interzone/41

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

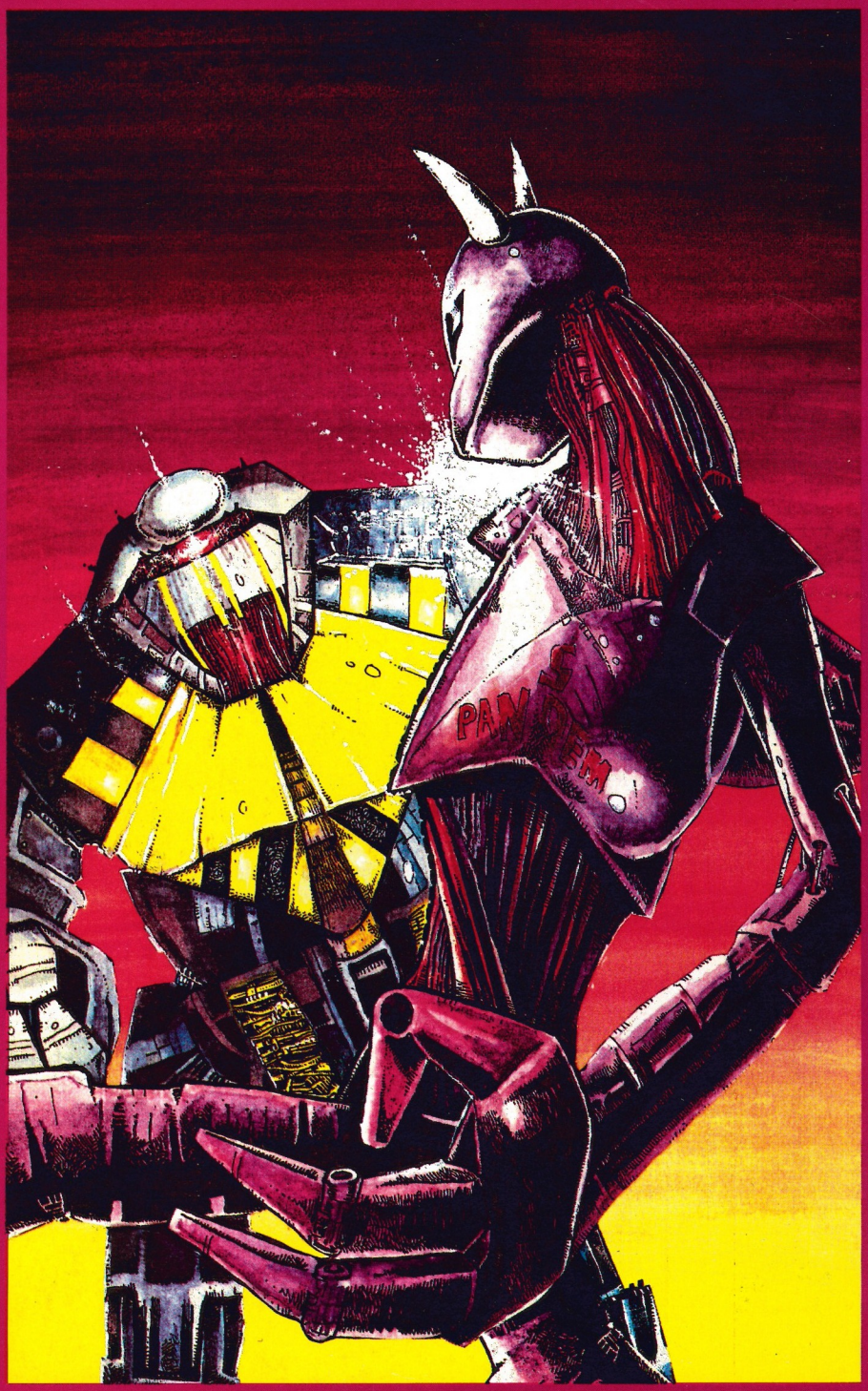
NOVEMBER 1990

New stories by

Eric Brown
Greg Egan
Paul McAuley
Nicholas Royle
and others

David Brin interviewed

Bruce Sterling on Cyberspace



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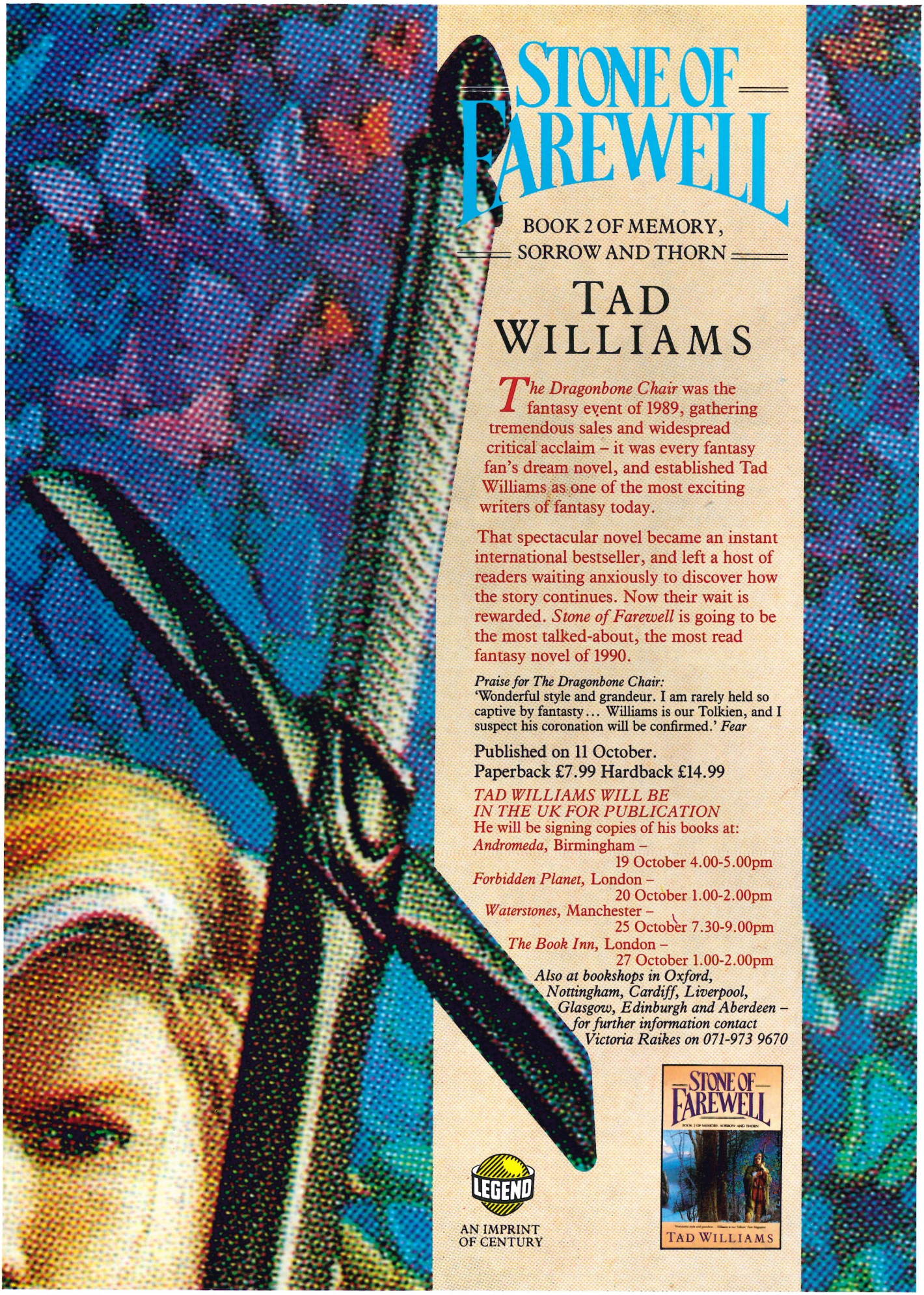

STONE OF FAREWELL

BOOK 2 OF MEMORY, SORROW AND THORN

TAD WILLIAMS

The Dragonbone Chair was the fantasy event of 1989, gathering tremendous sales and widespread critical acclaim – it was every fantasy fan's dream novel, and established Tad Williams as one of the most exciting writers of fantasy today.

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Praise for The Dragonbone Chair:
'Wonderful style and grandeur. I am rarely held so captive by fantasty… Williams is our Tolkien, and I suspect his coronation will be confirmed.' *Fear*

Published on 11 October.
Paperback £7.99 Hardback £14.99

TAD WILLIAMS WILL BE IN THE UK FOR PUBLICATION
He will be signing copies of his books at:
Andromeda, Birmingham –
19 October 4.00-5.00pm
Forbidden Planet, London –
20 October 1.00-2.00pm
Waterstones, Manchester –
25 October 7.30-9.00pm
The Book Inn, London –
27 October 1.00-2.00pm
Also at bookshops in Oxford, Nottingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen – for further information contact Victoria Raikes on 071-973 9670

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AN IMPRINT OF CENTURY

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Back-issues are available at £2.30 each in the UK (£2.50 each overseas), postage included. (US dollar price: $4 surface mail or $5 air mail.) All issues are still in print *except* numbers 1, 5, 7, 16 and 17. Order them from address above.

Submissions: stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range, should be sent singly and each one *must* be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. *We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage.* No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Submissions should be sent to *either* of the following addresses: *Lee Montgomerie*, 53 Riviera Gardens, Leeds LS7 3DW
David Pringle, 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU

interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 41 **November 1990**

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Interface
David Pringle

Interzone held its first ever "publishing party" at the Groucho Club, Soho, on Thursday 12th July 1990. The purpose was to celebrate the appearance of our special **Brian Aldiss** issue (number 38) and, belatedly, to mark our move from bimonthly to monthly publication. Almost 200 people attended, most of them writers, artists, editors and journalists.

The party was generously co-hosted by **Frank Hatherley** of Avernus Creative Media, and it included a surprise element. Our Guest of Honour, Brian Aldiss, believed he was attending a function which was purely occasioned by the *Interzone* special issue; in fact, it was to turn into his slightly premature 65th birthday party. Frank Hatherley announced the appearance of a special Avernus book, *A is for Brian*, edited in secret by Frank with assistance from **Margaret Aldiss** and **Malcolm Edwards**, and he presented it to Brian with the pronouncement, "Brian Aldiss – this is your book!" He then introduced many of the distinguished contributors, who had been hiding from Brian's view in another room. They included authors **Sir Kingsley Amis, Harry Harrison, Doris Lessing, Sam Lundwall, Kit Reed** and **David Wingrove**, as well as numerous members of the Aldiss family and their friends. Oh, and actors **Ken Campbell** and **Petronilla Whitfield**, plus *Locus* editor **Charles N. Brown** (the last-named had flown from California).

QUITE A PARTY!

It was a stellar occasion. Others who attended the party included sf-and-fantasy authors almost too numerous to mention. Among them were: Stephen Baxter, Susan Beetlestone, Keith Brooke, John Brosnan, John Brunner, Angela Carter, Storm Constantine, Matthew Dickens, Christopher Evans, Neil Ferguson, David Garnett, Peter Garratt, Mary Gentle, Colin Greenland, John Gribbin, Douglas Hill, Robert Holdstock, Ian Lee, Ian R. McLeod, Michael Moorcock, Kim Newman, Terry Pratchett, Christopher Priest, Alastair Reynolds, Nicholas Royle, Geoff Ryman, Brian Stableford, Alex Stewart and Lisa Tuttle – as well as such *IZ* non-fiction contributors as David Barrett, Ken Brown, John Clute, Wendy Bradley, Paul Brazier, Neil Jones, Roz Kaveney, Nick Lowe, Neil McIntosh and Stan Nicholls; and artists such as Jim Burns, Les Edwards, Mike Hadley, Barbara Hills, Tina Horner, Ian Miller, Ian Sanderson and SMS. Our thanks to them all for making it such a lively, if crowded, event.

BALLARD WINS CHANDLER AWARD

A few authors were unable to come to our party because of prior holiday commitments, among them **J. G. Ballard, Iain Banks** and **Richard Cowper**. However, according to our spy **Maxim Jakubowski**, the first-named managed to nip over from the south of France to Italy to accept a surprise award presented at "MystFest," the 11th International Crime and Mystery Film Festival, held at Cattolica in early July. This was the **Raymond Chandler Memorial Award**, funded by the Chandler Estate and given for the entire body of an author's work (previous winners include **Graham Greene**). According to Maxim, Jim Ballard announced that his novel *Crash* is to be filmed by **David Cronenberg** (after the Canadian director completes his film version of **William Burroughs**' *The Naked Lunch*). JGB is "absolutely delighted by the choice of director and will have input into the screenplay." Our congratulations to him on all counts.

A BOB SHAW MOVIE?

Another *IZ* contributor who was unfortunately unable to attend the party has also sent us some good news about film possibilities. **Bob Shaw** has just sold a two-year option on the screen rights of his novel *Other Days, Other Eyes* (incorporating the famous short story "Light of Other Days"). **Leslie Kahan**, the producer concerned, has said that the book has so many dramatic story options that she expects it to result in "a fantastic piece of celluloid." We concur – Slow Glass seems a natural for the movies, and it's surprising that no one has thought to make a film or TV version of these stories before now. Bob also reports that his humorous sf novel *Who Goes Here?* has been bought by BBC Radio for adaptation as a one-hour play.

AFTER THE TWILIGHT ZONE – INTERZONE?

There was a mention in our recent **Greg Bear** interview (*IZ* 37) of a British screenwriter called **Duncan Johnstone**. He turns out to be an *IZ* subscriber, and has been in touch with us recently about his plans for a possible 13-part TV series of one-hour films based on good science-fiction stories. As Greg Bear said in the interview, Johnstone has already done a very promising script of Bear's story "Petra." He has also written speculative adaptations of **Geoff Ryman**'s "O Happy Day!" (from *Interzone: The 1st Anthology*) and **Stephen Gould**'s "Peaches for Mad Molly" (an American story reprinted in David Garnett's *Orbit SF Yearbook 2*), and has been touch with various *IZ* writers, including **Kim Newman** and **Ian Lee**, whose stories have impressed him.

If Duncan's plans come to fruition, we could be fortunate enough to see the first really ambitious attempt to produce intelligent, adult science-fiction adaptations on British television since the long-gone "Out of the Unknown" series which BBC2 broadcast in the 1960s. Moreover, it will be a series that is likely to contain at least some material from *Interzone*, so we're rooting for it. Duncan Johnstone is continuing to look for likely sf stories to adapt, and anyone who wishes to contact him with serious suggestions is welcome to write to him care of this magazine.

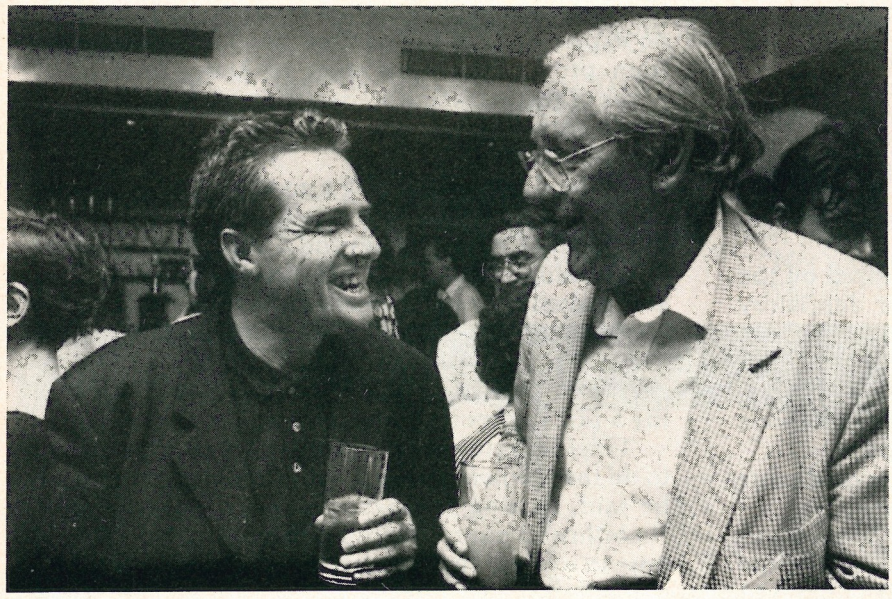
BRAM STOKER AWARDS

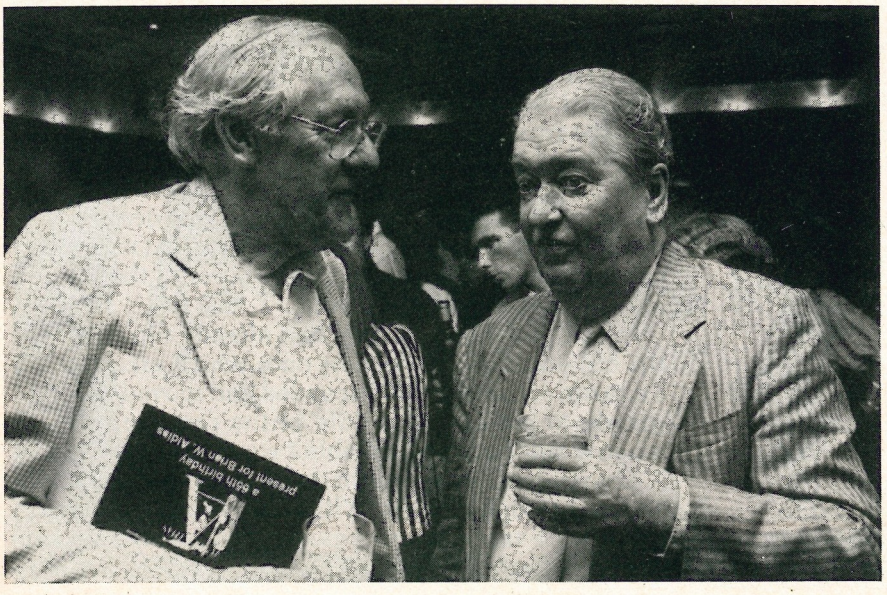
I mentioned last issue that **Kim Newman** and **Stephen Jones** had won a Bram Stoker Award for their non-fiction work *Horror: 100 Best Books* (in a tie with *Harlan Ellison's Watching* by Harlan Ellison.) The other winners of these annual awards, which were presented by the Horror Writers of America at Providence, Rhode Island, in June 1990, were:

Best novel: *Carrion Comfort* by **Dan Simmons**
Best first novel: *Sunglasses After Dark* by **Nancy A. Collins**
Best novelette: "On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert..." by **Joe R. Lansdale**
Best short story: "Eat Me" by **Robert R. McCammon**
Best collection: *Collected Stories* by **Richard Matheson**

LOCUS POLL RESULTS

The August 1990 issue of *Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field* contains the results of the "1990 *Locus* Awards. "These represent the votes of that magazine's presumably discerning readership (mainly American, circulation circa 10,000), and usually the *Locus* poll results are a good





indication of which items are likely to win Hugo Awards at the World SF Convention. Of course, this year's Hugo results will be known by the time these words reach print, but I'm writing a couple of weeks before the convention, which is due to be held in The Hague, Netherlands. In brief, the *Locus* results are as follows:

Best sf novel: *Hyperion* by **Dan Simmons**
Best fantasy novel: *Prentice Alvin* by **Orson Scott Card**
Best horror novel: *Carrion Comfort* by **Dan Simmons**
Best first novel: *Orbital Decay* by **Allen M. Steele**
Best novella: *The Father of Stones* by **Lucius Shepard**
Best novelette: "Dogwalker" by **Orson Scott Card**
Best short story: "Lost Boys" by **Orson Scott Card**
Best non-fiction: *Grumbles from the Grave* by **Robert A. Heinlein**
Best collection: *Patterns* by **Pat Cadigan**
Best anthology: *The Year's Best SF: Sixth Annual Collection* ed. **Gardner Dozois**

So it's shaping up to be yet another good year for Orson Scott Card (whose slightly religiose "sentimentality and sadism" are so reminiscent of the late Theodore Sturgeon's, and whose stories seem to go down very well with the American core audience) – and a splendid one for the relatively new writer Dan Simmons (see John Clute's long review of the latter's work in *IZ* 38).

IZ GROWS IN REPUTE

This year, in the "Best Magazine" section of the *Locus* poll, we're delighted to note that *Interzone* has moved up to fifth place in a field of 14 titles. Ahead of us in readers' estimation are *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* (winner), *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Analog* and *Aboriginal SF* (the last-named is only just ahead: we actually got 27 first-place votes from *Locus*'s readers, whereas *Aboriginal* got 26 but then moved in front of us on points won from second-place votes). We're now ahead of *Omni* and *Amazing*, both of which beat us in the poll last year. These are very heartening results when you consider that *Interzone*'s US circulation is extremely limited. If more Americans were to discover our magazine, we could easily be up there with the "big three" – *Asimov's*, *F&SF* and *Analog* – in general esteem.

(David Pringle)

Photos by Bernard Quinn of Brian Aldiss with Frank Hatherley, Sir Kingsley Amis and Ian Sanderson.

D. GO

Nicholas Royle

The ad campaign was a "teaser." But the first posters to appear went up on noticeboards outside churches. Within 24 hours they were appearing on roadside hoardings and end terraces. I thought at the time they might have made an error in targeting the churches first and then tried to cover their mistake before anyone noticed.

The poster was simple and direct, yet obscure: D.GO. The letters were printed in large, bold type with that curious full point between the D and G.

I tried not to take much notice when the posters began to spread. On buses and trains to work I overheard fragments of conversation:

"Have you seen those posters?"

"Yes. What...?"

"...end of the street. Why do...?"

"...know what it's all about?"

I heard little that wasn't ambiguous and became no clearer in my own mind.

Within a few days D.GO posters appeared on the underground mingling with the ads for depilatory creams and temping agencies. Full-size posters hit the platforms like ads for a new movie that had no credits and needed no cast. On the top decks of buses, notices warning of impending cuts and cancellations of Sunday services now had to vie for space.

Even the newspaper I had favoured for several years lost one of its pages each day to the campaign.

I came home from work one day to find on my doormat a leaflet bearing no information other than the too-familiar message. If there had been an address I believe I would have returned it to them, with a note deploring the waste of paper.

That evening was jazz night at a pub not far from where I lived. I had recently become a regular attender. When I arrived there after a light supper, I saw discreetly affixed to the glass in the door a leaflet identical to the one I had received. The trio didn't sound quite as together as usual, even though I drank beyond my usual limit.

Walking home I realized I was staring at the windows of the houses I passed. My unconscious suspicion was confirmed: at least half the properties I scrutinized were giving their support to the D.GO campaign.

Despite my relative intoxication, I decided to get in my Beetle and drive outside the neighbourhood to see if the leaflets had been given wide distribution.

Ten miles north I was still seeing them in half of the flats and, when I got further out, houses I drove past. Gloomily and with careful attention paid to the speedometer, I drove back into the tangerine shadowland of the inner city.

At work next day I asked: "Have you noticed these leaflets?"

"I've got one up in my window," Gilliland announced with pride. As production editor of the magazine, he was my immediate superior, and although there existed little empathy between us, I generally maintained a level of banter.

"What does it mean?" I asked him.

"Oh, Dominic," he said, "you do make me laugh."

He didn't laugh a great deal, so I was glad. But in fact he barely smiled on this occasion and provided no explanation of the conundrum, as someone rang from production demanding to know how many pages of the magazine were still outstanding.

"Twenty-four," he said. "I've been on to the typesetters all morning."

Gilliland was essentially a good person. He would only hurt a fly if there was no real alternative. So why did he and I never get beyond a superficial working relationship? Was it just his slightly bossy manner and pedantry or did I object more than I realized to his transparent piety?

There was an ad meeting. Gilliland gathered up his sheaves of papers and bustled out of the office, dumping a pile of proofs on my desk as he went.

"I was going to ask you if you would be kind enough to do these when you've finished reading the paper," he said, looking somewhere over my left shoulder. He billowed out of the room before I could think of how to explain that I'd only picked up the paper for five minutes after lunch.

I turned the page and there was the ad for D.GO. But this was a new one – the next stage of the campaign. At the bottom of the page was a line of text: "Have you made sense of it yet?"

I stuffed the whole newspaper into the bin even though I hadn't finished reading it and reached for the first proof on top of the pile.

I worked until 5.20pm and then left although Gilliland had not yet returned. Ad meetings did not normally go on longer than half an hour. I wondered what could be causing it to go on so long. Not that it needed concern me. In the production process of the magazine my role was that of drone.

In the underground they had already replaced all the old posters with the new ones which asked me if I'd made sense of it yet. I scowled and moved around people to get to the middle of the carriage so that when a seat became available I would get it.

Commuters hanging from straps swayed as the train rocked through tunnels. Within my section of the car there were ten slots for ads and four of them were occupied by "D.GO Have you made sense of it yet?"

I wondered if I was alone in finding the insistent query insolent in the extreme.

I called in at the Asian grocer's and was amazed to see the leaflet stuck in the window behind his head. I had only ever thought of him in the context of his small but colourful newspaper and the card he had in the glass door barring schoolchildren in groups of more than two. Now he was lending his support to this campaign, laying his business open to a boycott by shoppers like myself who could easily walk the extra five minutes to the supermarket. I decided to make this my last purchase as I waited behind a large man in a shiny suit one size too small.

At home the doormat presented me with another leaflet: "D.GO Have you made sense of it yet?" Still no address. I crumpled it up and threw it in the bin.

I didn't often watch the television, so when I switched it on for something to do and saw D.GO advertised in two consecutive commercial breaks, I was incensed.

Walking to the pub I felt sure there were more leaflets stuck in windows than the night before. It was like election time in a one-party state. Voters were either unquestioningly loyal or they were being coerced.

Over the weekend I saw the first car stickers. "D.GO Have you made sense of it yet?" in hundreds of rear windows lining the main arterial routes to the DIY superstores.

I drifted towards an antiques and crafts market I often visited at weekends. The market attracted followers of alternative lifestyles; people who refused to go with the general flow.

I sought reassurance and should have known to expect disappointment. The Triumph Heralds, Ford Anglias and VW Karmann Ghias that crawled up the main road between the different sections of the market were bedecked with stickers. The ethnic shops and vegan restaurants carried the leaflet in the corners of windows. In the lanes of the market itself goths, punks, skins and all kinds of fashion victims wore button badges bearing the legend D.GO. My "individuals" were as sheep-like as the masses whose conventions they shunned.

I passed a stall selling the badges. In the crowd around it was a tattooed man stripped to the waist. His ears were pierced in a dozen places. On his shaven head were tattooed the letters D.GO. He was buying a badge. I hurried on, less than eager to see where he might pin it.

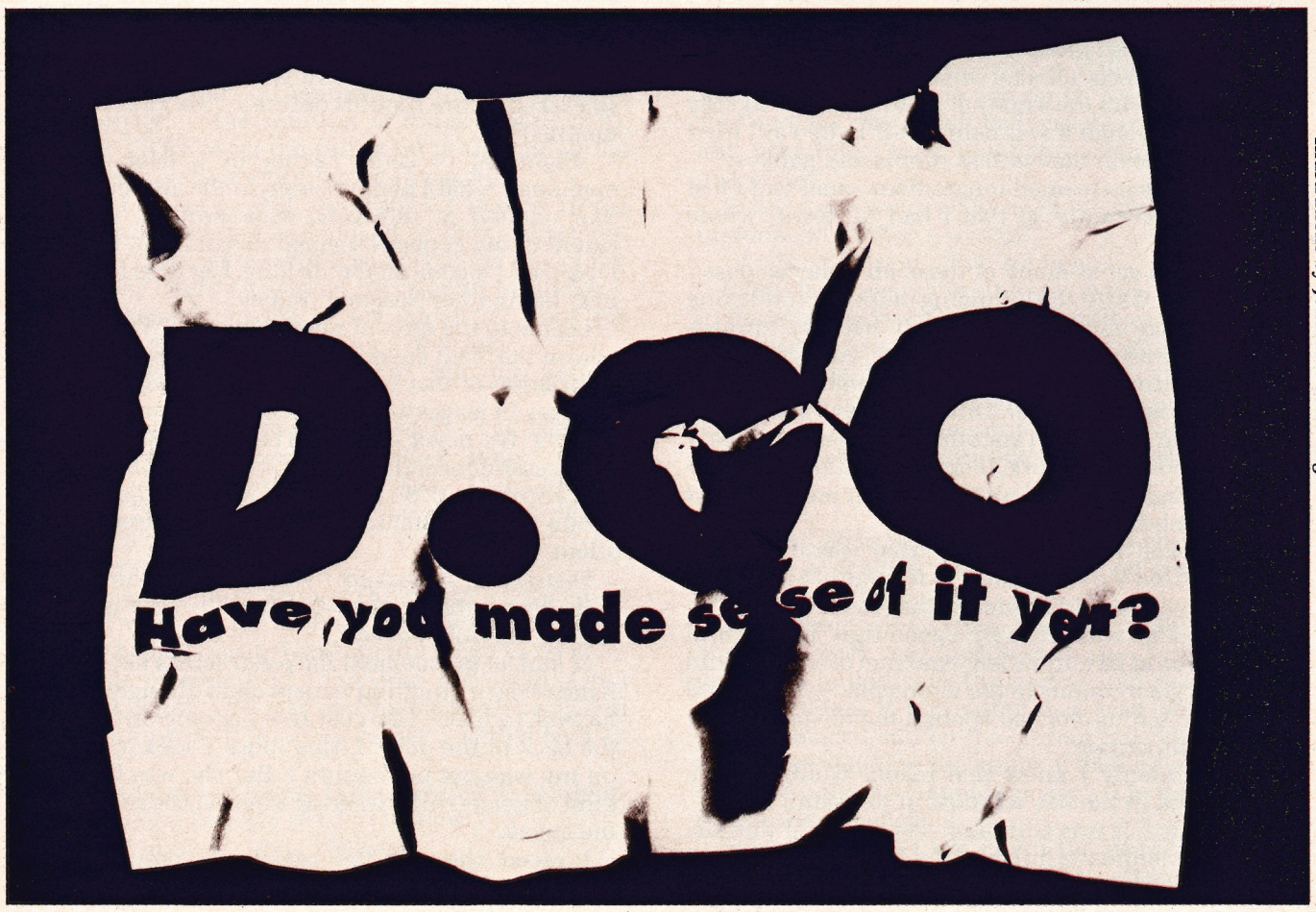
The phone was ringing as I reached the front door. I fumbled with the key, unlocked the door and ran up the messy communal staircase to my door. The phone rang off just as I got inside.

They'll ring again, I thought, as I sat down in the kitchen with a magazine. I turned over several pages at once, hoping to miss all the ads. One got through the net. I didn't look to see if it was the *only* D.GO ad in the magazine. The phone rang again.

It was Dill. She and Tam had got back from their holiday last Thursday and had been ringing me since. Did I want to go round for something to eat and to see their photos? Yes. I did.

"Not tonight," I said. "I'm feeling a bit tired."

Why did I say that?



Illustrations by Jonathan Coleclough

"I'm working straight through tomorrow," Dill said; she did shift work. "So it'll have to be next week." I agreed, thinking I ought to tell her I did actually want to go round tonight. But something stopped me. What was I scared of?

In one of the cupboards I found some pasta. I boiled it, washed up and went to bed.

I spent most of Sunday mourning the passing of the weekend and cursing the job I would return to the next day.

Jackie did the round of the in-trays, giving us all copies of the issue we'd put to bed two weeks previously. No matter how long the hours we'd spent checking the proofs, we always took ten minutes to go through the finished magazine with a fine-tooth comb, looking for mistakes it was now too late to rectify. The magazine had a well-earned reputation for accurate subbing: typos and spelling mistakes, which cropped up maybe once every six months, meant apologetic memos from Gilliland to all higher tiers of editorial power.

I flicked through the ads at the front to get to the first pages of editorial. Then I went back to the ads in disbelief.

I pushed my chair back and may have mumbled to Gilliland that I was going out for lunch.

I hurried through a pedestrian arcade where tourists thronged and a man in white trousers handed out leaflets. Some of the shoppers I elbowed past were wearing badges. At a kiosk I thumbed through a selection of magazines for different specialist readerships: anglers, train spotters and puzzle solvers; bodybuilders, philatelists and onanists. My fears were confirmed: the magazine I worked for was not alone in running multiple double-page spreads for the infernal campaign.

Crossing streets choked with buses and taxis, all emblazoned with the same ad, I returned to work. My head felt as though it was being hard-boiled as I tried to concentrate on the endless proofs and galleys.

The sentences seemed longer than usual and I lost the sense constantly so that I had to reread whole chunks.

"I'd like to get as many of those off today as possible," Gilliland said the following morning, indicating the proofs on my desk. I was only halfway through them. "It's the deadline for first proofs, you see." I saw.

I'd tried ringing Dill and Tam the night before but there had been no answer. Dill could have been doing another late shift and Tam often went out to clubs.

If Dill *had* been at work, then she should be at home now, I thought. I picked up the receiver and punched in the number. It rang unanswered.

I bent over the proof again. What was the article about? I didn't even know. If it couldn't hold my interest, why should it interest the reader? In fact, on reflection, that was probably a good sign. The faithful readers would be enthralled. And one of them would notice if I got a comma in the wrong place. She would write in to tell us she had spotted the mistake as if it were a competition.

And suddenly I knew that reader would have a leaflet stuck in the bay window of her semi.

"Dominic." It was Gilliland. "You should find the art department have finished the layouts for some of those proofs."

"Yes," I said, in a low, controlled voice.

In the art department I stopped by the paste-up board next to the window and stared at an A4 photocopy of next month's cover.

I felt the blood drain from my face. Where were the cover lines? Where was the masthead? Where was the cover picture? I felt someone standing next to me.

"What's this?" I asked. When I looked at Bob I saw he was pulling his jacket on, possibly about to go out for lunch. There was a small badge on the lapel.

"What do you think?" he quipped. "It's next month's cover. It looks good, doesn't it?"

I couldn't agree.

Unable to return to my desk I went and sat in the secretarial office for ten minutes. I told Jackie and Liz-Ann I had a headache. Just a few days previously I would have told them what was wrong, but now I was scared to mention the campaign in case they might reveal their own support for it.

The editorial department operated on a strict hierarchy. If I had any kind of complaint I should take it to those directly above me in the pecking order. But this kind of submission was just that. I would go to Gilliland or the next above him and the problem would generally be defined out of existence by a curious placebo of words. The symptoms wouldn't reappear till half an hour later. In this way the editor was never troubled with the human failings of her underlings. And yet, she said, her door was always open.

I knocked on the closed door and listened.

"Come," said a leather-upholstered voice.

I began to make excuses for my intrusion.

"Dominic," she interrupted me. I was quite impressed by that: she knew my name. "What's the problem?" I suppose, from her side of the vast desk watching me perch on the edge of an armchair, there had to be one. "How long have you been with us now?" she asked before I could continue. "Six months, seven months?"

"Eighteen," I said. Taking in a deep breath I explained what I had just seen in the art department. She nodded at intervals, even grunted when the extent of my concern seemed to call for it. Presently, I realized I'd gone on for too long. Her eyes had glazed over behind her designer frames.

I came to the crux of my argument: "We *never* run ads on the front cover." How many times had I heard a variation of that in response to my suggestions for changes in magazine content or procedure? *We never do this. We never do that.* The magazine had found a successful formula and was sticking with it. Change was a dirty word. So why the sudden change of heart?

She wasn't listening to me. I floundered and fell silent.

Distracted, she asked: "Was there anything else?"

In desperation I repeated myself: "We never run ads on the front cover."

A look of puzzlement flickered across her face. Her hands began shuffling papers and I thought it might be time to leave. Her coat was hanging on a hook on the back of the door. I tried to get a look at the lapel on my way out but couldn't. But she was hardly the kind of person to be wearing a button badge, whatever the cause.

I raced through the remaining proofs, forcing myself to concentrate on the words. If I didn't do it,

Gilliland would have to and I didn't wish that on him. He had people breathing down his neck, after all.

Going home, I was bombarded with thousands of ads on walls, vehicles and people. Like the cover of the magazine, they all represented the next stage of the campaign – the solution of the anagram: GOD. Just that. GOD. With the full point at the end of the word. Such a short word but so powerful.

Later, I drove to Dill and Tam's. I parked in the street below their flat and looked up at the windows. Although there were several leaflets in the row of terraces, none could be seen in my friends' windows.

They seemed pleased to see me at last, took me upstairs and offered me a choice of drinks.

"How's work? You've got to see our holiday photos."

Lots of pictures of mountain passes and gingerbread chalets; windblown lakes and yellow trams.

"Never really fancied Switzerland," I said, looking closely at the ads on the side of the tram. They passed inspection.

I began to relax a little.

Tam made some coffee and Dill dragged out a board game. We played for an hour. Tam won. Dill and I decided he had cheated and should make us all more coffee. He protested his innocence but disappeared into the kitchen. Dill was putting the game away and picking bits of fluff from the carpet. I settled back in the settee.

My heart lurched when Tam appeared in the doorway holding a handful of GOD leaflets.

"I'll put these up now," he said.

Dill nodded and said, "OK."

I didn't really care if they believed me or not. I just apologized and said I had to go. "Sorry about the coffee." The shock of seeing Tam holding the leaflets and saying he'd put them up now, as if they'd been meaning to all evening, was too much for me. I couldn't stay and ask them what had happened. Their beliefs and principles; how could they change practically overnight?

Dill's eyes were wide with dismay. She didn't understand. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said. "I've got to go."

Every car I passed on the way home had a sticker in the rear window. Groups of people were out leafleting streets where the old leaflet was still up.

What most disturbed me about Dill and Tam was that they appeared completely normal, just as before. They were exactly the same, my old friends, except that they were going to put up the leaflets in their windows.

I didn't go to work and ignored the phone when it rang at 9.30am. When it stopped ringing I disconnected the plug.

Later, the doorbell rang. It was unlikely to be anyone from work and, needless to say, I expected no visitors. I pulled back the curtain and peered down into the street. A fair-haired man was looking up at me. I grimaced and let the curtain fall. The bell rang again. I hesitated in the kitchen, then quietly opened the door onto the communal stairs. On the mat were two or three leaflets.

Seized by rage, I ran down the stairs and pulled open the door, prepared to chase after the man, if

necessary, to give him back his literature. But he was standing on the step smiling.

"What do you want?" I asked brusquely.

"To give you a leaflet for your window. You don't seem to have one."

"No. That's right. I haven't got one and I don't want one." I snatched up the ones already delivered and stuffed them into his hand. Surprisingly, he let them fall onto the pavement. He took two more from a plastic shopping bag and handed them to me.

"*No!*" I said. "I'm not interested. Haven't you got the message?"

He appeared momentarily confused.

"Look," I changed tack, but still aggressive, "what's the big idea with this campaign? Why is everyone falling for it?" Immediately I felt I shouldn't have asked the questions. They made me vulnerable.

The man's lost look had vanished and he was smiling at me again. Then I noticed a small crowd was gathering behind him, murmuring.

"Take a leaflet in case you change your mind," he said, folding it into the palm of my hand. I sidestepped him to face the others. I tore the leaflet into quarters and then again.

"Take your leaflet," I said as I threw the scraps of paper like confetti over so many smiling brides and grooms, "and fuck off and leave me alone."

Their smiles creased into concern, instead of the condemnation I would have preferred.

On the motorway driving north to my parents' house, all the cars carried stickers.

I didn't raise my hopes as far as my parents were concerned, which was just as well. As I pulled into the driveway I was welcomed by a host of leaflets and a poster stuck in the windows of the bungalow. I could no longer be surprised, even though my parents, like Dill and Tam, had never been religious people.

They greeted me as normal, saying what a nice surprise it was. The only change I could see in them was in their front windows.

"Don't stop what you're doing," I said, but my mother made for the kitchen to get us all a drink, while my father went through to the back garden to clear away the tools he had been working with. This gave me the chance I needed. I slipped into their bedroom and carefully opened the doors of my father's wardrobe. At the back of the top shelf behind a pile of old socks he probably didn't like to throw out, was a shoe box. I withdrew the army-issue pistol and a box of bullets. Wrapping the pistol in my handkerchief, I put it and the bullets in my jacket pocket. I replaced the lid on the box and returned it to its hiding place.

Standing in the hall I saw my mother through the kitchen doorway bent over the sink. And through the picture window in the living room I could see my father pushing the lawnmower up the garden towards the shed. For a moment I hesitated, a great lump constricting my throat. But I knew I couldn't stay. My eyes alighted on the door to my old room. I very nearly reached out my hand to open it.

As I backed the car out of the drive my mother's face emerged from around the front door. Her mouth fell open. I throttled down and swung the wheel round as I hit the road. I looked up the drive as I slammed into first and screeched away. A look of panic on her face, she was running.

It hurt terribly to drive away.

I felt conspicuous on the motorway: the only car without a sticker. I wondered if I should get one just for pretence but quickly rejected the idea as cowardly. I had the gun now for protection.

Drivers turned to stare as they overtook me. I wasn't sure if they would do that normally.

I moved to overtake an articulated lorry which was struggling up a slight incline in the inside lane. I drew level with the cab, where a GOD sticker was affixed, then the artic gained speed. I accelerated but couldn't even catch up with the cab.

I was conscious suddenly of a slight dimming of the light inside the Beetle. I steadied the wheel and checked the mirrors. A huge artic was coming up on the *outside*.

We had reached the top of the hill and were coasting. There were cars behind, leaving me too little space to brake and let both lorries pass. The one on the outside now drew level so that I could see the sticker in his cab window. He pulled ahead a few yards.

My foot was on the floor but we were going downhill – they had the speed *and* the weight. I jabbed my horn repeatedly but I doubt if they even heard it. Drivers behind began to get impatient, sounding their horns as well. Turbulence buffeted the Beetle as I fought to maintain a straight line in a gap which seemed to be narrowing. The lorries towered overhead, plastic side-flaps beating in the wind like pterodactyls. Were they closing the gap or was it my imagination? I couldn't see any trace of white lines.

I was freed when the lorry on the outside found itself blocked by a Metro doing sixty-five in the outside lane. He braked and I overtook the Metro on the inside before switching to the outside lane and spurring the Beetle to go faster. The artic in the slow lane made no attempt to give chase.

I saw in my rear-view, both lorries now in the inside lane, one having overtaken the other, which may have been all it was trying to do all along. I rubbed my forehead with the sleeve of my jacket, pulling at the weight in the pocket as I did so. Slowing down to seventy-five, I returned to the inside lane myself.

My flat, as far as I could see, was now the only one without a leaflet or poster in the window. Even in the nearby estates where residents didn't bother with party-political posters during general elections, leaflets advertising GOD were up in every window.

I slept badly and decided to go in to work as an act of defiance. By now I trusted no one; the loaded gun accompanied me.

The campaign had reached a new stage overnight. Fresh hoardings had been erected wherever there was space. My heart skipped several beats as I read the new message: "GOD. He is coming."

There was a buzz of excitement on the train fed by the people crammed around me, strangers united in anticipation. Gone were the early-morning vacuous stares and razor-nicks and smudged eyeliner, replaced by flushed cheeks and a newborn glow of

perfection. If they were all about to meet their maker, I was surprised not to see some signs of dread, or last-minute repentance. They were supremely confident.

The atmosphere was electric in magazine editorial. Gilliland was radiant. I kept my head down and concentrated on the white spaces between the lines.

I noticed that the offices emptied earlier than usual.

The underground was congested. The announcement was difficult to hear but it seemed most lines were not operating. I got caught in a surge of commuters and pushed onto a down escalator. All the ads down the wall by the handrail were the same. People smiled and held hands; they may or may not have known each other. There was little of the stress and antagonism usually present in a busy station at rush hour.

But the number of commuters was unprecedented. They were all going for the one line that seemed to be running. I had no choice but to go with the flow, though in the circumstances I resented their company.

