. The production values are low, but the film does work if viewed in the proper milieu – a decaying theatre in an American ghetto, where most of the patron enjoy smoking marijuana, playing stereos loudly, and accompanying the film with loudly-voiced critical comments ("God damn! Look at that mutha swingin' the axe!" etc.) I doubt if the film would work as a video.

**Martin Morse Wooster**  
Silver Spring, Maryland

Dear Editors:

Victor Koman, and presumably by implication the tiresomely provocative Charles Platt (*IZ 28*), makes the fairly elementary, but regrettably common, error of assuming all people in authority are not human. The ultimate end-point of the libertarian principle is that morally speaking you can kill another person. This, of course, is silly. It is ironic that the nonaggression principle itself can logically be used to repudiate the notion of killing others. Only in America.

Libertarians are basically narcissistic people who can't bear their precious self-images to be knocked by real society (which is irreconcilable with anarchy). Hence the accent on heroism, personal liberty, and particularly vengeance, something frequently connected with narcissism. Nor was I surprised to see Mr Koman dump the origin of libertarianism on us Brits, thereby giving it some kind of incontrovertible moral and intellectual foundation. Lastly, Mr Koman entirely destroys the libertarian principle by admitting that, in his ideal world, there would be order, tradition, and codes of conduct – in other words, authority. Perhaps sense doesn't live on the West



Coast, although Charles Platt seems to. I suspect this is not a coincidence.

**Steve Palmer**  
Egham, Surrey

Dear Editors:

In *IZ* 28 Ken Brown has made some misleading comments about my novel *Free Zone*. He describes the book as a "deliberate parody." It is in fact a pastiche. He "imagines" me saying that my book is "meant to be bad." He is wrong, he has no right to suggest such a thing, and in so doing he invalidates his credentials as a critic. He quotes the book as claiming to contain "almost all the major themes that have ever occurred in sf," which is true yet inaccurate – the quote should be "... themes that have ever been used in science fiction." Themes don't spontaneously "occur"; if I were as sloppy a writer as Brown, I might say they did, but I'm not, and I didn't, and I don't like being misquoted. He protests that it is almost impossible to follow the plot, but this seems an indictment of his own reading abilities, since I supplied a chart literally mapping the plot for the reader. Lastly, he states that "references to other books, to films, to whatever was supposed to have happened in the sixties, occur on almost every page." I cannot, myself, find any reference to any specific book or film on any page, and the 1960s are only mentioned indirectly by a couple of characters alluding to various historical periods. I challenge Brown to name the pages where references supposedly occur.

He has every right to say he likes Rudy Rucker's work more than mine, but I suspect he makes this comparison only because I mentioned Rucker myself in my acknowledgements. Rucker doesn't write pastiches – or "deliberate parodies," for that matter – so the comparison is misleading, especially since Rucker himself described *Free Zone* as "a succulent sushi-roll of a book. I couldn't put it down." This quote appears on the back cover.

Brown's comments on other books are equally inane. He criticizes *Double Planet*, for example, for inconsistently giving the weight of a comet as "a trillion tons" and "10 to the power of 18 tons." But a British trillion is, in fact, 10 to the power of 18.

**Charles Platt**  
Los Angeles

Dear Editors:

Being new to the fiction business, we expected *Double Planet* to get a few brickbats from reviewers who might not like our plotting and character development – but we are deeply wounded by Ken Brown's suggestion that we can't do our astronomical sums.

Sure, the comet in *Double Planet* is a little on the large side – our excuse is the requirements of plot and so on. But it is not impossibly large. At least one object about a thousand kilometres across is known to orbit beyond Jupiter. That's about  $10^{24}$  cubic centimetres of ice, which does indeed check in at around  $10^{18}$  tonnes. One of the key elements in our story involves the care taken to brake this behemoth, using a close flyby of the Earth to slow it and dump it fairly gently on the Moon. It isn't mass that matters here, but momentum. (Also, on the way, a few bits get lost, so its mass is less than we started with anyway). In round terms, the mass of the Moon is about 100 times the residual mass of the impacting (and slow moving) comet nucleus. I weigh about 82 kilos, and I've just carried out a little experiment in which a colleague tossed a 2 kilo bag of sugar to me. In relative terms, this has twice the impact of the comet in *Double Planet* with the Moon. I am able to report that I have not been "splattered all over the Solar System." Mind you, the sugar made a hell of a mess in the kitchen.