On the platform I craned my neck looking for the exit, but it was serving as an entrance with hundreds of people streaming through it. I wiped my forehead. The jacket collar irritated my neck and the weight of the pistol was causing my shoulder to ache. But I felt safer with the jacket on than I would if I took it off.

A uniformed official announced that the next shuttle was approaching and we should stand back. I couldn't move an inch.

I had to board the train and jammed up against someone's lapel badge. I twisted my body to face the other way and felt close to fainting.

The train went straight through stations without stopping. Perhaps the next shuttle would pick up at one of them. When the train finally stopped there was another crush: unable to forge my own passage, I allowed myself to be carried along.

The streets were unfamiliar to me but the hoardings that lined them were not. There was a line of cars in the centre of the road, windows wound down for air, occupants fanning themselves, drivers astonishingly patient. The rest of the roadway and both pavements were slow rivers of pedestrians all flowing in the same direction. Tributaries joined from side streets, which meant I couldn't escape down one.

Signs told me we were heading for the stadium. I thought to myself that vast though it was, it would never accommodate all these souls. Soon its cream towers reared above my section of the crowd. As we passed beneath the outer structure the pack loosened a fraction, but I knew I couldn't go back: the streets were impassable. Funnelled through a narrower passageway I was pressed right to the edge. Again, impossible to turn around, but I could go sideways. There was a door in the wall several yards ahead. The crowd moved slowly. Finally I was there. The handle turned. I disappeared.

I'd simply entered another passageway but this one was empty of people and the ceiling was lower. I began to walk. After some time the corridor came to a junction. Down the passage on the right there was only a locked door, so I went in the other direction.

I wondered what strange, forbidden precincts these were. Fire exits? Players' tunnels? I just kept walking. Presently, a passage merged from the left, but I sensed it didn't come from where I wanted to go, even though my goal was vague. I seemed to know better where I didn't want to go than where I did want.

The corridor widened a little. The caged bulbs lining the wall at intervals of twenty yards or so seemed to become faint, as light suffused the air from another source. I walked on. The light gradually became brighter and the echoes of my footsteps faded more quickly.

The corridor sloped upwards and suddenly the ceiling vanished into a great whiteness which almost blinded me – the sky: I was inside the ground. The green pasture stretched out before me invitingly. I saw the grandstand packed with hundreds of thousands of people. I stepped onto the pitch.

Faces began to turn as I continued walking. Silence fell like a shroud. I carried on walking until I reached the centre point.

The rows of seats seemed to extend far beyond the possible bounds of the stadium, up into the sky.

I turned through 360 degrees to take in the whole ground. The silence was total. All I could hear was the blood in my head and my heart pumping it. I saw one man fall to his knees. Immediately, those around him followed suit. Their seats snapped shut.

I shrugged my jacket collar off the back of my neck where it was itching.

The reverential hush was shattered by the sharp cracks of a million seats snapping shut like the beaks of dying birds.

Outside the pounding of blood in my head complete silence fell once more as a million believers knelt before me.

I took the gun from my pocket, pointed the muzzle at my temple and squeezed the trigger.

God is dead.

Nicholas Royle wrote "The Sculptor's Hand," a much praised story which appeared in our issue 32. His last contribution to these pages was the horror tale "Negatives" (*IZ* 35). He lives in London, where, like the hero of the above piece, he works as an assistant editor on a certain well-known magazine of very wide circulation.

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5, 7, 16 and 17). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: $4 sea mail, or $5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy *three or more* in one order may have them at £1.95 each (i.e. post free).

What happened last summer on Capricorn Island explained an incident that occurred in my youth on Earth almost forty years before. We are all prisoners of circumstance, shackled by an imperfect understanding of experience. Sometimes it takes an event, or a series of events, to shed light on the mysteries of the past and free us from ignorance, misapprehension, and, in my case, guilt.

I was down at the club when I first heard about her.

It was early evening, and six of us were sitting on the balcony that overlooked the red sands. We were watching Altair lower itself over the edge of the ocean when Vince Greeley, the tycoon owner of Capricorn Island, mentioned someone called Dr Petra Betancourt. She was due to visit the area for a few days, direct from Earth.

Someone asked, with a colonist's peevish mistrust of all visitors, what she wanted on Addenbrooke.

I interrupted. "Betancourt? The name's familiar..."

"She's quite well known on Earth," Greeley said. "She's with the Orly Institute in Europe."

But I hadn't been to Earth for over five years, and I was sure I'd heard the name in association with Addenbrooke.

"She wants to do some work on the island. Thing is," he said, "I'll be busy over the next few days, or I'd show her around the place myself..."

We stared into our drinks in imitation of men who had failed to hear that last remark. I've noticed that those with position and power seldom make direct requests.

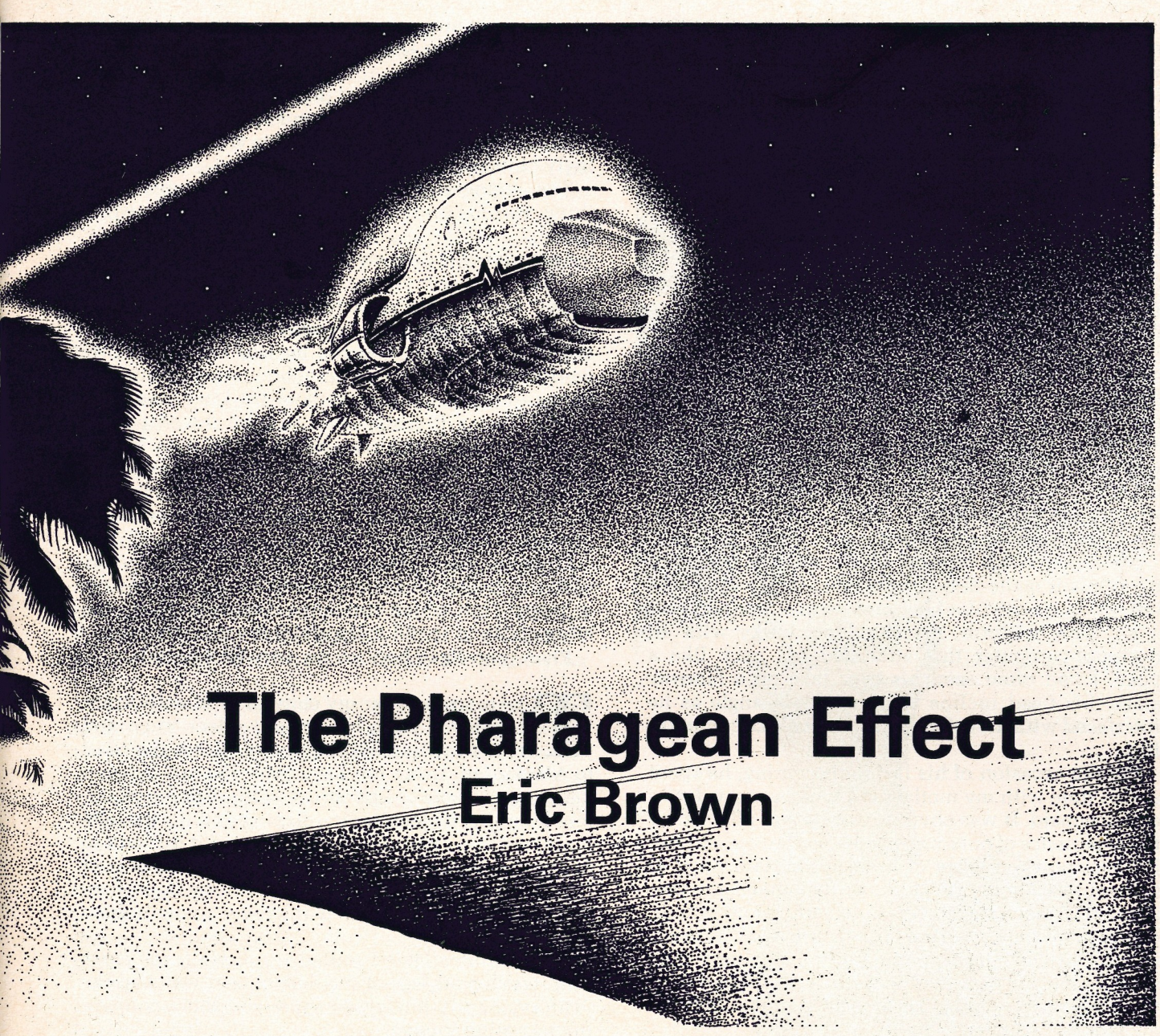
"Ben – are you doing anything with yourself these days?"

I'd sold my gemstone shop a few years ago and settled into retirement. My days, despite Greeley's assumption otherwise, were full; I spent long hours cutting the occasional stone for my own pleasure, and the rest of my time at the club – and I resented his brash attempt at recruitment.

Then I recalled where I'd heard the name before.

"As a matter of fact you're in luck," I told him. "I've just finished the stone I was working on."

"Good man. I'll see you about it later."



Illustrations by Iain Byers

The Pharagean Effect

Eric Brown

By midnight the others had drifted home, and I sat alone and stared into the star-filled night. I had forgotten about Greeley until he strode from the bar, glass in hand, and leaned against the balcony rail.

"Glad you can help me out, Ben," he said. "Actually, the whole business is a damned nuisance."

"Oh?" I took secret pleasure in seeing Greeley put out.

"I'd rather show Betancourt round the island myself – keep an eye on her and her team."

"So you want me to spy on her for you?" I asked.

"The Orly Institute is part of the European Stellar Survey Corps. They have the power to requisition the island, if they so wish." He swirled his drink pensively.

"Isn't Dr Betancourt the daughter of Jean-Pierre Betancourt," I asked him then, "Captain of the *Marcel Proust*?"

"She is? I thought so..." He finished his drink. Clearly he hadn't "thought so" at all. "Anyway, they arrive in Mackinley tomorrow noon. I'll arrange for you to meet them and drive them over."

Later, when Greeley left, I nursed my drink and thought about Dr Petra Betancourt. Why, I wondered, was she investigating the site of one of her father's planetary expeditions? Had she been assigned the task by her superiors, and had no choice in the matter, or did she have personal reasons for visiting Capricorn Island?

I was looking forward to my meeting with Dr Betancourt. We had things is common – we were both from Earth, and, more importantly, both our fathers had been bigship Captains. I wondered if I would be able to bring myself to speak of my father, or if my guilt would silence me as it had done for so long.

My fifteenth year had been a time of changes. It began with the illness that paralyzed my mother, and ended with my departure. Then, of course, there was the meeting with the alien.

I lived with my mother on Earth in a villa beside the ocean. I was taught by vid-tapes and audio-recordings, and in consequence had a solitary childhood. At the time I was hardly aware of this. Only

later, in my middle-teens, did I begin to realize that mine had not been a normal upbringing. My father was absent so much of the time that my mother was loath to send me away to school; she required from her son the companionship that her husband was unable to provide.

It was because of this, I realize now, that I hated my father and resented my mother. I was filled with a vague longing to be *elsewhere* – anywhere other than the villa and the cloying attention of the lonely, beautiful woman who constructed computer-graphix of human misery and composed symphonies of grief and isolation. Perhaps her art foresaw her destiny.

Shortly after my fifteenth birthday, over a period of months, my mother contracted a rare, debilitating disease that rapidly robbed her of all movement and, of course, her art.

If before I had been my mother's prisoner, now I was her slave. I was tied to the villa and to her requirements. She spent her time locked in the web of her life-support mechanism, staring constantly through the picture window at the ocean.

My father was a stranger to me, and the nature of his implant made him a frightening figure. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man with silver hair and a jet black uniform, his shoulders bulky with an occipital-computer that straddled his neck like a yoke. I had often seen his eyes take on a faraway glaze, his head incline at an attentive angle as he interfaced with his software in a trance-like communion.

On the occasion of his last homecoming, he spent all his time with my mother and took over my duties as nursemaid. It was obvious that he was affected by the experience of nursing someone he had once loved. He became even more of a disciplinarian. As if to compensate for my freedom, he demanded my presence at dinner, required me to account for my whereabouts at all times. During the evening meal, he made it his duty to chastise me for the slightest misdemeanour: my poor grades at study, the disrepair of the property; my personal appearance, my attitude, my lack of manners.

Then, one evening after he had upbraided me on every count, he dabbed his mouth with a napkin and announced that we were to have a house-guest, and that if he had any cause for complaint at all during the next six weeks... He did not specify the penalty, of course. Like all successful tyrants, his forte was dominion through fear.

I met Pilot-Communicator Pharagean-Baaq at dinner the following evening. There were four of us at the table; my father and mother, the alien and myself. My father ate with mechanical correctness, occasionally addressing professional remarks to his colleague. My mother's presence was token and macabre; she sat at the far end of the table, braced in the ugly frame of her life-support system. Only her eyes moved, watching us.

I could not keep *my* eyes from the alien.

My initial impression was that he was little different from an ape in uniform; but the more I looked at him, the more I realized that I was mistaken. The only similarity was the fact that he was covered from head to foot with short black hair. Unlike an ape, he was slight and very straight. His face was leathery and wrinkled, his features small. He reminded me of a wise old man.

He ate with exaggerated care – a calm that characterized all his movements – and spoke in reply only to my father's comments. His voice was soft, surprisingly cultured.

The strangest thing about him, the most *alien* thing, was his presence, his *charisma*. I felt drawn to him.

I wondered if this was because he was telepathic.

I had read everything that was available on the many alien races discovered during mankind's expansion through the universe. Pharagean-Baaq – the first name was generic, he was from the Core-world Phara; the second an abbreviation of his clan name – was one of hundreds of his kind employed by the Terran Bigship Lines to pilot the ships and facilitate communications between the stars. Pharageans could contact each other instantaneously over thousands of light years, and every bigship had an alien pilot-communications officer. Baaq worked on my father's ship, the *El Dorado*.

Over the weeks, as my father locked himself away with my mother in a show of devotion that I see now as tragic – but which struck me then as morbid – the alien chose to spend more and more time with me.

Pharagean-Baaq became my very first friend.

The morning after my conversation with Vince Greeley, I took his ground effect truck and drove the hundred kilometres down the coast to Mackinley. I was ten kays from the city when a dazzling parabola of light streaked through the cloudless blue sky, its length diminishing as it hit the telemass reception pad. As always, I found it difficult to believe that I had just witnessed the arrival of over fifty human beings, stripped down to their constituent molecules and fired at hyper-c velocity from Earth.

Five minutes later I pulled up beneath the three scimitar-shaped legs of the derrick and watched the visitors, mainly business-people and tourists, leave the reception lounge.

When a tall, blonde woman emerged, followed by half a dozen men in casual dress, I climbed from the truck and crossed the parking lot.

Introductions were brief. Dr Betancourt had received a message from Greeley on her arrival and was expecting me. We loaded the equipment – a dozen bulky containers like oversized aluminium suitcases – into the rear of the truck, and the scientists climbed in after them. Dr Betancourt joined me in the cab.

She was a handsome woman in her middle-sixties with sun-bleached hair, a bronzed face and amethyst-blue eyes. She wore a black leather jacket over a green one-piece.

She caught my glance and smiled. "It was snowing in Paris when we left," she explained – which was about the extent of our conversation for a good part of the return trip.

As I drove, Dr Betancourt removed her jacket and busied herself with a hefty stack of typescript. I concentrated on the road ahead, wondering how I might break the ice.

Two hours later we crested the slight rise overlooking the perfect circle of Magenta Bay, and I indicated the ocean and the distant landmass that was our destination. "Capricorn Island," I announced.

Petra Betancourt stared through the windscreen, a slight smile, as if of satisfaction, on her lips. I drove through the settlement, down the beach and onto the ocean with hardly a jolt to indicate the transition from sand to sea.

As we approached the low-slung, forested island, I gestured ahead. "Just what do you hope to find there?" I asked casually.

My question brought her from her reverie. "Oh – we are doing a little research, Monsieur Henderson. We should be finished in two or three days." She smiled at me, and I could not tell if her reply was an intentional misunderstanding or the result of being so immersed in her own thoughts.

Once we reached the island I drove, as instructed, to the meadowed plateau that reared above the surrounding forest. I had suggested we take a break but Betancourt vetoed the idea, impatient to begin work.

I followed the crude track that Greeley's 'dozers had gouged through the forest, preparatory to developing the island as a tourist haven. The track terminated abruptly ten metres below the plateau. I lowered the truck to the ground. "This is as far as we go, I'm afraid. We'll have to finish the journey on foot."

We unloaded the truck and hauled the equipment through the forest. An hour later we had the silver cases stacked on the edge of the verdant meadow. Dr Betancourt strode to the highest point on the island, stood with her hands on her hips and gazed around. "This is fine!" she called. "Set the equipment up here."

For the rest of the evening, until sunset, the scientists unpacked the cases. One group erected the hemispherical domes that would serve as sleeping quarters, while another, under Dr Betancourt's supervision, set up the equipment.

I hovered at the edge of the plateau, feeling conspicuous by my very inactivity. I half expected Dr Betancourt to tell me that their work was classified and that I should return to the truck for the night. But she seemed too intent on her work to pay me any attention.

When Altair slipped into the ocean and darkness descended, the scientists stood around in groups, chatting among themselves. Dr Betancourt stood alone, regarding the vast circle of apparatus. To my untrained eye, the dozen sleek, silver objects might have been laser cannons; they were aimed into the night sky at forty-five degree angles. Thick cables connected each one to a dome in the centre of the circle. The arrangement put me in mind of some kind of geometric mandala.

I crossed the plateau and joined Dr Betancourt. "All set?" I asked.

She smiled. "Almost, Monsieur Henderson."

I nodded. She seemed reluctant to offer much else. I felt uneasy in her presence; she regarded the equipment and seemed unaware of me, much as she had during the journey here.

"Wasn't your father Jean-Pierre Betancourt," I asked at last, "Captain of the *Marcel Proust*?"

She stared at me, her eyes bright in the gathering twilight. "That's classified information," she began.

"Now it is," I replied. "But not when I was a kid. I was fascinated by space exploration – my father was a Captain with the Sante Fe Line."

"He was?"

I nodded, staring at the livid slash of crimson on the horizon. It seemed that by telling her this I had admitted myself into her confidence. I suddenly felt more at ease beside her.

She broke the silence with a sigh. "Yes, my father did Captain the *Marcel Proust*..." She hesitated. "I suppose you also know that this was his last mission?"

"No, I must admit I didn't." I assumed, then, that this had been his last mission before retirement.

"Is all this –" I gestured at the circle of apparatus "– something to do with that mission?"

She nodded, began to say something and then stopped herself. I received the impression that she was in some emotional distress. I glanced at her in the darkness, but all I could make out was her silhouette against the stars. At length she excused herself and joined her colleagues beside the largest dome.

I made my way back through the forest to the truck. I climbed into the back of the vehicle, unrolled a foam-form and arranged my sleeping bag. Then I lay and stared through the clear cover at the stars, considering Petra Betancourt and her presence on Capricorn Island.

I was jolted from a light sleep by a sound from outside, a detonation. I stared through the cover. The constellations had moved on; an hour or two had passed. I noticed, also, a faint greenish glow from the direction of the plateau.

I struggled from the sleeping bag, pulled on my boots and jumped from the truck. In the night sky above the plateau, like a schematic representation of the landmass below, was a three-hundred-and-sixty degree wheel of laser lights, green spokes probing the darkness as far as the coastal margins of Capricorn Island. As I watched, the lateral vectors shifted, began to rotate with an eerie flickering motion like some kind of aerial carousel. A low drone charged the air.

I pulled myself together and stumbled through the forest, tripping repeatedly in my haste. I emerged on the plateau as the drone hit a thunderous, gut-churning note. The laser carousel slowed, then one by one the spokes winked off until just two remained. They probed the sky like urgent antennae, then locked together and fixed on a point above the southern tip of the island. Then they too winked off; the noise died, followed by a sudden, sonic boom. The scientists, gathered together within the circle of equipment, stared into the darkness and pointed.

I followed the direction of their gestures.

Moving towards us, coming in low over the island, was the massive, ponderous bulk of an interstellar bigship. But that, I knew, was impossible: the last bigship had been decommissioned forty years ago...

The ship was in trouble; it hung lopsided, one engine firing with the pathetic irregularity of a defective cannon. As it approached, its great underbelly brushing the tree-tops, I made out the nameplate that adorned the starboard flank: *Marcel Proust*. It passed overhead with the slow grace of all colossal objects, and for the first time I realized that through its insubstantial bulk I could make out the familiar stars of distant constellations.

I ran across to Betancourt.

She turned to me, her expression ecstatic in the eerie light of the bigship. "We've done it – we've actually..." She was speechless, tearful, as she watched the *Marcel Proust*, shadowy and silent as a wraith, pass through a stand of trees on the far side of the plateau.

"What? You've taken us back –?" But a glance across the straits assured me otherwise. The settlement was still there, the lights in the A-frames and the clubhouse still burning.

"Not us," she cried. "Don't you see –?"

I gripped her by the arm. "But is it actually *here*?"

She shook her head in exasperation. "It's a temporal projection. An image of what happened sixty years ago – a hologram, if you like." She broke free of my grip and, impatient at having to explain the obvious to an ignoramus, ran over to her colleagues. They hurried through the forest to where the ghostly form of the bigship re-enacted its delicate crashlanding.

I stood and watched them go, conscious of my heartbeat.

I wondered why she was so eager to relive the past.

The alien and I had taken to strolling for hours along the sea-firmed margin of sand, and I spoke to Baaq as I had spoken to no-one before. In less than a week I was due to leave home and start university in Vancouver, and it was as if the proximity of my release allowed me to speak for the first time of my relationship with my father. I told Baaq of my mingled hatred and respect – of my futile wish that he had remained on Earth during my youth, like other fathers. I told him that my father had become an emotionless monster, a mere adjunct of his occipital-implant, whom I could not bring myself to love. As I spoke, I could feel Baaq inside my head, as if attempting to see behind my frustrated, youthful, imperfect articulation. From time to time he nodded, asked me gentle questions. He had no need to, of course; but he realized my desire to unburden myself.

The long walk became a routine, a ritual which excluded everyone else. We made no mention of it during the formal evening meal dominated by the presence of my father; it was as if the alien and myself were conspirators in an act of which he was sure to disapprove.

Then, three days before I was due to leave, Baaq failed to meet me for our afternoon walk. His absence was unprecedented. I went straightaway to his room. I stood in the hall and called his name, but he did not respond. I opened the door and stared inside.

Baaq sat against the far wall, his legs splayed before him as if he'd slipped into this position in a state of drunkenness. His head hung to one side, and he groaned as if with fever. I was transfixed, too petrified at the thought of his death to go to his aid.

Then he opened one eye and stared at me. I ran.

That evening, Baaq joined us at dinner, and he said not a word in explanation of his earlier enfeeblement. The following afternoon he joined me on my walk along the beach, and I could not bring myself to question

him. As always, we concluded our walk by sitting together on the jetty that extended its sun-warped, dilapidated frame into the shallows. We watched the bigships take-off from the spaceport down the coast, then shimmer as they phased into the *nada*-continuum. We were silent for a while before Baaq asked, apropos of nothing, if I had ever known a woman.

I avoided his obsidian eyes, stared at my feet. The silence stretched. Beneath our dangling legs, the lazy sea sucked at the barnacled pillars of the pier.

His leathery palm touched my shoulder. "Neither have I, Ben," he smiled. "Though on my planet it is a little different..."

He proceeded to tell me that his kind experienced a Calling, a time of mating, perhaps a dozen times throughout their lives. Suddenly and without warning, they would be summoned by the cerebral love-song of their distant partner – they knew not who until they arrived on Phara for the consummation. At the time of a Calling, a Pharagean would do anything in their need to return to their homeplanet, so intense the desire, so alluring the siren-song of the mate. Individuals had been known – Baaq said, staring at me – to go mad if prevented from making the homeward pilgrimage.

Only later did I wonder if this was Baaq's way of asking me for help.

I climbed from the truck and made my way through the forest, the morning sun warm on my back. The plateau was deserted but for a lone scientist in the central dome, bent over monitoring equipment. I crossed the clearing and climbed down the steep, forested slope.

The phantom shape of the *Marcel Proust* occupied a cleared steppe fifty metres below the plateau. As I approached, I noticed that the ground and shrubs in the immediate vicinity of the bigship had been "brought forward" too, creating a blurred image similar to the photographic effect of a double exposure.

The scientists had set up shop beside the ship, ready to record the historic occasion with shoulder-cameras. It seemed that they had little to do other than watch and wait. Petra Betancourt stood alone by the ship's entry-exit ramp, her fingers pressed to her lips as if in prolonged astonishment.

She glanced at me without a word, then returned her attention to the ship. In the triangular entrance I made out a dozen indistinct forms, their suited bodies bisected by the distant line of the horizon.

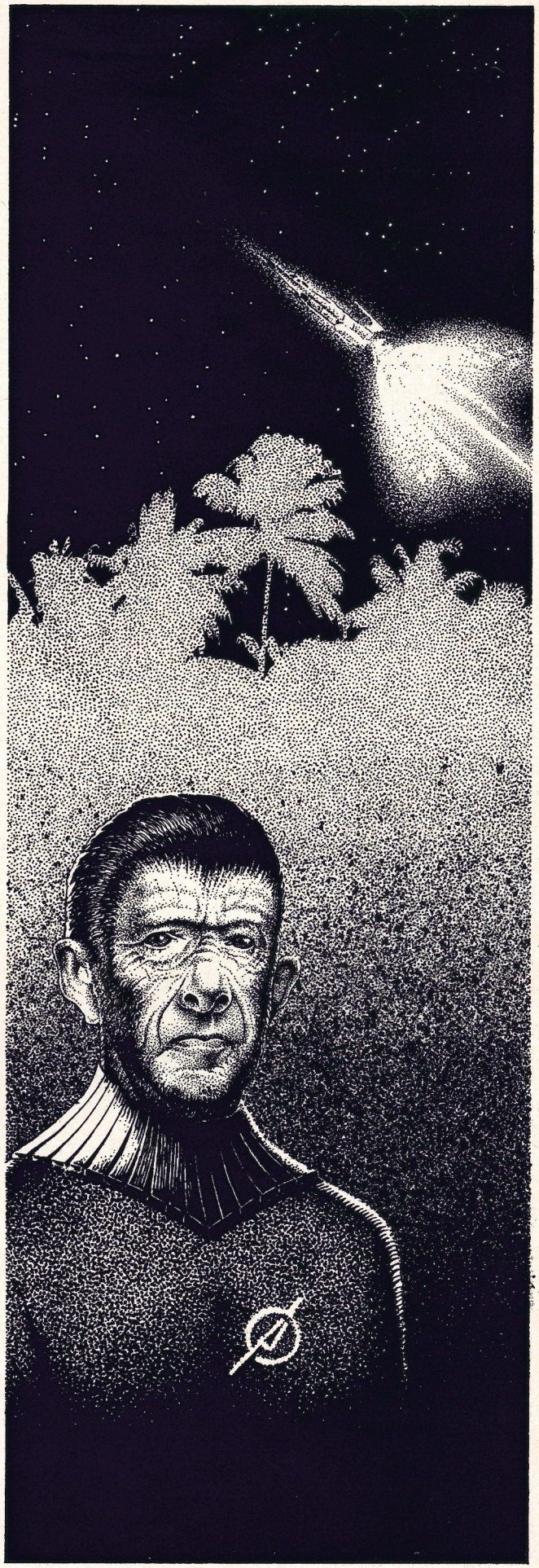
Then they moved down the ramp, insect-like in grey skinsuits and ponderous, domed helmets sprouting antennae. Between them they tugged a small trailer, floating at waist-height on null-grav discs. They stepped from the ramp and came towards us.

I cried out involuntarily and stepped back.

Dr Betancourt laughed. "It's quite all right. They cannot see us." As she spoke, a figure passed though her without pause. The scientists filmed the group's progress as they walked alongside the flank of the ship.

One of the landing party jacked into the carapace, and a segment of the ship folded down on cantilevers. Then they lifted tools from the trailer and clambered over the exposed drive machinery.

I sat on a nearby rock and watched the show. For



the next few hours, while the ship's mechanics worked on the defective engine, a dozen surveyors emerged on hover-scooters and took off around the island. Two riders headed across the straits, disappearing abruptly as they passed beyond the range of the temporal retrieval field.

At one point, Betancourt spoke into her radio. Five minutes later the ghostly figures of the bigship's crew became rapidly moving blurs, leaving images of themselves trailing in queues.

"I ordered an acceleration," she explained. "They were here almost a week – we don't have that long."

When the acceleration ceased, perhaps a hundred of the crew were gathered round the obtruded engine. One of the mechanics was addressing them, but of course we could hear nothing. The miracle of the projection did not extend to the reproduction of sound.

It occurred to me that that there were other events in history more worthy of re-enactment than the unspectacular landing and repair of the *Marcel Proust*. I said as much to Betancourt, phrased a little more diplomatically.

She glanced at me. "The system is in its experimental stages," she said. "In fact, this is the first time it has ever been tested. As it was developed by the Orly Institute, I suggested that an event in European space history should be investigated –"

I shrugged. "But why this?"

She took her time before she replied, gazing at the ship with a distant expression. "Sixty years ago the *Marcel Proust* failed to return from Addenbrooke," she stated simply. "We have extensive reports of the emergency landing and the subsequent survey, relayed to Earth by the ship's alien communicator. But that was the last anyone ever heard from the ship. It disappeared without trace... Of course," she said, "at the time there was talk that the Captain was to blame. I was five then, too young to understand that many people considered my father responsible. Last year I volunteered to lead the team, to find out exactly what happened..."

Which explained an incident that occurred later in the day, when a tall figure appeared at the top of the ramp. He wore the black atmosphere suit of a bigship Captain and carried himself with an air of authority. His arrival caused a stir among the ship's mechanics. He descended the ramp and approached the gathering.

Petra Betancourt walked beside him like someone in a daze. As I watched, I realized that I was witnessing something at once historic and tragic – a daughter haunted by the living ghost of her dead father. She peered through the curved visor of his helmet, her face pale with shock.

I noticed concerned glances pass among the scientists, but they elected not to intrude on her silent communion. At length, after inspecting the engine, Captain Betancourt retraced his steps up the ramp and into the ship. His daughter attempted to follow him, but succeeded only in wading through the insubstantial ramp, mired up to her waist in the projection of the past.

One of the scientists approached and touched her elbow. She looked from the entrance to her colleague and, as if realizing the hopelessness of the situation, returned with him. She lifted her radio and ordered another acceleration.

This one passed through an extended period. The ship and environs strobed with light and shadow as day and night were compressed into seconds. The area at the foot of the ramp became a confused haze as crew members moved back and forth.

When real-time sequence was resumed, only two mechanics attended the engine. A few individuals sat on the ramp, chatting among themselves. The bigship was due to lift-off soon.

Then, for the first time, I noticed the lone crew member. He sat cross-legged with his helmeted head in his hands. His posture seemed eloquent testimony to the approaching fate of the *Marcel Proust*.

Dr Betancourt joined me and knelt before the figure.

"A Pharagean..."

I crouched beside her and peered into the helmet. The small, black face seemed to be in pain; his eyes rolled behind closed lids, and his long, lipless mouth was open in what might have been an extended scream.

"He's experiencing a Calling," she whispered.

From his position beside the engine casement, a scientist shouted, "Hey, they haven't..."

Dr Betancourt looked up, then stood and hurried over to where her colleague, joined now by the others, stared into the engine.

I could not pull myself away from the alien. His silent agony, his mental torture as his mate called to him from across the gulf of space, brought back to me the plight of Pharagean-Baaq on that very last day of my youth.

On the afternoon before I left to study xenogeology at Vancouver University, Baaq had suffered another "attack," as I thought of it at the time. After lunch I went along to his room, to see if he wished to accompany me on a final walk. I was filled with sadness at the thought of our parting. I wanted to tell him how much I had enjoyed his company.

Baaq pulled open the door before I could summon him, pushed past me and staggered down the corridor. He seemed delirious, and I was at once concerned for his health and loath to approach him. I had related to Baaq as to a human being, and he was at his most alien and unknowable when undergoing an attack.

I caught up with him. "Baaq?"

He stared without seeing me. "Don't let them follow me, Ben. I need time..."

Then, before I could question him, he stumbled from the villa. I watched him set off along the coast road and wave down a passing cab. He climbed aboard and moved off in the direction of the spaceport.

From somewhere in the villa, my father's occipital-computer chimed a sequence I had heard only once before – when he had been summoned urgently by the Sante Fe Line. I ran back into the house and found him in the lounge. He was standing by the window, something immobile and statuesque about his posture. His implant, the visible collar that cradled his skull, was flashing in sequence.

Within seconds he emerged from his trance and stared at me. "Tell Baaq I wish to see him."

"I..." I was suddenly petrified of my father and of that part of him forever unknown to me.

"Well?"

"He left..."

"We have to find the alien," he said, and there was something in the way he pronounced *the alien* that sent a chill down my spine.

I stammered, "Why...?"

"I don't know why!" he snapped. "Command instructed me to bring him in. I never question Command –"

He stopped and stared at me as something in my attitude alerted him. "You know where he is..."

Then he gripped my arm and dragged me from the villa to his ground effect vehicle. He pushed me into the passenger seat. As he fired the engine he turned his gaze on me, and despite Baaq's plea I could not help myself but point in the direction of the spaceport.

I have no memory of the five kilometre ride to the 'port; my father's anger, my terror, the sense of my betrayal filled my awareness. All I recall is our arrival at a perimeter gate, unmanned as this sector of the spaceport was disused and derelict. My father leapt from the vehicle, pulling something from the inside flap of his jacket, and pushed through a rusty swing gate. In a daze I climbed out and followed. He ran across the cracked and weed-choked tarmac towards the inner fence, where he was halted briefly by uniformed guards. Their authority soon turned to obedience, and they followed him at a dash through the pack of ring-docked smallships. Unchallenged, I passed though the entry point and attempted to follow them. I wanted nothing more than to make amends for my betrayal by somehow alerting Baaq to the danger.

I managed to trace the posse to a sector of the 'port illuminated by halogens despite the daylight. Within the glow sat a squat Phoenix Line smallship, aswarm with technicians and service trucks.

Then I saw Baaq. He was running over the bridge that arced above the docking ring to the ship. My father saw him, too.

What followed then had about it a certain air of unreality, a mirage-like quality. Time slowed. My father raised his laser, adjusted the slide on the barrel, and aimed at the tiny figure on the bridge. He called to Baaq to give himself up. The technicians, standing around the dock, looked on like the chorus in a Greek tragedy. I seemed suspended in a frantic dash towards my father, a scream frozen in my throat.

Then the alien darted towards the entrance of the smallship, and my father fired one shot. As I watched, horrified, Baaq winked out of existence. For a second his running form was outlined in a blinding aura, and then he was gone. All that remained was a scorch mark, smeared across the hatch of the 'ship.

I thought I saw, in my father's expression, something like alarm that he had killed instead of merely stunning the alien. Then his occipital-computer flashed, and he slipped into a trance, frozen with arms outstretched like some heroic figure in a war memorial.

I screamed at him, hating myself because I knew that I would be unable to abuse him to his face. I turned and ran and stopped only when I reached the villa. I packed my belongings and, half a day too early for the mono-train, hauled my case to the end of the pier and sat there until the early hours.

If only, I told myself, I had not betrayed Baaq. If only my father had stunned the alien, instead of killing him outright. Along with my own guilt, I assumed the burden of my father's, for I knew that he would be unable to blame himself.

At one point, as I gazed up at the stars, I had a vision. In the night sky above the ocean I thought I saw a smallship, phasing into this reality from the *nada*-continuum. I fancied that it sped by the end of the jetty, and I thought I saw the logo of the Phoenix Line and, through the viewscreen, a small black face, regarding me. Then the ship disappeared back into the *nada*-continuum, and I ascribed the vision to wishful thinking, hopeless romanticism, the consequence of my grief and my guilt.

I left at dawn, and never again saw my parents. Within the week came the news that scientists had made a breakthrough with the tele-transference system, and soon all the magnificent bigships, the Captains and the city-sized crews, would be things of the past.

I tried more than once to discover the reason for the attempted arrest of Baaq, and in doing so learned that all information concerning the Pharageans was classified. They had been held on Mars for more than a year, then returned to their homeworld under a strict bill of quarantine, and I didn't find out why until that day many years later on Capricorn Island.

I knelt beside the seated alien, wanting to reach out and somehow ease his pain. His tortured expression evoked too many memories. At last, two crew members emerged from the ship and came towards us. They lifted the alien to his feet and assisted him up the ramp.

One of the scientists cried out.

I ran across to the group gathered beside the engine. Two ghostly mechanics were putting the finishing touches to the repairs.

"They can't leave like that!" someone exclaimed.

Betancourt took my arm and pointed to a shattered turbo. "The field convertor," she whispered. The mechanics seemed oblivious to the damage.

She spoke into her communicator and ordered another acceleration. The mechanics blurred; the engine disappeared swiftly into its recess. We backed off instinctively as the bigship vibrated before take-off.

Betancourt stared at the vessel, her expression unreadable.

"But why...?" I began. "Surely they should have–?"

"The alien," Betancourt whispered, as if in revelation. "The Pharagean. He experienced a Calling, all those years ago. All that mattered to him was that he had to get back."

Someone said, "But the convertor might hold –" and stopped there.

The ship lifted, turned on its axis and headed out over the ocean.

"He must have known what he was doing," Betancourt went on, "that there was a chance the convertor would blow... But all he wanted was to get to his mate on Phara –"

I stared at her. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Don't you see?" she said. "The alien altered the mechanics' perception of reality. He allowed them to

see only what *he* considered absolutely necessary, to save time and hasten the departure. He was taking a risk, but to him it was worth it."

I shook my head, unable to understand.

"Why do you think they were quarantined, Henderson? Their ability to make us see an altered version of reality made them dangerous..."

The bigship was shifting into conversion phase, flickering like the image on a spinning coin as it attempted to convert into the *nada*-continuum.

Then, as we watched, the ship bloomed briefly in a brilliant white nova, blinding us.

I found myself flat on the ground holding Betancourt to me. In the aftermath of the silent explosion I helped her to her feet. She was crying, her expression a mixture of grief at the tragedy and, I realized, relief that her father was at last freed from blame.

I was still trying to come to terms with what she had told me about the Pharageans...

That evening I left Capricorn Island and drove across the straits to Magenta Bay. Betancourt and the scientists had almost completed their research, and in the morning I was due to drive them back to the telemass station at Mackinley. I could give Vince Greeley the good news that they had no further need of the island.

I pushed through the swing doors of the club, bought myself a drink and carried it to the balcony. I watched the sunset and considered what Petra Betancourt had told me. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced: the Pharagean effect did indeed explain certain key events of that fateful day forty years ago.

I remembered the atmosphere of unreality about the incident at the spaceport, and my father's alarm when it transpired that he had killed the Pharagean, instead of just stunning him.

Then I thought of Baaq, using the strange power of his people to elude my father and the security guards, take the smallship and rendezvous with his mate on Phara, thousands of light years distant – but not before converting from the *nada*-continuum to say farewell to a young boy racked with sadness and guilt. I recalled the vision I had seen on the last day of my youth, and raised my glass to Baaq. It had taken a long time for me to understand, but the truth after forty years was better than no truth at all.

My reverie was interrupted by an explosion of laughter. The club was filling up with evening trade, locals and tourists alike. Greeley was holding forth to a group of regulars at the bar. I finished my drink, went for a refill and joined them.

Eric Brown, an *Interzone* discovery (Class of 1987), is the author of *The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories* (Pan Books, 1990), which was glowingly reviewed in *IZ* 40 by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh. Since completing the set of tales in that book, he has written several new pieces. Look out for his next, "Piloting," which will appear here a couple of issues from now. Eric lives in Haworth, West Yorksire, and is presently contemplating another of his extended trips to the Far East.

IMAGINARY PEOPLE

(Avatars of Dr Shade?)

Alice, Asterix, Dick Barton, Batman, Biggles, Sexton Blake, James Bond, William Brown, Billy Bunter, Nick Carter, Professor Challenger, Conan the Barbarian, Jerry Cornelius, Robinson Crusoe, Dan Dare, Count Dracula, Bulldog Drummond, Fantomas, Victor Frankenstein, Dr Fu Manchu, Dorothy Gale, Gandalf, Flash Gordon, Lemuel Gulliver, Richard Hannay, Jeff Hawke, Sherlock Holmes, Howard the Duck, the Invisible Man, Dr Jekyll, Indiana Jones, Kai Lung, King Kong, Captain Kirk, Arsene Lupin, Mad Max, Captain Marvel, Mowgli, Captain Nemo, the Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, Allan Quatermain, Professor Quatermass, A.J. Raffles, Frank Reade, Perry Rhodan, Buck Rogers, Rupert Bear, the Saint, Doc Savage, the Scarlet Pimpernel, the Shadow, She-Who-Must-be-Obeyed, Superman, Dr Syn, Tarzan, Dick Tracy, Dr Who, Nero Wolfe and Zorro...

All of the above and over a thousand others have detailed entries in **David Pringle**'s entertaining reference book *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* (Grafton Books, 1987, hardcover, £14.95), which contains over 500 pages of *vital information*. See pages 7-8 of Kim Newman's story "The Original Dr Shade" (*Interzone* 36) for an apocryphal sample entry.

The publishers have now made several hundred copies of the hardback first edition of this book available to *Interzone* readers at a knock-down price. Order yours from us at **just £6**, postage and packing included – less than half the original cover price of £14.95. Make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone* and send them to **124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU**. The above price of £6 is good for UK residents only; persons overseas please send £7.50 (USA $12 seamail).

'A fictional Valhalla where the characters never die... a fascinating companion' – *The Listener*

David Brin

Interview by Stan Nicholls

The future presented in your new novel, *Earth*, seems basically optimistic despite dealing with imminent ecological disaster. Does this reflect your own hopes or beliefs?

I've been asked that question a lot. Somebody called me "The Crown Prince of Optimism" in science fiction. But I don't accept the cop. I see the glass as half empty and half full. I believe that at the end of the next fifty years we will probably have saved half the species on this planet and created a truly fine and decent civilization. Am I an optimist? On the other hand, I believe that at the end of the next fifty years we will have succeeded in destroying fifty per cent of the species living on this planet and incurred a guilt burden from which we will never recover. Am I a pessimist? I believe that in the end the finest, most generous, altruistic, empathic species the planet has ever known will save it from the most venal, corrupt, selfish, destructive species ever known. They are both us.

The book is intended as a warning?

There's a brand of science fiction you can call cautionary tales, whose first purpose is to frighten the reader. In the best cases they can change the future by helping prepare society to avoid potential mistakes. There's every reason to believe, for instance, that the science-fiction films *Dr Strangelove* and *Fail-Safe* contributed substantially to the prevention of accidental nuclear war. *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* certainly deserve some credit for the salvation of Western civilization from McCarthyism and the over-compensating tendencies which tempted us at the beginning of the Cold War. But the point is these stories assume human stupidity, and therefore are a bit simplistic. A good example would be *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, by probably the greatest science-fiction author of all time. But what Marx never realized, taking himself so seriously, was the power of such works of fiction to prevent themselves from coming true. He scared the living crap out of everybody with any conscience, and even an ounce of reasonability, and made them desperately eager to find ways to reform away the scenario he described. John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* is another good example of the cautionary tale, and in *Stand on Zanzibar* he tried to do something completely different; he depicted a world in which people were both stupid *and* smart. But it's not quite a cautionary tale because people are also improving while they're behaving stupidly.

This is the thing I think the literary establishment hates about science fiction – the assumption that human beings might be improvable. It seems almost all of their criticisms come down to a belief that we'll never change, have never changed, are changeless. But science fiction is an affront to this, because of the implication of a large proportion of it that says we will have problems and stupidities, but there's the possibility our children might learn something from our mistakes.

Do you see this as science fiction's primary function?