**Dr John Gribbin**  
Piddinghoe, E. Sussex

Dear Editors:

*IZ* 28 was yet another excellent issue, and I agree completely with Keith Brooke: the American majors just don't measure up to *IZ*'s consistent quality. The Ian Miller cover was the best yet. Lyle Hopwood's "The Outside Door" was marvellous – Luis Borges goes cyberpunk? Aldiss meets Varley in Delany's basement? – and much more original than her work in *Back Brain Recluse* had led me to expect. I can't say that I care for the work of S.M. Baxter, though. Stableford's formulae show through rather too starkly in Baxter's "The Jonah Man," a story which merely reminded me why I quit reading Larry Niven.

Rucker and Laidlaw, now there's a combination! As if California and Chaos Theory weren't brain-damaging enough, these guys have the reader

giggling continuously, spinning the magazine in order to make sense of this Moebius-story. Read "Chaos Surfari" on the bus and someone will call an ambulance for you. Unfortunately, the best thing about William King's "Visiting the Dead" was Fegredo's illustrations (my favourite among your artists, I would say). The story suffered from a case of clumsy-expository-dialogue syndrome. A shame, since the social extrapolation and "devil's advocate" narrator were interesting.

**Glenn Grant**  
Montreal

Dear Editors:

Comments on issue 28: best story was King's "Visiting the Dead" (though not as good as the previous issue's Korean spot-the-alien classic). Countless stories have told me Our way is right, Their way is wrong; this time, for the first time, I've been left wondering.

The Baxter and the Campbell were good pieces of pure entertainment; Lyle Hopwood proved, in "The Outside Door," that there's life yet in "big building" stories, and I think I got all the cosmological jokes. Kim Newman's "Twitch Technicolor," obviously intended to be predictable and ludicrous, was fun, but comparing it with his "Dreamers" was disconcertingly like comparing *Aliens* with *Alien*.

Which leaves "Chaos Surfari." Heaven knows, I tried to like it. I love Gleick, I love Lovecraft, and I even played "Kill Surf City" and "Surfin' USA" (Mary Chain cover version) while reading it, all to no avail. I hated it. I'm sick and tired of "loser culture" stories, all about youths who swear a lot and think they're charismatic and can't tell the difference between philosophy and drugs. They just about work in Gibson stories, but outside they're as hackneyed as Clarke's chummy bland scientists.

Other things: the Stableford article was excellent, and I'll be getting his book. Film review a bit over the top, but interesting. Editorial makes me feel like a real person and valued reader in a way that Asimov has never been able to do in his magazine (not even when he was addressing me specifically in reply to a letter). The book reviews were excellent, especially Ken Brown who manages to be genuinely funny.

**Paul Beardsley**  
Havant

Continued from page 4

to mention L. Ron Hubbard, E. E. "Doc" Smith, E. C. Tubb and A. E. van Vogt). *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Some outstandingly good writers – Michael Bishop, Thomas M. Disch, M. John Harrison, John Sladek, etc. – scored very few points. And it's a pity that certain of our other regular *Interzone* contributors, such as Garry Kilworth or Brian Stableford, couldn't make a better showing. Incidentally, none of the editors or staff of *Interzone* was allowed to vote, so we didn't bias the results.

## THE CLARKE AWARD

The winner of the 1989 Arthur C. Clarke Award, for the best new sf novel published in Britain in the preceding year, is **Rachel Pollack** for her book *Unquenchable Fire* (Century/Legend). The Clarke Award is decided by a panel of experts appointed by the Science Fiction Foundation, the British Science Fiction Association and the International Science Policy Foundation. The announcement was made by awards chairman **Maxim Jakubowski** at a meeting in the Groucho Club, London, on the evening of 15th March. The award carries £1,000 prize money, kindly donated by Arthur Clarke. The immediate runners-up were **Brian Stableford** for his *The Empire of Fear* (Simon & Schuster) and **Richard Grant** for his *Rumours of Spring* (Bantam). The remaining authors on the shortlist were Michael Bishop, Gwyneth Jones, Lucius Shepard and Ian Watson.

We'd like to congratulate Rachel Pollack on a well-deserved win. In *Interzone* 26 our reviewer Paul McAuley described *Unquenchable Fire* as "wonderful, funny, disturbing and, by God, original." And I'm pleased to say that we have in hand a new story by Rachel Pollack which is set against the same background as her winning novel. "The Bead Woman" will appear as one of three previously-unpublished stories in *Interzone: The 4th Anthology* (forthcoming from Simon & Schuster in August 1989). The other original pieces due to appear alongside it are **S. M. Baxter's** best space story to date, "The Quagma Datum," and a powerful sf/horror tale by a completely new British writer, **Richard Calder's** "Toxine." Watch out for these three strong stories.