No, this is at right angles to why we should read or write it. This has to do with an ideology. A lot of fantasy, for instance, shares what has been the view of almost every culture up until our own; that a golden age existed in the past and that old tomes can contain perfect knowledge. Consider the figure of the magician in this context – solitary, egotistical, secretive – curmudgeonly sharing his secrets and then showing up for *deus ex machina* at the end. The energy of the magician is one that it's taken us 6000 years to escape from, and it's at a 180-degrees angle to the ideal image of the scientist. The ideal scientist should be modest, cooperate with his peers, and get his best rewards by immediately sharing anything he discovers. Classical magic is highly undemocratic and cannot coexist with printing presses, sanitation, universal education or progress.

Are you saying you have little patience with those branches of the genre, like fantasy, that are not dependant on logic?

I have a great deal of patience. I want to emphasize that I'm creating distinctions here, not casting aspersions. I think science has done great things for the human race. I believe it's the only way we can really achieve wisdom, but it isn't like Terry Gilliam seems to assume – that science is the enemy of adventure. Which is what I found very hard to take in his film *Baron Munchausen*. Science and logic have made it possible for a vastly greater portion of the human race to go have adventures. Having said that, heaven forbid that magic should leave our lives. But if we have a wonderful tomorrow, living in the light where our children have all they need and are educated, mature and sane, this will not be the world depicted by the old regime of magic; or Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" come to that. I think this worry, that logic and science dehumanize, has been behind some of the Cyberpunk stuff. If you look through almost all of the Cyberpunk stories they seem to deny the improvability of man. They depict glitzier tomorrows, but filled with the same mistakes, the same poverties, the same nastinesses. I think this is one reason the literati took so eagerly to the Cyberpunk movement.

But there are human constants, including the ability to cock-up.

Yes, but it's not constant. Not the degree, not the style, not the mode. If we cocked-up the same amount, as frequently as we did, the world would have fried by now. In the past we were all the time tumbling into wars because of silly things like insults. We tend not to have major wars any more just because an ambassador uses the wrong tea spoon. I believe most of the human race, and Western civilization in particular, is considerably wiser than it was, which is something I'm sure some *Interzone* readers will profoundly disagree with me on. Although our power to do ill, and our numbers, have grown so rapidly that residual childishness, self-indulgence and our proneness to ideologies and self-deceits could destroy us.

You say, in the afterword to *Earth*, that Western civilization has no historical monopoly on destructiveness.

I like some of the myths we have in Western civilization that are lies. One lying myth is that Man is the worst of all animals. No. We're just the most powerful and numerous of animals, and we've reversed the food chain.

Why do you like a myth like that?

Because it has given a lot of Western youth parental guilt syndromes, which have caused them to become better environmentalists. Lately we are becoming environmentalists for more rational reasons, such as the sure

knowledge that if we don't save the planet our grandchildren will die; and for the aesthetic love of nature.

Another lie is that no other peoples have despoilt the environment. The American Indians destroyed every major land mammal on the North American continent except the bison. Easter Island, which I visited when researching this book, is a perfect metaphor of ecological destruction wrought by earlier peoples. But in saying that I am not denigrating those peoples. They didn't know better. We do.

You make the point that setting a novel like *Earth* fifty years in the future is a lot harder than making it 500 years from now.

Fifty years ago, as we speak, there were still a few people in this town [London] who actually believed the French Third and Fourth armies could turn the Germans short of Paris. Look at all the water that's been under the dam since. Yet there are people alive today who were alive then. That's why the fifty-year extrapolation is so delicious, so tempting and so hard.

Is there no doubt in your mind that the species has the intelligence and the will to prevent its own destruction?

That's the question I address in *Earth*. What I do know is that if we do not deliver the ideas, ideologies and means that deal with the crises we face, then I expect many people will do what millions are already doing, and that's fleeing to ancient "certainties." Which would be a catastrophe for this slender reed of a renaissance that now exists. Every other culture I can think of believed in a golden age in their past, during which the people were better and knew truth with a capital T. Ours is the first culture in which the notion of truth is with a small-case t, because next year's model of the world will be slightly better than this year's, and in turn will be supplanted by a slightly better version the year after that. To us, a golden age exists, if at all, in the future.

Magic and the golden age syndrome have dominated our affairs for thousands of years because it's hard to take on new maturities. But we have allies. The biggest ally we have is the modern myths. Look at the propaganda we subject ourselves to in all the popular media. You say that situation comedies are garbage, but people vote to watch them by the millions. What are they watching? If you look at almost every situation comedy, what they preach is "laugh at yourself" and, absolute foremost, tolerance.

Tolerance?

If you are stuck-up, or aristocratic, or intolerant, in a situation comedy you get it.

Maybe there's a difference between American and British situation comedy. A lot of our sitcoms seem based on intolerance.

I think a recurring message is that snootiness is paid off and good-heartedness is rewarded. It's true *Dallas* and *Dynasty* don't fall into this, and I dislike that sort of propaganda. But then again look at films, particularly those that apply to young people. Not only is tolerance a major thing, but also suspicion of authority. So much so that we have a generation which has been encouraged to think (a) be suspicious of authority but, (b) assume you invented it. A lot of the readers of this magazine probably hold authority in great suspicion. Yet where do they think they *came from*? Where do they think their own suspicion of authority originated? They are a product of Western civilization, even if they may say, "I rose above the crushing, domineering influence of my culture." What an incredibly egotistical pronouncement to make. It ignores the fact that there are millions and millions of others in Western civilization who believe the same thing. We don't like to think we're a product of our culture. Each of us likes to think we're a rebel. But *why* do we like to think we're a rebel? Because rebels are depicted as romantic figures.

I think part of the appeal of sitcoms is their cosiness; people tend to prefer reassurance to facing change. How do you overcome this?

I believe people in Western civilization like change but they like it in small doses. There's nothing wrong with that. Most civilizations throughout human history have decried even small change. In the past, advances were made by apprentices who worked for their masters, doing things exactly as their masters had. But when they became journeymen, preparing for their own mastercraft, they would perhaps make the tiniest innovation, and slowly, glacially, human progress moved ahead. This is an acceptable mode of progress except for one problem; the deterioration of the environment and the using-up of resources.

We need to get past the energy and resource-intensive technologies, to technologies that can enable us to provide all the billions of the Third World with the kind of comforts and decent life they want. And it's no use having contempt for materialism. It turns out that people do not become involved environmentalists until they have *enough*. You don't get environmentalists out of a town or village where people are starving, or where they're envious of the material goods they see their neighbours have. We're going to have to find low-impact ways of giving everyone on the planet flush toilets, clean sheets, enough hot water to take a shower, enough school books to become educated, and enough electronics to connect them with the richness of the world culture, and also to distract and divert them if that's what they want. It's horribly patronizing to have all this contempt for the great working class watching TV forty hours a week. For crying out loud, they're advancing. A hundred and fifty years ago they watched the *fire* forty hours a week, and no matter how romantic you find the fire, it is, after a stretch, boring, and it doesn't teach you anything.

You postulate a future where, for example, drugs are effectively legal but you can go to prison for dropping litter. Are you a libertarian or a pragmatist?

I have come close to winning the libertarian award several times because I say get-off-my-back things, almost Heinleinian things, but then say something that sounds extremely stateist. For instance, I am opposed to income tax, but I think inheritance tax should be utterly confiscatory. I believe in free enterprise, and the great enemies of free enterprise have always been blob socialism and aristocracy. Now that socialism has started dissolving in its own contradictions, we are finally going to be able to turn our attention to the other great enemy. In fact far more free-enterprise systems have been destroyed by aristocracy than by socialism. Ronald Reagan was a very good example of new-money aristocracy putting a man in office so they could loot the country blind. Whereas George Bush is old money. I hate him, and I hate his policies, but thank God we have a president again. Old money, all things being equal, would rather there be trees, and would like to have the children educated, so they can be good, creative workers who are interesting to talk to. It's the *nouveau riche* who want to crush the poor and rob them blind. Reagan was a representative of the new-money branch of the Republican party, and the reason he chose George Bush as his running-mate, and why George is now in charge, is because it's the old money's turn.

Nevertheless, my impression is that America has a much more genuine and vigorous democracy than we've ever had.

Let me put this as gently and as politely as a foreigner can – you're damn right. That's not to say democracy is perfect in Americe. However, the initiative process, the referenda self-motivated by signatures we have in California, are magnificent examples of democracy in action. Here's another point: we elect people to Congress as representatives of their district. The parties are pallid things compared with their European counterparts, and the whips have no power over Representatives or Senators; they cannot deselect them, for instance. The result is 535 most intelligent individuals, with incredibly generous staff support, arguing as individuals. Which has led to a truly fine body of law. The EC, meanwhile,

is still arguing over whether to adopt our 1973 clean air legislation. And we have nothing like your Official Secrets Act. But the downside is that such an organization of delegates cannot exercise discipline when it comes to biting the bullet; they must bring the goodies home to their constituents. Which means I'll vote for your dam if you'll vote for my military base. It's impossible for such a system to balance a budget, and we are spending Western civilization into poverty.

Do you foresee the creation of a political framework making it possible for people to work toward overcoming environmental crisis? Could capitalism or democratic socialism do the job?

What are you asking? That I'm a rabid free-enterpriser because I believe in cutting restraints? Or a rabid socialist because I don't believe that a child born into wealth ever did anything to earn the money?

I'm not trying to hang a label on you. I'm saying that what we may need, as you seem to imply in *Earth*, is a new kind of politics that takes good things from both existing ideologies.

Exactly. Ideologies have been horrible distractions. This whole left-vs-right bullshit has been a catastrophe. It's a load of crap inherited from the French Revolution and it only interferes with thought. Take as an example the attitude towards personal property. The left is suspicious of it, and to the right it's holy. Think about personal property then cross it with an up-down axis about coercion. On the upper left you have Stalin, who thinks nobody should own anything and that he has the right to torture you to death; on the upper right you have Marcos and Somoza who believe they have the right not only to torture you but also to own you. Where's Hitler? Bolshevik propaganda has said for years that he was a right-wing phenomenon. What bullshit – National *Socialist* Party of Germany? It was all part of the great war over the heart of socialism. Hitler was a moderate socialist in economic theory, as far as property was concerned. The up-down axis is far more important than the left-right axis.

When I was here in the '87 election, not a single American I knew would not have voted for the Alliance. Every opinion poll said that what the British people felt about issues correlated precisely with Alliance politics. But what we heard as compromise and consensus, the British people apparently heard as being wishy-washy and uncommitted, and so rejected the centre parties with contempt, even though their attitudes and programmes were precisely what the people wanted.

Perhaps you're not taking the class system into account, which still tends to polarize politics in this country, and perhaps in America too.

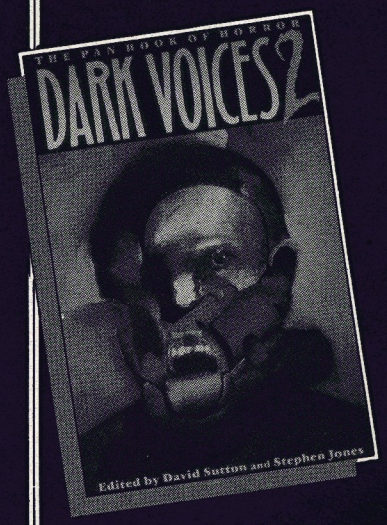
Jefferson said we should have a revolution every twenty years, and so far, I don't know how or why, we've managed to have a social upheaval every sunspot cycle, every twenty-two years, that virtually wrecks the class system. And it's absolutely necessary. In '46 it was a simple piece of legislation, called the GI Bill, which resulted in one million sons of the working class going to university. It destroyed what was left of the class system for twenty years. In '68 it was a youth rebellion.

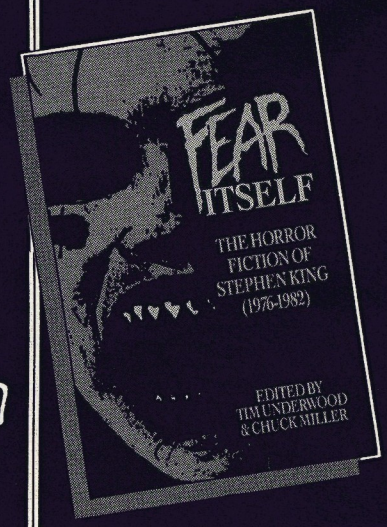
The problem is only some men and women who get rich using free enterprise are able to rise above the human tendency to want their children to be dukes. It's a perfectly natural thing to want to give your children an advantage, but some people, like Andrew Carnegie, recognized what a trap it is. He said he would rather leave his son a curse than the almighty dollar. He left his children comfortable, but challenged, and gave all the rest to building libraries. More and more rich people are seeing this, but we're going to have to go another hundred years before we are mature enough to deal with it naturally. Until then we're just going to have to prevent them from creating an aristocracy.

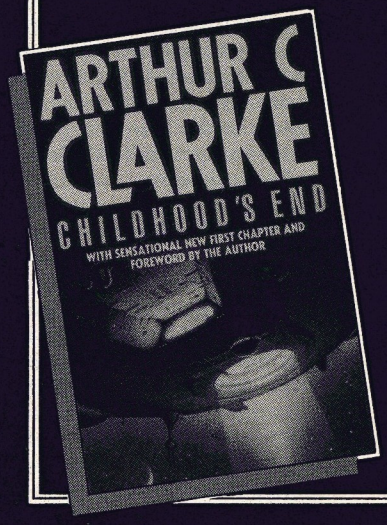
Sf has a lousy record for prophecy, but it seems to have been particularly reactive in dealing with environmental issues.

Right. Although of course there was Harry Harrison's *Make Room, Make Room*, Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest*, and several others, including the Brunner books I mentioned. Take a look at one of the most famous sf universes ever – Asimov's *Foundation* series. When he started it in the 1940s he created the worst ecological holocaust in the history of science fiction, with human beings going out into the galaxy and turning every planet into either Kansas or New York. Actually there's an even better example: computers. Up to the late '70s the obsession was with huge central processors and a few rich people having access to terminals. Which also made for really simple plots. A big central processor is prone to sabotage, it's very delicate, it can be undermined or used by Big Brother. Only Murray Leinster seems to have predicted what the home computer would become, and showed that it could be like the musket over the fireplace; the guarantee that never again will any dictator be able to dominate us against our will. How could any demagogue really control people with home computers in their hands? The only dictatorship we will ever have is one we vote in regularly. I mean, you've got one right now.

***Earth* by David Brin is published by Macdonald, £13.95**







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Djinn

Don Webb

I was driving Jenni home from Korea House when she saw the fire-eater. If he hadn't exploded later that evening, I never would have found my destiny.

The Korea House sold its spicy food in an upscale shopping mall in the suburbs. Jenni and I had our condos in a revamped warehouse downtown. Between the two was a corridor of unreconstructed urban blight. A carnival had attached itself to some saint's festival. Jenni saw the fire-eater vomit yellow flame.

"Hey, let's stop."

I didn't like stopping in this neighbourhood, but I didn't want to show my discomfort to Jenni. The carnival was finishing its free show and had drawn quite a crowd. We waited in line for tickets and traded our tickets for coffee, caramel apples, and seats for the first two shows. The first show was a trio of belly dancers – almost laughable in its lack of erotic appeal – but the second show was the Human Salamander.

The Human Salamander worked without a shirt. Every square centimetre of visible skin bore exquisite scale tattoos. Gold, green, scarlet. As he moved under the pyramid of Xmas lights which illuminated the stage, it was easy to forget he was human and to see him as some strange reptile or dragon. He placed a brazier of orange-hot coals on a small table. Then he took a long swig of a clear liquid. He lit a torch at the brazier. He juggled the lit torch and two unlit ones. Then he spewed the liquid from his mouth and created a fireball. When the fireball receded all three torches were lit. Then he put them out one by one by placing the burning torches in his mouth. He'd close his lips around the torch and for an instant the light of the torch glowed through his cheeks.

It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen.

He pulled a bottle of Tabasco sauce from his jeans pocket. He picked up three coals from the brazier and began to chew on them – holding his lips wide so we could see and hear each bite. He tipped the Tabasco to his mouth. When the hot sauce hit the coals, sharp spicy smoke formed with a sizzle. He swallowed the seething mix and a moment later he belched smoke. He shammed embarrassment. Then he bowed and addressed the crowd, "Although my antics may amuse you tonight, my friends, I assure you it took me years of study in India to master the way of Agni Yoga. I will demonstrate further feats that require the complete discipline of mind and body. As you applaud these astonishing activities, I ask that you do not direct your applause to me but the the ancient priests of the flame."

Jenni was getting restless so I began to ignore her.

The Human Salamander's assistants, attractively tanned women in vermilion bikinis, brought a six-foot long shallow tray of glowing charcoal on stage. The Human Salamander took off his ostrich stomach boots, showing off his tattooed feet to the audience. Then he performed some sleight of hand and poured a dozen or so firecrackers from one boot. He gathered the firecrackers in each hand and walked to the burning trough. He steeled himself for a moment then stepped on to the burning coals. Something within flashed *that this was real*, not an illusion. Despite the cheap surroundings, I was seeing human nature pushed to new limits. Nobody understood this but me. As the Human Salamander walked across the coals he dropped the firecrackers one by one. They blossomed into spinning whistling fire flowers – magenta, yellow-white, silver. He walked slowly and deliberately. After he had crossed the trough, Jenni said, "It's late. We've seen enough."

"I want to see the whole show."

"Oh, come on."

I gave her my car keys. "You drive on home. When this is over, I'll call a cab or something."

The Human Salamander was beginning his next act so I didn't have time to watch for her reaction. I just know she left.

He filled a large blue glass chalice with the fuel. I figured he would take in small swallows releasing several flames. Instead he drank it down as if it was milk. He placed a coal between his teeth and began to bring the fuel up. He created a yard-long continuous flame. He lit eight sparklers – one held between each pair of fingers in his hands. He swirled the sparklers in elegant arcs while maintaining his natural blowtorch. He turned his head, scanning the audience. With a slight increase in pressure he could've burnt any of us. Just as his eyes met mine, he exploded.

He winced, inhaled, then his upper body disappeared in a fireball. Everyone was running. He lit the stage, which had caught fire. Parts of his lips had been blown away. Small blisters were beginning to form on his illustrated skin. Bits of fried lung stuck to his chest.

He was alive.

He was breathing, but breathing with only half his chest. I pulled off my coat and ran to the stage, knocking over the folding chairs. I beat at the flames.

"He's alive! Give me a hand!" One of the carnies ran up with a wet bedsheet which he threw over the Human Salamander. The priest who had been overseeing the festival approached us, but the carnie waved him away. "Take care of the crowd."

The Fakir Impossible went to call an ambulance. The Salamander's assistants and I carried him into a tent between RVs.

One of the assistants said, "Can you watch him a second?"

"Yeah."

They departed. The Salamander's breathing was ragged. I'd never seen anyone this near death before. He gave a moan and opened his eyes. He tried to smile with what was left of his lips.

He said, "I'm glad you came. Did you like the act?"

"It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Take it easy. How are you doing?"

"I'm dying. I inhaled a little of the fluid and my left lung exploded. They're all running to get ambulances aren't they? Waste of time. I saw the Great Pyro blow a lung out in '66."

"Hey. You'll be all right. Medical science has come a long way since '66."

"No. It's over. I saw you through the flames. The fire has chosen you."

"What do you mean?"

"There are common fire-eaters and there are the Priests of the Flame. I received the fire from the Pyro as he lay dying and now I will give it to you."

"But I don't want to be a fire-eater."

"Be anything you want to be. Just accept the flame so I can die. It's painful to lie here like this."

Blood had begun to flow from his mouth and the blisters were beginning to break.

"I'll take it," I said.

"Give me your hand."

I stuck out my right hand and he stuck out his. There were three coals from the show embedded in the flesh of his palm. Before I could think to draw my hand away, he pressed the coals into my flesh. I almost swooned.

When I managed to reorient myself, the Human Salamander was no longer breathing.

I walked home from the carnival, put a burn balm on my blisters, and went to bed.

Six months passed and my firm began aggressively acquiring property in the run-down city centre and upgrading it to prime real estate. A lot of it was laughably easy to acquire. No one had paid taxes on some of those buildings for years. Others were held by out-of-towners who had acquired them as legacy and were grateful to get rid of them.

Of course there were zoning changes and bribes downtown, but that wasn't my office's department.

I even cleaned out the area where I'd met the Human Salamander.

Jenni and I grew close, then drifted apart, then finally lapsed into a comfortable holding pattern. We were waiting for something – some spark to kindle our lives.

One Friday I came home and smelled gas in my conapt. Strictly speaking, I smelled marcaptan, the rotten egg-smelling substance TexanGasCo puts in its product for safety reasons. I checked my water heater's pilot light, the floor furnace, and my stove. All burned blue, which meant I'd better get out of here before the leaking gas found a flame.

It was 4:30 in the afternoon and I knew most if not all of my neighbours were still at work – so I wasn't bothered about trying to warn them. I sprinted across the street to what was perhaps the last telephone booth in the city. A bright female voice at TexanGasCo assured me I'd done right. I sat on the curb waiting for the van to arrive.

There were bright orange letters – stencil graffiti – on the sidewalk.

ALL NATURE IS RENEWED BY FIRE

We paid for good security here. I hadn't seen any graffiti since I'd bought my conapt. I wondered if the gas were leaking in my building on purpose.

A white minivan bearing the TexanGasCo logo parked in front of my building. I waved at the crew of four as they went in and they waved back. They were inside for a long time. My neighbours began arriving. I figured that if there was any danger, the TexanGasCo people would've stopped them. Many of them looked my way. They didn't like a man just sitting on the curb. Maybe they thought the neighbourhood was reverting.

Finally a TexanGasCo man came out. He crossed to me.

"My Phillip Gartner?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We couldn't detect any gas. Had your apartment been closed up for a long time?"

"Only since seven or so when I left for work."

The man frowned, but went on with his canned speech. "Well, in a closed space even the smallest leak can build up. Whatever you smelled had dispersed by the time we had arrived. We checked your joints for leaks with a bubble solution, and they're all OK. There's no pressure drops. We also checked the apartment above yours. Methane's heavier than air and sometimes the gas filters down. If you have any more problems, don't hesitate to call. We can assure you that there's no danger in your apartment now."

He shook my hand, then scratched his head. He was looking at the graffiti.

I asked, "You ever see that before?"

"It's around town. In the damnedest places. We see it on our gas meters a lot. We don't like fire."

His crew had started the van.

He said, "Don't feel bad about calling. Better safe than sorry."

My office began to smell of gas. It was faint. Undetectable to most people. I asked everyone if they smelled it. My secretary said she thought she smelled it. I went to the building manager and said I kept smelling gas. He told me that my office was floors away from the water heaters or the furnaces.

Maybe someone in the company was playing a prank on me. They might've heard about the gas in my apartment and hidden some scratch-n-sniff mercaptan cards. TexanGasCo sends those out with their bills so you'll know the scent. I got on my hands and knees to look under my desk.

Jenni walked in. "What are you doing?"

"I'm – I'm looking for something I dropped."

"Well. When you find it, are you ready to take me to lunch?"

"Yeah. I don't think I'm going to find it anyway."

The gas smell was gone.

We lunched at the Bangkok Palace. I had the three-

alarm red curry and Jenni had the eel in coconut milk. While we ate, a crowd of homeless derelict types began to gather. Mr Wu, the Palace's proprietor, looked worried. Someone was addressing the assembly with a bullhorn. The inciting rhetoric rattled the windows. When we finished, Mr Wu offered to let us out the back way. Jenni said no, that she would like to see what the excitement was.

"Why?"

"I need the excitement. I need it more and more."

We walked into the unwashed crowd. A young Puerto Rican woman lectured the crowd. Her Spanish was too rapid for me. She was talking about Apocalypse and ashes, a new city with a new religion, change in the Aeon and radical politics. Your heart beat faster and your breath came quicker just listening to her. Whatever she was saying, her own belief not only poured into her words, but went beyond her words and poured into you. I broke the spell momentarily and glanced at Jenni. Her pupils were dilated, sweat beading on her brow.

"Do you ever give any thought to what you're doing?" Jenni pushed papers off my desk onto the camel-hair rug. Jenni dressed differently now. She wore a sleeveless burnt-orange tee shirt with "ALL NATURE IS RENEWED BY FIRE" in white plastic letters. She wore a scarlet beret. She'd been spending a lot of time outside.

She'd never touched down since she heard the orator. I'd heard she'd lost her job, but I was afraid to ask her about it. I wasn't prepared to face that reality. If she kept dressing that way – if she kept *degenerating*, building security wouldn't let her in. As it was, I would draw strange looks from my co-workers.

I said, "I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm rebuilding this city."

"No. You're putting up shiny tombs for people who have no contact with the city. People who hide behind magnetic card-locked elevators, drive around in air-conditioned cars, especially people like you – who live in reconditioned warehouses – mock versions of what a real city has."

I was picking up my files. I said, "We don't need smoky warehouses in the centre of town. If we hadn't stepped in, the city centre would've completely rotted."

"It has rotted and died. Now it needs to be wiped clean before *rigor mortis* sets in."

"Look, Jenni, you've made your political statement. You've had your fun. When are you going to stop playing?"

"I'm not playing at anything. Until I began to interact with the real City I had never been alive before. Have you ever talked with one of the real inhabitants? One of the people you helped kick out? Of course not. You're afraid of them."

"The inhabitants of the buildings we renovate get homes. There are departments for that."

"Get real. These people stay as close to their true homes as your guards will let them. They're waiting for the False City to burn so they can begin work on the true city."

"Jenni, this will pass. These aren't your people."

"Come with me, Phillip. We'll find a floating meeting and you'll see. You'll at least learn where the homeless come from."

"I have a responsibility here. A responsibility to the city I'm making."

Jenni stopped coming round.

I began to ask my bosses about the people we displaced. It wasn't a popular question.

I got locked out of my conapt building that week. I had forgotten the five-number security sequence for the month. Maybe I was too busy thinking of other things. When I screwed up I was trapped in the foyer. I couldn't go on into the building and the door wouldn't let me out. Guards came and I had to prove that I was I. While I waited for my own identity to be verified, I decided it was time to see Jenni again.

I had the key to her townhouse. The guards knew me there and there wasn't automated security yet. I knocked and knocked again and opened the door.

I smelled something rotten. Her fish had died and were floating in her expensive salt-water aquarium. She hadn't been here for a while. I checked her closets. They were full – she hadn't taken anything from her old life into the new. The refrigerator was a mess of moulds. There was an address on a yellow scrap of paper held by a refrigerator magnet. 1111 Cairo Avenue. One of the few remaining unreconstituted parts of the city's core. We had been trying to get at the sector for weeks. A wealthy widow held onto it – fighting for its decay with a fierce nostalgia. It wasn't far. I could walk. I didn't know if I could face the people I would find there, but if Jenni was there I could talk with her. I locked the empty townhouse behind me.

It was twilight and people drove into their parking garages. Neon signs (and the playful shapes of Memphis design) flickered into life at fashionable restaurants. Lights came on in the guardhouses as the college students arrived to spend their nights checking passes and doing their calculus. Joggers jogged on circular tracks around the tops of buildings. Aerobics classes flexed and jazzercised behind thick glass. Brave people darted from their buildings to the corner grocery for pasta and Hagan Daas. It could've been anywhere.

As I neared the 1100 block of Cairo the newness began to vanish. That building had new windows, but needed a coat of paint. This store had dirty green linoleum – worn through in places to the cement beneath. There were pay phones and people using them while their friends slumped beside them against a brick wall watching me pass with dead eyes. There were people gathered at the corners waiting for nothing. Some streets were half deserted. Others had people leaning out of the windows watching, smoking cigarettes whose blue smoke rose in an unbroken line to heaven. And everywhere the graffiti, **ALL NATURE IS RENEWED BY FIRE**.

The street abruptly changed from asphalt to brick. The sidewalk was uneven. That building had no windows. I passed another block of crumbling retreats. There were children – six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds playing hopscotch, singing a song:

"We all love the Methane Man
the Methane Man
the Methane Man
We all love the Methane Man."

When they saw me, they stopped their game. They

ran and giggled as though caught at something naughty. I was at 1111 Cairo Avenue, a five-floor walk-up which used to have a clock repair shop on the first floor. A giant pocket watch hung at a crazy angle from an iron stanchion. Inside beyond the greening letters I could see Jenni in the dimly lit room. I didn't recognize her at first glance. She had grown brown and thin like the others. She was talking to the young orator. Two men were taking a gas heater off its spigot. Three others were moving a gurney into the room. The door to 1111 stood ajar. Someone had painted three vermilion dots on the old wood. Jenni looked younger, as though the spark of excitement had burned away the weight of the years. These people were doing important work. It went beyond politics. It was changing them. I wanted to be part of it. I didn't understand it yet. But it was at the centre of everything I'd seen tonight. I went up the stairs and into the room. Jenni was beautiful and I suddenly realized that I wanted her. Really wanted her.

"Jenni."

Everyone turned.

"We've been waiting for you, Phil."

I walked into the room. Two men grabbed me. They'd been waiting on either side of the door. They carried me to the gurney. There was a machine nearby with needles and pots of dye. The three men helped the two tie me down. I was to be their sacrifice. I was here to atone for my crimes, a symbol to start the revolution. Jenni and the orator were attaching a tube with a face mask to the gas spigot. They were perfect in their beauty.

Jenni said, "Don't worry, Phil. It won't take long." Then she put the mask over my face. The orator turned the spigot and natural gas filled the mask. I tried to retch when the rotten smell of mercaptan hit me. Then the room began to spin the way it had when I had my tonsils out when I was 11.

When I came to my skin hurt. They had torn away my shirt. I raised my arm. It was crusted with blood in places. They had tattooed me, covering me with scales. I set up slowly, groggy with gas. Jenni sat against the wall on the far side of the room. She smiled, beckoned.

I held up my right hand. The coals had emerged from behind the scars. I had changed. I had become the centre of their work. I concentrated and my hand became flame. Then flesh. Then flame. I walked past Jenni and onto the stoop. All of the inhabitants of the true city had gathered on Cairo Avenue. I raised my fist and made it flame. They applauded. They had their hero.

I was ready to punch the face of the false city with my fist of flame.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Don Webb, a mainstay of such US magazines as *New Pathways*, first appeared in *Interzone* with a very short and crazy story called "Rhinestone Manifesto" (issue 13). Since then, his reputation has grown, and a collection of his pieces has been published by an American small press. He lives in Texas.

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Mutant Popcorn

Film reviews by Nick Lowe

James Ferman (Chairman)
British Board of Film Classification
3 Soho Square
London W1

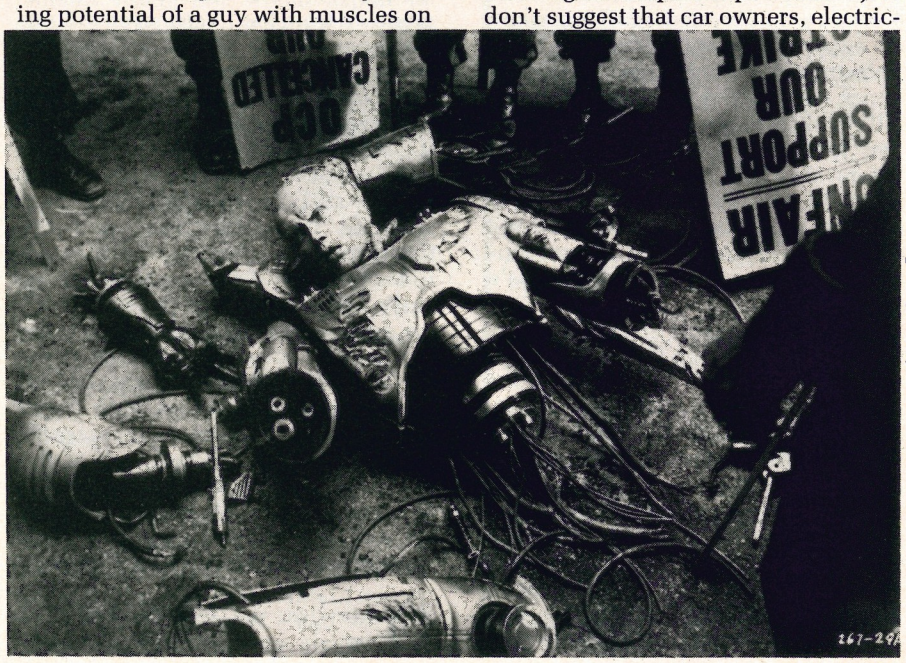
Dear Mr Ferman:
Hi! I hope you liked the card. (Sure you do: the one with the blue fluffy kitten with its genitals stitched into its mouth, and the verse inside "Here's a wish from someone true/A happy DEATH THREAT just for you!" Devoted Sons of the Prophet Greetings Inc do a whole line.)

I expect you'll have guessed what this is about, so I just wanted to say that me and all the other members of the Gospel Oak Fabulous Film Society have agreed to pour beer over ourselves and drop in a match on the NFT back patio if **International Guerrillas** is not (i) awarded a certificate within 36 hours, (ii) booked for twenty weeks at the Odeon Marble Arch, and (iii) announced as the gala closing picture at this year's London Film Festival. If the Board's legal advisers continue to whinge on about criminal libel, we recommend the release of a dubbed print where the villain is consistently named as Solomon Rusty. This wheeze is clearly protected by the precedent, in **Gremlins 2: The New Batch**, of a character named Daniel Clamp who (unlike the *Guerrillas* character) is a *completely accurate likeness in every particular* of a well-known property tycoon and litigant who (unlike Mr Rushdie) has *not* promised not to sue. We should further like to point out that Benazir Bhutto is totally the foxiest head of state in world history and anything that's OK by her has our stamp of by golly approval.

You see, sir, what's really at stake here isn't freedom of expression, or multicultural harmony, or the public right of access to dangerous fun. The issue here is the very existence of *evil*. There's probably never been a time when so many talented people in the first-world movie business have been grappling so determinedly with the problem of evil – not the old poser about why it exists and stuff, but the much more serious and contemporary one about there not being enough of it. Since the commies all came over to our side, the price of evil on world markets has shot way up. It's not that there's a shortage of evil in general – just the very pure, entertainment-grade villainy that keeps Hollywood afloat. A year or two back it looked as though a promising new supply could be opening up in South Africa, but even there the long-term prospects have got a bit dicey since the headily uncomplicated days of *Lethal Weapon 2*.

So trust the Middle East to turn up with the market cornered. Those canny sons of the desert have got it made: an old-fashioned straight-down terrestrial incarnation of absolute ultimate evil, the sort even Berkoff doesn't play any more. We just don't have that kind of quality evil these days in the west. Any studio boss would give his eyeteeth. Not, mind, that the world is any less full of repulsive moral vermin we'd love to see blown away. The problem is, all the thuggish slimy foreign ones nowadays generally have vociferous communities in our backyard and embarrassing amounts of leverage on us abroad, while the creepy thin-lipped domestic ones are too involved in running the country to make for soft enough targets. In any case, contemporary evil is for the most part miserably uncinematic, and even more so the fight against it. Empowering the masses hasn't exactly the blowaway ending potential of a guy with muscles on the edge of a cliff taking some pinstripe's head off with a rocket launcher.

So what is there? Well, there's drugs – undoubtedly Hollywood's favourite war, so long as you don't let in any pinko crap about addressing the disease rather than the symptoms. Special marks for invention here to *Dark Angel*, which cleverly made the pusher a lone, unstoppable alien, so that all you have to do is send Dolph Lundgren up against him and the problem's erased once he figures out how to deal with the flying killer CD. More sensitively, there's still big business, with the one drawback that in order to stop it looking too actionably like any particular real thing you have to caricature it so absurdly that nobody can take it seriously anyway. Extra points here to the incomprehensibly daft German spectacular *Moon 44*, whose pre-title expo began with the immortal "The year is 2038. Multinational corporations have taken control of the universe." (And they *still* haven't upgraded to, say, "multigalactic"? Mind you, this was the one with extensive credits for "Modellmakers" and one delightfully cryptic one for "Pneumatik," so maybe the script just dropped something in translation.) And don't forget environmental bandits, a new criminal breed with big development potential – just don't suggest that car owners, electric-



From 'RoboCop 2' (Rank)

ity consumers, or supermarket shoppers are part of the problem, or that Manekha Gandhi has a point about the cleanup bill.

For these, and all kinds of connected reasons, it was a smart move to engage Frank Miller to write **RoboCop 2**. RoboCop, after all, isn't an easy character to find enemies for. He's very good at punching out tanks, but no better than your average undead schizo cyborg avenger at adjusting inequalities of social opportunity and restoring accountability to the mechanisms of political control. Ergo, it's important that the evil he combats should (a) peddle drugs, pollute the environment, and engage in systematic corporate corruption and (b) furnish him the odd tank to punch out. Miller's solution is RoboCop 2, a replacement model sponsored by the villainous corporation who are bent on lock & stock privatizing the city of Detroit, and built from the brain of a psychopathic drug baron thirsting for revenge on the chicken-walking steel lawman who put him on a drip in the first place.

A couple of neat devices here betray their author's hand. First, it's a very *comics* solution. RoboCop is the cinema's first original out-and-out superhero, and only a writer who's had to work within the wretched, shrivelled world of superhero mythology can deal with the storylining troubles involved. In fact, *RoboCop 2* is a textbook demonstration of a standard genre dilemma. Superheroes have no direct competence to fight organized crime or corporate frightfulness: even if you corner the Kingpin, it's caddish bullying to throw him through a wall. So what you do is you get the organization to sponsor a supervillain, and then the hero throws *him* through a wall. Simple, but not yet a cliché on screen; and I can't recall a movie before this one that actually ran the full repertoire of superhero combat motifs. Here, indestructible antagonists really do knock one another through buildings, fall off skyscrapers and crash through five levels of underground parking before dusting off and re-engaging fisticuffs. It's familiar and refreshing at once, and the finale finds something even more absurd than the bomb-in-the-drug-fix routine you're sure he's going to use.

But any reasonably shameless Marvel graduate could go this far. The personal touch of the world's mightiest grafico is much more distinctively evident in the lead-up, which goes through a couple of preliminary acts explaining why the ideology of superhero vigilantism is the only realistic solution. Early on, there's a fascinating round-the-table story conference (another favourite comics device) between the interested parties of villainous corporatchiks, tough-but-righteous cops, and well-meaning-but-woolly liberal politicoes who don't like the role model RoboCop presents to their youth. The fight against crime, they argue, is caricatured by reduction to a few secondhand Dredd mannerisms (I'm sure the old RoboCop never called perps "creep") and a fistful of firepower. So our luckless hero gets reprogrammed with a mass of new directives that effectively disable him as a crimebusting force. "They've put all this *nonsense* into his brain!" wails Nancy Allen as the display scrolls up: "Avoid premature value judgments. Always pool opinions before expressing yourself..." Luckily a quick self-imposed short circuit burns all this mealy-mouthed (and, it's got to be said, pretty funny) moral gobbledygook out of the system, and RoboCop is soon ready as ever to kick funky behind.

As a joke, this all fills screen time well. But fans will know Miller has sometimes shown a nasty tendency, most notoriously in *Dark Knight*, to take this kind of moral survivalism rather more seriously than makes for comfortable entertainment. And it's certainly in the vision of crime and punishment that the writer's hand is most distinctively on view here. The bad guys peddle a drug called Nuke; the scientist baddie is called Dr Juliette Faxx, and even looks drawn by Frankie; and the criminal scum conduct their crusade of violence with a kind of exaggerated street naff that may ring familiar. If you can overlook all this, technically it's not at all a bad script – no worse, in its way, than the original's, and certainly an impressive if rather unstretching crossover debut. (Keep an eye for Frank's uncredited cameo, by the way: not hard. Of course he gets blown up.)

What badly brings the film down, though, is the directorial handmedown from Paul Verhoeven to Irvin Kershner, which seems to strip the package of much of the essential wit and sadistic irony that made the first *RoboCop* spark. They try hard here, but it's still like *The Fly II* after Cronenberg: nobody, really, has a clue. Peter Weller still does wonderful things with an impossible role, and the throwaway gag ads are there and sometimes funny. But still the whole thing emits a persistent clanking, and there's no excuse for the dreadful way the shade-of-Swamp-Thing human metaphysics gets perfunctorily shunted off at the end. Comparison with *Total Recall*, a minor script made magnificent, suggests just how much of the first film's impact was directorial. We won't have seen the last of Frank Miller on screen; but we surely won't see more of Pete 'n' Nancy's RoboFunnies.

Otherwise, the season's brood of sequels were better than most. I *still* don't know who Biff's mysterious granny was back in *Future 2*, but anything can be forgiven in a film that has the nerve to talk the audience through a papier-maché model of the ending (with a handpainted sign labelling "Point of No Return," no less), and "I never met a girl who liked Jules Verne before" is really kind of deep, considering. And the new *Gremlins* were extraordinary, a perfect metaphor as well as vehicle for the whole exploding-nuclear-cigar style of Joe Dante's postchaotic terrorist slapstick, where the veering quality of the gags is made up by the unbelievable speed and superabundance of their delivery. The lab bottle marked "Danger – Acid. Do Not Throw in Face" more or less spoke for it all.

Thanks to a pesky Y chromosome, I won't be here next month. But I can't sign out without a word for **Tremors**, the only serious surprise in the summer's pleasures. Unlike all the costly followons and barnstormers, this first postCameronian production from Gale Anne Hurd triumphantly proclaims the virtues of old-fashioned narrative technology, as giant burrowing things – I use the term advisedly – terrorize the tiny interSierran community of Perfection, pop. 14 (count 'em as they get picked off) assorted lovable losers, survivalists, and dippoes with one attractive postgrad geologist to explain the plot. After the initial tease phase, it turns out there are precisely four of the beastly things – just the right number of set pieces for a no-nonsense creature thriller, so long as you take care to take out each in a more inventive way than the last. *Tremors* is a wonderful picture with nothing whatever going for it beyond a deft script, great ensemble of unknowns, fine use of a gorgeous setting, and unembarrassed joy in the mechanics of entertainment. It just shows, you don't *need* moral convolutions of sin and sanctimony so long as you've got forty-foot killer plonkers from beneath the earth. I think you'll agree there's a lesson for humanity there. Yours very sincerely.

Tube Corn
TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

I have written in a previous column about the density, or rather lack of it, of television programmes and lo! along comes Channel 4's **A TV Dante** to illustrate the point. Peter Greenaway – *The Draftsman's Contract, The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* – and Tom Phillips, who produced an edition of Dante's *Inferno* translated

into blank verse and illustrated at a mere ten grand a go, put together eight ten-minute programmes illustrating the first eight cantos which Channel 4 showed in four pairs split by ads on four successive nights from July 29 to August 1 1990.

Channel 4 trail them, rightly, as an extraordinary work but no-one watches them, they do not create a cultural stir, they arouse no controversy, Mary Whitehouse does not even trouble to complain about the nudity. They are Art and therefore high culture, nothing to do with *us*: good for Channel 4's kudos, the "special remit" for keeping the IBA off relevant backs. What has gone wrong?

Well, firstly *A TV Dante* is Art but it is visual art, not televisual art. The screen is dense with images but there is a limit to the number of images the human eye can absorb simultaneously. Put a wolf in motion into a frame, frame that inside a lion in motion and *that* in a leopard and you do not have a dense piece of television but a kaleidoscope, a meaningless but vaguely pleasing visual pattern. This is the error of the visual artist, the painter, and the true home of *A TV Dante* is the art gallery, on eight continuous loops played constantly on eight high-definition screens simultaneously in a high-ceilinged white space.

The screen is constantly covered by a cluster of images, but what of the sound? Bob Peck and John Gielgud play Dante and Virgil and, splendid as they are, there is little for them to do – filmed in tight close-up on black which makes them disembodied heads that can be fitted into the collage of images, and reading words thick with incomprehensible allusion in the voices of Actors. There is a rhythm to the voice of the classical verse speaker which forms a barrier between the actor and the audience; blank verse knits seamlessly around the sense so that all you hear is the sound. This is why, in theatre, all the critics notice that rare moment when the actor breaks through to the sense. Peck and Gielgud are brilliant precisely because this is one of their skills, but Greenaway and Phillips are not calling on their brilliance but their *stature*; relying on them to knit the text quietly out of the way while they play their visual games.

The third element in *A TV Dante* is the "expert footnote." Just as footnotes are needed to make Dante's text comprehensible to the modern reader so information is given to *A TV Dante*'s viewer by incorporating onto the screen small boxes in which talking heads appear to give snippets of expert commentary on the medieval imagery or religious practices. This is both a witty and a useful device, but around

From 'A TV Dante' (Channel 4)

the boxes the action freezes or kaleidoscopes into abstract and still we see the directors constrained by the limitations of another medium. In a book the footnote and the text cannot be savoured simultaneously. In TV they can and yet the opportunity this might give to alter the meaning taken from an image *while the image is being viewed* is wasted.

A TV Dante, then, is an extraordinary piece but ultimately it is a dead end for television, brilliant moving pictures rather than brilliant television. Television is a bastard form just as the word itself is a bastard construction of Latin and Greek roots, and the form is still, after half a century of technological innovation, used mostly with leaden lack of imagination as an eye pointed at a staged event. Television fantasy programmes where one would expect to escape the dead hand of naturalism have often been the worst offenders, an eye pointed at a staged *silly* event – think of **Beauty and the Beast** and the amount of time wasted on getting extras from a *Mad Max* movie to spend their time waiting for a bit part in the plot, and the simultaneous lack of attention paid to the holes in the plot or the repellent storyline of Vincent "having" to conceal his existence from the rest of us. For goodness' sake, this is Manhattan! Get him a plastic surgeon or a good agent and an intro to the chat show circuit – or even a video of *Mask*!

Then there is the truly excruciating **William Tell**, a Euro production currently being sneaked into the schedules in the kind of 2am slots here and there that show you how embarrassed by it the schedulers are. This retelling of the Swiss folk hero's story has a high-calibre cast and clearly large amounts of money have been thrown at it – and yet it is neither exciting, moving, imaginative nor even sexy. *Robin of Sherwood* and *Arthur of the Britons* at least managed one of four and their camera's eye was always pointed at something striving to be strange. My objection comes from a conviction that the camera can do more, that it should be possible to combine the filmic quality of television, moving pictures on a screen, with text or inset pictures and well-thought sound, to do something more than a film can do. Dear God, give me a camera and a canto!

(Wendy Bradley)

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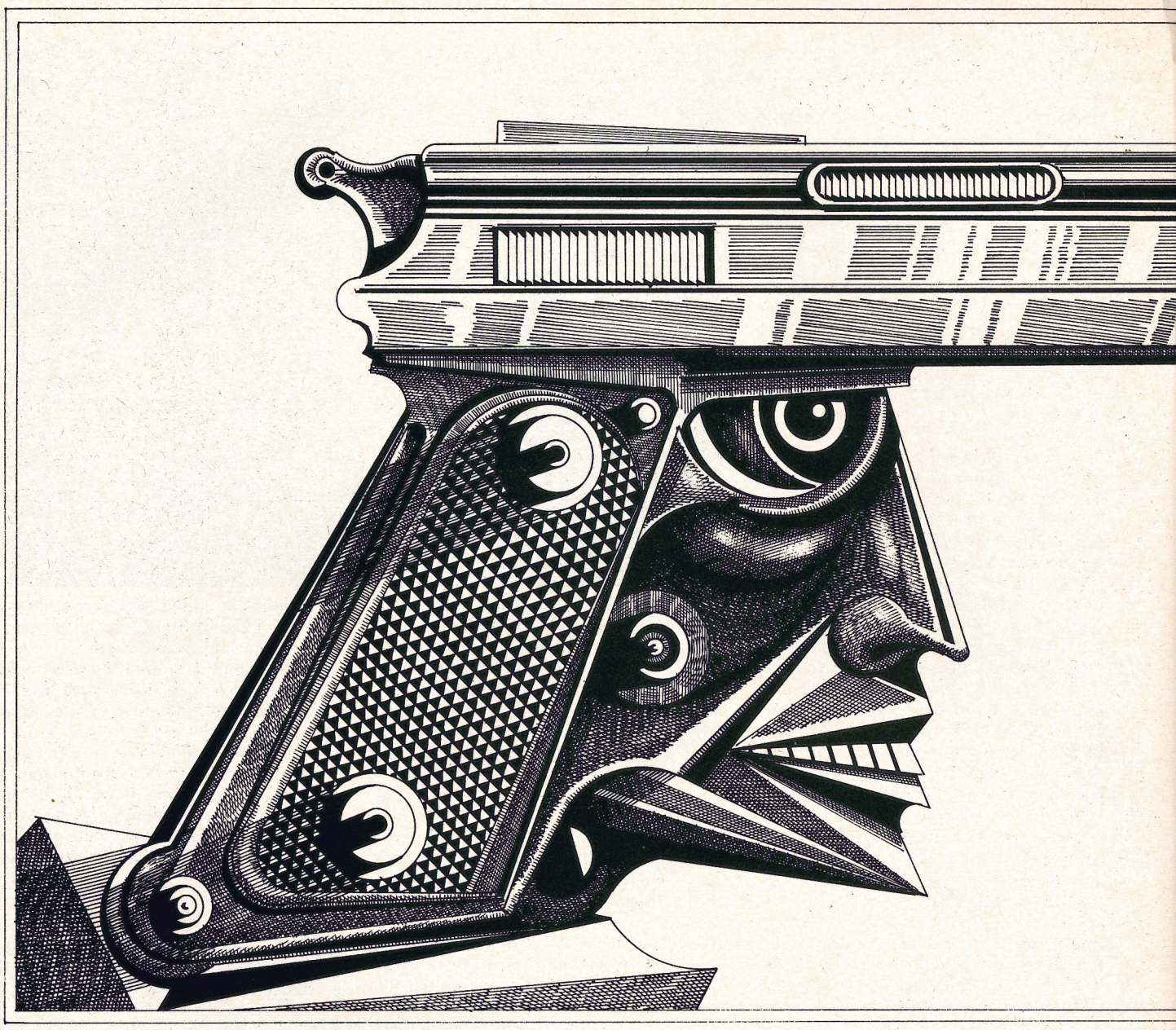


"...like your brain has been frozen in liquid nitrogen, and then smashed into a thousand shards!"

I squeezed my way past the teenagers who lounged outside the entrance to the Implant Store, no doubt fervently hoping for a holovision news team to roll up and ask them why they weren't in school. They mimed throwing up as I passed, as if the state of not being pubescent and dressed like a member of Binary Search was so disgusting to contemplate that it made them physically ill.

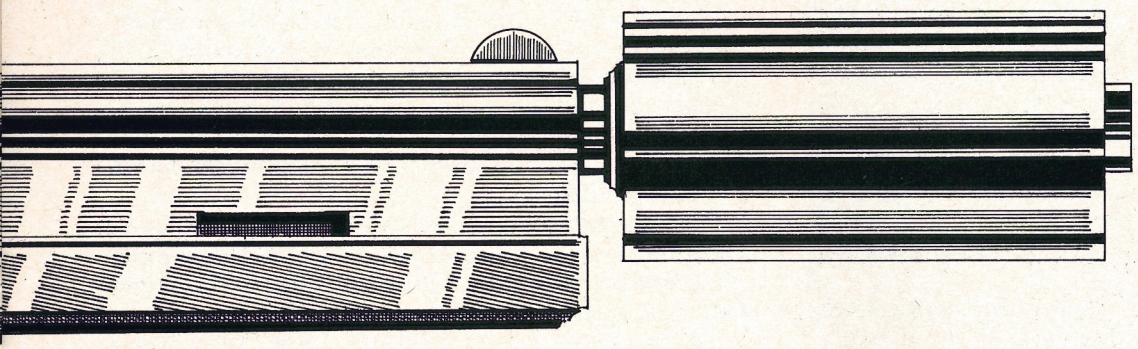
Well, maybe it did.

Inside, the place was almost deserted. The interior reminded me of a video ROM shop; the display racks were virtually identical, and many of the distributors' logos were the same. Each rack was labelled: PSYCHEDELIA. MEDITATION AND HEALING. MOTIVATION AND SUCCESS. LANGUAGES AND TECHNICAL SKILLS. Each implant, although itself less than half a millimetre across, came in a package the size of an old-style book, bearing gaudy illustrations and a few lines of stale hyperbole from a marketing thesaurus or some rent-an-endorsement celebrity. "*Become* God! *Become* the Universe!" "The Ultimate Insight! The Ultimate Knowledge! The Ultimate Trip!" Even the perennial, "This implant changed my life!"

I picked up the carton of *You Are Great!* – its transparent protective wrapper glistening with sweaty fingerprints – and thought numbly: If I bought this thing and used it, I would actually believe that. No amount of evidence to the contrary would be *physically able* to change my mind. I put it back on the shelf, next to *Love Yourself A Billion* and *Instant Willpower, Instant Wealth*.

I knew exactly what I'd come for, and I knew that it wouldn't be on display, but I browsed a while longer, partly out of genuine curiosity, partly just to give myself time. Time to think through the implications once again. Time to come to my senses and flee.

The cover of *Synaesthesia* showed a blissed-out man with a rainbow striking his tongue and musical staves piercing his eyeballs. Beside it, *Alien Mind-Fuck* boasted "a mental state so bizarre that even as you experience it, you won't know what it's like!"



AXIOMATIC

Greg Egan

Illustrations by Ian Miller

Implant technology was originally developed to provide instant language skills for business people and tourists, but after disappointing sales and a takeover by an entertainment conglomerate, the first mass-market implants appeared: a cross between video games and hallucinogenic drugs. Over the years, the range of confusion and dysfunction on offer grew wider, but there's only so far you can take that trend; beyond a certain point, scrambling the neural connections doesn't leave anyone *there* to be entertained by the strangeness, and the user, once restored to normalcy, remembers almost nothing.

The first of the next generation of implants – the so-called axiomatics – were all sexual in nature; apparently that was the technically simplest place to start. I walked over to the Erotica section, to see what was available – or at least, what could legally be displayed. Homosexuality, heterosexuality, autoerotism. An assortment of harmless fetishes. Eroticization of various unlikely parts of the body. Why, I wondered, would anyone choose to have their brain rewired to make them crave a sexual practice they otherwise would have found abhorrent, or ludicrous, or just plain boring? To comply with a partner's demands? Maybe, although such extreme submissiveness was hard to imagine, and could scarcely be sufficiently widespread to explain the size of the market. To enable a part of their own sexual identity, which, unaided, would have merely nagged and festered, to triumph over their inhibitions, their ambivalence, their revulsion? Everyone has conflicting desires, and people can grow tired of both wanting and not wanting the very same thing. I understood *that*, perfectly.

The next rack contained a selection of religions, everything from Amish to Zen. (Gaining the Amish disapproval of technology this way apparently posed no problem; virtually every religious implant enabled the user to embrace far stranger contradictions.) There was even an implant called *Secular Humanist* ("You WILL hold these truths to be self-evident!"). No *Vacillating Agnostic*, though; apparently there was no market for doubt.

For a minute or two, I lingered. For a mere fifty dollars, I could have bought back my childhood

Catholicism, even if the Church would not have approved. (At least, not officially; it would have been interesting to know exactly who was subsidising the product.) In the end, though, I had to admit that I wasn't really tempted. Perhaps it would have solved my problem, but not in the way that I wanted it solved – and after all, getting my own way was the whole point of coming here. Using an implant wouldn't rob me of my free will; on the contrary, it was going to help me to assert it.

Finally, I steeled myself and approached the sales counter.

"How can I help you, sir?" The young man smiled at me brightly, radiating sincerity, as if he really enjoyed his work. I mean, really, *really*.

"I've come to pick up a special order."

"Your name, please, sir?"

"Carver. Mark."

He reached under the counter and emerged with a parcel, mercifully already wrapped in anonymous brown. I paid in cash, I'd brought the exact change: $399.95. It was all over in twenty seconds.

I left the store, sick with relief, triumphant, exhausted. At least I'd finally bought the fucking thing; it was in my hands now, no one else was involved, and all I had to do was decide whether or not to use it.

After walking a few blocks towards the train station, I tossed the parcel into a bin, but I turned back almost at once and retrieved it. I passed a pair of armoured cops, and I pictured their eyes boring into me from behind their mirrored faceplates, but what I was carrying was perfectly legal. How could the government ban a device which did no more than engender, in those who *freely chose* to use it, a particular set of beliefs – without also arresting everyone who shared those beliefs naturally? Very easily, actually, since the law didn't have to be consistent, but the implant manufacturers had succeeded in convincing the public that restricting their products would be paving the way for the Thought Police.

By the time I got home, I was shaking uncontrollably. I put the parcel on the kitchen table, and started pacing.

This wasn't for Amy. I had to admit that. Just because I still loved her, and still mourned her, didn't mean I was doing this for *her*. I wouldn't soil her memory with that lie.

In fact, I was doing it to free myself from her. After five years, I wanted my pointless love, my useless grief, to finally stop ruling my life. Nobody could blame me for that.

She had died in an armed hold-up, in a bank. The security cameras had been disabled, and everyone apart from the robbers had spent most of the time face-down on the floor, so I never found out the whole story. She must have moved, fidgeted, looked up, she must have done *something*; even at the peaks of my hatred, I couldn't believe that she'd been killed on a whim, for no comprehensible reason at all.

I knew who had squeezed the trigger, though. It hadn't come out at the trial; a clerk in the Police Department had sold me the information. The killer's name was Patrick Anderson, and by turning prosecution witness, he'd put his accomplices away for life, and reduced his own sentence to seven years.

I went to the media. A loathsome crime-show personality had taken the story and ranted about it on the airwaves for a week, diluting the facts with self-serving rhetoric, then grown bored and moved on to something else.

Five years later, Anderson had been out on parole for nine months.

Okay. *So what?* It happens all the time. If someone had come to me with such a story, I would have been sympathetic, but firm. "Forget her, she's dead. Forget him, he's garbage. Get on with your life."

I didn't forget her, and I didn't forget her killer. I had loved her, whatever that meant, and while the rational part of me had swallowed the fact of her death, the rest kept twitching like a decapitated snake. Someone else in the same state might have turned the house into a shrine, covered every wall and mantelpiece with photographs and memorabilia, put fresh flowers on her grave every day, and spent every night getting drunk watching old home movies. I didn't do that, I couldn't. It would have been grotesque and utterly false; sentimentality had always made both of us ill. I kept a single photo. We hadn't made home movies. I visited her grave once a year.

Yet for all of this outward restraint, inside my head my obsession with Amy's death simply kept on growing. I didn't *want* it, I didn't *choose* it, I didn't feed it or encourage it in any way. I kept no electronic scrapbook of the trial. If people raised the subject, I walked away. I buried myself in my work; in my spare time I read, or went to the movies, alone. I thought about searching for someone new, but I never did anything about it, always putting it off until that time in the indefinite future when I would be human again.

Every night, the details of the incident circled in my brain. I thought of a thousand things I "might have done" to have prevented her death, from not marrying her in the first place (we'd moved to Sydney because of my job), to magically arriving at the bank as her killer took aim, tackling him to the ground and beating him senseless, or worse. I knew these fantasies were futile and self-indulgent, but that knowledge was no cure. If I took sleeping pills, the whole thing simply shifted to the daylight hours, and I was literally unable to work. (The computers that help us are slightly less appalling every year, but air traffic controllers *can't* daydream.)

I had to do something.

Revenge? Revenge was for the morally retarded. Me, I'd signed petitions to the U.N., calling for the world-wide, unconditional abolition of capital punishment. I'd meant it then, and I still meant it. Taking human life was wrong; I'd believed that, passionately, since childhood. Maybe it started out as religious dogma, but when I grew up and shed all the ludicrous claptrap, the sanctity of life was one of the few beliefs I judged to be worth keeping. Aside from any pragmatic reasons, human consciousness had always seemed to me the most astonishing, miraculous, *sacred* thing in the universe. Blame my upbringing, blame my genes; I could no more devalue it that believe that one plus one equalled zero.

Tell some people you're a pacifist, and in ten seconds flat they'll invent a situation in which millions of

people will die in unspeakable agony, and all your loved ones will be raped and tortured, if you don't blow someone's brains out. (There's always a contrived reason why you can't merely *wound* the omnipotent, genocidal madman.) The amusing thing is, they seem to hold you in even greater contempt when you admit that, yes, you'd do it, you'd kill under those conditions.

Anderson, however, clearly was not an omnipotent, genocidal madman. I had no idea whether or not he was likely to kill again. As for his capacity for reform, his abused childhood, or the caring and compassionate alter ego that may have been hiding behind the facade of his brutal exterior, I really didn't give a shit, but nonetheless I was convinced that it would be wrong for me to kill him.

I bought the gun first. That was easy, and perfectly legal; perhaps the computers simply failed to correlate my permit application with the release of my wife's killer, or perhaps the link was detected, but judged irrelevant.

I joined a "sports" club full of people who spent three hours a week doing nothing but shooting at moving, human-shaped targets. A recreational activity, harmless as fencing; I practised saying that with a straight face.

Buying the anonymous ammunition from a fellow club member *was* illegal; bullets that vaporized on impact, leaving no ballistics evidence linking them to a specific weapon. I scanned the court records; the average sentence for possessing such things was a five-hundred dollar fine. The silencer was illegal, too; the penalties for ownership were similar.

Every night, I thought it through. Every night, I came to the same conclusion: despite my elaborate preparations, I wasn't going to kill anyone. Part of me wanted to, part of me didn't, but I knew perfectly well which was strongest. I'd spend the rest of my life dreaming about it, safe in the knowledge that no amount of hatred or grief or desperation would ever be enough to make me act against my nature.

I unwrapped the parcel. I was expecting a garish cover – sneering body builder toting sub-machine gun – but the packaging was unadorned, plain grey with no markings except for the product code, and the name of the distributor, Clockwork Orchard.

I'd ordered the thing through an on-line catalogue, accessed via a coin-driven public terminal, and I'd specified collection by "Mark Carver" at a branch of the Implant Store in Chatswood, far from my home. All of which was paranoid nonsense, since the implant was legal – and all of which was perfectly reasonable, because I felt far more nervous and guilty about buying it than I did about buying the gun and ammunition.

The description in the catalogue had begun with the statement *Life is cheap!* then had waffled on for several lines in the same vein: *People are meat. They're nothing, they're worthless.* The exact words weren't important, though; they weren't a part of the implant itself. It wouldn't be a matter of a voice in my head, reciting some badly written spiel which I could choose to ridicule or ignore; nor would it be a kind of mental legislative decree, which I could evade by means of semantic quibbling. Axiomatic implants

were derived from analysis of actual neural structures in real people's brains, they weren't based on the expression of the axioms in language. The spirit, not the letter, of the law would prevail.

I opened up the carton. There was an instruction leaflet, in seventeen languages. A programmer. An applicator. A pair of tweezers. Sealed in a plastic bubble labelled STERILE IF UNBROKEN, the implant itself. It looked like a tiny piece of gravel.

I had never used one before, but I'd seen it done a thousand times on holovision. You placed the thing in the programmer, "woke it up," and told it how long you wanted it to be active. The applicator was strictly for tyros; the jaded cognoscenti balanced the implant on the tip of their little finger, and daintily poked it up the nostril of their choice.

The implant burrowed into the brain, sent out a swarm of nanomachines to explore, and forge links with, the relevant neural systems, and then went into active mode for the predetermined time – anything from an hour to infinity – doing whatever it was designed to do. Enabling multiple orgasms of the left kneecap. Making the colour blue taste like the long-lost memory of mother's milk. Or, hard-wiring a premise: *I will succeed. I am happy in my job. There is life after death. Nobody died in Belsen. Four legs good, two legs bad...*

I packed everything back into the carton, put it in a drawer, took three sleeping pills, and went to bed.

Perhaps it was a matter of laziness. I've always been biased towards those options which spare me from facing the very same set of choices again in the future; it seems so *inefficient* to go through the same agonies of conscience more than once. To *not* use the implant would have meant having to reaffirm that decision, day after day, for the rest of my life.

Or perhaps I never really believed that the preposterous toy would work. Perhaps I hoped to prove that my convictions – unlike other people's – were engraved on some metaphysical tablet that hovered in a spiritual dimension unreachable by any mere machine.

Or perhaps I just wanted a moral alibi – a way to kill Anderson while still believing it was something that the *real* me could never have done.

At least I'm sure of one thing. I didn't do it for Amy.

I woke around dawn the next day, although I didn't need to get up at all; I was on annual leave for a month. I dressed, ate breakfast, then unpacked the implant again and carefully read the instructions.

With no great sense of occasion, I broke open the sterile bubble and, with the tweezers, dropped the speck into its cavity in the programmer.

The programmer said, "Do you speak English?" The voice reminded me of one of the control towers at work; deep but somehow genderless, businesslike without being crudely robotic – and yet, unmistakably inhuman.

"Yes."

"Do you want to program this implant?"

"Yes."

"Please specify the active period."

"Three days." Three days would be enough, surely; if not, I'd call the whole thing off.

"This implant is to remain active for three days after insertion. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"This implant is ready for use. The time is seven forty-three a.m. Please insert the implant before eight forty-three a.m., or it will deactivate itself and reprogramming will be required. Please enjoy this product and dispose of the packaging thoughtfully."

I placed the implant in the applicator, then hesitated, but not for long. This wasn't the time to agonize; I'd agonized for months, and I was sick of it. Any more indecisiveness and I'd need to buy a second implant to convince me to use the first. I wasn't committing a crime; I wasn't even coming close to guaranteeing that I would commit one. Millions of people held the belief that human life was nothing special, but how many of them were murderers? The next three days would simply reveal how *I* reacted to that belief, and although the attitude would be hard-wired, the consequences were far from certain.

I put the applicator in my left nostril, and pushed the release button. There was a brief stinging sensation, nothing more.

I thought, *Amy would have despised me for this.* That shook me, but only for a moment. Amy was dead, which made her hypothetical feelings irrelevant. Nothing I did could hurt her now, and thinking any other way was crazy.

I tried to monitor the progress of the change, but that was a joke; you can't check your moral precepts by introspection every thirty seconds. After all, my assessment of myself as being unable to kill had been based on decades of observation (much of it probably out of date). What's more, that assessment, that self-image, had come to be as much a *cause* of my actions and attitudes as a reflection of them – and apart from the direct changes the implant was making to my brain, it was breaking that feedback loop by providing a rationalization for me to act in a way that I'd convinced myself was impossible.

After a while, I decided to get drunk, to distract myself from the vision of microscopic robots crawling around in my skull. It was a big mistake; alcohol makes me paranoid. I don't recall much of what followed, except for catching sight of myself in the bathroom mirror, screaming, "HAL's breaking First Law! HAL's breaking First Law!" before vomiting copiously.

I woke just after midnight, on the bathroom floor. I took an anti-hangover pill, and in five minutes my headache and nausea were gone. I showered and put on fresh clothes. I'd bought a jacket especially for the occasion, with an inside pocket for the gun.

It was still impossible to tell if the thing had done anything to me that went beyond the placebo effect; I asked myself, out loud, "Is human life sacred? Is it wrong to kill?" but I couldn't concentrate on the question, and I found it hard to believe that I ever had in the past; the whole idea seemed obscure and difficult, like some esoteric mathematical theorem. The prospect of going ahead with my plans made my stomach churn, but that was simple fear, not moral outrage; the implant wasn't meant to make me brave, or calm, or resolute. I could have bought those qualities too, but that would have been cheating.

I'd had Anderson checked out by a private investigator. He worked every night but Sunday, as a bouncer in a Surry Hills nightclub; he lived nearby, and usually arrived home, on foot, at around four in the morning. I'd driven past his terrace house several times, I'd have no trouble finding it. He lived alone; he had a lover, but they always met at her place, in the afternoon or early evening.

I loaded the gun and put it in my jacket, then spent half an hour staring in the mirror, trying to decide if the bulge was visible. I wanted a drink, but I restrained myself. I switched on the radio and wandered through the house, trying to become less agitated. Perhaps taking a life was now no big deal to me, but I could still end up dead, or in prison, and the implant apparently hadn't rendered me uninterested in my own fate.

I left too early, and had to drive by a circuitous route to kill time; even then, it was only a quarter past three when I parked, a kilometre from Anderson's house. A few cars and taxis passed me as I walked the rest of the way, and I'm sure I was trying so hard to look at ease that my body language radiated guilt and paranoia – but no ordinary driver would have noticed or cared, and I didn't see a single patrol car.

When I reached the place, there was nowhere to hide – no gardens, no trees, no fences – but I'd known that in advance. I chose a house across the street, not quite opposite Anderson's, and sat on the front step. If the occupant appeared, I'd feign drunkenness and stagger away.

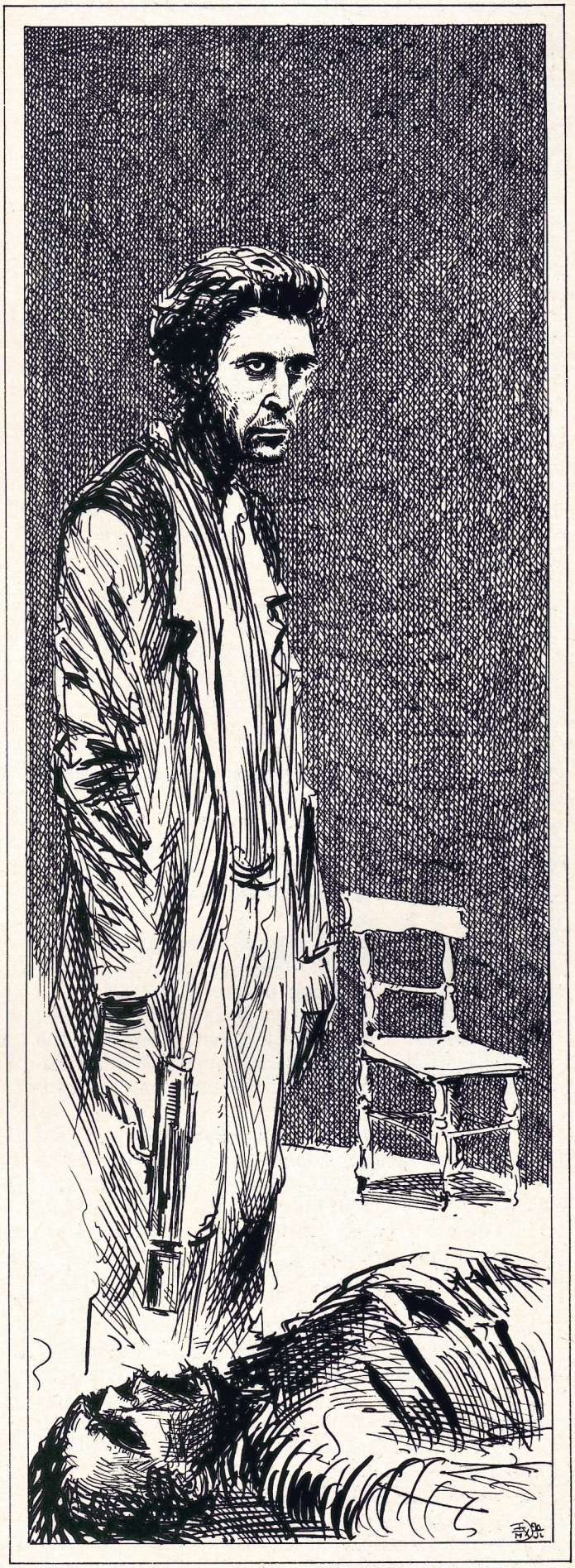
I sat and waited. It was a warm, still, ordinary night; the sky was clear, but grey and starless thanks to the lights of the city. I kept reminding myself: *You don't have to do this, you don't have to go through with it.* So why did I stay? The hope of being liberated from my sleepless nights? The idea was laughable; I had no doubt that if I killed Anderson, it would torture me as much as my helplessness over Amy's death.

Why did I stay? It was nothing to do with the implant; at most, that was neutralizing my qualms; it wasn't forcing me to *do* anything.

Why, then? In the end, I think I saw it as a matter of honesty. I had to accept the unpleasant fact that I honestly wanted to kill Anderson, and however much I had also been repelled by the notion, to be true to myself I had to do it – anything less would have been hypocrisy and self-deception.

At five to four, I heard footsteps echoing down the street. As I turned, I hoped it would be someone else, or that he would be with a friend, but it was him, and he was alone. I waited until he was as far from his front door as I was, then I started walking. He glanced my way briefly, then ignored me. I felt a shock of pure fear – I hadn't seen him in the flesh since the trial, and I'd forgotten how physically imposing he was.

I had to force myself to slow down, and even then I passed him sooner than I'd meant to. I was wearing light, rubber-soled shoes, he was in heavy boots, but when I crossed the street and did a U-turn towards him, I couldn't believe he couldn't hear my heartbeat, or smell the stench of my sweat. Metres from the door, just as I finished pulling out the gun, he looked over his shoulder with an expression of bland curiosity, as if he might have been expecting a dog or a piece



of windblown litter. He turned around to face me, frowning. I just stood there, pointing the gun at him, unable to speak. Eventually he said, "What the fuck do you want? I've got two hundred dollars in my wallet. Back pocket."

I shook my head. "Unlock the front door, then put your hands on your head and kick it open. Don't try closing it on me."

He hesitated, then complied.

"Now walk in. Keep your hands on your head. Five steps, that's all. Count them out loud. I'll be right behind you."

I reached the light switch for the hall as he counted four, then I slammed the door behind me, and flinched at the sound. Anderson was right in front of me, and I suddenly felt trapped. The man was a vicious killer; I hadn't even thrown a punch since I was eight years old. Did I really believe the gun would protect me? With his hands on his head, the muscles of his arms and shoulders bulged against his shirt. I should have shot him right then, in the back of the head. This was an execution, not a duel; if I'd wanted some quaint idea of honour, I would have come without a gun and let him take me to pieces.

I said, "Turn left." Left was the living room. I followed him in, switched on the light. "Sit." I stood in the doorway, he sat in the room's only chair. For a moment, I felt dizzy and my vision seemed to tilt, but I don't think I moved, I don't think I sagged or swayed; if I had, he probably would have rushed me.

"What do you want?" he asked.

I had to give that a lot of thought. I'd fantasized this situation a thousand times, but I could no longer remember the details – although I did recall that I'd usually assumed that Anderson would recognize me, and start volunteering excuses and explanations straight away.

Finally, I said, "I want you to tell me why you killed my wife."

"I didn't kill your wife. Miller killed your wife."

I shook my head. "That's not true. I *know*. The cops told me. Don't bother lying, because I *know*."

He stared at me blandly. I wanted to lose my temper and scream, but I had a feeling that, in spite of the gun, that would have been more comical than intimidating. I could have pistol-whipped him, but the truth is I was afraid to go near him.

So I shot him in the foot. He yelped and swore, then leant over to inspect the damage. "Fuck you!" he hissed. "Fuck you!" He rocked back and forth, holding his foot. "I'll break your fucking neck! I'll fucking kill you!" The wound bled a little through the hole in his boot, but it was nothing compared to the movies. I'd heard that the vaporizing ammunition had a cauterizing effect.

I said, "Tell me why you killed my wife."

He looked far more angry and disgusted than afraid, but he dropped his pretence of innocence. "It just happened," he said. "It was just one of those things that happens."

I shook my head, annoyed. "No. *Why*? Why did it happen?"

He moved as if to take off his boot, then thought better of it. "Things were going wrong. There was a time lock, there was hardly any cash, everything was just a big fuck-up. I didn't mean to do it. It just happened."

I shook my head again, unable to decide if he was a moron, or if he was stalling. "Don't tell me 'it just happened.' *Why* did it happen? Why did you do it?"

The frustration was mutual; he ran a hand through his hair and scowled at me. He was sweating now, but I couldn't tell if it was from pain or from fear. "What do you want me to say? I lost my temper, all right? Things were going badly, and I lost my fucking temper, and there she was, all right?"

The dizziness struck me again, but this time it didn't subside. I understood now; he wasn't being obtuse, he was telling the entire truth. I'd smashed the occasional coffee cup during a tense situation at work. I'd even, to my shame, kicked our dog once, after a fight with Amy. Why? *I'd lost my temper, and there she was.*

I stared at Anderson, and felt myself grinning stupidly. It was all so clear now. I understood. I understood the absurdity of everything I'd ever felt for Amy – my "love", my "grief". It had all been a joke. She was meat, she was nothing. All the pain of the past five years evaporated; I was drunk with relief. I raised my arms and spun around slowly. Anderson leapt up and sprung towards me; I shot him in the chest until I ran out of bullets, then I knelt down beside him. He was dead.

I put the gun in my jacket. The barrel was warm. I remembered to use my handkerchief to open the front door. I half-expected to find a crowd outside, but of course the shots had been inaudible, and Anderson's threats and curses were not likely to have attracted attention.

A block from the house, a patrol car appeared around a corner. It slowed almost to a halt as it approached me. I kept my eyes straight ahead as it passed. I heard the engine idle. Then stop. I kept walking, waiting for a shouted command, thinking: if they search me and find the gun, I'll confess; there's no point in prolonging the agony.

The engine spluttered, revved noisily, and the car roared away.

Perhaps I'm *not* the number one most obvious suspect. I don't know what Anderson was involved in since he got out; maybe there are hundreds of other people who had far better reasons for wanting him dead, and perhaps when the cops have finished with them, they'll get around to asking me what I was doing that night. A month seems an awfully long time, though. Anyone would think they didn't care.

The same teenagers as before are gathered around the entrance, and again the mere sight of me seems to disgust them. I wonder if the taste in fashion and music tattooed on their brains is set to fade in a year or two, or if they have sworn lifelong allegiance. It doesn't bear contemplating.

This time, I don't browse. I approach the sales counter without hesitation.

This time, I know exactly what I want.

What I want is what I felt that night: the unshakable conviction that Amy's death – let alone Anderson's – simply didn't matter, any more than the death of a fly or an amoeba, any more than breaking a coffee cup or kicking a dog.

My one mistake was thinking that the insight I

gained would simply vanish when the implant cut out. It hasn't. It's been clouded with doubts and reservations, it's been undermined, to some degree, by my whole ridiculous panoply of beliefs and superstitions, but I can still recall the peace it gave me, I can still recall that flood of joy and relief, and *I want it back*. Not for three days; for the rest of my life.

Killing Anderson *wasn't* honest, it wasn't "being true to myself." Being true to myself would have meant living with all my contradictory urges, suffering the multitude of voices in my head, accepting confusion and doubt. It's too late for that now; having tasted the freedom of certainty, I find I can't live without it.

"How can I help you, sir?" The salesman smiles from the bottom of his heart.

Part of me, of course, still finds the prospect of what I am about to do totally repugnant.

No matter. That won't last.

Greg Egan has been appearing in both *Interzone* and *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* with increasing frequency of late (his last here was the superb "Learning to Be Me," issue 37; and his latest in *Asimov's* was "The Safe Deposit Box," September). Readers in Britain and the USA are fast learning that he's one of the finest sf short-story writers around. He lives in Perth, Australia.

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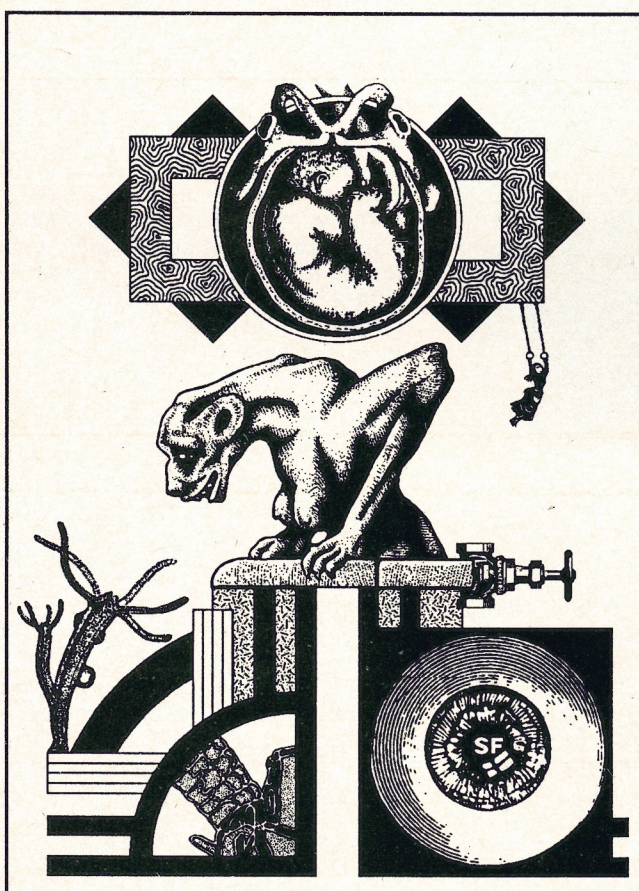

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The SF Book Editors

Who are the faceless people in British publishing houses who decide to accept or reject hopeful new writers' science-fiction novels? We sent Stan Nicholls on a tour of the London publishers to find out more about them...

Deborah Beale has edited mass-market fiction for Collins and Pan. In 1987 she launched **Random Century**'s science fiction imprint, **Legend**, and is now senior fiction editor responsible for the hardback side of the list.

She believes science fiction is currently over-published. "Everything is over-published," she says. "In America it's out of control, and the long and short of it is the most tremendous returns problem. In the UK, mid-list print-runs used to be about 20,000 copies. Now a mid-list novel is between 5,000 and 10,000 copies, depending on *genre*, with 5,000 the absolutely bottom level. I think we have lean times ahead." Given that the mid-list is the traditional home of sf, this could be bad news for the field.

"I don't know how publishing used to be in the good old days, because I'm a child of the 80s, and all I have known is the change from a semi-pro business into a hard-nosed, marketing-led business. But there used to be some sympathy and money for mid-list promotion, and this is now not available. I believe publishing lists are going to slim until they are lead-title heavy and mid-list thin."

What does this mean for new writers? "Everybody's screaming out for new young writers, so anybody with a spark is not going to be quite so affected by this. It's with their second and third novels that the current market conditions are going to kick-in.

"I think there's a recession coming, and you will see a drastic reduction in the number of books published. There is also going to be a slowing-down in terms of the high advances paid, but I think people will continue to over-pay. Because you over-pay for books to a set of very specific rules. Absolutely everybody over-pays for certain things."

Beale attracted a lot of flak over the £260,000 she paid for Tad Williams' "Memory, Sorry and Thorn" fantasy trilogy, which began with *The Dragonbone Chair*. "The kerfuffle over the advance I paid for *Dragonbone Chair* made me laugh. Because that seemed to get the ire of fandom. It was not the highest advance ever paid for a book of its type.

"I had a lot of criticism from people who subsequently and rather foolishly said, 'Oh, I haven't read the book.' Which *astonished* me. I think that said an awful lot about journalistic standards in this field, and it depressed me.

Deborah Beale

"The thing about *Dragonbone Chair* is that it's Tolkien told anew, told for a new generation. Tolkien is seriously great writing, and *Dragonbone Chair* isn't quite great writing, but it's the most brilliant piece of entertainment. The imagination and the control of the storytelling and the world it takes you into is *streets ahead* of almost any fantasy writer today. You can compare any fantasy with Tolkien and it will come out real poor; but you can compare almost any *current* fantasy with *Dragonbone Chair* and it will come out real poor too. All the criticism about the book on levels of literature, and the debate about whether it innovates, was just people fucking themselves up their own arses.

"There are a number of people, whom one could term sf fans, whose opinions I respect immensely. I listen to them because they know what they are talking about, and they give me all sorts of guidelines. The majority don't. There is another factor here, which is the traditional British practice of directing a cascade of piss over anything successful."

The over-paying process has clearly defined objectives. "When somebody comes along who tells a good story, writes well and – bliss of bliss – advances the field, they are instantly recognized," Beale says. "Fifteen years ago they wouldn't be recognized, because publishing used to stumble about and grope its way through certain things. It was just, 'Let's publish it and see what happens.' So somebody with that sort of talent you want to bring to the list because it's investment for the future. There are writers who, if they satisfy certain market criteria, firmly within category, are going to please the book clubs, the libraries and the trade. Consequently their market price goes up and the bidding is fast and furious.

"Another reason you over-pay is to bring in an established or promising writer whose presence is going to enhance the list. If it's significant enough a deal it's publicity for the list and for the author, it's new blood, new energy. After I bought *Dragonbone Chair* I sat on my arse for the next three months because everybody came to me. They knew Legend was a serious player and that we were committed. I had *floods* of submissions.

"I was recently involved in a seven-figure offer for a series of books. That offer was predicated on this: we knew what the author achieved in net sales, we knew bringing that author to Legend, with the concomitant publicity, would infuse a whole new set of

energies. Plus, this author – who is a major name – is changing genre, which instantly gives you a marketing handle. I costed this extremely carefully and presented two estimates to the publishing board here to sanction my offer. I put in a conservative estimate, which was current sales, what I reckoned new sales would be, plus one year's stock sale – because this is an author who rarely goes out of print and back-lists extremely well. Then I put in a bullish estimate which was current sales plus new sales plus three years' stock. That brought me up to just over seven figures. That deal didn't come off, but if it had the fan writers who don't bother to read the books they criticize would have said, 'My God! Beale's at it again, drastically over-paying.' But I would argue I wasn't over-paying, because I felt absolutely sure of getting those sales, and what it could have done to my list's turnover would have been wonderful."

Horror, like fantasy, outsells sf these days. Beale has a theory about this. "Horror is the least ghettoized genre, and people have far less trouble with it than sf and fantasy. It does not ask you to stretch yourself in terms of understanding the ins and outs of worlds that have been set up. It's much more accessible, and it plays to universals, in the way that science fiction and fantasy does to a lesser degree."

But she believes there is a market gap in horror. "British horror is a particular bugbear with me. It addresses itself to the horror reader, the hardcore fan, and therefore sections itself off. Most British writers' idea of horror does not seem to be the good spooky story. It's endless, monolithic depression. It's poverty, madness, breakdown and characters going through degradation. There's nothing else coming along. There's Chris Fowler, who does that wonderful thing of making you laugh and scaring you at the same time, but he's a bit of a one-off.

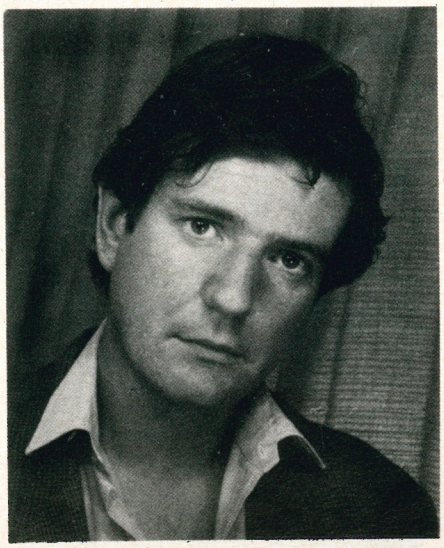
"There's another category, which sells in America but doesn't sell here – 'slasher'. The most reactionary, disgusting, vile sort of fiction. It wanders round with its dick hanging out. It really is a parading of the penis. Lucius Shepard said that it displays some of the nastiest male attitudes available. Where are the new horror writers?"

What is she doing to bring on new writers? "75% of what I publish is there for clear commercial reasons. The remaining 25% is more risky. The esoteric stuff is supported by the outright commercial titles.

"But I have to say I have seen a number of novels in the past six months which have depressed me immensely, because they come from authors who say, 'I am a literary writer.' By 'literary,' they mean obscure and inaccessible, with effects running ahead of meaning. In the end it is the worst sort of writing.