You may ask why we are placing original pieces of fiction in our latest anthology rather than bringing them first to the readers of the magazine. The answer is simply that we have too much good material in hand. Recent acquisitions include new stories by **Barrington Bayley**, **David Brin**, **Ian McDonald**, **Kim Newman** and **Nicholas Royle**, plus several talented writers you are less likely to have

heard of – and all those are in addition to the stories by **S. M. Baxter**, **Eric Brown**, **Gwyneth Jones** and others which are slated to appear in our next issue, number 31. More and more worthwhile material comes through *Interzone's* letterbox.

## IZ WRITERS MAKE GOOD

The 1989 **Philip K. Dick Award**, for the best paperback original sf book published in America in the preceding year, has been won jointly by **Paul J. McAuley** for his novel *Four Hundred Billion Stars* and **Rudy Rucker** for his *Wetware*. Rucker was in fact the first winner of this award, back in 1983, for his earlier novel in the same sequence, *Software*; and we published a zany story by him, "Chaos Surfari," in *IZ* 28. But well done, Paul McAuley! Naturally I'm delighted that a British author, and one who has published many times in *Interzone*, should be this year's joint winner.

Still on the subject of awards, we've just been informed that *Interzone* has been nominated for a **Hugo Award** for the fourth year running. We're in the category headed "Best Semi-Professional Magazine." Apparently magazines are eligible for this award if their print-runs average less than 10,000 copies during the relevant year. Since the year in question is 1988, and we didn't boost our print-run past the 10,000 mark until August of that year, we have managed to scrape onto the ballot for what may be the last time. The winner will be decided by the members of "Noreascon Three," the 47th World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Boston, Massachusetts, at the beginning of September this year. If you're going to that convention please don't forget to vote.

## YEAR'S BEST FANTASY

The co-editor of the big new *Year's Best Fantasy* anthology (published in Britain by Century/Legend as *Demons and Dreams*), Ellen Datlow, has selected two *IZ* stories, **Greg Egan's** "Scatter My Ashes" and **Ian Watson's** "Lost Bodies", for her 1989 volume (neither of these will appear in *Interzone: The 4th Anthology*, as it happens, so we're happy). Ellen says that she's now searching for stories, poems and graphic novels from all branches of horror – "from supernatural to psychological to sf techno-horror" – for the 1990 volume. Her partner, **Terri Windling**, is looking for fantasy and "magic realism," including young adult material. They have been experiencing difficulty in getting hold of British books and magazines: eager authors or publishers of likely material are hereby alerted. Send anything which you wish to be considered (pro-

vided it has a 1989 first-publication date) to Ellen Datlow, c/o *Omni Magazine*, 1965 Broadway, New York, NY 10023, USA (print "YEAR'S BEST HORROR" on the envelope) or to Terri Windling, Endicott Studio, 63 Endicott St., Boston, MA 02113, USA ("YEAR'S BEST FANTASY"). End of exhortation.

## MAGAZINE DEATHS

A couple more American sf/fantasy magazines have gone the way of all flesh. **Twilight Zone**, founded in 1981, is ceasing publication with its June 1989 issue. Apparently this was a hard-nosed business decision by its corporate owners: it seems the magazine wasn't actually losing money – it just wasn't making enough. Also deceased is the quarterly **Argos F & SF** after just three or four issues. R.I.P.

(David Pringle)

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Note: our "Coming Next Issue" announcement appears on page 32.

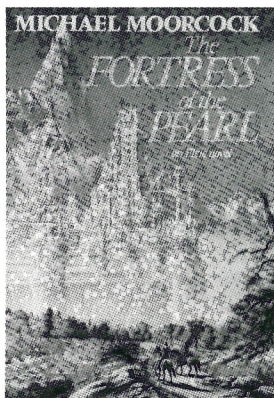
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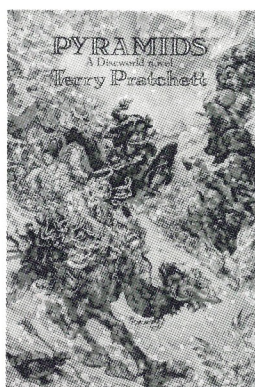
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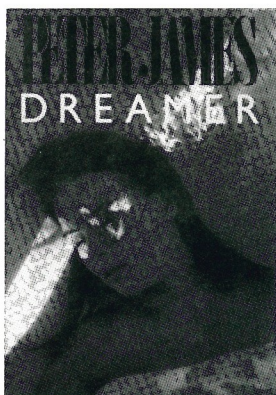
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