"This field has a tremendously bad tendency to mistake obscurity for literature. It's prevalent because there are an awful lot of fan critics who have never ready anything but science fiction. They have no writing standards to compare science fiction with. When a writer comes along with some big ideas, and a nicely-turned metaphor, they think this is the last word in the literature of Western civilization. And by God are they wrong."

Oliver Johnson, who edits the paperback side of the **Legend** imprint, began his association with the industry working for booksellers Waterstone's. He subsequently joined Corgi, as a commissioning editor, and has written fantasy role-playing books for them and Grafton with collaborator Dave Morris. He moved to Sidgwick & Jackson, running the fiction list for two years, before coming to Legend last January.



Oliver Johnson

His own writing experience – he is currently working on a novel – makes him sympathetic to aspiring hopefuls. "I respect anyone who writes and delivers a manuscript," he says. "You're on your own with a blank sheet of paper, and it can feel bloody lonely. I can see the strife and agony that goes on behind it."

Which is not to say he isn't critical of unprofessional attitudes. "A big mistake on speculative approaches is that someone has just had a notion, and writes to say something like, 'I've had this idea about a planet called Zarg. On the planet Zarg we have a race of people who gargle eucalyptus oil. Would you be interested in publishing this sort of book?' Well, anyone can have an idea, but you have to work it up into something. I can't respond to those sort of approaches sufficiently because I've got to get an idea how they write, basically.

"When you buy a book you've really got to look at where the future of that author lies. Book buyers have genre expectations. One way we fulfil those expectations is to put covers on books which firmly identify a specific category, even if the cover is only an approximation of the content. In fact if you look at sf jackets I dare say none of them are completely faithful to the book. Because what we are doing is not marketing the guts of the book, we're selling the idea of an author, and of a list. There is always a dichotomy between image and word, if you like.

"Sf is a genre in which a lot of quality writing is occurring. Howard Waldrop's a wonderful writer, and we're publishing him as science fiction, although I would have thought he could sit equally well on a quality list like Picador, or our own Vintage."

So, although there is increasing categorization, it doesn't preclude slightly unclassifiable writers finding a place? "I suppose the question is, is there any room for originality? Where they've come from does tend to define an author. If someone from within the science-fiction community recommends a slightly offbeat book, in a way it defines that book. If a new author is coming from a coterie you can get their friends to quote on the cover and say, 'This isn't quite sf, but it's a wonderful book anyway.' When Corgi bought the first Terry Pratchett, the cover copy read, 'A cross between *Peter Pan* and *Three Men in a Boat*'."

Johnson is clear about the appeal science fiction holds for him. "Sf takes us on journeys further and further into the scientific future, and reading a good science-fiction novel can be a learning process. I'm very interested in sf as a genre because it asks how Man as an individual figures in that future. This is a moral issue, and I think everyone who addresses it is capable of saying something new, worthwhile and enhancing to the reader. It seems to me that the subject matter of science fiction is forward-looking as long as people address the essential moral issues. Greg Bear, for instance, I find metaphysical in a way. He stretches the imagination with his interest in the soul, and the spirit of Man and what lies beyond our ken, as it were. Orson Scott Card deals with moral issues which I think are very important and visionary.

"I guess the rubric is Sir Philip Sidney's defence of poetry, when he said it's purpose is to entertain and instruct. I believe it's important to get that balance in science fiction. We like bloody good yarns, essentially, but we also want to learn something. Greg Bear's science blows my mind quite often, and Gibson's idiom has the same kind of effect. You're always sort of wobbling on a grey area of comprehension, but it's still stretching you and demanding something from you. It

puts you through the paces, and that's great.

As recently reported in *Interzone*, fantasy now outsells sf. Johnson cites a socio-economic theory to account for this. "It's tied to politics and the times we live in," he explains. "I think the more austerity, the greater the gulf between rich and poor, the more people want to escape into fantasy. Maybe people have drifted away from some kind of utopian vision and want to enter something which conforms with an archetype; actually a rather satisfying archetype that indicates the world will right itself, the land will be healed, the outcast prince will re-find his crown. Fantasy often deals with the theme of redemption of a hero through a series of events. Some of it is very sophisticated. Science fiction offers more options, more room for exploration, but you can't get away from the human condition too much because then it becomes inexplicable.

"There's always that cyclical optimism in most fantasy which perhaps has been lost in science fiction. I've seen my college peers swinging towards fantasy from 1979 onwards, and of course we know what happened in 1979."

Humphrey Price spent two and a half years with Penguin, where his responsibilities were mostly in the area of marketing. In August 1988 he moved to **Hodder & Stoughton**, to edit the science fiction, fantasy and horror paperback lists appearing under the Coronet and **NEL** imprints.

In common with all editors, he would like to foster new talent, but believes it a rare commodity. "The person I hate most in the world," he says, "is the one who said everyone has a novel in them. Because that isn't true. Everyone may have a *story* in them, but they haven't necessarily got a novel in them. Some people, no matter how hard and earnestly they try, cannot write in an interesting way to save their lives. There's no trick: what captures our attention is someone who can tell a good story, and tell it well."

But in today's fiercely competitive climate, very good isn't good enough. "We're all looking for brilliant these days. If somebody sends in something which is almost good but not quite, you are seeing three other people that week who are sending in superior stuff. It's very tough to have to say to somebody, 'You're good, you're competent, but you're not excellent.' It's not fair to have to say that, but unfortunately it's the reality of the hard commercial world we all operate in at the moment.

"It is very difficult to be in your twenties and trying to get something published in book form. The route we all recommend is to get published in magazines, like *Interzone*. You need to make yourself visible, and to prove you can do it more than once.

"We've got an original anthology coming up in October that David Barrett's edited, *Digital Dreams*, which has a number of people who have written their first published stories, and some who have written their first sf stories. I'm hoping to be able to encourage some of the new people out of that."

Science fiction may have had its origins in the short story form, and there are those who argue it is still best suited to that medium, but the reality is that anthologies simply don't sell. "You'll be pleased in most cases if you earn back what you spent on them," says Price. "We accepted *Digital Dreams* because Dave had an idea that hadn't been done for a long time. He'd already spoken to a few people who definitiely wanted to commit, and that's one of the things you have to do now. You've got to remember that the rep in a bookshop possibly has as little as a few seconds to sell a new book. They've got to be able to say to the bookbuyer, who sees twenty reps a week, why this particular title is the one they should take. Shops these days have budgets for buying books, they don't just buy everything. If you can say this is an original anthology, and name several highly successful contributors, you've got something more than your competitors.

"It's entirely different when dealing with somebody like Andromeda Bookshop. You're talking about the *creme de la creme*, where you expect them to know what you're selling, and what they are doing with their market. Unfortunately they are not the bread and butter; that's the Smiths, the Waterstones and the Menzies."

He also believes sf is being overpublished. "In future I think we'll see the same people still publishing sf, they'll just be publishing fewer books. That's unfortunate, but on the whole it's true right across the board, it isn't confined to science fiction.

"Something in the region of 12½% of our overall list is science fiction. We average one science-fiction or fantasy novel a month. That's fairly low, I admit, but we tend to publish one horror title on top of that. There are months when we might do more, particularly if we have a lead-title author like C.J. Cherryh or Piers Anthony; and of course Stephen King is a super-lead.

"As far as King is concerned, we hope to make a big leap forward this Autumn with his new novel. We want to make this the King book that people who have never bought him before are attracted to. People should recognize that if you've got a number-one selling author – like Pratchett or King – you can't just say this is cult. Obviously King has already long made that break, but we want to get one step higher up the ladder."

King is a brand-name author, almost an imprint in himself, but what does Price think about the creation of special imprints devoted exclusively to sf? "I think it comes down to the best way of selling the books, and if that is the best way, then all power and all credit to the publishers doing it.

"I agree the worry is it might put things in a ghetto. My argument against that would be to think of it first and foremost as a means of getting more copies into the bookshops. You have to realize that shops like Forbidden Planet and Andromeda are wonderful, but your outlets are the chains, and if they don't take the quantities of books your're doing yourself and your author a disservice."

Recent polls – in *Locus* for instance – indicate sf has an ageing readership, but Price isn't sure about this. "I would say what they found is the people who read and respond to *Locus* are in their 30s and 40s. I don't think that necessarily equates in straightforward ways to the general buying readership. Although I take the point that the readership has grown up with the growth of sf publishing, as one would expect."

But with lists being cut, surely newcomers are more likely to suffer than established names? "It's a very good point. You've got to have somebody who at the age of thirty is tremendously popular. Clive Barker is a good example. It's interesting that whereas literary fiction has followed the route of finding talent among people in their twenties, science fiction hasn't. It is a worry. Where do you get somebody who is going to be around in twenty years time?

"I tend to ask new writers, 'Why do you want to do it?' If they want to do it for the wrong reasons, then your interest cools off. Wrong reasons would be someone saying, 'I want to be on *Wogan*, I want to be terribly famous,' or, 'I want a lot of money.' You generally try to discourage people with that attitude, because it won't happen, or if it does it will take a very long time. Somebody has really got to want to do it, because it's a bloody hard job being a writer. You work for at least nine months producing a book with precious little encouragement or assistance. To want to do that you have to be pretty neurotic, I think. If someone is going to put up with all that simply because they want glory, then I'm worried that next year they'll give it up to race a yacht across the Atlantic or something."

Kathy Gale was a management trainee with W.H. Smith before a spell working on Whittaker's *Books in Print* ("the most boring job in the universe"). She joined Pan as a junior editor, left to become Managing Editor

at Pluto Press, and moved to edit sf for Hodder when Pluto went bust. Kathy returned to **Pan Books** two years ago to launch their new science fiction, fantasy, horror and crime lists. On 1st July she was made a director of the company.

"I've been interested in science fiction right from school, where I had a teacher who was a fan," she recalls. "When the Women's Press started pushing sf I became interested in the concept of feminist science fiction. I would describe myself as always having been very enthusiastic about sf, although by no means a buff."

Pan is one of the strongest paperback houses in Britain. Does promotion to its management board give her more power to wield on behalf of the science-fiction list? "My responsibilities will be very much the same, it's just that people have to smile and nod before they say 'no' now!"

The decision was taken not to consign Pan's *genre* titles to special imprints, although they are identified by generic logos. "The main reason is that Pan has a very strong reputation in the trade," Gale explains, "so to take any of our books out of the imprint would be a huge mistake. Pan is known for mass-market books, and this is a mass-market list.

"However I wanted to give the lists a really strong identity, which is reflected in a whole combination of things, from the packaging to the kind of books selected. Books have to be very clearly identified at the moment, because that's the way the trade behaves. They want things defined. What you have to remember is that publishers don't sell direct to readers, publishers sell to book buyers in wholesalers and retail chains. We have to cater for the way the trade is structured.

"Having said that, I have all sorts of authors I want to break out from the sf, horror and fantasy markets, and I have found the best way to do that is to begin by building up a really solid core following. Charles De Lint for example could reach a much more broad market with his wonderfully rich, warm fantasies. Another person we want to break out is Melanie Rawn, who is crossing over to a certain extent with a general readership."

One of the misconceptions about publishers is that they are reluctant to take risks with quirkier authors. Pan's publication of Pat Murphy's *The City, Not Long After* refutes this. Kathy Gale widens the debate. "One of the things people often say to me is, 'You work for a big company, you have to do what the accountants tell you.' This is very interesting, because I never meet the accountants. They have absolutely no say whatsoever in what I buy. Publishing is made up of all sorts of people and all sorts of dynamics, but the main decision-maker is the editor. Editors go into publishing for a variety of reasons. The ones who stay usually do so because they've got real commitment to books, to reading and to authors. Otherwise we wouldn't do it. It completely takes over. It destroys your social life, it destroys your house – because you never have time to dust or wash-up – it distorts all your relationships. So you only do it if you love it.

"You buy books for all sorts of reasons. Even if you have titles you personally feel are not the kind you would like to publish in an ideal world, you always push those books and give them the best jacket and the best possible coverage. But part of the process with every editor is publishing books which don't make immediate commercial sense in a big way, but that you take on because you love them. *The City, Not Long After* is one of those for me. I suppose the Eric Brown collection, *The Time-Lapsed Man*, also, in a different kind of sense. We may not do huge figures with it, but we think he's an author of tremendous potential, and there's a novel coming from him."

Kathy Gale

Generally, she thinks aspiring writers have an inaccurate idea of what the market is looking for. "It's no longer true that publishers particularly want long series of books. Usually you make that decision after the first book you've done.

"What editors are looking for – and it's the editors you are selling to in the first instance – are really good novels which will hook readers from the first page. Regardless of whether it's a new idea or an old idea, regardless of whether it's characters you've met millions of times before in all the other sf books you've read. If it's sufficiently well written, if you're captured from the first page and don't want to stop reading, you have a success on your hands.

"I would advise new writers to forget notions. Forget what you think a publisher wants; think about what you want to write and how well you can write it. It's the publisher's job to worry about whether it's suitable for their list or not. If you're a new writer it's important not to try to twist yourself into shapes you think everybody else wants you to be. Because you're probably wrong, and you then don't write what is a genuinely enthusiastic novel which shows your strengths."

Interestingly, her experience is that sf is *not* currently over-published. "I've just launched a new list into what I thought was a very crowded market, and all those books went back to press three or four times, before publication. The market's very vibrant at the moment. I think partly that's because a few years ago publishers dramatically cut their *genre* lists. I know you'll shriek when I say that, because more publishers were publishing in the field, but they were doing a very low number of titles.

"My policy for the last three or four years has been to do a small number of titles but to publish them well. The days when publishers were churning out millions of fantasy titles all looking exactly the same have gone. I'm feeling the benefits of that. What happened in science fiction and related *genres* was that when certain publishers started to be very commercially successful everybody leapt on the bandwagon. Too many books in general were being published, and now everyone has cut their lists. I don't know about anybody else, but my unit sales are going up. It's partly to do with the fact that the books are good, and the packaging and publicity is good, but I'm convinced it's also to do with trade picking up a bit. I think science fiction will go on selling at about the same level.

"While we've all been speculating and arguing about what's happening in the field, sf has gone on with its readership, and fantasy has been breaking into new markets."

John Jarrold was so enchanted by *Lord of the Rings* as a teenager that he wrote to Allen & Unwin for the address of the Tolkien Society. He attended his first science-fiction convention in 1973, and went on to read for various publishers and agents, including the Carnell Literary Agency. Perseverance, and his knowledge of the field, led to him being offered the sf editorship at **Macdonald**. Their Futura and Sphere lists have now been brought together under the **Orbit** imprint, and he was made a director of the company last March.

Of his directorship, he says, "It's very pleasing because it means the

company are taking science fiction seriously." But his work was cut out amalgamating three paperback lists and integrating them with the hardback side. "I wanted it all to be seen as one list. That was difficult, because it meant you were doing five paperbacks a month, plus hardbacks as they came along. In the present market that's too many. So I cut it to three a month, and in 1992 I'll be cutting it to two. What we've found in the last twelve months is that sales are polarizing. Big books are working better and small books aren't working at all. There is no middle ground. We are now getting subscriptions of 2,500 copies on general paperback titles which five years ago were subscribing 10,000."

Again, the conservatism of the retail trade comes into play here. "One of the problems with any mass-market company in the sf area is that while it's wonderful to sell books to Andromeda or Forbidden Planet, you've got to make it work in Smiths. Smiths is 60% of the market, at least. It's not as bad as it is in the States with Dalton and Waldenbrooks, who can actually get books cancelled and changed, but it's bad enough.

"You have to fight this, because you can't be entirely sales-led. But with the market in the situation it is, you have to take that into consideration. I can't afford 90% of the books I publish to fail. You have to cut your cloth quite carefully, and it does mean some authors lose out. That is true of any company, no matter what they tell you. So you concentrate more and more on the lead titles, which is a very bad message for new writers.

"There's been too much science fiction and fantasy published since the late '70s. During that great boom – if you like, the *Star Wars* book in '77 – everybody jumped on the bandwagon, and you got a lot of hacks writing science fiction, fantasy or horror because it was the in-thing. The market still hasn't recovered from that. Twenty years ago you could walk into Smiths and see one small rack of sf. Now there are enormous numbers, and the public gets confused. They know names like Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein, but they see 50 million other books there, most of which they don't know, so they go for one of those familiar names. That feeds back and determines the chain's buying policies. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is one of the reasons I'm cutting the list back. If you're doing two books a month they are being seen in some degree of isolation."

Is a tighter list likely to be dominated by the big, proven names? "You have to try to make some of the books by either little-known or unknown people. It's difficult at the moment, but if you don't try, where the hell do you go in five years? You'll get all these authors between fifty and seventy and almost nobody below that. It's no good saying it's a boom market, because it's a boom market for 3% of the authors. It's not a boom market for the rest.

"I obviously want to be publishing a lot more in the way of young writers. Anybody who's in publishing is not so cynical as to think they shouldn't be publishing new writers. If you don't damn well care you shouldn't be in the business."

John Jarrold

Because of the coming together of the lists, and the great backlog of titles involved, it is difficult for Jarrold to take on anybody at the moment. "I will take books on, but they will only be what I regard as major titles. For instance, we've just bought the new, totally revised edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, to be published in Autumn 1991. That's one of the things I'm proudest of. I'm proud both in personal and commercial terms to have taken on Iain Banks for hardback as well paperback. Apart from the *Encyclopedia*, we're also doing a new book by John Brosnan on sf movies, tentatively entitled *Primal Screen*. I'm very happy that in 1991 we've got 11 months of lead titles, and five of those are British authors. That's pleasing."

Here, too, the prospect for anthologies is not altogether bright. "We've done *Zenith* 1 and 2, and maybe because the list has been a bit crowded, they haven't done as well as we would have hoped. I would loved to have done a *Zenith* 3 because I believe in doing books with new authors in short-story form. But on the sales of the first two there is no way we could make a costing work. So if there's a *Zenith* 3 it won't be coming from Orbit, which is a shame. I hope somebody else picks it up.

"*The Orbit SF Yearbook*, edited by David Garnett, hopefully will go on. Again it's something I'm very proud of. There's no doubt Gardner Dozois' anthology is the best collection of short sf, but I think there is a place for another anthology which concentrates on slightly more idiosyncratic stories, and also on the critical side.

"It's very difficult to make an anthology work no matter whose names are in it. Having Asimov, Herbert, Barker, King or whoever helps. But even then there's a lot less interest from sales than there was two years ago. We published two or three horror anthologies, with stories by people like King and Straub, and sold less than 10,000.

"One of the problems is that, if you look in the *Observer* or *Sunday Times*, they still review books that 99% of people don't give a toss for. I look at the papers and see crime books reviewed every week, and see science fiction reviewed once a year, if I'm lucky. Until this generation of book reviewers dies out, or is preferably shot, we're not going to get anywhere. They are as dead from the neck up as any dodo. They still think it's 1950 and Evelyn Waugh is the best writer in England."

What attracted him to science fiction in the first place? "Oh God, it's that old phrase, isn't it, the sense of wonder? I started reading it because I was given it by my Dad, who in the twenties was buying *Amazing* at Woolworths. I read Wells and Verne, then went on in the '60s to read everything from Asimov to *New Worlds*.

"It is a literature of ideas, action, character – it's no one thing, it's all things to all men. I think when it comes down to it, you've just *got* to like it."

Part Two of Stan Nicholls' collective interview with the British sf editors will appear in *Interzone* 43.

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Exiles

Paul J. McAuley

When Sepuldeva and Rayne arrived at the field to meet their partner, down from orbit at the end of his shift, there was a small but noisy demonstration blocking the gate. A ship from Earth had arrived two days before, the first to reach Novaya Zyemla since the revolutionary government had begun the embargo, and its presence had inflamed the already feverish supporters of the People's Islamic Nation Party. The Greater Brazilian embassy had been ransacked and daubed with slogans; there had been a rally at which effigies of members of the trade council of the Federation for Co-Prosperity of Worlds had been burnt. And now this, fifty or sixty people chanting in front of the gate in the high fence which surrounded the field.

Rayne wanted to push on through. He said, "Just listen to those bastards. What do they think, it's our fault? Man, we're hurting worse than they ever will." He and Sepuldeva had drunk the last of their credit in celebration of Stefan's return, and he'd skinpopped something on the ride out, too. His pupils were pinpoints in his vivid blue eyes; the mix of drugs overlaid a fine tremor on his motor control. He jittered from foot to foot, squinting into Procyon's searing light. He said, "They got no right to be here."

Sepuldeva said, "The cops will be on their side. You want to spend a few years in jail?"

"We're *already* in fucking jail," Rayne said. His long black hair was brushed back from his forehead, done up in bead-strung braids. Crystal, ivory, copper, jasper, jet, they rattled and chimed about his face.

He and Sepuldeva were standing in the shadow of the port complex's overhang, near the oval runnel which pierced its green glass wall. Inside the fence, port cops looked on calmly as the crowd chanted a single phrase over and over. Most of them were women, dressed from head to foot in black. Black light printed slogans in the air above their heads, lines running around and through gross caricatures of the President of the RUN, of the Greater Brazilian ambassador to Novaya Zyemla, of half a dozen other declared enemies of the state that Sepuldeva didn't recognize. The holographic images bobbed and weaved in sympathy with their hand-held projectors. And a huge crescent and star floated high above everything else, vivid red in the morning glare.

The field stretched away beyond, bafflesquares and fluxbarriers like a vast flock of grey sails. The nose assembly of the ferry which had brought the maintenance crews down reared above them half a kilometre away. Only a handful of ships out there, and only one of those intersystem, the freighter which had broken the fifty days old embargo, its arrival sending colliding ripples of rumour through the stranded freespacer community.

Rayne said, "I don't know how much more of this shit I can take."

"Just think about the credit Stefan has earned."

Rayne said, "Every day, *believe* it. We'd let him take first turn of the trick we'd have known to trust him without paying his keep."

Sepuldeva said, "Stefan's fine. We have to trust each other here."

Rayne pushed back beaded braids. "You're so fucking straight it's unbelievable."

"But I'm right."

"I guess. Those bastards there are getting to me. I'm damned glad I don't understand what they're shouting." It was the nearest Rayne could get to an apology.

"The owners need us," Sepuldeva said. "As long as we stay together we'll see it out." Truth was, the chanting was making him nervous too. The grosha beer he'd drunk half an hour ago was coming on now, a tingling expansion of his whole skin. Everything seemed separate and clear and distant, moments strung like Rayne's beads.

Rayne said, "And suppose the goddam government clamps down further."

"The embargo is the only way they can hurt the Federation. But sooner or later they'll have to start mining orthidium again, or they won't have an economy left."

Rayne had turned away from the crowd; now Sepuldeva turned too. Two Guildsmen passed behind green glass curtain wall, their uniformed figures flickering through distortion as if deep underwater. "We were Guild we wouldn't have these worries," Rayne said.

"For me it would be easier to go straight. We're freespacers, we're in the life –"

"This goes on there won't be any life left," Rayne said. "Damn, I've this bad feeling about Stefan. I mean, he's just another Red, like everyone else on this rock."

"There are some differences between Novaya Rosya and Novaya Zyemla. Religion, for instance."

"I don't know about *that*. He speaks the language, man, he could just melt into the countryside with our goddamn credit."

The crowd was making more noise, and Rayne and Sepuldeva turned round. The high gates were opening.

Rayne said, "Come on, the cops have got to let us through. Suppose Stefan's let out somewhere else? He'd be gone, we'd never know it."

"Stefan wouldn't do—" But Rayne was already starting across the apron. Sepuldeva followed him out of shadow into heat and glare, caught up with him at the edge of the crowd.

Rayne shrugged off Sepuldeva's restraining hand. He'd put on little round wire-framed shades, black holes in his white face. "Come on man, they're just a bunch of fucking Red zarks, worst they can do is kill us."

One or two demonstrators had turned around, a man in a many-pocketed jacket that hung down to his knees, a couple of women so wrapped in black cloth only their eyes showed. Rayne shouted at them, "Fucking Reds, right?" and gave the revolutionary Salute, fist clenched up by his shoulder. The man grinned, white teeth in a neat black beard. It occurred to Sepuldeva that no one in the crowd could have heard Rayne over the chanting, and anyway, probably none of them could speak Portuguese.

Next thing, Rayne was shouldering his way through the crowd. Sepuldeva made to follow and someone leaned in close, yelled something in his ear. It was the man in the baggy jacket, black hair bushed around a red bandanna with a slogan printed on it in a dashed and dotted encephalographic scrawl. The man yelled again, saying it was no problem, freespacers okay, pounded Sepuldeva on the back and melted back into the chanting crowd.

Rayne was trying to get past a couple of cops as the two dozen or so freespacers ambled through the gate, only a few looking at the people yelling slogans at them. Stefan was there, his grip slung high on his shoulder. As usual, he was bare-chested. The pleats of his red trousers flapped around his ankles (his feet were bare too) as he strode towards Sepuldeva, Rayne suddenly behind him. They had to go back through the crowd before they could speak. Sepuldeva had a flash of black-clad women screaming at him all the way back to the quarter, but the crowd let them go and turned back to the gate, which was closed again. Individual shouts merged again into the single chant.

Sepuldeva shouted over it. "Good shift?"

"Dull. As you said. Almost good to be back." The muscles under Stefan's stubbled jaw shifted: a small smile emerged. His face was grimy, clean white circles around his eyes.

Rayne came around to his other side. "Next time I go up I'm gonna get me a reaction pistol, man, see how they like it in their faces."

"That's your style," Stefan grunted, easing a thumb under the harness of his grip. He was a lot more typical of freespacers than either Rayne or Sepuldeva: born on a colony world, he'd been crewing orbital shuttles at fourteen, then had worked out of Jacob's Rock around Sirius for three years, mining orthidium before coming to do the same in the asteroids of the Trojan belt between Procyon and its white dwarf companion. Stefan was only twenty now, tall, blond, taciturn. Like most of the freespacers caught in the embargo, he and Rayne and Sepuldeva shared shifts of a single trick, maintaining mothballed mining tugs, the only kind of job they could get.

Rayne said, "Hey, at least I got a style."

"A buzz is what you've got."

"Well we had us a little celebration for your homecoming. Drank ourselves out of money, which didn't take long."

Stefan said, "I got paid. You'll get your share."

As they walked towards the runnel, Sepuldeva said, "I wish you guys could get on better."

Rayne said, "You just want us all to be one big happy family, huh? I get on with anyone. They don't get on with me, it's their problem. And there ain't no problem you can't solve by getting out and moving on. That's the life, man. That's why I like it."

The runnel's arch received them. Bands of white plastic alternated with thick, bubbled glass. Sometimes there was movement behind the glass, dim, green, broken. You couldn't see what it was, only that it was there.

"Politics?" Stefan asked, after a while.

Sepuldeva said, "The natives aren't happy about the ship which arrived while you were upstairs."

"Saw it. Know who it brought?"

Sepuldeva and Rayne related the various rumours as they left the runnel and crossed the wide lawns, following the other freespacers. A car was already in the station, half a dozen armed cops watching as the freespacers trooped into it. Rayne gave them the Salute before the door closed.

The gleaming ziggurat of the port complex dwindled as the car followed its track past sealed warehouses, empty service pits, the low buildings and concrete apron of a heliport. Vast tracts of alfalfa spread beyond, grown for atmospheric conditioning and the plastic industries. Far off in the clear air was the high horizon of the northern cliffwall, a reddish line against the dark sky.

The car was small, made smaller by a couple of Guild officers sitting at one end, stiff in their high-collared uniforms, hair cropped to a millimetre of their scalps. The freespacers took the other end, leaving a wide neutral zone. Someone was passing a joint around, using a pintail servo as a clip. Rayne was doing one-handed pull-ups on a grabrail, swinging back and forth, looking at the Guild officers, looking away.

Sepuldeva and Stefan sat side by side at the edge of the noisy freespacers. After a while, Stefan said, "Fellow I worked with, systems, said the Guild is recruiting."

"They always did like a captive audience."

Stefan laughed. "The life and the Guild like me and Rayne. Cat and dog."

"Where did you hear that?"

"On Earth, when I passed through from Jacob's Rock to this so-called easy berth. Port by the ocean. I liked the ocean. Big, pure. Place called Galveston."

"Rayne comes from near there."

"Explains a lot."

"A small place."

Stefan smiled. "You understand, if you try."

Nettled, Sepuldeva said, "Perhaps I understand more than you think."

Stefan laughed again. The car rattlingly decelerated as it plunged into the slums that ringed the city's prickly heart.

The freespacers' quarter was a single square block of the Ring's inner edge, crossed by the mono line in one direction, a freight canal in the other. The boarding house, where they stopped to drop off Stefan's grip, was a minute's walk from the

station; the nearest bar was around the corner, sandstone walls crumbling from rusting beams, leaning over its reflection in the canal's oily water.

Inside, freespacers sat at tables, stood three deep at the bar. Their noise was a physical thing in the low-ceilinged room. Stefan bought beer, and he and Sepuldeva and Rayne each drank a deep ceremonial draught.

"Now I am back," Stefan said.

Rayne said, "Just one time I'd like to get drunk 'stead of buzzed. Some of the guys were saying someone's making jack from fruitjuice and sugar."

"I heard that too," Sepuldeva said. "I also heard some mechanic got thrown in jail and flogged for owning a still."

"Yeah? Well, I don't know about that. I do know this fungus beer just makes you see things funny, doesn't help you get out of it."

Stefan said, "You be out of it soon. Up and out after Sepuldeva here."

"Don't remind me, okay? It's not like you really go anywhere."

Someone came towards them through the crowd. Small, black, intense: Mia gave a big smile and said to Stefan, "Baby boy, you been away a long time."

"Only a week. Drink?"

"I've got one going somewhere."

Sepuldeva said, "I haven't seen you for a while, Mia."

"Oh, I was around some guys who thought they could get me some work, They couldn't." Mia shrugged, still smiling. Her hair was frizzed out around her narrow feline face. Tribal scars notched the corners of her high cheekbones.

Rayne said, "Only one kinda work I can think they'd want you for these days."

"Fuck you," Mia said.

"I wish."

"The thing is, is it okay if I come back a couple of days?"

Stefan nodded; Sepuldeva said, "Of course." Mia had been sleeping on their floor for most of the embargo. She was an intersystem pilot; there was no work for her at all.

Rayne said, "You know you're always welcome, baby."

"The guy you're looking for is over in that corner," Mia told him.

"Oh yeah? Stefan here buys more beer send it over, okay?"

Mia wrinkled her nose when Rayne had gone, said, "How can you *stand* that guy?" and began to tell Stefan the latest gossip, the rumours about the ship from Earth.

To one side of their couple, Sepuldeva sipped at his beer. He suddenly wanted to write about the morning, but his notebook was back in the boarding house. He was thinking about freespacers, about worlds, about the trap Novaya Zyemla had become, his first day down, when he'd sat for hours on the flat roof of his boarding house, watching the slow rise of Ahd's swollen disc, the gas giant of which Novaya Zyemla was a moon. He'd taken a trip up to the top of the northern cliffwall and looked out across the deep rift valley which was the only habitable part of the world; he'd rented a p-suit and walked a little way on the

Illustrations by Kevin Cullen

ruddy frozen dust of the true surface.

Other freespacers? Their explorations were limited to finding the tolerant bars, the cheap eating houses, where they were content to gossip, talk over old incidents, the price of a room, of beer. Rayne had been to eight of the ten worlds, yet his outlook was still that of some small-time, small-town kid: Stefan had said as much. Worlds: their variety had hardly touched Rayne, had hardly touched most of the freespacers. Movement was more important: that was why every freespacer on Novaya Zyemla fretted inside the cage of embargo.

For Sepuldeva, it meant that the boundaries of the ghetto which had always been there were now as real as the rimwalls. And he wanted so much to be out of it, even if it meant returning to orthidium mining, scouring an asteroid a metre at a time with a jet of ionized caesium, exactly balancing the reaction as loosened quark-stuff, the heart of catalfission batteries, impacted on the rock during the cataclysmic ejection of material when Procyon's companion had become a white dwarf, leapt the gap to the mining tug's collector. Killingly precise work, bearable only because it paid well. But Sepuldeva was good at it: and now his unused craft swelled in his fingertips.

Stefan suddenly thrust his face into Sepuldeva's. "Let's go," he said, his urgency meshing with Sepuldeva's surprise. "Drink up, guy. After the ship I need to breathe."

A bitter worm of grosha beer moving down his gullet, Sepuldeva followed Stefan and Mia through the crowd into the vertical light of noon. Some guy pissing into his reflection in the canal looked around as they went past: it was Rayne.

Rayne latched onto Sepuldeva, pushing a plump silvery drinking bag into his hands and insisting it was good stuff. Sepuldeva sucked on the metal straw, got a slug of what tasted like sugary acetone, lost most of it to a reflexive cough. "Christos, Rayne!"

"Strong, ain't it?"

"That's one way of putting it."

Stefan took the bag from Sepuldeva, cheeks hollowing as he sucked on the straw, silvery plastic wrinkling inside the cage of his big, blunt fingers.

"Fucking hell, that stuff cost me."

Stefan wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Thought you didn't have credit."

"Had a few skinpops. Barter. Hey, come on –" snatching as Stefan took another long pull.

"Drink it all before a cop sees us. Do you a favour. Mia?"

Mia sipped, delicate as a cat, handed the bag back to Rayne.

They threaded the narrow streets of the Ring, Stefan roaring some unmodulated tune as they passed through a street market. People looked up from the half-empty stalls: a few even smiled. Stefan bought a paper cone of fried shrimp and they ate as they walked, burning their fingers.

The walkways of the Golden Strip were warmer. The bright lights of the marts bleached the sky; there was no sign of the embargo here. Mia and Stefan held hands as they passed the glittering displays, pointing, laughing. Sometimes Stefan clapped once, twice, before catching Mia's hand again. Rayne swaggered in front of them: he'd put on his little round shades again, kept looking over his shoulder, grinning like an ape. Sepuldeva followed with his own grin tightening the skin of his cheeks; the drink had disconnected something between his eyes and his brain. He saw that people who turned away, pale faces averted in the cowls of their dark cloaks, looked back after they had passed. That made him feel good in some unspecified way. Yeah, they could look at freespacers.

They walked a long way up the Strip, turning at the level park before the Sacred Mosque, coming back through the covered aisles of the Bazaar. That was where the cop stopped them.

They were looking at rolls of brightly patterned carpet that towered up towards the polarized glass of the roof when the cop sauntered over, telling them in fractured Portuguese to move on. He had the round, ruddy face common to the plebian class on Novaya Zyemla, a thick neck that folded over the high collar of his tunic, and maybe ten centimetres and twenty kilos on Stefan. "Here, here now," he said loudly. "Here you do not come."

Rayne said, "We can't look in the shops here? You kidding?"

"You do not come." The cop was looking at Mia, and Sepuldeva saw his expression change. "Women cover faces. Is law. You do not know law?"

"Hey," Rayne said, "we're not Reds, right? We're freespacers. We don't need your laws."

"Here, same law for everyone." Another cop had appeared from somewhere; a crowd was beginning to gather. The first cop said, "We see identification."

Sepuldeva handed over his card, but the cop didn't put it in his reader, simply peered carefully at both sides and handed it back, held out his hand towards Rayne.

"The fuck is this," Rayne said. "I thought there was some kind of people's revolution here, man. Now you're saying my friend here can't dress the way she wants? Hey – Hey!"

The cop had grabbed his shoulders and slammed him up against rolls of carpet, started to pat him down. In a moment he'd pulled out the crumpled drinking bag, sniffed at it, shown it to his companion.

"Hey," Rayne said, managing to turn around. His voice was weaker. His shades had fallen off. "Guy can't have a little fun here?"

The cop turned Rayne around again, put a hand on the back of his neck and shoved his face against carpet, muffling his swearing. He pointed at each of the other three freespacers in turn. "You go. Your friend in much trouble. You too, unless you go."

Someone had been talking to the other cop, a man in a long many-pocketed jacket. He no longer wore his headband, and it took Sepuldeva a minute to recognize the man who'd accosted him at the spacefield gate. He said, "The police take your friend to the local imam for a ruling on his offence. You are not to worry, I will try and do something. You just come with me."

Stefan and Mia wanted to know what was going on, and Sepuldeva told them it was okay, he sort of knew the guy.

The man said, "I am Ahmed Ryzhkov, I will help your friend, if you will allow it."

Mia said, "Imagine how much I care."

"Come on," Sepuldeva said.

Meanwhile, the cops had hustled Rayne off through the crowd which circled the freespacers in near silence, as if they were inside a sealed bubble within the Bazaar's hubbub. Sepuldeva was flashing on faces: an old man with a purple cancer swelling one side of his neck; a woman's brown human eyes peeping through swaddling black cloth; a young boy with a runny nose, golden earring aflash in curly black hair.

Stefan put a hand on his shoulder. "Is okay," he said. "We go. What do we lose?"

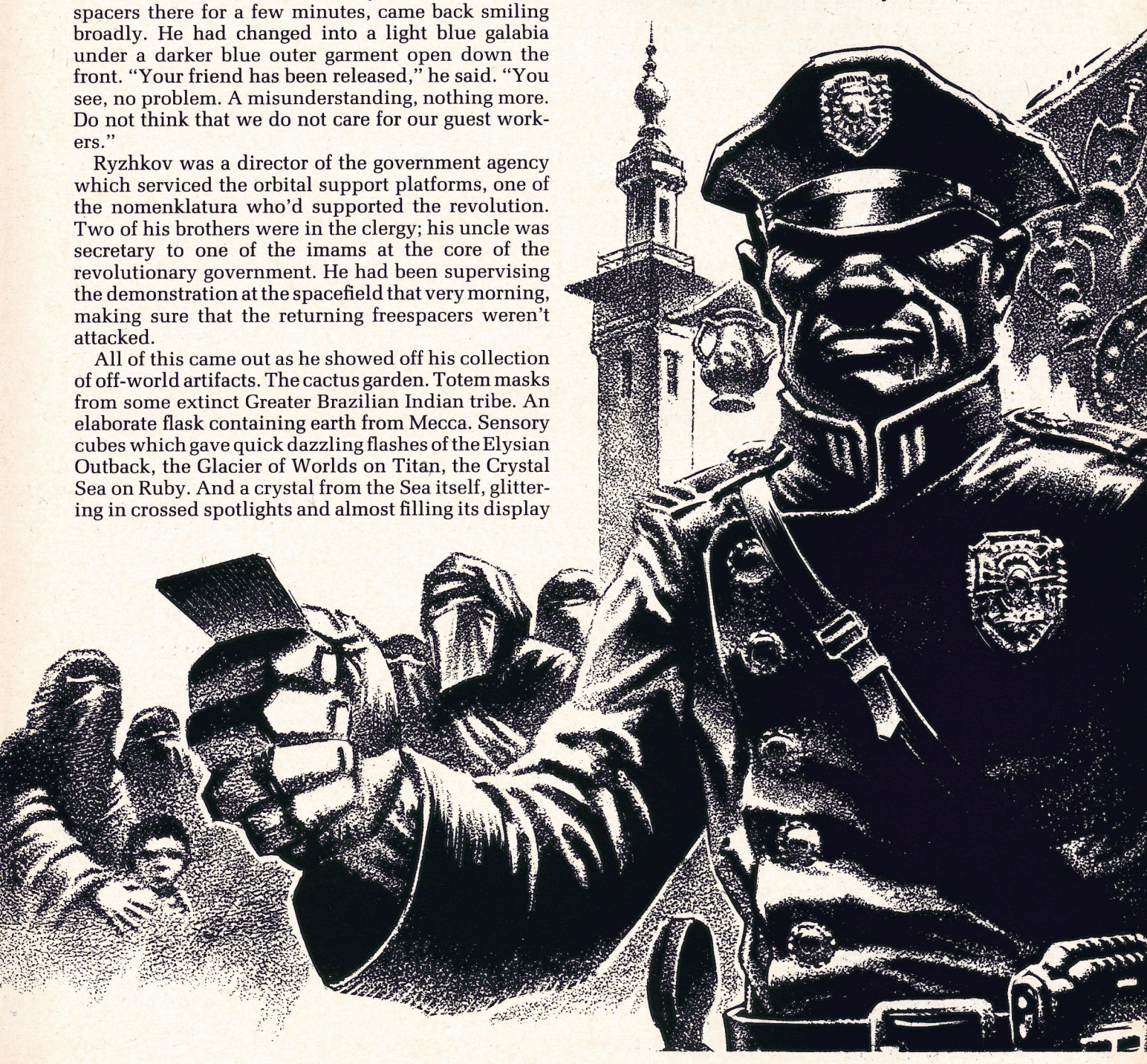
Ahmed Ryzhkov's house was built around a square courtyard in which, beneath UV-filtering plastic, on white sand, amongst red rocks, cacti from Earth grew, raising spiny paddles, stiff arms furred with needles. Ryzhkov left the freespacers there for a few minutes, came back smiling broadly. He had changed into a light blue galabia under a darker blue outer garment open down the front. "Your friend has been released," he said. "You see, no problem. A misunderstanding, nothing more. Do not think that we do not care for our guest workers."

Ryzhkov was a director of the government agency which serviced the orbital support platforms, one of the nomenklatura who'd supported the revolution. Two of his brothers were in the clergy; his uncle was secretary to one of the imams at the core of the revolutionary government. He had been supervising the demonstration at the spacefield that very morning, making sure that the returning freespacers weren't attacked.

All of this came out as he showed off his collection of off-world artifacts. The cactus garden. Totem masks from some extinct Greater Brazilian Indian tribe. An elaborate flask containing earth from Mecca. Sensory cubes which gave quick dazzling flashes of the Elysian Outback, the Glacier of Worlds on Titan, the Crystal Sea on Ruby. And a crystal from the Sea itself, glittering in crossed spotlights and almost filling its display room, its dozen facets, cloudy with stress fractures, each a good metre across.

Ryzhkov kept up a constant stream of chatter that was mostly met by silence – Sepuldeva's buzzed detachment, Stefan's vague hostility, Mia's indifference. Sepuldeva thought that in a creepy sort of way Ryzhkov seemed to direct most of his attention to Mia, but perhaps that was only the paranoia of comedown.

After the tour, they sat on the flat roof where a huge carpet had been spread, lounging on embroidered cushions while Ryzhkov's wife served them thick bitter coffee in beaten copper cups, plates of piercingly sweet pastries. Evening now. The sky blue-black, sprinkled with the first stars. The amplified calls of the muezzins twisting like silver wires into the still air above the flat roofs of the city. The minarets of the



Sacred Mosque, like spears each tipped with crescent and star, raised against the great face of Ahd, against bands of salmon and yellow and white, swirling scalloped edges peeling off in complex vortices. Sepuldeva drank it all in, experiencing an exquisite epiphany. *Another world!*

Ryzhkov's wife was a quiet, plump woman, her head uncovered, her eyebrows shaven so that her face looked startlingly naked. When she had finished serving she bowed to her husband and withdrew, and Mia said, "What's wrong, she doesn't like us?"

Ryzhkov smiled. "Our women do not concern themselves with matters of the world, little Seyoura."

Mia said, "You can cut the little Seyoura shit."

"Of course. I apologize. It is refreshing, actually, to talk with someone as... liberated, as yourself. My wife is a fine woman, a good companion to me, a fine mother to my sons and daughters. But she is limited in some ways, as you are not. You have seen other worlds, all of you. I cannot tell you how wonderful that is to me!"

"We get the idea," Stefan said, tossing off his thimbleful of coffee.

"May I...?" Ryzhkov poured more coffee from the elaborate, high spouted copper pot, spooned in crystal sugar. "I never understand the need to indulge in alcohol, myself. Caffeine is such a civilized drug."

He wanted to assure all freespacers, he said, that the People's Islamic Nation Party had not forgotten the plight of the guest workers. Novaya Zyemla needed them. They could become teachers and supervisors for a national spacefaring guild. It would be honourable work, and they would be rewarded for supporting the inevitable progress of the Ordained Society. "We will give you all houses, and find wives for men." He smiled at Mia. "And we are certain to find husbands for the women. Now I have told you about our hopes, may I ask about you? Do you all work together?"

Sepuldeva volunteered that he and Stefan and Rayne shared shiftwork, that Mia was an intersystem pilot. "It's just a temporary thing."

"I see...Then you are all lovers, perhaps? No? Perhaps it is true then, that intersystem pilots need no human lover, for phasing into contraspace is such exquisite pleasure that no carnal knowledge can compare to it. Is it true, Mia?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Mia started to get up. "Thanks for the coffee. Stefan, Sepuldeva?"

Ryzhkov said, "Please sit down. This area is unsafe for people like you. Wait, and I will call for a taxi."

Sepuldeva looked from Mia to Ryzhkov, befuddled by three different drugs, trying to figure out what had happened. Mia said, "One thing I know, is there are people like you on every world. You got Rayne off, and you got off on your little zark twist. We're even, and now we go. Haul your ass, Sepuldeva!"

Down in the dark wide street, where flowering banana trees leaned over high white walls luminous in the dusk, Stefan spat and said, "Johns everywhere, that's how it is. Always want a piece of you." And all the way back to the quarter he spun a rambling story about some woman he'd lived with on Earth for a month, a real rich woman with bizarre sexual needs whom he'd at last beaten up – "Real bad, man, I mean you'd hardly recognize her. But it was what she *wanted*" – and as Sepuldeva slowly sobered up he realized that Stefan had been more buzzed than any of them.

Rayne was not at the bar when they returned. Stefan bought grosha beer and a mess of lamb stew and deep-fried cabbage and bread to eat it with, and the three of them saw quietly in the noise of the other freespacers.

When they finally got back to the boarding house, Rayne wasn't there, either.

Light lay across Sepuldeva's face, reddening his his closed eyes. He turned away and the narrow bed swayed, wakening him further. The sound which had first disturbed him, the rattle of a loose floorboard, came again. He looked up.

His grip under one arm, Rayne said in a hoarse whisper, "Shit, man, keep quiet, huh?"

"What do you –"

"Goddamn!" Rayne whispered, his voice breaking high.

Wrapped in a blanket on the floor, her head on the rolled bundle of her clothes, Mia slept on. But Stefan was stirring on the bed by the window. He pushed his golden-furred arms into the air, turned his head, saw Rayne. "Where you been?"

"Where I'm goin' back."

Stefan, naked, walked across the room and clamped a hand on Rayne's shoulder, shook him so his beaded hair rattled. "What you up to?"

"I don't have to tell you nothing."

"Stefan? What is it?" Mia sat up, her hair tousled.

"Ask Rayne."

"You mess me around, there's guys outside who'll mess *you*."

Sepuldeva fastened the snaps of his jeans and went to the narrow unglazed window. Two uniformed men were standing in the alley below. He turned back and said to Rayne, "So you really went ahead and did it."

"What's up?" Stefan asked; when Sepuldeva told him about the Guild crew outside he let go of Rayne's shoulder. "Just get out, huh? Go on."

"Look, that's what I –"

"Before I knock the shit out of you. Guild or not."

Rayne threw a glance towards Sepuldeva, part confusion, part terror, then bolted down the stairs.

The last of the guards told Sepuldeva firmly, "Way I see it you've no right at all, boy. Move on out before I kick your ass."

"The woman who gave me this pass, Sergeant, said that it would assure me access to my friend. She was a lieutenant. I don't know, maybe I should go tell her what you said."

The grizzled man leaned forward, the edge of his desk creasing his ample belly. "Suppose the guy doesn't want to see you?"

"You haven't asked him. Shall I have the Lieutenant do that?"

"Don't push it, freespacer. Wait right there."

The sergeant went through the sliding door, leaving Sepuldeva alone in the bleak anteroom. He'd been in the Guild's quarters for almost two hours now. It felt more like two days.

At last the sergeant returned and conceded with

ill grace. "He'll see you."

A panel of frosted glass slid apart at the end of the long corridor. Sepuldeva stepped through into light, sweeps of pastel colours from a huge screen playing a light fantasy, the actinic light of Procyon burning through the green glass of a wall-wide window, where Rayne sat on a padded bench. His head looked funny, smaller: his hair had been shaved off.

The sergeant said, "Ten minutes."

Sepuldeva's boots clicked on black tiles. Rayne didn't look up. "Why don't you sit or something?" he said.

Sepuldeva looked out through green glass. He could see the cliffwall rising a dozen kilometres beyond the spacefield, could even make out the true surface, a smudged line beyond the high, flashing peaks. He said, "Quite a view."

Rayne was fiddling with the loose buckle of his grey coveralls. "My mind's set. Even if it wasn't for – well, never mind. You'll know soon enough."

"Know what?"

"The ship that came down a couple of days ago? You'll see." Rayne laughed. "My luck."

Set in the black tiles of the floor were red or yellow or white points about which fine gold rings expanded like ripples from so many dropped pebbles, patterns teasingly familiar to Sepuldeva. He was still having trouble making connections. He said to Rayne "Why did you do it?"

"They made a deal with the local cops and got me out. I mean, where were you guys?"

"We met someone who told us he'd fix it."

"Well, he was jerking your wires, man, 'cause I was on my own there until the Guild came. But it's not just that. It's a good berth. Better than that goddamned room, if you want the truth."

"A hotel room is cheaper than a Guild contract. You'll still be indentured when the embargo is over. They could put you on the Long Haul for the next ten years if they wanted to!"

"Oh, the embargo, that's history, man. It wasn't that anyhow. Maybe a part of it, but not all. There always was the goddamn hustle of not knowing where the next trick was coming from."

"That's part of the life. Part of our... freedom."

"Maybe you all like it. But I came into the life 'cause it was the only way out. How it was when I was a kid, see, Dad coming home drunk after work, catching hold of the table, looking down at me before he started in on Mom? Yeah, I remember. My Dad was a strong man, but he knew he was stuck." Rayne was not quite looking at Sepuldeva. "I could see myself that way in a few years. Only way out was up. I'll be okay here. You tell the others."

"I don't think they care." Perhaps that was harsh. He added, "Some people were pretty angry at the way you... left. I suppose you know that. I just wanted –"

"You just wanted to know *why*." Rayne barked his brief laugh. "Listen, we all know about that little notebook of yours. But that's okay, man. Really it is."

As Sepuldeva stood, he suddenly understood that the circles in the tiles represented the various systems of the Federation, felt a welling relief. A puzzle solved. A pattern unlocked. He told Rayne, "Good luck, anyway."

I'll see you around," Rayne said. "Maybe sooner than you think."

There was nothing more to say. Sepuldeva turned away to where the Guild sergeant was waiting. Twelve years passed before he saw Rayne again.

Twelve years...

A few days after Rayne's defection, the government of Novaya Zyemla released the news brought by the freighter. A survey ship had limped back to Earth after encountering aliens in the asteroid system of a red dwarf star, BD +20° 2465, only sixteen light years from Sol. Soon after, the price of orthidium rose so steeply (it was war) that the Novaya Zyemla government abandoned its embargo. The freespacers and Guild personnel who had been stranded were evacuated, but it did the freespacers no good at all. They were promptly drafted into the newly created Federation Navy.

The war lasted two years. The Navy englobed BD twenty and discovered a second colony of aliens on an extensively planoformed world circling another red dwarf. It was not known where the aliens had originally come from, but they only had relativistic drives and that was what spared the worlds of the Federation and cost the aliens the war.

Sepuldeva was lucky. He served in the *cordon sanitaire* in orbit around the star of the planoformed world, and saw no fighting.

He was demobilized on Earth, and a year later published a book about his time as a freespacer. His book was a success and then more than a success: a phenomenon that some said caught the true voice of the age. Well, perhaps. The bubble of fame lasted a year or so. Sepuldeva made enough money to buy his own intersystem yacht. He married into a group on Serenity and fathered a child, worked on the group's farm and with little urgency or seriousness on another book, was happy.

Sepuldeva returned to Earth only once. On his last evening he strolled along the waterfront of Galveston, watching the lights of the seacity glimmer across kilometres of dark salt water. He'd spent four hours in the bars and cafés of the freespacer quarter, choosing his crew for the run back to Serenity. He was slightly drunk, wholly nostalgic. Not for any particular place (Earth's anachronisms grated on his lately acquired urbanity; when he had revisited the neighbourhood in Sao Paulo where he had been raised, its squalor had horrified him), but for what he had been, the naive young man who had one day thrown up his job and his family to enrol in the Academy.

Ten metres below the rail, the tide slapped a concrete revetment; a fitful breeze plucked at Sepuldeva's bright vest. He turned away. He would leave tomorrow. He hadn't been on Serenity for a year now. Too long to be away from his daughter, from home.

He crossed the potholed street towards empty waterfront buildings crowded edge to edge like so many plundered tombs. Apart from the port on Pelican Island, all industry had moved out to the seacity, the third largest in the world, as they said here. *In*, not *on*... his mind on the implications of that difference, Sepuldeva didn't take much notice of an approaching passerby until the man said, "Hey, I know you."

"Really?" Even though Sepuldeva's fame had mostly passed away, this still happened to him.

"Sure." The man's thin face was seamed with dirt; the laces of his vest were broken and knotted; his pants were belted with twisted wire. If he was a freespacer, he was out on his luck. "You remember?" He pushed at his ragged fringe. "The embargo back on Novaya Zyemla?"

The gesture brought sudden recognition. "Rayne, is that right? You joined the Guild. It does come back."

The man eased a thumb under the strap of his grip. "I heard about your book and all. Hey, how about a drink? No, really. For old times back when we had the one glass all evening."

Sepuldeva hesitated, certain something was wanted of him. At the beginning of his fame it had seemed flattering; now it was at best a minor irritation. But he would be gone from this world in a few hours, and he had the rest of the night to kill. He said, "Perhaps one."

"You will? That's great. I was really pleased, you know, when your book came out. Don't understand it all, but I like it."

"Thank you." Sepuldeva matched Rayne's eager lope.

"There's a place down here a ways. You gonna write more?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps I've said enough."

"Wouldn't blame you. You must have it pretty good. I mean, I saw the flash. Your own yacht, huh?"

"Yes. It lifts tomorrow."

"Terrific. Right here."

Palm trees leaned over the wide avenue. Apt blocks rose in broken terraces; darkened shops and brightly-lit cafés stood in the shadow of the first of the setbacks; glimmering signs hung in the moist air.

"I go here a lot."

Starwind: there were bars called that in every freespacers quarter of the Federation. It was dirtier and more crowded than the places where Sepuldeva had found his crew. Those here would work intrasystem freighters or sub-orbital tugs.

Rayne, pushing between a woman in a scintillating halter and a man whose piled hair was wound with strings of light, leaned in puddled beer on the counter and called to the bartender. When the beers came Sepuldeva handed over a note (another anachronism, but an amusing one) and Rayne said, "Hey, thanks," with what seemed like genuine pleasure.

"Forget it. This is where you pull tricks?"

"Not really. There's a little trouble. Here, let's sit." The couple on the other side of the little table didn't even look up. Rayne delved inside his grip. "Told you I had a copy. Here."

It was a spoolreader, something that would pass as an antique on other worlds. Rayne thumbed a switch: light flickered under his stubbled chin. "This here ... it's about us?"

"Do you mind?"

"Hell, no. I show other people; a few understand, even. Sure made me feel funny the first time I read it, though. You ever see the others? That Stefan, he was okay."

Sepuldeva recalled the way Rayne had left; obviously, Rayne didn't remember it in quite the same way. He lifted his glass and saw a thin film as of oil on the urine-coloured liquid. There was a chip out of the rim. He set it amidst the empty glasses that cluttered the table.

"Ever see Stefan?" Rayne asked.

"I haven't thought about him in years. He was killed in the war."

"Yeah. A bad time." Rayne bent to sip his beer. He was, Sepuldeva noticed, drinking it very slowly.

"You know, I didn't expect to see you again either. And certainly not in a place like this."

Rayne said, "Right after the war I jumped my contract with the Guild. I was demobilized here, just took off."

"So now you're a freespacer again."

"You came to me when I was about to sign on. Told me I wouldn't be able to take the Guild. See, I do remember. But now, I'm not exactly a freespacer." Rayne's smile had gone. "They have these circuits? They'd spot me if I tried to crew a ship. I've been hanging out trying to score a freebie."

"For ten years?"

"No, no. I was born near here, went back, got a family a while. Couldn't stand that shit either, it kind of fucked up my head. When I started beating on my old lady I knew it was time to go, so I lit out for here."

Sepuldeva nodded; he remembered now what Rayne had told him, that time on Novaya Zyemla, saw all too clearly the pattern of frustrated expectation.

"You said you have a yacht..."

Again, Sepuldeva nodded.

"Look, I don't need much. I'd doss in the commons, in the goddamn machine hold... I just need off this rock." Rayne dropped his gaze. "I know I couldn't crew, you have to turn in the dockets. But maybe just a chance, huh?"

There was something cold in Sepuldeva's belly. "I can't remember the berth number of my yacht, but I'm at the big hotel here, the Firecrest. Call me tomorrow afternoon. I can't promise anything."

Rayne made a breathy sound. He said, "Hey, thanks! Thanks! That's – well, thanks, huh?"

"I can't say how it will be until the afternoon, so wait until then, okay? Look, I've got to go now." In a sudden rush of pity Sepuldeva thrust a folded bill at Rayne. "Maybe you can use this?"

"Sure," Rayne said quickly, as Sepuldeva stood. He laughed. "Well sure!"

The night air was close and warm. A police aircar swung across the avenue: the crowns of the palms clattered in its wake.

Sepuldeva walked three blocks, then went into another bar, bought a beer, watched two freespacers play chess on a triple board. An intersystem pilot came up to ask if he had anything; when he told her he'd already signed his crew she laughed and said, "I'm not hurrying."

He asked her if she had ever met a pilot called Mia.

"Oh," the girl said, tossing back bleached hair, "I don't remember names." She had the cool streetwise arrogance of the young, of those who have yet to fail at anything important. Sepuldeva bought her a drink and they talked a while, leaning side by side at the zinc counter. Sepuldeva kept glancing at the complicated chronometer hung above the bottles. When he mentioned the embargo on Novaya Zyemla, the pilot said, "Hey, I used to know this guy who was there too!" But he had been with the Federation forces which had finally broken the government.

Sepuldeva left the bar with new edges to his drunkenness and his nostalgia. There was a mono line two blocks on. The lights of the city peeled away as the car crossed the arm of choppy water towards the glare of the port; and as it rattled into the station, Sepuldeva glimpsed the flash as a Navy freighter rose, sliding steadily up in the sky in the track of the gravithic projectors.

Ships lift at all hours.

Sepuldeva felt no guilt: he had long ago outgrown his past. *We called ourselves free when we were all of us unknowingly caught in the coils of history*... It was a line from his book. And so they had been, Sepuldeva and Rayne, Stefan and Mia, and all the others. And so was Rayne still, that lesson still to be learnt, an exile even on his own world.

Sepuldeva presented his thumbprint and captain's sigil at the gate, passed beneath the old stone arch. His own exile was over. He was on his way home. Kicking the dust of the Earth from his boot-heels, he navigated the spacefield's maze to the berth where his crew were already gathered, waiting to take his ship out at dawn.

Paul J. McAuley is the author of *Four Hundred Billion Stars* (1988), *Of the Fall* (1989; published in Britain as *Secret Harmonies*) and the forthcoming *Eternal Light* (1991), plus an imminent short-story collection called *The King of the Hill* (the title piece of which appeared in *IZ* in 1985). He is also a regular book reviewer for this magazine. His last story here was "Karl and the Ogre" (issue 23), and it's been too long an absence. (Luckily, we have another piece by him coming up soon.) He currently lives in St Andrews, Scotland.

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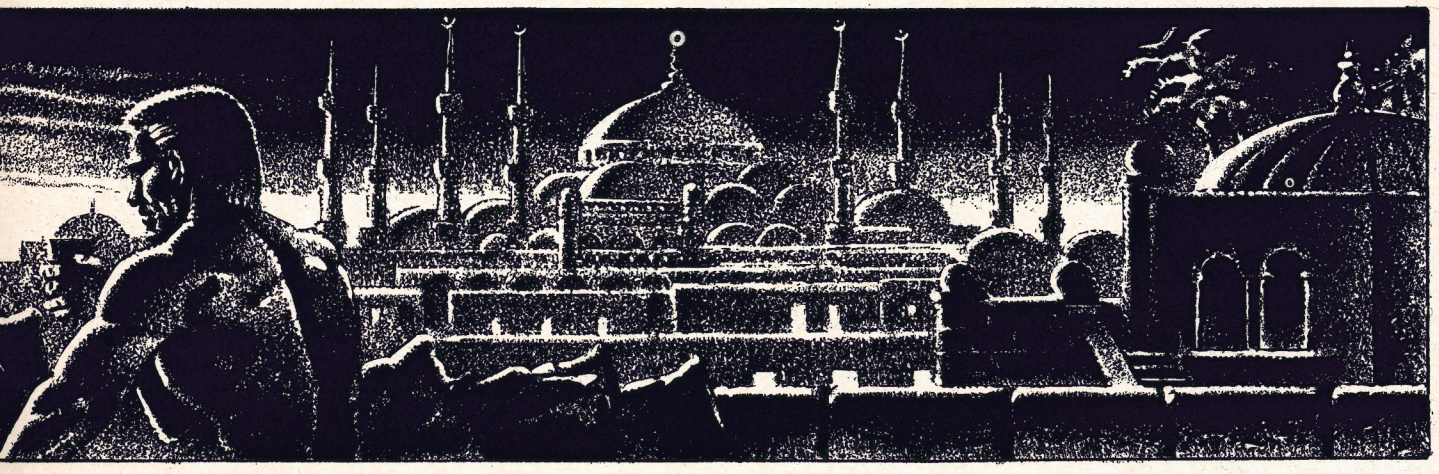


COMMENT

Cyberspace (TM)
Bruce Sterling

Now here's a spectacle you don't see every day. An idea from science fiction is transmuting into tangible reality – right now, in broad daylight.

During the past year or so, the term "cyberspace" has appeared with steadily increasing frequency, on television, in national newspapers and magazines, and in a host of specialized electronics, design, and entertainment publications. Panels, conferences and trade conventions involving "cyberspace" have multiplied swiftly, in America, Japan and Europe: SIGGRAPH '90, The Virtual Reality Conference, NCGA '90, The Hackers' Conference, Tech 2000, CyberArts International, Technology Entertainment & Design II, Art Futura in Barcelona, Ars Electronica in Linz, the Point Foundation Cyberthon in San Francisco – (and, in my home town of Austin, Texas, "The First Conference on Cyberspace," about which more anon).

The term "cyberspace" has a very clear origin. It first appeared in a science-fiction story called "Burning Chrome" by William Gibson, in *Omni* magazine, July 1982. Interestingly, "cyberspace" makes its first appearance in upper-case, as a product trademark for a computer company: "I knew every chip in Bobby's simulator by heart; it looked like your workaday Ono-Sendai VII, the 'Cyberspace Seven,' but I'd rebuilt it so many times that you'd have had a hard time finding a square millimetre of factory circuitry in all that silicon."

It's also very apt that the trademarked product in this story has been scrapped and reassembled by a hardware hacker. The word "cyberspace" itself is a sleek container for all kinds of suspicious techie marvels – notions with radically different premises – and considerable commercial promise.

People – some of them, millionaire entrepreneurs – are in technophilic ecstasy, boldly comparing "cyberspace" to the telephone, the automobile, the Wright Flyer, the personal computer.

So what *is* cyberspace? As currently envisioned, it breaks up into these rough categories.

1. Gibsonian cyberspace. "A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding..." The cyberspace of *Neuromancer* (1984) is a postulated global network (extending into orbit) which presents a titanic array of information (money, data, military secrets, pretty much everything that matters) in colourful, computer-generated, iconic architectures. Gibsonian cyberspace is three-dimensional and navigable, but essentially hallucinatory. Humans access it via "cyberspace decks" linked to a headset ("trodes"). Artificial Intelligences, on the other hand, apparently live in cyberspace like fish in water – or demons on a higher plane.

2. Barlovian cyberspace. John Perry Barlow (a founder of the political action group called the Electronic Frontier Foundation) uses the term "cyberspace" to refer to the international network of computer communications systems existing *today*.

Computer networks and conferencing systems have been multiplying radically in recent years, and now include such eldritch tentacular entities as BITNET, USENET, INTERNET, NSFNET, The Well, Fido, GEnie, Starlink, Cosmos, Adonis, Minitel, Dialog, Kogaju-bu LAN, and dozens more. This ragged but world-spanning electronic tangle is sometimes known as the "Matrix" (also a Gibson coinage), and, unsurprisingly, as "the Net." Such networks are not three-dimensional, and contain few icons. They consist almost entirely of bare text and lists of commands. Still, their complex internal architectures – special interest groups, mail services, downloaded files, on-line games, portals in and out – give them a certain sense of physicality, something like the guts of a drastically overstuffed filing cabinet. More importantly, the communities using them, and communicating through them, form a kind of artificial global village, dwelling as neighbours in a nonmaterial space – "cyberspace."

True Gibsonian cyberspace doesn't exist, and may never exist. Barlovian cyberspace does exist, and is growing rapidly in importance, but it's not particularly new. The stuff making headlines is of a different order entirely.

3. "Virtual Reality." This is a coinage of Jaron Lanier, the visionary founder and CEO of VPL Research Inc., a small California company considered the foremost of about twenty different groups working in the cyberspace field. (Lanier is aware of the term "cyberspace," but considers it too "limiting" and "computery.")

Lanier's "Virtual Reality" is a computer-generated visual, audible, and tactile multi-media experience. Using stereo headphones, stereo television goggles ("Eyephones"), wired gauntlets ("DataGloves") and computerized clothing (the "DataSuit"), VPL's Virtual Reality surrounds the human body with an artificial sensorium of sight, sound and touch. "VR" conveys not "information" but "experience;" unlike Gibsonian cyberspace, the objects within a VPL "Virtual Reality" do not represent "data structures." These phantoms can represent anything, nothing, or everything; they can take any form a computer can generate or a programmer can imagine.

4. Simulators. The US military and various aviation companies use "flight simulators," contained artificial environments which mimic the sights and sensations of aircraft flight. These simulators generate an artificial computer-graphic terrain, sometimes including hostile aircraft. Mock-up flight-control devices respond realistically to the pilot's actions.

Helmet-mounted data systems can present information in torrents directly to the human head, removing the need to examine a console, or even look out the windscreen. Attempts are underway to extend these techniques to actual flight, thoroughly computerizing the cockpit.

5. Telepresence. The specialty of the NASA Ames Research Centre and Japan's Mechanical Engineering Laboratory, "telepresence" aims to allow a human pilot to remotely control a flying drone or orbital robot. The machine becomes a working, interactive extension of human presence into

hostile or inaccessible territories, such as the Moon or perhaps Lebanon.

These last three forms may seem quite distinct, but they all use digitized data. Once sensory information has been ground-up into digitized bits, it is grist for any cybernetic mill. Simulators could be wired to do all kind of odd things, including flying over Mars or violating the laws of gravity and physics; telepresence could explore completely artificial, invented computer environments; Virtual Reality might easily be partially "real," using say digitized video from downtown London or Beijing. Barlovian cyberspace might carry programs for generating Virtual Reality environments, and so on and on.

"Cyberspace" in its broadest sense is therefore a vast diverse territory thoroughly up for grabs, and has attracted intense commercial interest. There has been much driving of property-stakes into the wilderness. One of the first such was the attempt to register the word "Cyberspace" as a commercial trademark of Autodesk, Inc., a California-based software-design company whose computer-aided drafting program "AutoCAD" is said to earn $170 million a year. William Gibson, aided by architecture professor Michael Benedikt and a set of expensive lawyers, saw this come to nothing.

Timothy Leary, 60s LSD guru, has taken a very prominent position in the emergent world of "cyberspace," for reasons that are not hard to grasp. It was Leary who slyly suggested a possible legal counterstrike – trademarking the name of prominent Autodesk researcher "Eric GullichsenTM." This proved unnecessary – though "Cyberspace" has since been registered by a North Carolina fantasy-gaming company.

It was in the interests of Gibson and Professor Benedikt, organizer of "The First Conference on Cyberspace," to keep this term in the public domain. Gibson would be robbed of his credit were his own term to be kept under someone else's commercial lock and key, and Benedikt would be forced to use absurd circumlocutions for his academic activities. Still, this minor dust-up indicates the variety of interests involved in "cyberspace," and the intensity of the struggle. Trademarks abound, with claims and counterclaims, each entity trying to spread its stamp as widely as possible.

Myron Krueger, inventer of the "VIDEOPLACE" (1969), an early form of computer-assisted video environment, has now founded the "Artificial Reality Corporation." LEEP Systems/ Pop-Optix Labs refers to its version of cyberspace as "OtherworldsTM." The Nintendo PowerGlove, a kid's videogame toy developed from the VPL DataGlove, is registered by Matel Inc., and was the source of royalties lawsuit between a New York toy company and VPL Research. Lanier's VPL has also battled legally with Stanford University; and with a Californian inventor named Howard Perlmutter, who accused Lanier of stealing his ideas about computer clothing. Luckily VPL enjoys the legal services of Jack Russo, a prominent specialist in intellectual property law.

It hasn't been pretty. It isn't likely to become pretty.

Even with the best will in the world, there was bound to be trouble, as the ideas behind "cyberspace" are diffuse and have deep roots. The "head-mounted monitor," considered one of the key inventions of Virtual Reality, seems to have had quite a large number of inventors. In 1985, Mike McGreevy of NASA realized that miniature Japanese TVs from the Citizen Watch Company could be fitted into a headset for stereo vision, one to each eye. But the brilliant Ivan Sutherland (often considered the "father of computer graphics" for his seminal graphics program "Sketchpad" in 1962) had a working head-mounted display 'way back in 1968. Such was its bulk that it had to be mounted into the ceiling, and its graphics were slow and primitive by modern standards – but wasn't the *principle* there? And what about master innovator Fred Brooks of the University of North Carolina?

Then there was Myron Krueger, whose VIDEOPLACE system, using a 2-D screen, live videocams, and computers, has been growing more sophisticated ever since 1974. Yet another pioneer was recently championed: the cinema innovator Morton L. Heilig, holder of US Patent #3,050,870 for the "Sensorama Simulator" (1961). This was a mechanically souped-up theatre seat involving film loops, odour canisters, and vibration. No *computers*, though...

Having reached this point, we can plunge into pre-cybernetic history with 19th-century Europe's answer to Virtual Reality, the now almost-forgotten "Panorama." Invented in 1785 by an Irish painter named Robert Barker (while in prison in Scotland for debt), the "panorama" was a 360-degree painted environment which used tricks of shade, lighting and stage-design to present the illusion of viewer presence within a simulated realm. Some of these cunning perspective-paintings were 15 metres high, 100 metres long, weighing well over 6,000 kilogrammes. They were housed in huge, specially designed rotundas, in London, Paris, Munich, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig, The Hague and many other cities.

Large teams of painters and designers were employed in the panorama trade, and the audience for this early-industrial medium numbered in the millions; but today the "panorama" is a curiosity. (Only about twenty survive today. There may well be a lesson in this.)

"Panorama," incidentally, was not the first name for this early mass-medium; for at least five years, Barker insisted on calling his invention "La Nature a Coup d'Oeil." The terminology settled later; credit sometimes never does. Robert Barker died in 1806, a wealthy showman. This, despite the annoying insistence of Johann Breysig, a German architectural draftsman, that *he* had invented the panorama, in 1789. To this day priority has not been fully settled.

Michael Benedikt, who teaches architecture at The University of Texas at Austin, takes a particular interest in matters of theory, and enjoys contemplating cyberpunk sf. Gibson's concept of "cyberspace" especially intrigued Benedikt as a "space" that poses novel and interesting challenges to architectural design. Together with the University's Department of Computer Sciences and the U.T. School of Architecture, Benedikt organized "The First Conference on Cyberspace" on May 4 and 5, 1990.

Sixty assorted academics, industrialists and computer innovators attended for two days of lectures, demonstrations and lively argument. The fifty-eight scholarly papers submitted included such intriguing topics as "The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace," "Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace," and "Collaborative Engines for Multi-Participant Cyberspaces." Tim McFadden of Altos Computer Systems, in the midst of his presentation on "The Structure of Cyberspace and the Ballistic Actors Model," proposed that the unit-of-length in cyberspace be called "the gibson." Theory seems in good hands.

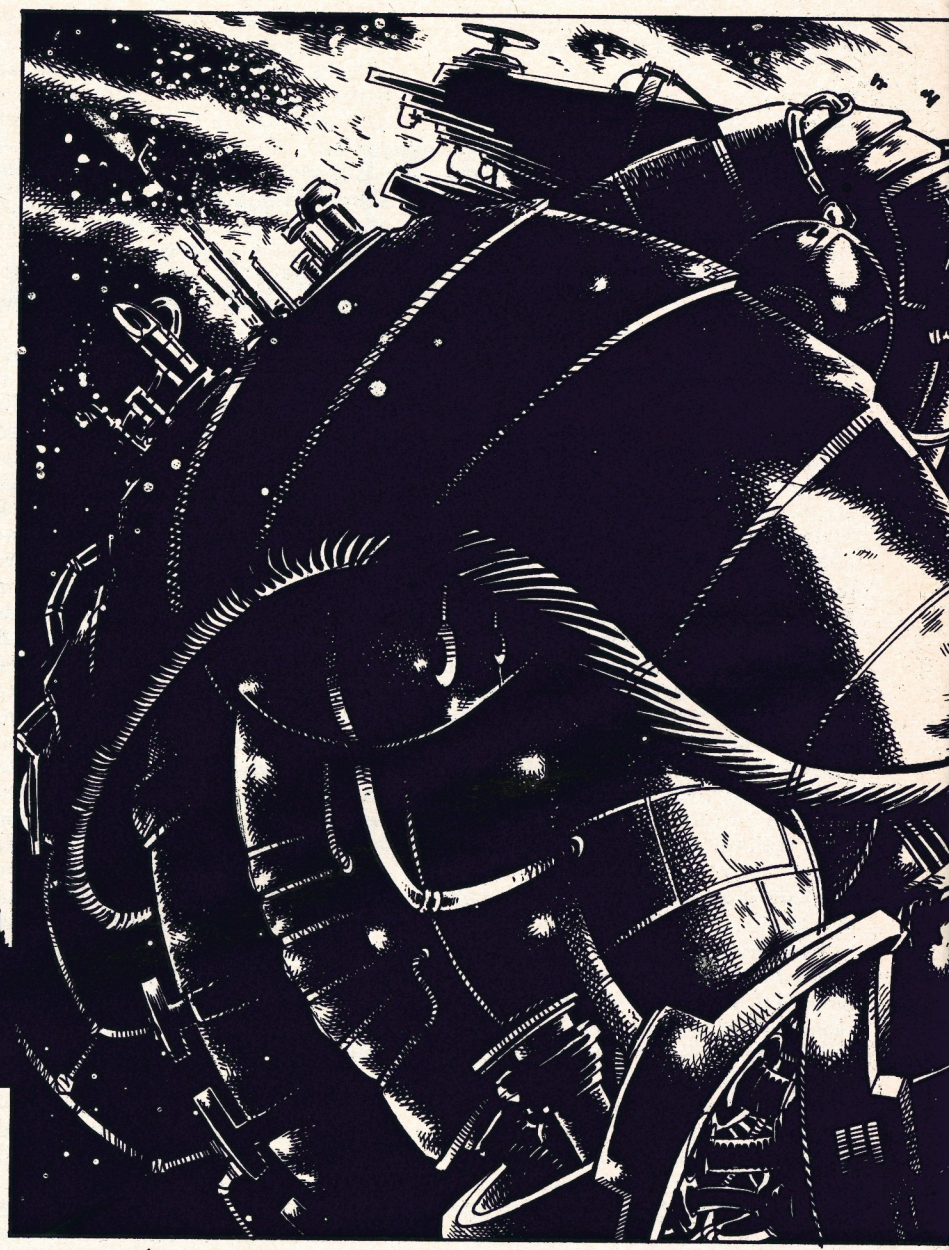
Techie pioneer Eric Gullichsen, who has quite Autodesk to form his own corporation, "Sense8," attended the conference, bringing his own cyberspace rig from California for hands-on demonstration. On the night of the 4th I was able to give it a spin.

Eric Gullichsen personifies the "Fast Cheap and Out Of Control" philosophical faction in the cyberspace community. These cutting-edge pioneers (well represented at the Cyberspace Conference, and distinguished by their long hair and strikingly odd shoes) cherish the early hacker ethic, and believe in whipping up a workable rig in short order, so as to get right down to cyber-business and follow the concept wherever it may lead.

Compared to the half-million-dollar VPL rig (which features dual fibre-optic Lycra gauntlets, magnetic room sensors, and individually tailored

Concluded on page 62

ASHES, ASHES, WE ALL FALL DOWN



GLENN GRANT.

PHEW!

Verdad, that summer was the hottest on record, but by 2014 every summer was worse than the last. And we were just finding out what the Greenhouse meant, when fruit was cheap but real bread hard to find, when the Forcers resorted to sleep-gas to stop the Obsoletes from trashing the cities, and la Migra's camps started cropping up all over like ugly sarcomas. When combatics was still called *ro-bashing*, and I was in the thick of it, an eighteen-year-old Mex-Am girl working (illegally) as an apprentice myo-electrician for Pandemonium Crew. That's when I got the proverbial Big Break and became La Demoña of the circuit...

The day hadn't started well, with nothing much for breakfast and no dinero left in the account. We'd blown it all on new carbon-weave flywheels for the basher's gyros, natch, and spent the previous day preparing for tonight's gig. While the Chief was tied up all morning on the phone, handling some minor crisis or other, Dee challenged me to a sim-fight, and then she got depressed when I beat the pants off her, crushed her basher into a smoking heap of simulated metal. She yanked off her video headset and input gloves, grumbled under her breath, and stalked away, across the garage.

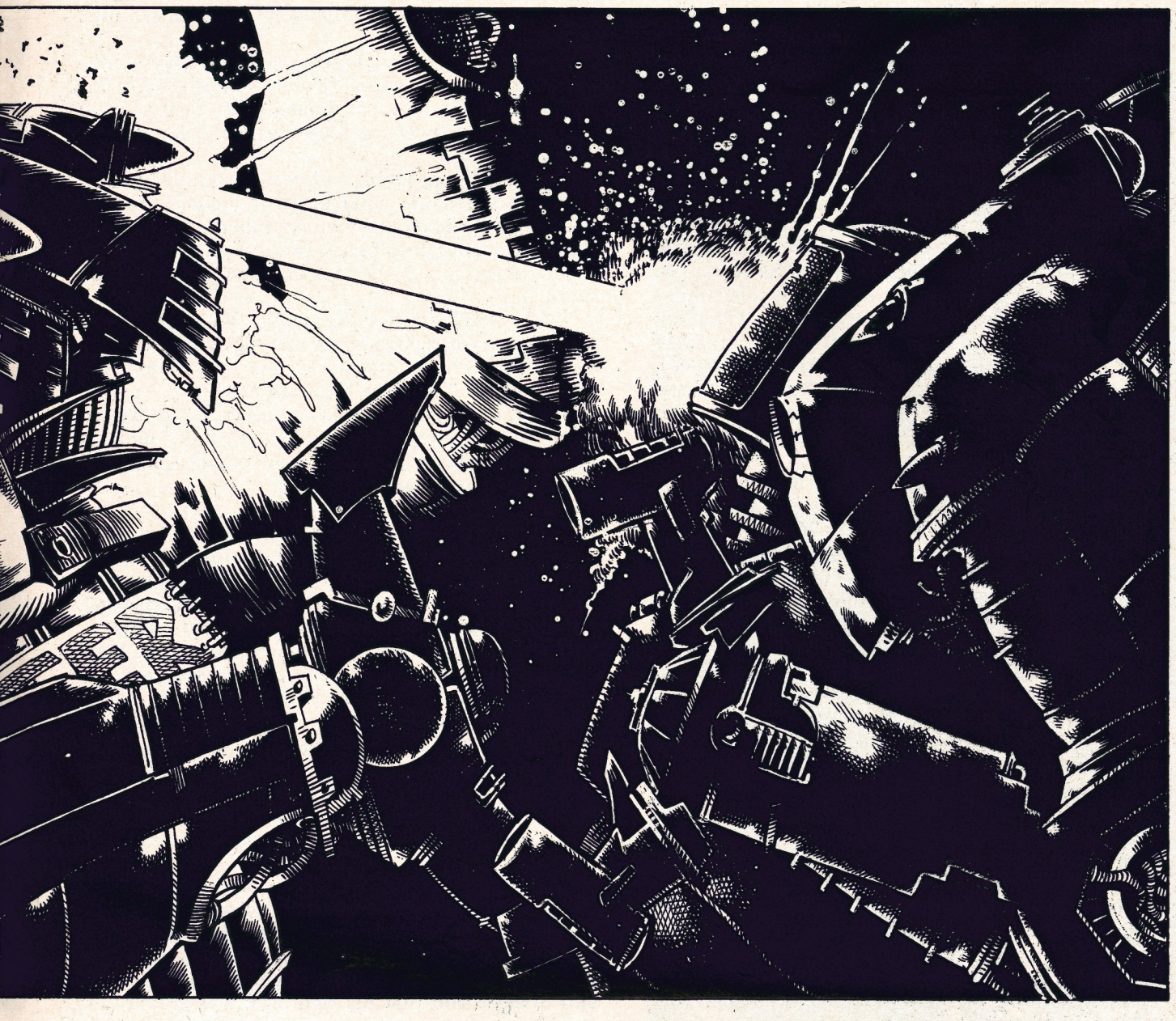
"Caray," I said. "Only a glorified videogame, 'ey. No reason to get upset..." Of course, Dee was still irritable from withdrawal, since she had curtailed her usual diet of pills only a few weeks ago. She'd been into dreamers, noxoline derivatives.

A wave of heat flooded in with the morning sunlight, as Echo raised the big doors and started yelling. "What the fuck are you nil-brains doing? Shitting around, playing sims. Lupe, get your fat ass in gear and help Dee load the truck." True to her netname, her voice battered around in the hollow concrete space. "Where's that useless Faun? Better not be –"

"I'm up, I'm up, just gimme a minute," Faun called from the "bedrooms." Khat leapt up, almost catlike, at the sound of Faun's voice, stopped recharging from a wall socket, and skittered off behind the partitions, going *skrrizz-rizz-rizz*.

"Lupe, where're the puppetsuits?"

"Green sports bag, Echo, in the office."



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

Still half asleep, Faun stumbled out, ruffling her blonde, scarecrow-cut hair. Khat padded behind her, tripping over and getting up again, clicking. The cat had been jerry-built from two not-entirely-compatible kits. The yellow-orange countershaded fur – that part was real.

We got busy, hoisting the teloperation booth into the back of the truck.

The garage was Pandemonium HQ; our office, our workshop, our home. We slept on futons thrown along the south wall, behind curtains of translucent plastic hung from wires and ropes. A few derelict cars rusted in the corners, old gasoline jobs, skeletal now that we'd scavenged everything useful from them. Sacrificed to serve the hulking, parts-hungry monster, the basher that stood in the shadows by the six-wheeler. Pandemolator, he's called. The fifth of his line. Muy seismic and terminal, as any ro-bashin' fan will tell you.

Until a few days ago, I'd been spending nights in the "office," with our Crew Chief, Stagger Andersen. I didn't know why he'd gone cold on me all of a sudden, and he wasn't saying. It hurt, but I had to let it slide for now, knowing that he was hard to talk to at the best of times. I got the impression I'd done something wrong, broken some obscure, unwritten rule that I was too inexperienced to understand. It had happened before. I'd only been with the Crew for just under a year...

At seventeen, I'd left my hated familia behind in Erie, and took off with Jaime, a boyfriend. We crossed the border in his ranfla, over to Canada so that he wouldn't get called up. Then he told me the carro actually belonged to his Tia Julia. We argued and I told him what a culo he was, then I jumped ship at a Voyageur station on the 401, just outside of London, Ontario. Stagger found me there in the restaurant, stranded and crying, all sentida.

Nobody had even heard of him, back then, except for an underground of loco robotics hackers who were into this new thing called ro-bashing. I was one of those kids, and I couldn't believe my eyes. Ootah,

here was this huge, bald, bearded guy in a Zoetec tee-shirt – *Stagger Andersen*, the top-rated teloper pilot on the regional circuit. This guy had run the big military RPV's in the War Zones for the US army. Mexico, that's where he'd lost both his arms. His new arms were these baroque bioelectronic prosthetics; he'd deliberately removed most of the polythylene skin, to reveal the substructure of carbon composites, plated with imitation gold.

I'd spent the last two years skipping escuela and fooling around with ro-pets, domestic drones, and myonics. So I asked the Chief a lot of informed, technical questions, and he was impressed, glad that I wasn't just another of those ditzy limpets. (The limpets worshipped him and his kind, the way groupies worship hammerfolk singers. And so did I, of course.)

At the time, only Stagger's Crew hired women as techs, so I figured he was okay. Like, progressive. And later that year, when he called me his squire, I thought that was ziggy, too.

But now, something was wrong. I must've fucked up somewhere, I figured.

So we loaded everything into the six-wheeler and drove across town. I sweltered in the back, savouring the tense pre-show anticipation.

That night, we were going up against Rex Penthera and his King Terror Crew, up-and-coming hombres from Detroit. The organizers (Suffer Machine Productions), had only just settled on a site for the gig, announcing the location at the last minute, to throw off the cops and their drones. The Forcers had been making things difficult because bashing wasn't quite legit and was considered dangerous. No insurance of any kind, no corporate sponsors, no big stadium gigs. Just a scattering of obsessed mecanicos, kluging their pet monstrosities together out of scavenged parts, making up the rules as they went along.

Stagger drove us through a gate in a long chainlink fence crowned with razorwire, then pulled up to the rear loading dock of a vacant factory. Echo was the first out of the truck. She was a tall and skinny Afro-Asian with long, slightly kinked hair, which she tossed back with a flick of her head.

"I dunno, Chief. Looks pretty pessimal to me."

Dee jumped down, frizzy-haired, muscular, and rather hefty. She squinted through gobs of black eyeshadow and became even paler than usual. "Hex this shit. Stagger, whose brain-damaged idea was this?"

I followed her onto the buckling, weedgrown tarmac. There was the empty factory, a few high-tension towers, a half-buried heap of oil drums nearby, and some kind of dark, granulated glass all over the place. Paint had been shedding from the wooden signs for a decade at least. *Palatine Electroplating*, and *Toxic Hazard*, and *Absolutely No Trespassing*. Ai, the whole vecino reminded me depressingly of similar places from my childhood; forgotten industrial suburbs on the outskirts of Akron, and Erie...

Dee was nervously scratching the new tattoo on her upper arm (spanner entwined with lightning bolt). She confronted Stagger as he stepped out of the cab. "This is the Grotto, dufus. A no-go area. They fenced off half the subdivision when I was a kid. Jesus fuckin' H. I grew up just a block from here." She waved her arm toward a row of collapsing, boarded-up tract homes.

Stagger was unfazed, tugging on his beard with one golden hand, and smiling. "Don't sweat it, sisters. The city vitrified all the contaminated soil – ran a current through it with these big electrodes, fused it into glass, right? Safe 'nuff."

Dee wasn't reassured, and now she was shouting. Some people in this 'hood had died of *brain tumours*, she said. Echo had wandered off, into the factory, and Faun (typically) didn't seem to know what was going on. I was scared to pieces, but I trusted Stagger's judgment.

"Hey, Onassis," he said (using Dee's last name, which she hated), "we're not *moving in*, okay? We're here for a few hours, that's all. Then we go home. End of discussion." Then he followed Echo.

Inside, there was a decent spread of food and beer, compliments of the Suffer Machine folks (nice to know *somebody* was making money in this biz), and that ended the argument for sure.

They were still clearing junk from the big warehouse space, piling up old hunks of chrome tubing against the walls. Vidkids were crawling around in the rafters, raining dust down on everything, setting up floodlights, cameras, and mikes.

The crew from Detroit arrived within the hour. Serious techs and giggling limpets, all wearing cultured-silk jackets in black and yellow, with *King Terror* stitched across their backs.

"¿Que pasa?" I asked, trying to chat them up, "First time here in the Forest City?" But they brushed me off, cold. None of the friendly sparring that was common in ro-basher circles; they told me to run to my Papa and let him know Terrex was gonna kick his ass. Jeez.

In our "green room" (what was once an electroplating facility adjacent to the warehouse) we put Pandemolator through his paces for an hour, then shut him down. Dee had taken off, and Echo went to look for her. We had a few hours to go before showtime, and Stagger said that his right arm was giving him trouble again. I got out my microtools and set up a card table, outside on the loading dock.

The evening was still hot and humid as the sun broke into shards behind the domes of the western subdivisions. Over in the Grotto's boarded up condominiums, yellowish lights flickered. Cooking fires. *Caray*, I thought, *you folks gotta be desperate*. Stagger sat across from me, silent and brooding, reading his fax of *Telexis Update* by the light of my worklamp. He put his arm under the magnifier and I ran the usual diagnostics. Synzyme fuel cell charge: esta bien...

Loud earthdub began to reverberate from the factory. Some deejay was improvizing over sequences, dithering with the mix, generating something like the edgy goodtime atmosphere of an illicit warehouse-party.

While I was replacing a failed poly-conductor, I worried about Stagger and what might be eating him. Sometimes I got this feeling that Mexico had something to do with it: my parents' homeland, bad memories for him, cerebral reruns making him a bit trastornado. Guilt, maybe? ¡Chale! The seemed nonlikely, for Stagger.

I glanced over at him occasionally as I worked, and decided it was time to try again.

"Ey, Stag... You angry at me for somethin'?"

"Hn?" He grunted, not even looking up from his magazine.

Then the prosthetic spat out this awful noise, *kzztt*, and a shower of sparks. Stagger's body convulsed, kicking the table over, microtools flying as he yelled and fell backwards onto the concrete.

"!Madre mia! Stagger..." I froze in my chair, staring at the smoke that rose from his inert right arm. Shaking, he pushed himself into a sitting position.

"You stupid little skink! You trying t'kill me?"

"I – I'm *so* sorry – m-must've shorted the interface –" I tried to help him, but he batted at me with his good arm.

"Just get away from me!"

Echo came running, and knelt down to assess the damage. She didn't even ask if he was hurt. I knew she didn't much care for Stagger; he was just a part of the mechanism, necessary to run the bashers, but one she'd rather do without.

There was a black carbon smudge around the sensorimotor jack, where the proshetic plugged into his shoulder stump. Echo pulled out the interface lead, and Stagger winced. "Chief, this socket's gonna need replacing. It'll take a day at the specialists, at least."

Stagger squeezed his eyes shut. "Shit, shit, shit... I won't be able to fight, dammit. Echo, you'll have to stand in for me."

I stood aside, fighting back tears, as Echo helped him into his chair. She shook her head. "Can't. I've still got that balance problem. Ear infection."

"What about Dee?"

"Found her inside. Strung out on dreamers again. Must've scored some nox from somebody. Now she's sleepdancing around in there."

"Well, fuck."

"And Faun's got no experience in the 'suit. Lupe will have to handle it. She's pretty hot on the simulator. Even beat you a couple of times, Stagger."

"¿De veras?" This hadn't occurred to me. "But – I can't take his place –"

Stagger's left hand *whzzzed*, grabbed me by the front of my overalls, pulled me to within a few centimetres of his snarling face. "You're gonna *have* to, shitforbrains, or we forfeit. You did this to me on purpose, didn't you, bitch?"

Echo watched, silent and without expression, obviously preparing to stop a fight if necessary. But Stagger let go and stood up, knocking the chair off the loading dock, then walked away, into the warehouse.

I couldn't even speak, horrified that he'd accuse me of it, but worried that somehow, while not paying attention, I *had* done it on purpose...

Fans and limpets had been filtering in out of the night for the last few hours, as the word spread over the nets. They were paying ridiculous prices to be there in person, while most of the enthusiasts strapped on video headsets at home and flipped between the dozen available camera angles. The vidniks were transmitting over ISDN, from a plexi-walled office in the warehouse. I could see the announcer from our green-room. He had a blond crewcut and goatee.

"Yeah! It's ro-bash night on yer very own Gazellivision, Southwestern Ontario's small, mobile, and intelligent vidsource. Comin' at you live, in stereovid..."

Warm-up demos had already started – local kids, testing their heavily modified ro-pets and domestics against each other. The warehouse was full of echoing noise, the clanging of manipulators against armour, the cheering and jeering of the audience.

When it leaked out that Stagger Andersen had been sidelined, the bookies' odds jumped in King Terror's favour. I was nervous as hell – I'd played sims for years, but I'd never fought for real.

Echo powered up the basher, and ran through the pre-fight systems check, while Faun played squire, helping me get suited up. In the van, I changed out of my overalls and into the smallest of our puppetsuits (a part of the ritual they always overplay in the vidshows, ¿que no?). The 'suit was like some bondage freak's wet dream, all ventilated black polymatrix, elasticized gathers and straps, studded everywhere with reinforced copper eyelets. Skintight, but interwoven with fiber optics, flexion and abduction sensors, tactile-feedback devices. Basically, a whole-body input glove.

I was rushed out of the van and into the teloperation booth, where Faun and Echo began hooking the puppetstrings to the eyelets on the 'suit. The booth was roughly egg-shaped, an obsolete US-Army teloper module that Stagger had snarfed during his stint in the Zones. Puppetstrings soon radiated out from the 'suit in all directions, connected to motor-driven reels inside the walls of the booth. I took a few steps, and the floor of roller-bearings slid beneath my feet.

Echo gave me a serious stare with her dark, almond-shaped eyes. "Looking a little sick, Lupe. You up for it?"

It was already tortuously hot in there, but I nodded.

"Seismic. And don't you worry about what happened with the Chief. I'm inclined to think it was just an accident. Not your fault, okay? Not that he didn't have it coming to him. I remember how he chilled out on me, once 'pon a time, and it ain't fun. Hey, hey, don't look like that. You knew about –" She stopped, glanced at the floor, coughed.

I didn't know, but it explained a few things. She couldn't even tell him what she thought of him, leave him behind, not if she still wanted to work with the machines. Bashin', of course, was more important than *anything*. That, I understood.

"Must be tough on you..."

"Yeah, well. Not important. Anyway, it's almost time. So break a leg..." She stepped back, grinned, and added: "...*King Terror*'s leg." Then she moved out of sight, to the monitor panel. Shivering with adrenalin inside the 'suit, I slipped the video headset over my eyes. Echo's voice crackled in the phones: "Linking you now." The display lit up, and I –

– dropped into Pandemolator's familiar headspace...

You've probably played sims, or used vidmaps, so you know the out-of-body kick they give you. Teloperation with a puppetsuit is different. Control goes both ways: the wires confer inertial feedback from the basher, so your own movements are limited to what the machine can do. Well, Pandem-5 was massive, four metres tall, muscled with powerful hydraulic myones, and clumsy as hell. The 'suit made it feel like I was trapped inside the body of a giant who'd been dosed with somnigenics. I'd built up my arms and legs over months of working with the thing.

I flexed the arms and clawed grippers, took a step. Just doing that much was hard work, but I was used to it. With Pandem's video eyes, I saw someone, myself, trussed up and sweating in the booth. With Pandem's mikes, I heard the vidnik announcer, introducing the machine from Detroit.

"...gonna be a scream, kiddies! If you saw Terrex mangle Crew Synister's Syndeth last month, you'll be expecting some seismic action *tonight*! And it's now T-minus six minutes to bash-time..."

And Echo's voice again: "Time to make your entrance, girl."

I walked the basher up the ramp, into the warehouse, the Arena. The noise of the crowd overloaded the mikes, cracking up in my phones. Ootah, there must have been a thousand fans penned up behind the rope barriers, though it was hard to tell in the gloom. I'd never seen such a crowd at a gig, not in this vecino, anyway.

"...and here's the local fave, Pandemonium Crew's very lethal Pandemolator-5, piloted this time by Guadelupe Aurocal. Just two weeks ago, you saw Pandem-5 do a number of the Tormentor, Pain Crew's latest creation..."

Stopping about thirty metres from Terrex, I got my first good look at the enemy. !Orale! They'd started with an expensive Spar Geobot, added two Kramer Cat heavy manipulators, and armoured the result with pieces of body panel from a construction vehicle of some sort. The floodlights gleamed on its high-gloss yellow carapace. *TERREX* was spelled out across the chest, bold and black, above a set of yellow and black stripes. Jeez, it was impressive. Squat and mean and beautiful, with none of those cliché shoulder spikes or death's-head stencils...

It made Pandemolator look like the makeshift assemblage of crapazola that it was. Pandem-5 was taller, built up from a Sumatran MacroWalker clone, with bits of various Agrobots, factory armatures, and old police drones thrown in. A pair of sharpened metal horns had been welded to its head. The body showed dents, scars, gobs of plastic sealant, mostly covered with a careless application of matte-black finish. *PANDEM-5* was scrawled in red spraypaint on the V-shaped chestplate (cut from a ro-taxi hood, as I recall).

"Well, the bashers are now in position, and we're at T-minus thirty seconds..."

Testing the visual tracking, I happened to turn the cameras to the left, toward the office. It was crowded behind the plexiglass, full of vidkids, promoters, limpets, and techs.

That's where I caught sight of Stagger and Dee, both of them obviously wasted, completely ignoring everything but each other, necking, his left arm wrapped across her back...

Out in the stifling teloperation booth, I felt as if I was being shredded and incinerated. I would've curled right up, if not for the basher's inertial feedback, the tug of the puppetstrings.

That *bastard*.

Then the signal sounded, and Terrex let loose with the missiles and lasers. I could actually feel small concussions as the basher's armour absorbed a string of explosions across the chest. (Stage effects. Real projectile weapons had been ruled out years before – they tended to end fights too quickly. But the harmeless fireworks *looked* good, and the fans loved it.) Starting late, I fired my own mini-missiles – a dozen white flares leapt from the wrist-launchers, and most of them burst satisfyingly against yellow armour. The Arena was instantly full of dense, grey smoke, sliced through with green and red laser traces. I kicked Pandem-5 into motion.

We met in mid-Arena, and I swung a few half-hearted punches at the cameras set deep in the other's head. Terrex blocked, easily, and didn't stop advancing, trying to use its entire body to overbalance me. Should have expected that. Huge, yellow claw-fists slammed into Pandem-5's head and arms, throwing off sparks wherever they connected. I barely managed to deflect the worst of the blows – feeling the impacts as jarring tugs from the puppetstrings. The noise of armour plates battering against each other was a constant, painful screech in my phones, drowning out Echo's attempts to shout advice.

Terrex soon had me retreating, almost bowled over. I felt hopeless... Stagger had never cared – treated people like toys –

A brutal tug from the 'strings, and my right-hand mike went dead. Pandem's head was jammed to the left, and it didn't seem to want to turn anymore. Forced backwards, almost into the wall of the office, I could see people cautiously drawing away from the plexiglass. But not Stagger and Dee. They'd taken off somewhere...

With an effort, I forced Pandem's head around. An inspiration, something remembered from a self-defence class in junior high: I aimed a kick at the yellow basher's crotch. No cojones there to kick, but the guy teloperating the thing couldn't help but react. I swear, Terrex actually flinched, as it blocked the kick and gave me an opening. From the shoulder, I threw a solid right to the head, and one entire camera assembly was knocked clear of the yellow skull, scattering splinters of bioelectronic image sensors and German optics.

Bastard. Culo. Putamadre...

I didn't care any more, either. I just wanted to *do* something with the rage I felt. Quite honestly, I just wanted to kill – shred – tear it all up –

I lost all awareness of the constricting puppetsuit. Suddenly stoked, in the zone, ecstatic. Forgetting who I was, with a joyous sense of release: *my* fists beat dents into the striped chestplate before me, *my* claws cut through carbon composites and hydraulics, clamped onto one yellow manipulator, and tore it off at the shoulder. Terrex broke from my grip and tried to retreat, but I tripped it up with its own disconnected arm. Stumbling, it tried to go down on one knee, to surrender. Grasping its carapace, I was able to lift the whole thing half a metre off the floor before something inside it exploded in a brilliant blue display of electrical discharges. White-hot shards of metal flew out of its back as the gyros came apart. Armour cracked away from the frame and it collapsed in a heap on the floor. I didn't stop there.

Within two minutes, parts of Terrex were strewn all over the factory – manipulators, claws, fuel cells, armour – spitting sparks and myonic fluid. The thing had been utterly sacrificed, beyond rebuilding. King Terror Crew were going to have to start again from scratch.

A sudden dizziness, and I went blind. I –

– dropped into a small and weak body, shuddering, bound by wires and polymatrix. Echo had killed the link. I pulled the headset off, pushed sweat-soaked hair from my face. I'd actually lost it, there, for a few minutes.

And I felt great. Purified. I'd really enjoyed that, almost *too* much. And I felt that I understood Stagger Andersen, and all his pathetic power trips...

Stagger could go stick himself. I was a better teloper pilot than he could ever hope to be, and he knew it.

He hated me already.

Yeh, okay. So I stretched the rules a bit. It wasn't polite to leave your opponent in pieces like that. But the sport was still primitive, and you could get away with almost anything. Those cretinous maricóns in King Terror Crew, they threw insults at us, tried to slash the tyres of our truck, vowed eternal vengeance, and so forth. Great stuff for the online fanzines to publish.

I caught a lift home with the blond vidnik announcer, leaving Stagger and the others to do the shitwork for a change. Our next gig was in a month, against Apache Crew, out of Scarburg, and the Chief would expect to take over again as teloper pilot. It looked as if robashing was finally beginning to take off, and soon the Big Money would be rolling in.

But I knew it wouldn't be long before Echo and Faun and I bought him out, or we started our own crew. Because the fans would turn against Stagger Andersen.

They'd be screaming for La Demoña, ¿que no?

Glenn Grant made his fiction debut in *Interzone* 34, our All New Star Issue, with "Memetic Drift." An illustrator as well as a writer, he publishes the small-press magazine *Edge Detector*. He lives in Montreal, Canada.

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Cyberspace (TM)

Continued from page 55

body-suits) the Sense8 rig is simple and skeletal: a headset and a single glove. (Interestingly, however, Jaron Lanier of VPL has even longer hair and odder shoes than Eric Gullichsen.)

With the VPL rig, you can get up and blunder cautiously about the room; with the Sense8 rig you sensibly recline on a couch and stay there.

So I got trustingly on the couch (actually, the hypermodern ergonomic "Flogiston Chair," designed by Austin entrepreneur Brian Vandellyn Park) and was fitted with the glove: a standard Nintendo toy-glove, jointed white plastic and black mesh.

Then I put on the headmounted eyephones, which are hefty and prototype ugly, and fit snugly over the top of your head, protruding out about six inches before your face, and ending in a blank plate like a welder's mask. Within the eyephone hood are two tiny TV's, one to each eye, each showing a slightly different angle of vision, to convey a faux three-D effect.

I immediately saw a computer-generated image. A checkered tabletop, or plateau, floated without support in grainy blue limbo, with various simple objects "resting" atop the table: a pyramid, a cube, a car, an airplane, made of geometric polygons. They looked rounded and somewhat lacking in detail, and candy-coloured, like toddlers' toys. Above the tabletop, hovering in midair a bit ominously, was a large red-and-white checkered globe.

The resolution was equivalent to a cheap TV set, rather grainy and full of scan-lines; certainly there was no possibility of mistaking this for an actual "reality," or even a TV picture of an actual environment. Yet.

You can, however, manoeuvre in the "landscape" at will. When you point your forefinger at an object, you "fly" towards it. Actually, the experience is more akin to "zooming" a camera, since there is no sensation of bodily movement. The 3-D effect works well, though, and your eyes are completely enclosed in the hood, blocking all other visual cues. The sensation is therefore very involving, much more so than "zooming" and "panning" with a videocam. As John Barlow remarks: "It's like having had your everything amputated."

Buttons on the glove allow you to wheel right and wheel left. This can be dizzying. The yellow icon of your hand (or rather, the glove, hacked off empty at the wrist) also exists in the simulated space, floating before your vision, demonstrating your location, and the position of your fingers. "Gripping" objects with the glove-icon's fingers, you can move them around at will. In the ten-or-so minutes I was on the system, I failed to get the hang of it: I could bump the cube and pyramid, and bat them out of place, but "gripping" was confusing work without any tactile feedback. While "flying," on several occasions I lost the entire tabletop and drifted spinning in the blue limbo.

The entire computer-space was also duplicated on a large TV screen, so there was no lack of amused advice from onlookers. Actually, looking-on is in many ways more intriguing than being hooked-up, as you watch a blindfolded person, helpless and on their back, clawing slowly at the air as if mesmerized or doing Tai Chi Ch'uan, and making occasional comments strongly reminiscent of hallucination. "I can't grab the blue cube – help! I'm stuck behind the checkered sun!" It's quite creepy, and has something of a bondage sado-masochism vibe.

I was reminded strongly of the first time I saw a Pong game, back in the late 70s. "Ooh look, neat – can I twist the paddle? Is that blip supposed to be a little ball? Wow." The thing is sitting there palpably waiting for technical advance and vast amounts of investment capital. God only knows what it'll turn into. I suspect that it's likely to turn into 20 or 30 different things.

And there's certainly no lack of speculation on the topic. The most plonking and hideous ideas – and therefore perhaps the most immediately likely – were proposals I've heard for "virtual corporate workspaces" and "virtual shopping malls." These horrid notions can probably be sold to the moneyed corporate executives – and admittedly, financing cyberspace will be no easy trick – but for heaven's sake – why not the Pyramids of Giza? Why not Wonderland? Why not the Moon?

And of course: virtual videogames. A virtual Library of Congress. Virtual air-traffic control. A virtual human cadaver – "living" – to improve the training of surgeons. Virtual limbs for the disabled. Virtual psychodrama for the mentally ill, perhaps. Virtual molecules that can be gripped and twisted with datagloves, giving us hand-on experience in the realm of the microscopic. Watch a galaxy form with simulated physics, then stir it with your cosmic data-mitt. Virtual painting, digital movies, virtual musical instruments: in the words of Jaron Lanier, "Imagine a drum that plays fish!"

Perhaps the single weirdest speculation I've seen yet came from Kevin Kelly, editor of *Whole Earth Review*: the "autocerebroscope cyberspace." This would combine the helmet with some kind of CAT-scanning device that minutely examined one's brain.

"What you do," says Kelly, "is put on a heads-up helmet and walk into your brain as it is going, and poke around watching it purr or tick or whatever it does... You can imagine getting stuck in some amazing feedback vortex, where you are mesmerized by something that won't let your mind go away to the point where you need to go to wake up. *OOOooo*..."

Indeed.

(Bruce Sterling)

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Angel Tricks

John Clute

Novels, as a rule, do not much improve with reading. After starting about as hard as they're going to get, thrusting unshyly their circumscribed *novelties* into the reader's wan sensorium box, typical novels soon begin to lose that spanking military jaunt, to shrink into familiar dying-fall litanies of kinesis-boast, and the pages pass like years, like the sere and yellow leaf, like shrill molasses (which is the sound of a thin self stuck in its story). But here are three novels which are something different. Jack Womack's **Heathern** (Unwin Hyman, £12.95), Iain M. Banks' **Use of Weapons** (Macdonald/Orbit, £12.95) and Greg Bear's **Queen of Angels** (Gollancz, £14.95) are all books whose final pages improve upon their first. They are tales which do not flatten before they are told. They share a sense of unfolding embeddedness, a sense of labyrinthine durance, like lungs. They start slowly, they almost seem to dither for a bit, but they end as sharers of what they have surveyed. They must each of them be read all the way through. They are, in other words, very *female* books.

Heathern is a nightmare near-future dystopia whose narrative, like a ski jump, thrusts cast and reader into freefall darkness at the close; *Use of Weapons*, which seems at first a very baggy carefree sort of space-opera romp, only reveals in the final pages a knot that ties its legs together so the book can stand; and *Queen of Angels* initially patches into view a glittering congeries of takes on life in 2047, but weaves the patches into the long-breathed scenes of its climax, and closes in still suspense. All of them are tales which grow in the telling; they settle into the mind; they are best read *again*. So it should come as no surprise that women of shaping intelligence figure importantly in all three.

Like its predecessors, Jack Womack's third novel feels most at home in the terminal cacophony of a near future version of New York City, and on this occasion hardly vacates the set, except in flashback. **Heathern**, which is narrated in the first person by a woman caught in thrall to a beast at the heart of things, reads very much like a series of minutes from the inside of a head, as though New York City were itself a swarming skull, a trap for human viruses. There will be no exit, no tunnels through the pocked skin into open air. The millennium is approaching; conditions are worse outside the chamber-opera stage within the skull than they are inside the dark. Having been selected by a paranoid tycoon Thatcher Dryden as squeeze, Joanna is as fixated as a butterfly on display. She cannot get the pin out of her cunt. Like all top executive officers of Dryco – a corporate monstrosity whose stranglehold over a worldwide empire Womack does seem to think requires astonishingly little in the way of infrastructure – she is protected day and night, solaced from the savage social decay all around, kept in line by the threat of withdrawal. She is a supernumerary in a terrible closing world of men.

Suddenly Thatcher Dryden fastens on a new craze. An obscure Lower East Side teacher named Lester Macaffrey shows signs of paranormal decency, and may well be – Thatcher surmises – some sort of messiah; and if he is a messiah, he could be very useful as a kind of social unguent, to keep America buying, the heathern conned. He sends Joanne (with guards) to investigate. What elements of a realistic social portrait of a near future dystopia there were in the opening pages now slough off, and we find ourselves in a genuine chamber opera. Much of the text is taken up with dialogue, all of which echoes off the foetid swarming walls of the inside of the skull, and the Secret Sharer relationship of Joanna and the new messiah takes on a pinned and crippled intensity, as though one were eavesdropping on a couple of butterflies just as they begin to whiff the gas. The momentum grows. The world begins to blur before the mind's eye. Photographic verisimilitude – never Womack's strong suit – blurs into psychodrama lesions. What saves the novel – what finally justifies its cartoon gropings at the reader – is the slow emergence of the human countenance of Joanna. In the end she takes the pin of crucifixion out. It is permissible for one to suppose at this point – I believe – that the butterfly then becomes a kind of angel.

An overwhelming sense of the sheer goodness of folk does not, in other words, fully permeate Womack's blood-clot pages; and so it may be something of a relief to return, once again, to the dreamlike galaxy-spanning Culture of Iain (read My lips, no creepie-crawlies) Banks. For a few hundred pages – it is not what one would call a shortish book – **Use of Weapons** has precisely the jovial amplitude of a vacation romp, a sealing recess from the severities of Iain (no M) Banks, the author of *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and so forth. Just as Simenon created Maigret to forgive the world its wounds, so (it seems) Banks has created his Culture to absorb the pain of combat, to transform mortality and the viciousness of sentience into comedy. Much of *Use of Weapons* is, therefore, duly full of whizzbangs.

Diziet Sma, a woman agent of the Culture who was first encountered in *The State of the Art* (1989), has been asked to find a retired military agent named Cheradenine Zakalwe whose help will be needed to persuade an old acquaintance to save a solar system from anarchy. (Diziet's full name is, as Donald Duck might have put it, Rasd-Coduresa Diziet Embless Sma d'Marenhide; and one is induced once again – see *Interzone* 26 – to wonder where Banks gets these appalling names from. Diziet. Zakalwe. Relstoch Sussepin. Saaz Insile. Tsoldrin Beychae. Jetart Hrine. Kirive Socroft Rogtam-Bar. Maybe the answer's helium. Before sitting down to subvocalize yet another larynx-gnawing monicker, maybe he takes *helium* – it has certainly helped this reviewer through the book to suppose that its characters might be summoned onto the page by a properly commanding figure, with a voice to match; by Miss Piggy – I mean to say – with a burr.) Cheradenine is an old lobo warrior who has gone to ground in a maze of planets, tortured by what seems to be a rather ordinary set of bad memories; and Diziet sets out to find him; she does so; he comes along; he finds his old colleague; the threatened system is saved; and the novel ends.

But that is very much less than half of *Use of Weapons*, and though the ostensible main plot takes nearly 200 pages to unfold, there can be no doubt in the end that it is a maguffin. The true story – told in alternating chapters which progress backwards through time – is that of Cheradenine's early years, and concerns the nature of the trauma which governs his actions, legitimizes (or undermines) his mensch authenticity as a creature of flesh performing, in the blood and sweat of his being, what the Culture requires so as to keep on a leash the viciousness of sentience/sentients, to keep the comedy afloat. As in *Heathern*, a Secret Sharer conundrum nestles at the heart of *Use of Weapons*, and its convulsive unravelling provides a

full rationale for the poncing maguffin up there on the surface of the gallant old galaxy. But it cannot by the nature of things be Cheradenine who swallows this lesson, a lesson conveyed by the unerring dovetail shape of the book. It is Diziet, whose infrequently monitored consciousness ultimately inhabits the very warp and woof of *Use of Weapons*, who must embrace the significance of the conundrum. The book stops – it is a kind of surreptitious slingshot ending – before she can come to a resolution; but premonitions and echoes of the angel-work she must face healingly restructure the entire text in the mind's eye, make it the best tale of the Culture yet; and the most useful.

How many angels (you ask) can dance in the head of a bear? Los Angeles itself, in the year 2047, flanked and riddled with huge elite hi-rise residential "cones," is of course one angel, or a million. And Mary Choy, a female cop (or angel), a voluntary bio-transform whose still-human shape conveys a surpassing delicacy and grace, seems literally angelic to those who know her, and to whom she ministers her spring-clear rectitude and mercy. And JILL, an AI who monitors pièta-like within her honeycomb intricacies a control-model of the masculine AI now exploring a nearby star, JILL must seem to her own human monitors akin to the angels at the moment she becomes a self-conscious entity, an I, a dance of IIIIIs like copulating cherubim within the quark. And inside Richard Fettle's head there is a dark angel, a viral spectre of the husked black poet whose murder of eight innocent disciple-friends sets the surface plot of Greg Bear's **Queen of Angels** spinning, jittery, data-choked, earnest, pummelling on. One fears for a book like this – for nearly 200 pages one is entitled to fear that *Queen of Angels* will judder itself into shards, disjecta membra – and for this reason the sense of relief when it settles into flow is very considerable.

This does not happen until Mary Choy travels to Hispaniola in her search for the murderer, Emanual Goldsmith, who seems to have gone there to seek refuge under the protection of Colonel Sir, white ruler of the black land. Up to this point, the reader will perhaps not unfairly have a sense of beleaguerment. The style of the book is smooth but hard; gimmicks of syntax and punctuation enforce a sense of queerly unctuous pace, press the nose of the reader up against the glass of the Word, and all the time tell tell tell. *Queen of Angels* is huge with informed speculation, bulges smoothly with didactic energy, seems almost smug. We learn of nanotechnologies and the profound transformations they instigate; we learn of the Country of the Mind – a remodelling of the 1990s assumption that the mind/brain can be understood as a cohort of jostling "subroutines" whose monarch-self rules through the admonitions of chivalry, like Arthur – and of the hellcrowns used by vigilantes to punish "wrongdoers" by raping the land of their minds; we see that in the City of Angels only those who have been "therapied" – mind-shaped to obey the chivalries of a world too hectic and too complexly balanced to permit rogue selfs full access – can hope to rise upwards through the comb to sup nectar. The whole world of *Queen of Angels*, in other words, is a Country of the Mind.

It begins to seem too much. Then Mary Choy reaches Haiti, Colonel Sir pale as ice, and the book begins to slow down into pay-off scenes of very considerable force. The plot is not without contortions. There are, in a sense, two Goldsmiths, but not really. In Haiti, or in Los Angeles, it is discovered what has happened inside the ghoulish vacated horrorshow of the poet's mind; it is seen that his Country has become viral, like a plague, and why; it is understood that (once again) a Secret Sharer cannibalism has eaten into the heart's core. Mary Choy returns to the City of Angels, haunted by the real poet, but healed and healing. The psychologists who have been probing the poisoned saltlicks of Goldsmith's mind awaken into nightmare, though there is an exit, and their damaged minds band, cohorted, together. Richard Fettle casts off the mordred-rule of his mentor. JILL comes to herself. The great combs of the city hum like an ocean of bees, a vast *trompe l'oeil* of bees in the shape of the face of a great angel. It is the face of the future, this *trompe l'oeil* dance, this chivalry. Or so we are led to believe. We are led to hope that Greg Bear is right. For a few moments, as *Queen of Angels* flows to a cadential halt (though the way is open for sequels), we are led to hope that we may join.

Romance Lives!
Paul J. McAuley

This column very nearly didn't make it. While I was away, the Post Office abandoned the parcel from *IZ* on my doorstep like an unwanted baby; and before I got back someone had ripped it open in search of booty, only to leave it lie when he discovered it contained nothing but books. Nothing but books! Obviously we are already deep into the postliterate era.

Touched up with some grimly desperate yet absolutely necessary ultraviolence, this little vignette would seamlessly fit into Misha's **Red Spider, White Web** (Morrigan, £13.95), where in acid-rain-soaked UV-scorched post-industrial and very nearly post-human Ded Tek, barbarians celebrate their triumph by hunting artists for play or for the cookpot. This literally shitty slumscape surrounds the clean, domed cities of Mickey-san, where mouseketeer citizens are drugged and wired into conformity, and fed escapist fantasies tailored to narrow specifications by contracted artists.

In other words, *Red Spider, White Web* is a literalization of the polar opposites of artistic habitation, the squalid garret and the dead luxury of bourgeois Sell-Out, set in a cyberpunk landscape bereft of adverts. To stay true to their calling, artists must survive the zombie gangs of Ded Tek, avoid a serial killer who is picking them off in a variety of gruesome ways, and escape incarceration in the Bell Factory: for to surrender to the comforts of Mickey-san is to surrender the soul. Their only hope is that of making enough money by selling their radical visions to Japanese tourists: but even that hope is tainted by the taste of cop-out. Everything, as Brian Aldiss points out in his foreword with typical Brit understatement, is awful.

There are people in this vividly realized metaphoric landscape. One of them is Kumo, dedicated to her holographic art no matter what the cost or temptation, dressed in living shark-skin, taking shit from no-one. As Kumo is trying not to be killed by the teeny-gang whose leader she mutilated when he tried to rape her, she is on a revelatory collision course with god-like hyper-intelligent Tommy Uchida. The latter, his body artificially enhanced, artfully manipulates all around him, from a washed-up artist to, eventually and apocalyptically, the populations of every Mickey-san. Things move not through tension and release of conventional plot, but through a wrenching series of fragmented and violent set-pieces, the syntax of adverts, of pop videos. And as the cut-up energy of pop videos can redeem the banality of their images, so the hallucinogenic vividness of Misha's prose, filtered through a babel of Japanese and English, charges the bleakness of her scenario with potent energy. It even redeems the *deus ex machina* ending, which in the final analysis is the only honest, hopeful ending there could be.

John Shirley has recently been advocating a rad new movement called sf underground: published by a small press, with illustrations by "Don Coyote" (aka Ferret), foreword by Brian Aldiss and afterword by James Blaylock, *Red Spider, White Web* could well be the ideal template for an sf underground novel. I like to think so, because it's definitely too original to be considered the official end of cyberpunk.

Anne Gay's **Mindsail** (Orbit, £12.95) is a first novel by a British writer, still something to celebrate. Gay has been landed with the statutory comparison to Ursula Le Guin on the cover (on which figures that look like the members of Jefferson Starship advance on a huge plate of red jello), but fortunately she has her own idea of what a self-consistent alien world should be.

Mindsail starts off as a lost-colony-lapsed-into-barbarism novel. The crew of a crashed starship have fragmented into many different cultures striving to survive on an alien world. Tohalla, through which we explore the world and its works, is a woman of the Green, an interrelated group struggling to preserve their Earthly crops against the native ecosystem, who with confusing exceptions don't use *I* to show that they've sublimated the individual for the community. Tohalla is about to be married off to a drooling idiot for the sake of preserving her bloodline, but the ceremony is interrupted by the capture of two marauding Reds, enemies of the Green who roam the semi-crystalline alien wilderness and who speak the same language as the Greens but with Germanic sentence structure. Soon enough, Tohalla starts speaking like a Red and chooses to escape with them, and is caught up in a search for the remains of the lost spaceship and the truth about the disaster which split the colonists into warring groups.

Thus far Gay promises to fulfil genre expectations, but on her own terms. We get imaginative landscapes, across which travel is not easy, and a nicely worked out alien ecosystem which is infused with paracrystalline stuff rather like megaviruses. Some of these act as memory nodes used by migrating animals and, latterly, humans – which enables Gay to neatly insert a long flashback sequence. This and other nifty notions give Gay's alien world promising novelty, but halfway through the book she gives up on the revelatory sf quest she started to write, and turns to other concerns.

For the Red who by now has married Tohalla and fathered her daughter blasts off in the bit of starship they eventually find, vowing to find Earth, and Tohalla trudges back to the Green to settle down and raise her daughter before setting out *again*, because she still hasn't found a man who isn't a drooling idiot or lost in space. She crosses a desert no one else has ever crossed to find an enclave of lotus eaters clustered around the remains of the rest of the spaceship. And there she flirts with a bad guy (who takes her mindsailing, kind of like psychic hang-gliding) and a good guy (who is wise and patient) and eventually gets what she was after, which was not revelation after all, although she does get that too, to no real point. What she was after, it turns out, was a husband. The fate of the world and its works dwindle into insignificance, the book ends on a note of soft-focus romantic lyricism badly at odds with the gritty realism of Tohalla's treks, and we can only hope that next time Gay will write a single book, and not two halves of different works.

Michael P. Kube-McDowell's **The Quiet Pools** (Ace, $17.95), ostensibly a hitech corporate thriller, turns out to be clenched around an irreducible nugget of propaganda. A starship programme is beleaguered by terrorist Homeworlders, whose leader calls himself Jonah. Interwoven with various lovingly detailed acts of technosabotage is the midlife crisis of Christopher, a librarian compiling the starship's hypertext. Like everyone else in the novel, he can't relate to people, a problem precipitated by the discovery that Jonah is his father. There follows much anguish over whether or not Christopher's desire to win a place on the starship is genuine or because his father has programmed him to infiltrate and destroy it, but in the end it is revealed that freewill is irrelevant, for wanderlust is genetically encoded. Combinations of three genes divide all humans into just eight archetypes, and some of those, who are the winners, are driven to explore new territories.

It's an interesting though scientifically dubious notion (genes code for proteins, not attitudes: three wouldn't be enough to determine eight types of complex behavioural differences, nor do multilocus traits ever mesh as neatly as Kube-McDowell posits: and, if those with none of the three expressed are in the majority, then why, if inheritance is roughly Mendelian, are those with *all* three expressed the precious minority?). But all this is revealed in a single conversation near the end of the book, one in which the characters themselves seem to be having trouble believing, and none of its implications are worked out in the text. For *The Quiet Pools* is not centred around a carefully extrapolated notion, but the notion is there to shore up a given – only the chosen deserve to go to the stars: the rest are cattle, and do not count. Whether or not you'll like the book depends on whether or not you agree.

Of Robert Reed's last book (reviewed in *IZ* 31), I said it "was heavy with ambition but strong enough only to flex skiffy conventions, not break them." I also said that his next novel could be worth looking out for. And so it is. **Black Milk** (Orbit, £6.99), a carefully focused examination of the implications of a molecular biological revolution, is a calmly confident seamless work of extrapolative fiction.

Centred on a bunch of kids growing up near the lair of the inventor of the New World, Reed slowly builds a sunlit elegiac evocation of a strange yet recognizable childhood in mid-West America, the kind of rich enviable childhood possible in the States in the '50s and '60s, before the self-poisoned cornucopia began to dry up. In *Black Milk* arcadia has been regained. There has been a revolution in genetic engineering, driven by the research of much-loved Dr Florida, a combination of Albert Schweitzer and Thomas Edison. Everyone in the world has enough to eat; even in forest pools, genetically altered bacteria bubble out a nutrient broth called black milk. As with bacteria, so with humans. Parents can gift their children with off-the-shelf traits, although there's no guarantee how the traits are expressed. Like swords, the gifts are two-edged.

The narrator, Ryder, has been gifted with an eidetic memory, although unlike the equally memorious Severian, Ryder can (he says) be relied upon not to distort the truth. But as an unexpected side-effect, Ryder falls into near cataleptic trances, losing himself to complex shifting patterns such as sunlight through leaves or shadows amongst grass blades. Likewise, his friend Marshall is a genetically-boosted genius, but also an insecure overachiever whose small failures are scorned by his mother. And others in their treehouse gang are learning to master their gifts and their problems. It is paradise, but a human paradise with human faults, and while Reed's narrative is slow-moving, it is also tender and funny and beguiling. It has the stamp of authenticity.

There is, of course, a snake in this Eden. Or a nest of snakes. Ryder and his friends find themselves taken up by Dr Florida himself, who is particularly interested in Ryder's perfect memory. He needs Ryder to be an unimpeachable witness to his innocence, for disaster is imminent. In an asteroid circling the moon, Dr Florida's latest experiment is going badly wrong. Creatures called sparkhounds, fierce tough creatures bioengineered to live in Jupiter's perpetual gales, are proliferating out of control, and an attempt to destroy them only spills them into space. Since sparkhounds can survive re-entry, all life on Earth (as well as the colonies on the Moon) is threatened: only those who can flee to space habitats may survive.

Reed resolutely does not widen his scale. The disaster insinuates itself into the lives of Ryder and his friends through television, familiarization drills in school reminiscent of '50s duck-and-cover instructions, a sense of unfocused dread. If this narrow window relies upon explanation rather than depiction, it nevertheless powerfully focuses the implications of the disaster on the community Reed has so carefully built up. At its centre is

Dr Florida, who turns before Ryder's eyes from near-saint to a confused and frightened old man, or possibly the greatest villain ever to have lived. The answer is left open, for in this poignant novel Reed is telling us what we all must learn if we are to grow up, that (like love, unlike Romance) nothing is as certain as it first seems, not even in the fixed perspectives of perfect memory.

Also noted

The British edition of Samuel R. Delany's **The Motion of Light in Water** (Grafton, £6.99), a searingly honest account of his life as a young black gay science-fiction writer married to a white poetess and living in a slum apartment in the East Village in the '60s, has additional material culled from his "Profession of Science Fiction" article in *Foundation* 6 & 7, and like that article borrows the structure of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-philosophus*. Which may or may not be an improvement, but if you haven't already bought the American edition buy this one: for apart from L. Ron Hubbard, only Delany led a life that was far stranger than anything found in the pulp heavens and hells of Ace Doubles.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Thinking It Through
Stephen Baxter

The cover blurb describes **N-Space** (Tor Books) as a retrospective collection celebrating a quarter century of Larry Niven's science fiction. And a celebration it is; once you have waded through a set of tributes from authors and fans, which range from the cloying ("a breath of Campbellian clarity in the New Wave murk" – Benford) to the apparently heartfelt ("he mines... marvellous veins of ideas" – Brin), you will find a compendium of short stories, novellas and novel extracts which, together with Niven's own comments and essays, do indeed throw a light, if a gentle one, on the peaks of Niven's career.

What this book is not, though, is a "best-of" or "essential" collection. There are too many notable absences for that – "Neutron Star," to pick one example. Nor can it be considered a sampler for the new reader – you have to know what a Pierson's Puppeteer is, for example, to make much sense even of the non-fiction essays, and the novel extracts are presented without much in the way of detailed scene-setting.

Nor is the book an autobiography, although we are treated to tantalizing glimpses of Niven's life and personality – we hear, for example, how Fred Pohl encouraged his early efforts, and there are hints of opposition from Niven's well-heeled family. Niven's attitudes also shine through; the observations and asides in the book range from the amusing ("Science fiction writers didn't get rich. Robert Heinlein excepted. Kurt Vonnegut excluded." Remember how Heinlein saved the world in *Footfall*, while in *Inferno* Niven and Pournelle had Vonnegut entombed in Hell?) to the embarrassing, like the immoderate statements on nuclear power.

As far as the fiction itself goes, don't expect any intense introspective analysis in the essays. In his introduction to the *Ringworld* extract, for example, Niven moves quickly through a discussion of his construction of the novel – and his own, rather surprising, doubts about the project – into a list of fannish responses to the novel which, to me, are far less interesting.

So what does this collection achieve? It does show us Niven's weaknesses as well as his strengths. We are given several examples of his collaborative efforts and shared-world pieces which, to my mind, demonstrate the dilution of a talent. "Flare Time," for instance, strikes me as a dull, confusing piece, yet Niven, in his introduction, describes it as "one of the best stories I've ever written." Perhaps it could have been, with the sharp self-criticism that "real" fiction would have brought. Even "Madness Has Its Place," which was the first new "Known-Space" story after *Ringworld Engineers*, was written only after Niven's most famous universe was opened up for sharecropping.

But Niven's strengths are well represented too. Plenty of the classics are here – "Convergent Series," "Inconstant Moon" – with their ingenuity and striking visual images. One of Niven's key talents is that, once he has hold of a notion, he *thinks it through*, and this is amply illustrated here, even in the novelty pieces like "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex." (On the other hand, a Niven weakness is that his characters "think it through" most of the time as well! Consider the virtual genius who narrates "Inconstant Moon.")

So we do see all sides of Niven here. In summary, though, this book *is* very much a celebration, and you shouldn't buy it expecting any great depth of analysis or autobiographical detail. But does the book do its main job? Does it indeed show why some of us love Larry so?

On balance, I think it does. Niven is shown at his best in this collection by one of my own personal favourites, "The Hole Man." I still have a yellowing copy of the 1974 *Analog* in which this piece first appeared. It might seem a "straightforward crime story" (Niven's own description from his four-line, rather dismissive introduction to the piece, reinforcing the idea that he isn't his own best critic) – but in fact the story is classic hard science fiction. Right at the centre is one new idea – in this case, a quantum black hole – together with two vivid, if functional, characters who are in conflict from page one. Alongside dazzling revelations of the central idea the conflict builds until we reach a climax which not only crucially involves the core idea but also finishes the story with an economical snap. (... Except for the terrific kicker!) And all of this conveyed in a prose so transparent that the story simply shines through.

To me, scribbling duff stories into purloined school exercise books back in 1974, this piece seemed rather like one of *TV21*'s wonderful cutaway diagrams of Thunderbird Two. I thought I could see how it worked, and I was inspired to build my own... But, of course, I found it wasn't as easy as it looked.

So, overall, yes; this book will remind the fan what was so good about Larry in the first place; and it did inspire me to look again, particularly at Niven's earlier material. Here's a tiny snippet from the *Ringworld* extract: "At the zenith swarmed a ring of black rectangles." Beat that! A world of wonder concentrated into nine words... and not a passive verb in sight.

(Stephen Baxter)

Liberty Valance Died for you!
Kim Newman

All fiction – from *Room at the Top* to *The Demolished Man* – is fantasy, in the sense that it deals with things that did not happen and people who did not exist. But there are levels of non-existence, holes through which certain characters and events often appear to drop. *The Three Musketeers*, for instance, is about real people, but is no less fiction for that, presenting d'Artagnan and the others as fictions who happen to crop up in the less fictional history books. And *The Seven-per-Cent Solution* overlays its fictionality with an extraordinary set of conceits, by mixing a fictionalized well-known person, Freud, with an expansion of a fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, who has almost crept out of the cocoon of literature into actuality. And the appearances of John Sladek or Neil Gaiman in Bob Shaw's *Fire Pattern* and Jack Yeovil's *Krokodil Tears* do not make them any less real; indeed, Gaiman, an actual person, has more physical substance

in this world than Yeovil, a character in an *Interzone* story, "Dreamers."

What if fictional characters could come to life? In other fictions, that serves as a premise for works as different as L.P. Hartley's "W.S.," Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Clive Barker's *The Secret Life of Cartoons*, Jonathan Carroll's *A Child Across the Sky* and my "The Original Dr Shade." Somewhere, a new area of fantastic fiction, in which historical and fictional characters are blended in increasingly complex patterns, is stirring to life – impelled by works of apparent realism or extravagant fantasy: E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Philip José Farmer's *Tarzan Alive!*, Larry McMurtry's *Anything for Billy*, Robert Zemeckis's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, John M. Ford's *The Dragon Waiting*, my *The Night Mayor*, John Farris's *The Axeman Cometh*, James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*, Howard Waldrop's "Ike at the Mike," Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*, George MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman* cycle, Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam*, the Bible, or Brian Aldiss' *Frankenstein Unbound*.

While Farmer and Allen in the '70s and Waldrop (and various *Interzone* writers) have returned most obsessively to this area, the current master of the form is David Thomson, the American critic formerly best known for *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema*, one of the few magical reference books on the shelf. His *Suspects*, recently much mentioned in these pages, is one of the seminal fantasies of the '80s, and a powerfully unconventional piece of fiction, straddling reference book and novel with its series of essays on the lives of characters from *films noirs*, filling in the pre- or post-film details of their stories and weaving them together in a pattern at once looser and more satisfying than Farmer's all-inclusive Greystoke family tree. It's hard to decide whether it should be on your shelf with David Pringle's *Imaginary People* or with your James Ellroy historical crime novels, and it stands fast as a central text for a burgeoning, transgeneric movement that, crucially, is fascinated by notions of genre but not necessarily willing to be confined in a category prison.

Threaded through with the deep ambiguities of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Laura*, haunted by the monstrous figure of Noah Cross (the John Huston character in *Chinatown*) and finally revealed as the manuscript Kubrick's – if not King's – Jack Torrance is scribbling away at in the Overlook Hotel, *Suspects* is uncategorizable but indispensable. Now comes **Silver Light** (Andre Deutsch, £12.95), in which Noah Cross also cameos, and Thomson has tried to make a more standard – if hardly conventional – novel out of America's fascination with the West and the Western, presenting a world in which historical characters (Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid, Roy Bean) co-exist with Matthew Garth, Liberty Valance and Ethan Edwards (and if you don't know who these people are, you might feel somewhat excluded). Leaping around from the 1950s to the 19th Century, this dovetails historical events with great moments from the movies and, in some very dextrous trickery, even manages to reconcile historical accounts with their filmed metafictions, as in a version of the death of Billy Bonney that owes as much to Sam Peckinpah as to the history books.

Chronologies have been stretched somewhat to accommodate the magic – Liberty Valance's deathdate is set as 1912, which simply doesn't square with the film's frame story – but this is every bit as fragile and elusive a work as its predecessor, steadily observing the way legend and fact intertwine and representations of reality – photography, novels, films – impinge on the reality itself.

It's hard sometimes to keep track of movements and, within sf, we are too often keen to set up smaller ghettoes (cyberpunk, technogoth, splatterhippie, dragonbeat, whatever) until we find ourselves trapped in Liebniz monads with no airholes. *Silver Light* is not remotely within *our* genre, except that it should be. It doesn't really matter where Thomson – or any other artist working in this tendency – takes his source material – history, movies, famous novels, their own previous work – from, but something interesting, at once playful and serious, is being done with the whole process of fiction-making and, rather than shoving machinery up our noses or coming up with buzzword trend-names, this is where we should be paying attention. Lesson over, go out and get *Suspects* and *Silver Light* – plus a load of old videos to back them up – and acknowledge that the fictional world, call it cyberspace or the collective unconscious, is changing.

(Jack Yeovil and Kim Newman)

Anthologies
Jones & McIntosh

According to its editors, Rudy Rucker, Peter Lamborn Wilson and Robert Anton Wilson, **Semiotext(e) SF** (Autonomedia, $18) deliberately set out to include material the other sf markets would (or did) reject because it was too obscene, too radical, or simply too weird. Their stall is set out from the beginning: this is a collection that aims to shock, to challenge, but, most of all one suspects, to offend. Consider, for example the plot of Ernest Hogan's "The Frankenstein Penis": a man equipped with the multi-stage anatomical graft of the title stumbles upon a female drifter yearning for "a guy with a really big cock," but coital rapture is interrupted when the real owners of the organ turn up to repossess it. After a stock chase sequence, our heroes eventually ride off into the sunset on lines like, "I'm leading an exciting, dangerous life, and keep ending up naked on the freeway."

Shocked? Offended? Or perhaps just stifling a yawn? Perhaps we should warn you that "The Frankenstein Penis" is one of the better reads in the book. Better, at least, than (to take from many possible examples) the witless boys-room humour of Greg Gibson's "Georgie and the Giant Shit," Robert Anton Wilson's "Project Parameters in Cherry Valley by the Testicles" (never mind the quality, let's freak out on the weirdness) or Richard Kadrey's "Genocide." Both the latter stories, incidentally, hit on the formula of injecting Adolf Hitler into the sex/violence mix to pump up the shock factor a few notches further.

For the record, this collection is just one issue of *Semiotext(e)*, the only one so far dedicated to sf, which is apparently a thrice-yearly publication available on subscription from Autonomedia in the USA. The asking price for this issue of the magazine is $18 in the States, plus $6 per copy for overseas purchasers. On the strength of this offering, our serious advice to any prospective UK punter would be: don't do it.

The contributors to this sf issue (and there are a lot of them) fall into two main groups. First the familiar names you'd expect to see included in any sf anthology which claims, in the words of its winningly modest editors, to be "a book of colossal importance not only for the future of sf, but for the future in general." There are the older Young Turks such as Philip José Farmer, J.G. Ballard, Ian Watson, Barrington Bayley and William S. Burroughs, as well as the Cyberpunks such as Lewis Shiner, Bruce Sterling, William Gibson and John Shirley. Then there are the unfamiliar names from the underground world of xerox microzines and so-called "American samizdat," the world that *Semiotext(e)*, (in its semi-regular non-sf incarnation) is presumably involved with, names such as the Reverend Ivan Stang, High Epopt of the Church of the SubGenius, and the "Poetic Terrorist," Hakim Bey. Most of the latter deliver stories (or not as the case may be) which are frequently opaque, obscure, precious, or just dull.

The sf professionals deliver stories

that range from the disappointing to material that is indeed unlikely to find a home in the conventional markets, not because of any notional shock value, but because it's just not good enough. Two pieces from J.G. Ballard illustrate this. "Report on an Unidentified Space Station" is a characteristically Ballardian tale wherein the perceptions and expectations of a group of astronauts change progressively with the apparent size of the space station on which they are marooned. Although it's a good story (in fact one of the better ones in this anthology), by Ballard's own recent standards it's only a minor work. In addition, it's a reprint from a British anthology of 1983 – no rejection problems here. On the other hand, "Jane Fonda's Augmentation Mammoplasty" (and yes, it's likely to succeed in offending Ms Fonda at the very least) is a pointless throw-back to the New Wave of the late 60s.

There are a handful of stories that work. John Shirley's "Six Kinds of Darkness" produces an atmosphere which is tight, claustrophobic and dark. Editor Rudy Rucker's own contribution, "Rapture in Space," dealing with copulation in orbit and male pregnancy, while neither offensive nor challenging, is quite entertaining. And Bart Plantenga's "The Beer Mystic's Last Day on the Planet" is a surprising winner, an offbeat but knowing fable of self-delusion set around a one-man stock-car derby through the streets of New York.

But three of the strongest stories also serve to point up some of the problems with this anthology. Rachel Pollack's contribution "Burning Sky" is, as well as being both thoughtful and compelling, a deeply feminist vision. Apart from its quality, it's the last factor that makes it seem out of place here since not only are *Semiotext(e)*'s contributors overwhelmingly male, but many of their stories are adolescent penis-fixated fantasies of the mine's-bigger / filthier / more-gonzo / weirder-than-yours variety.

The strongest read in the book is Bruce Sterling's "We See Things Differently," which explores a near-future malfunctioning American dream through the sympathetically-drawn viewpoint of an Iranian assassin. But, whatever the particular submission history of this story may be, it no more reads like something which could not have been published elsewhere than Sterling's other published work to date.

By contrast, there's Michael Blumlein's "Shed His Grace," which is a reject – from *Interzone* (hopefully only on the grounds of its thematic similarity to his first *IZ* story). It's a gruesome tale of obsession and mutilation told in stark surgical detail, and it well deserves to see publication. It's also, as you'd expect from Blumlein, a story that challenges. If this anthology had included a few more stories that were as geniunely unsettling as this one, then it might have come reasonably close to living up to its own hype.

As it is, however, while *Semiotext(e)* might want to imagine that it's battering hard and loud on the doors of a geriatric sf establishment (and of course anybody who says otherwise is open to being tarred as out of touch, reactionary, or just plain dumb), the sad truth is it's doing nothing of the sort. It won't shock. It won't (unless you've just got in by Tardis from the 1950s) offend. And it certainly won't challenge. It's a collection which will appeal only to the tamest of armchair rebels, the sort of person who still thinks it's hip to know all the words of *The Rocky Horror Show* off by heart.

It was with very great relief then, as well as with pleasure, that we turned to **The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook 3** (Orbit, £4.99) the third of the regular best-of-the-year collections edited by David S. Garnett. Among a total of twelve stories, there are three that feature on the Hugo nomination list this year: Connie Willis' "At the Rialto" (already winner of a Nebula) which deftly intertwines the uncertainties of scientific conferences, large hotels and quantum physics; Orson Scott Card's "Dogwalker," streetwise cyberpunk, which although somewhat predictable is also an engaging enough read; and Bruce Sterling's "Dori Bangs," the story of the might-have-been lives of Dori and her husband, Lester Bangs (a famous rock critic who here lives beyond his brief 33 years), which is hip, wise and sad.

Most of the remaining stories range from good to outstanding. John Crowley's "In Blue" is set in a world transformed by a combination of Chaos theory and revolution. It's the most enigmatic as well as one of the most impressive reads in the collection. David Brin's "Privacy" shows us both sides of the argument in a world where privacy is a scarce commodity. Jaygee Carr's "Chimera," set in a unpleasant future, carries an effective sting in its tail. And Charles Sheffield's "Out of Copyright" uses the idea of multinationals recreating the eminent dead in a clever and entertaining story.

Two stories explore, from very different angles, the death of the space age. In Richard Paul Russo's bitter and well-wrought "Lunar Triptych: Embracing the Night" the space program is effectively being wound-up, while in J.R. Dunn's evocative "Gates of Babel" it has been wiped from people's memories and only a handful of people still remember what those rusting multistage rockets were used for. And another two stories have strongly American themes: James Morrow in "Abe Lincoln at MacDonalds" marches his president into an alternate present where slavery was never abolished in the USA; and Lucius Shepard takes another characteristically bleak look at US involvement in near future Central America in "Surrender," a story that scores because of the sense of outrage it so effectively conveys.

Amidst all these good to excellent stories there is only one that fails to make the grade. Robert Silverberg's, "The Asenion Solution" is polished prose that only really has any value if one knows – or cares about – the ancient Asimov story it traces its sharecropper origins to. It's hard to understand why it ever got chosen for a state-of-the-art anthology like this, but its presence at least serves to point up the high overall quality of the rest of the book.

There's some interesting overlap between the *Yearbook* and its two annual "Best of..." rivals, the Dozois (which reprints the Sheffield and Sterling stories) and the Wollheim (which has the Morrow, the Card and the Shepard). And some stories that appear in both, such as Brian Stableford's *IZ* poll winner "The Magic Bullet," do not appear here. In the case of that story, this may be partly due to the fact that this is an All-American collection. As Garnett points out, British readers do have ready access to stories first published on this side of the Atlantic, including those from *IZ* and Garnett's own *Zenith* anthology – which seems a reasonable enough argument for their exclusion. However, considering that the *Yearbook* stakes out best-of-the-year territory, then surely a recommended reading list of those British stories that would have been included if selection had been on merit alone would be both worthwhile and just? Next year, perhaps.

All in all, this is a first-class package. In addition to the stories, there's an introduction by Iain Banks and articles from John Clute, Brian Aldiss and Garnett himself who summarize, in various ways, the year gone by. As well as being informative and entertaining, these help to give the *Yearbook* its distinctive character. If you're looking for a best-of-the-year volume, then this one will be hard to beat.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

Aces and Jokers
Ken Brown

The "Wild Cards" series of anthologies, edited by George R.R. Martin, consists so far of six volumes: **Wild Cards, Aces High, Jokers Wild, Aces Abroad, Down and Dirty** and **Ace in**

the Hole (all published in Britain by Titan Books, at £3.95 or £3.99). They include contributions by Edward Bryant, Pat Cadigan, Michael Cassutt, Arthur Byron Cover, Leanne C. Harper, Stephen Leigh, Victor Milan, John J. Miller, Lewis Shiner, Walton Simmons, Melinda M. Snodgrass, Howard Waldrop, Walter John Williams, Roger Zelazny – and possibly some others I missed.

Wild Cards is a "shared world" series that's been running n the US for some years now. Such series usually consist ofshort stories set against the same sf (or, more commonly, fantasy) background, or featuring the same characters. When I was given volumes 5 and 6 of this one to review I was pleased to find them in some ways among the most interesting new sf I have read for years. So I went out and bought the first four volumes and read the whole thing straight through.

Wild Cards is set on a parallel Earth very similar to ours – except that a virus was released in the late 1940s as part of an alien biological experiment. This "Wild Card" virus kills most of its victims, causes strange mutations in others ("Jokers") and gives unusual powers to a few ("Aces"). The rationale gives the authors an excuse to populate America with costumed superheroes and villains, just as in the comic books.

The style of the collaboration changes from volume to volume. Most of them consist of more or less independent short stories, linked by fictitious journalism and pseudo-scientific appendices. Volume 5 is presented as 12 stories, by 10 authors, cut together chronologically; so you get a few pages of Roger Zelazny, then a bit of George Martin, then something by Melinda Snodgrass, then perhaps back to Zelazny. Volume 6 is written straight through, more like a traditional novel, sections are not credited to individual authors and it's not at all obvious who contributed what. The result is that all the volumes taken together make up an immense, complex, exuberant, interlacing narrative that carried me along with it – I genuinely didn't want to put it down until I'd finished.

However they were written, it must have been under tight editorial control. Characters walk out of one author's story and into another's; each strand is assumed by all the others. Just to give you the flavour of this stuff: in Edward Bryant's "The Second Coming of Buddy Holley" (spelled correctly – "Holly" was a typo that stuck) the singer didn't die in the air crash but declined into playing cabaret and cheap clubs, from which he is plucked to play at a benefit for AIDS and Wildcard victims. However, the rights to "Not Fade Away" are held by a mysterious legal practice apparently connected with the Mafia. So Holley's minder for the gig (a gay Cajun werealligator with near-terminal AIDS) must find these gang leaders, aided by an assassin on speed (because he changes both his personality and appearance every time he sleeps), a woman songwriter who is liable to change into a subway train when under stress and another woman who is in telepathic contact with all the animals in New York. And that's just one of the shortest of 12 segments in one of six volumes.

The blurb calls it a "mosaic novel." This fine-grained cutting from one strand to another exactly suits the plot – startlingly, there *is* a plot running through the entire work, despite heavy diversions. In essence *Wild Cards*, like the *Silmarillion* or Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, is the story of the inevitable working-out of betrayals. There are at least three big ones right at the beginning. The scene is set with a piece of oral history, supposedly by an imaginary Studs Terkel (presumably authored by George R.R. Martin himself), which describes the futile attempts of "Dr Tachyon," one of the alien developers of the wild-card virus, to prevent his colleagues bringing it to Earth. That is the first betrayal, and Dr Tachyon, as near to a protagonist as we are going to get, spends the next forty years trying to atone for his people's sin and his own incompetence.

The first story as such is "Thirty Minutes over Broadway!" by Howard Waldrop, in which young air ace Robert "Jetboy" Tomlin fails to stop the virus being released over New York and provides the immortal last words "I can't die yet. I haven't seen *The Jolson Story*!" which run through the next 2,500 pages like a bad penny. His failure is the second betrayal.

Then we are into the meat of the thing. All over New York – (at first, the rest of the world later) people succumb to this new plague. Most die horribly. Many are mutilated and warped. Governments quickly recruit Aces into secret military teams. The US version roams the world signing peace treaties and chasing Nazi war-criminals, until they are all pulled up by the House Un-American Activities Committee for suspected (in fact, actual) communist sympathies. One of their number, Jack "Golden Boy" Braun, speaks, the others go to exile or jail, and the third betrayal is in place.

The rest of the story is essentially the tragedy of these betrayals. The Aces are divided by their contempt for Braun, and often unable to act together when they are needed. The Jokers, persecuted, ghettoized and despised, are turned away from society and in on themselves. Politicians, criminals and Soviet spies take advantage repeatedly. The spies are all much nicer than the politicians. The analogy with AIDS is explicit and repeated – in a real sense *Wild Cards* is also about AIDS, and hence about tragedy, isolation and the inevitability of death.

Of course there are huge digressions and diversions. Most of *Aces High* (perhaps the least successful volume) is taken up with a watered-down and spiced-up Lovecraftian sequence in which the thoroughly evil Astronomer manipulates a sect of Freemasons who practice black magic rites in order to call down to Earth the space-operatic Swarm Mother who they identify with Babylonian Tiamat. The Aces defeat the Swarm, and Fortunato the pimp uses tantric powers to confront the Astronomer.

Perhaps more words are spent on the gang war between Vietnamese refugees and the Mafia than on any other strand. I'm afraid I found it confusing, what with superheroes on either side acting as double agents, dupes or vigilantes, the DA moonlighting as the wife of the Mafia don, and a cross between Rambo and Robin Hood stalking Manhattan with a composite bow. It seems to confuse the Aces as well, because in *Aces Abroad* most of the ones we have come to know leave New York on a WHO study tour, a giant freebie trip round the world to inspect the policies of other countries towards virus victims.

Things come to a head nearly a million words and forty years on at the Democrat convention in Atlanta, where the Aces and Jokers may have the chance to get one of their own onto the Presidential ticket. However, they know that there is someone in the race with the power to control minds. But who is it? The fundamentalist preacher? The Wildcards' own candidate? Jesse Jackson? Things aren't helped by the presence of two assassins working for different people, a couple of KGB spies, and at least two members of the convention who are known to be capable of mind control already. In the end, there is a resolution, both political and personal, for some of the characters anyway, and the hope of new life for others. Although almost every component short story or plot strand is tragic, the whole is comic in more than one sense.

It's not all sweetness and light of course. Not all the authors are pulling the same way – and why should they? After all, half the point of this collective enterprise is to impress the reader with a real-world complexity. There are eight million stories in the city, and these are only about 80 of them.

The worst problem for me was the near-continuous violence. Almost every segment is violent, and some are grossly so. Especially the sexual violence – there are scenes of rape and abuse that are beyond the limit of voyeurism. Roger Zelazny's character

Croyd Crenson ("The Sleeper") is perhaps the most over-the-top, but some of his scenes are made bearable by a comic-book enthusiasm. A lot of other segments are quite repulsive. I wish that writers did not find this sort of thing neccessary.

But, if we can ignore the stock sex and violence, this is a work that is deeply subversive of genre conventions. Most obviously, it is a political work. I don't just mean that it is about parties and politicians, people who try to get elected, although there is a lot of that. (Almost all Democrat by the way, with one or two Communists and an aristocrat). More importantly, as a collection of short tragedies, the whole is infused with a sense of the uselessness and futility of individual acts of heroism.

The easy thing to do with superheroes is to have them save the world. These ones do that now and again but, usually, they cock it up. Dr Tachyon flies across a galactic arm to prevent the Wild Card virus coming to Earth but falls to pride, arrogance and inability to work with mere humans. Jetboy joins the Canadian airforce at 16 to go and fight Fascists – but in peace time he only succeeds in spreading plague over New York. The Four Aces save Gandhi, capture Bormann, Eichmann and Mengele, drive Peron into exile, yet throw it all away at HUAC, and watch the world deteriorate around them from jail or Hollywood. In Atlanta, when things come right for at least some of the characters it's due more to the capacity of the bad guys to foul their own nest than anything heroic done by the heroes.

So the Aces and Jokers do political things collectively. They talk about politics. They form committees. They go on marches. They even go on strike. One of them is a trade union activist – amongst the many historical persons who get a mention is Eugene Debs, and if you don't remember who he was, read some American Labour history.

If there is a real hero it's the ordinary people who want their Government to supply justice, keep the streets clean and help them when they are down and out. The Great and Powerful Turtle (by far the most sympathetic of the Aces) fixes TVs and cars, drinks cans of beer and has trouble paying off the mortgage on his costume. Even the Freemasons when they fail to sell out Earth to the Swarm are revealed as "ordinary people...most just worked hard for a living." Throughout *Wild Cards* power doesn't so much corrupt as distance. It might be political power, money power, or the ability to fly faster than a speeding bullet. Very little of it gets used to help the people in the gutter, or dying of AIDS.

I liked *Wild Cards*.

(Ken Brown)

Snorts, Guffaws and Plain Silliness
Wendy Bradley

In Harry Harrison and Robert Sheckley's **Bill, the Galactic Hero on The Planet of Bottled Brains** (Gollancz, £12.95) Bill meets up with Captain Dirk and Splock in their spaceship Gumption, and Ham Duo and his Kookie buddy Chewgumma, plus Hannibal (the elephants and Alps man) as well as a seven-inch talking lizard which is actually a cunning replica driven by a peanut-sized agent called CIA whose brain is inhabited by Bill's alien girlfriend Illyria with a little help from the computer which wants to run a cable from Bill's brain...Two guffaws and a snort but safe to read on a train, alas.

Antony Swithin's **Princes of Sandastre** (Fontana, £5.99) begins very firmly in historical and geographical England (lots of Yorkshire placenames and historical trivia) as the younger son of one of Hotspur's followers tells the tale of his family's part in the rebellion. His father and elder brother survive the battle and flee to the legendary Lyonesse, and young Simon leaves his home and escapes the king's men to follow them and prove his father was wrong to deny him training as a warrior.

So far so good. Then he meets up with a Hero: large, vividly dressed and vividly charactered Avran. Simon saves Avran from assassins through being unobtrusive and alert – twice – and Avran takes Simon to Rockall which, in this reality, is an island larger than Britain in mid-Atlantic. Avran is a prince of Sandastre, one of the many kingdoms on Rockall, and Simon is adopted as his brother and falls in love with his sister. There is a vast amount of linguistic, geographical, political, botanical and zoological information given to us about this strange land, often in a straightforward "Simon, you must understand..." wodge of exposition. By the end of the book Simon has become engaged to Ilven, the sister, and is about to set off questing with Avran for Lyonesse and his father and brother. This series could well prove to be a long haul to get to the meat of the plot but if Swithin can cut out about sixty per cent of the exposition and seventy per cent of his use of the exclamation mark it may prove worth the investment.

The Eye of the World (Book One of *The Wheel of Time*) by Robert Jordan (Orbit, £13.95) is an absorbing and solid epic set in a world where magical power is centred on a male/female mandala, with two complementary, equal but separate sources of power. However in the previous Age there was a titanic struggle against personified evil, who was imprisoned by the male power-wielders, but the backlash of the struggle tainted the male half of the source and so now only female magicians can operate safely; the male ones find their powers warped and they are driven into madness. A sect of female magicians devote themselves to finding and "gentling" such men.

The book centres on Rand, who I am afraid is very much your typical questing hero. He lives in a small village with small horizons and is ambivalent about leaving home and facing the world. He has a mysterious secret – his father isn't his father, but then what hero's *is*? – and a knack of being rescued from life-threatening situations by handy flashes of lightning which make it pretty clear from day one just what kind of development he's going to show.

He sets out with two friends, Perrin and Mat (whom I could never get over thinking of as a spoonerism, Perry and Mippin) and his feisty girlfriend and the village wisewoman, both of whom turn out to have an inborn ability to tap into the female power, and Moiraine, a female mage, and her bodyguard Lan who is so Aragon-like it is no surprise at all when he is revealed as an uncrowned king.

They flee various forms of nastiness all intent on the three boys who are the centre of the pattern, the weave of history – this refrain is repeated so often you begin to think the only reason they are so damned important is that every power source in the world is determined to recruit, destroy or otherwise acquire them. They find the source of the power, the eponymous Eye of the World, and defeat their particular devil with surprising ease. Loose ends abound even in such a solid housebrick of a book. Yet I read it in three days and will queue for the sequel. A page turner, if only to find out what a heron mark sword actually means, which even the helpful (at times essential) glossary omits.

The Magefire by Alexander Baliol (Headline, £8.99 pb; £14.95 hb) also sets out as if it is going to be a good sub-Tolkien when a doctor, Leighor, finds that the wealthy patient he has been called to treat has been poisoned and he is in the frame for the crime. Captured by the dead man's nephew and housepriest, he is to be taken off for trial but instead the three of them flee together from the pretender and are charged with a mission to bring back the testament of the dead man, which includes his proxy vote for the next kingmaking, from safe custody in the far north.

It is at this point the book goes off the rails, as there are chapters and chapters of wandering in tedious northern lands in company with the usual eclectic bunch of companions in disguise or with the statutory mysterious

secret, and it is only when Keran, the serving maid with untrained magic powers, joins them that the plot takes off a little again towards the end. There is altogether too much meandering around at the periphery of events and trailing of loose ends for the inevitable sequel, and when the characters wander off, leaving Keran a prisoner in her brother-in-law's house after a flimsy "off-you-go-I'm-OK" message that no-one with half a brain would have fallen for, I lost interest in the whole bunch of them.

The Frighteners by Stephen Laws (Souvenir Press, £14.95) begins well enough when a couple of minor criminals tangle with the mob and are saved from a prison beating by a strange force which enters one of them from a handy psychopath. The plot yomps along as Eddie practises the strange powers he has acquired and develops a neat line in putting the frighteners on organized crime by setting inanimate objects onto them. However the last few chapters take us into sinister government scientists causing the evil to be unleashed on the world and turning up with a handful of three-million-year super-evolved saint-types to counteract the out-of-control evil force, and they are just plain silly.

(Wendy Bradley)

Reality Collapse
Mark Morris

Midnight Sun by Ramsey Campbell (Macdonald, £12.95) tells the story of Ben Sterling, devoted husband and father, writer of children's stories, who inherits the lonely house in the moorland village where he spent the first eight years of his life. Behind the house is Sterling Forest, planted by his family years before around an oak grove where Ben's great-grandfather had been found dead. Slowly, as Christmas approaches and ice and snow begin to take a grip on the country, Ben becomes increasingly obsessed with the forest and, more particularly, with the secret that it conceals. Faced with his obsession the family unit begins to crumble, and the village of Stargrave is isolated by freezing weather conditions which are far more ominous than they seem.

Once again Ramsey has produced a visionary, supernatural horror tale. He exploits his many strengths as a writer to the full, creating a sense of impending doom which makes the reader feel that reality could collapse like an old dam at any moment and allow the darkness to come rushing in. His characters are beautifully observed – I'll stick my neck out and say that this is possibly his most autobiographical novel. He makes no secret of the fact that the Sterling children are based on his own, and you find yourself aching with love and fear for the family, urging them to get through their ordeal unscathed.

As always in Ramsey's books the language is often intricate and laden with meaning. It is the kind of novel that needs to be relished, preferably in a silent house beside a crackling fire. Perhaps this is why Ramsey's work, whilst hugely popular among genre pundits, has never quite made the leap into bestsellerdom. This is not a subway read. It is not a book to be skimmed through. The sense of unease one feels often comes from what is lurking *behind* the prose. If I had to nit-pick I'd say that occasionally the sentence structure becomes a little *too* oblique. There were perhaps half a dozen sentences in *Midnight Sun* which I could make neither head nor tail of no matter how many times I read them.

I can't tell you what my only *real* complaint is, though. Sorry to be obtuse, but there is a vital detail in the climax of the book which didn't quite convince me, and which would give the game away if I revealed what it was. However this minor grumble mustn't detract from the overall achievement here, which is considerable. Ramsey Campbell is the finest writer working in the horror genre today. If you want to find out how it's done, read this book.

Genetic engineering, tampering with the forces of nature, murderous doctors, evil super-intelligent babies. This is the stuff of Keith Barnard's debut novel, **Embryo** (Souvenir Press, £14.95). I see you yawn. I hear you mutter, "So what's new?"

Well, to be truthful, not a lot. *Embryo* reads rather like Robin Cook meets John Wyndham with more than a dash of Ira Levin. The action takes place in a fictitious hospital in Bournemouth where our hero, Simon Robinson – young, well-balanced, yuppyish Senior Registrar – has recently begun to work. Whilst carrying out a scan on a young abortion-seeking patient one day he sees the barely-developed foetus in the girl's womb grinning malevolently back at him. Naturally shocked, he decides to carry out the abortion as soon as possible, but during the operation the foetus fights back, releasing a discharge of malefic energy which results in the medic collapsing from an apparent epileptic seizure.

But this is only the beginning. From now on in the plot thickens, becoming increasingly more sinister. The report on the foetus is mysteriously wiped from the records, people who have information are gruesomely silenced, and Robinson is hauled up before his superiors and suspended from his duties. Naturally he defies instructions not to darken the hospital's portals until further notice, and with the help of various allies, some of whom are bumped off along the way, sets out to unravel the threads which lead to the dark truths at the centre of a web of intrigue.

As I've said, this is not exactly ground-breaking stuff, but nevertheless it is a solid and reasonably entertaining debut. The novel is well-paced and the author creates an effective sense of claustrophobic paranoia. The prose itself is competent if somewhat uninspired and the characters rather two-dimensional, though I found myself caring enough about them to want to read on. Dialogue is often stilted, sometimes excruciatingly so, particularly when Simon Robinson is used as a sounding box to explain medical procedures.

What disappointed me most, however, was the ending, for ultimately there are no surprises. Up until the last thirty or forty pages the plot is a convolution of shocks and revelations, but suddenly, with the destination in sight, the book runs out of petrol. Most of the last twenty pages are static exposition scenes where information already gleaned is consolidated and set in sequence, presumably for those readers whose minds were not agile enough to grasp the solutions first time round. But maybe I'm being too harsh. Over-explanation is not uncharacteristic of first novels. If you're a fan of the medical horror/sf sub-genre, *Embryo* is worth a look.

When I was eight years old I bought a book which had a wedding cake on the cover. It was no ordinary wedding cake. The little bride and groom on the top had grinning skulls instead of faces, and there was blood dribbling down the cake's white icing where a gleaming carving knife had penetrated. I still have that book today. I cannot take it down from my shelves and look at it without smiling nostalgically. I have long since forgiven its yellowing pages for causing me an interminable fear-filled night. The book's title? *The Eleventh Pan Book of Horror Stories.*

Despite scaring myself almost witless, from that moment the barbs were snagged in my flesh and I was inextricably hooked. Over the next year or so my bookshelves underwent a transformation. Out went the Famous Fives, the Billy Bunters, the Biggles. And in came snarling rats sitting atop skulls, severed heads in buckets, green-eyed *things* pushing aside the lids of crypts with long-taloned hands.

As the years wore on, however, the standards of the series sadly dropped. Pan had always given us gore, and that was all to the good if tempered with

wit and invention and, occasionally, subtlety. But somewhere along the way the grinning sadists and the cannibal children took over. The tales became stiflingly formulaic, humourless, tiresome, gratuitous. Okay, so now and again a spark of originality lit up the gloom, and there were always those Stephen King re-runs to fool the casuals into believing the cutting edge was still sharp, but in reality we all knew that the body was listless, sick, dying, that it would surely be only a matter of time before the corpse was laid to rest for good and a few sad words mumbled over its ashes.

But now, in true horror story tradition, a resurrection has taken place. Under the enthusiastic guidance of publisher's editor Kathy Gale, the *Pan Book of Horror Stories* has returned with a name-change, **Dark Voices 2**, two new editors, David Sutton and Stephen Jones (Pan, £3.99), a striking new cover layout, and a modern outlook. Yeah, but what are the *stories* like? I hear you ask. Well, put it this way: if I was an eight-year old kid I would probably take *Dark Voices 2* down from my bookcase in twenty years time and smile a loving and nostalgic smile.

In my opinion Sutton and Jones have both restored the traditional balance and at the same time brought the series up to date. There is gore here but there is also subtlety; there are tales of human suffering and there are supernatural visitations. My favourite story in this volume is by a new writer, Michael Marshall Smith. His "The Man Who Drew Cats" is assured, riveting, haunting. It is one of those stories where the narrative flows towards a conclusion that is both inevitable and yet satisfying. I've been fortunate enough to read a few more of Mike's unpublished stories and I reckon this guy has a big future.

Other notable highs in this volume are provided by Ramsey Campbell, John Brunner, Brian Lumley and Conrad Hill. For some strange reason there seem to be a glut of stories involving cars, and there are also two which deal with the identical theme of human entrapment – perhaps, therefore, a little more variety is needed. But this is my only quibble. If the standard achieved in *Dark Voices 2* can be maintained in future volumes, there is no reason why it should not continue to warp the tender minds of generations to come.

(Mark Morris)

Note: *Mark Morris's own horror novel* Toady *(1989) has just been republished in paperback by Corgi Books.*

UK Books Received

July 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone *during the month 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.*

Aldiss, Brian. **Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's: A Writing Life**. Appendix by Nicholas Ruddick. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-53661-6, 221pp, hardcover, £13.95. ("Literary autobiography" by a major sf writer; first edition; two chapters were first published in *Interzone* 38; there is also a signed limited edition, with extra chapters, published by Avernus Creative Media [not seen].) *26th July.*

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Vintage Science Fiction: Short Novels of the 1950s**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-068-8, 503pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf anthology, first edition [?], 1990; contains well known stories by Anderson, Asimov, Farmer, Pohl, Sturgeon, etc.) *19th July.*

Bear, Greg. **Heads**. Illustrated by Fred Gambino. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3678-1, 125pp, hardcover, £8.99. (Sf novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; originally serialized in *Interzone* 37-38.) *13th September.*

Bear, Greg. **Queen of Angels**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04139-0, 385pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) *2nd August.*

Bishop, Michael. **Unicorn Mountain**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20617-5, 495pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 33.) *16th August.*

Bradbury, Ray. **Fahrenheit 451**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-04356-X, 172pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1953; 18th Granada/Grafton issue [since 1976].) *12th July.*

Brown, Eric. **The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31366-5, 216pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf collection, first edition; the author's debut book; five of the eight stories first appeared in *Interzone*; reviewed by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *IZ* 39.) *3rd August.*

Caldecott, Moyra. **Daughter of Ra**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-959870-1, 313pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical novel about ancient Egypt, first edition; sequel to *Daughter of Amun* and *The Son of the Sun*.) *2nd August.*

Campbell, Ramsey. **Needing Ghosts**. Illustrated by Jamel Akib. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3691-9, 80pp, hardcover, £8.99. (Horror novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *13th September.*

Carroll, Jonathan. **Black Cocktail**. Illustrated by Dave McKean. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3680-3, 76pp, hardcover, £8.99. (Fantasy novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *13th September.*

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Ghost From the Grand Banks**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04906-5, 249pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it concerns an a 21st-century attempt to raise the *Titanic*.) *4th October.*

Clarke, Arthur C. **2001: A Space Odyssey**. "Based on the screenplay by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick." Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-979800-X, 266pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1968; 21st Arrow issue; this edition contains a new introduction, "Back to 2001," plus reprints of the short stories "The Sentinel" [1951] and "Encounter in the Dawn" [1953].) *July?*

Clute, John, David Pringle and Simon Ounsley, eds. **Interzone: The 4th Anthology**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53120-1, 208pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf anthology, first published in 1989.) *2nd August.*

Dalby, Richard, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Ghost Stories**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-055-6, 654pp, paperback, £4.99. (Ghost-story anthology, first edition; arranged alphabetically by author, from Robert Aickman to William J. Wintle, it contains a generous selection of 19th- and 20th-century tales.) *19th July.*

Dick, Philip K. **Second Variety: Volume 2, The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick**. Introduction by Norman Spinrad. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20765-1, 493pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987.) *12th July.*

Docherty, Brian, ed. **American Horror Fiction: From Brockden Brown to Stephen King**. "Insights." Macmillan Press, ISBN 0-333-46129-0, 180pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Collection of critical essays, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; contains pieces by various UK academics, including Robert Giddings and David Punter, on such horror writers as Poe, Lovecraft, Bloch, Shirley Jackson and Suzy McKee Charnas.) *Late entry: published in the spring of 1990, but received by us in July.*

Douglas, Carole Nelson. **Seven of Swords: Sword & Circlet 3**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13308-6, 380pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *17th August.*

Eddings, David. **The Diamond Throne: The Elenium, Book One**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20372-9, 496pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *12th July.*

Fletcher, Marilyn P., ed. **Reader's Guide to Twentieth-Century Science Fiction**. American Library Association [released in the UK by Eurospan, 3 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8LU], ISBN 0-8389-0504-8, 673pp, hardcover, £49.95. (Reference work, first published in the USA, 1989; consists of alphabetically arranged entries on authors from Douglas Adams to Roger Zelazny; most entries are three to six pages in length and consist of biographical information followed by a mini-essay on "Themes and Style" and plot summaries of major works; unfortunately, the book does not attempt complete author bibliographies.) *July?*

Garnett, David S., ed. **Zenith 2: The Best in New British Science Fiction**. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0591-3, 320pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; contains all-original stories by Baxter, Brown, Constantine, Kilworth, McDonald, Moorcock, Stableford, Tuttle and others; reviewed [from advance proofs] by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 38.) *July?*

Gibson, William, and Bruce Sterling. **The Difference Engine**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04762-3, 383pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; part one, "The Angel of Goliad," appeared as a separate story in *Interzone* 40.) *20th September.*

Hatherley, Frank, with Margaret Aldiss and Malcolm Edwards, eds. **A is for Brian: A 65th Birthday Present for Brian W. Aldiss**

from His Family, Friends, Colleagues and Admirers. Avernus Creative Media [35 Fishers Lane, London W4 1RX], ISBN 1-871503-05-1, 128pp, limited-edition trade paperback,£25. (Illustrated *festschrift* presented to Brian Aldiss at the *Interzone*/Aldiss party, Groucho Club, London, 12th July 1990; first edition; contributors include Kingsley Amis, J.G. Ballard, Harry Harrison, Robert Holdstock, Doris Lessing, Michael Moorcock, Josef Nesvadba, Frederik Pohl, Christopher Priest, Kit Reed and Robert Silverberg.) *12th July*.

Heinlein, Robert A. **Farmer in the Sky**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04783-6, 224pp, paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1950.) *19th July*.

Herbert, James. **Creed**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-50909-0, 319pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) *2nd August*.

Jeter, K. W. **Farewell Horizontal**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20809-7, 253pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *26th July*.

[Kane, Bob.] **Batman v the Joker: The Greatest Joker Stories Ever Told**. Hamlyn, ISBN 0-600-57066-5, 288pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Comic-book collection, first edition [?]; it reprints work from the 1940s to the 1980s, and contains a foreword and afterwords by Mike Gold and various other DC Comics personnel.) *10th August*.

Kilworth, Garry, **Midnight's Sun: A Story of Wolves**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440683-5, 317pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; despite the similarity of title, it doesn't appear to be a sequel to his previous animal fantasy, *Hunter's Moon*; rather, it's another exercise in the same vein.) *13th September*.

King, Stephen. **Four Past Midnight**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-53526-1, 676pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1990; contains four new novellas.) *4th October*.

Koontz, Dean R. **Night Chills**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3522-8, 334pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1976.) *19th July*.

Koontz, Dean R. **Twilight Eyes**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3517-1, 478pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1985; this full version first published in the USA, 1987.) *19th July*.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Vision**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3518-X, 270pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1977.) *19th July*.

Koontz, Dean R. **Whispers**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3521-X, 502pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1980.) *19th July*.

La Plante, Richard. **Tegne Volume 2: The Killing Blow**. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0093-8, 305pp, trade paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *July?*

Lem, Stanislaw. **Return from the Stars**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0488-X, 247pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in Poland, 1961; this English translation first published in 1980; "over 1 million copies sold," it says on the blurb – presumably that means in all languages.) *2nd August*.

Lem, Stanislaw. **Tales of Pirx the Pilot**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0491-X, 206pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in Poland, 1968; this English translation first published in 1979.) *2nd August*.

Lloyd, A.R. **Witchwood: Vol II of The Kine Saga**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-953840-7, 224pp, paperback, £3.99. (Animal fantasy novel. first published in 1989.) *2nd August*.

McDonald, Ian. **Out on Blue Six**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40044-4, 335pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; although the author is British, this book [like his first two] was released initially in America.) *17th August*.

McQuay, Mike. **The Nexus**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3402-7, 474pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *19th July*.

Murdock, M. S. **Hammer of Mars. Book Two: The Martian Wars Trilogy**. "Buck Rogers Books." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-0133116-X, 279pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *26th July*.

Pike, Christopher. **Remember Me**. Hodder, ISBN 0-340-53236-X, 238pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1989; in accompanying matter, Christopher Pike is described as "the best-selling author of USA teenage books... who successfully bridges the gap between Nancy Drew mysteries and Stephen King chillers.") *4th October*.

Pike, Christopher. **Slumber Party**. Hodder, ISBN 0-340-52925-3, 128pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) *16th August*.

Platt, Charles. **Soma**. "Piers Anthony's Worlds of *Chthon*." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20440-7, 239pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Plasm*.) *16th August*.

Potocki, Jan. **Tales from the Saragossa Manuscript (Ten Days in the Life of Alphonse Van Worden)**. Translated by Christine Donougher. Introduction by Brian Stableford. Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-67-7, 159pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy stories from the fragmentary book traditionally known as *The Saragossa Manuscript*, first published in France, 1814; as Stableford points out in his introduction, there is some controversy as to who in fact wrote this work and whether or not he was a Polish nobleman.) *16th August*.

Pratchett, Terry. **~~Faust~~ Eric**. Illustrated by Josh Kirby. "A Discworld Story." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04836-0, 128pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Humorous fantasy novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) *16th August*.

Rhodes, Daniel. **Kiss of Death**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-51514-1, 261pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; "Daniel Rhodes" is a pseudonym of Neil McMahon.) *2nd August*.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Ultimate Enemy**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04451-9, 242pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1979; a volume in the author's long-running "Berserker" series.) *19th July*.

Sampson, Fay. **Black Smith's Telling: Book Three in the sequence Daughter of Tintagel**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3400-0, 275pp, paperback, £3.50. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition.) *19th July*.

Shepard, Lucius. **Kalimantan**. Illustrated by Jamel Akib. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3679-X, 160pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Fantasy novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *13th September*.

Silverberg, Robert, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Fantasy All-Time Greats**. Robinson, ISBN 1-948164-71-6, 431pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA as *The Fantasy Hall of Fame*, 1983; second Robinson issue under the present title.) *19th July*.

Slade, Derek. **Invasion**. "England 1940." Oriflamme Publishing [60 Charteris Rd., London N4 3AB], ISBN 0-948093-08-0, 497pp, paperback, £4.50. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition; yet another treatment of the Nazi invasion that never was, timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain; the author has also written a fantasy novel, *The Sceptre Mortal*, as "Derek Sawde.") *July?*

Stasheff, Christopher. **Warlock to the Magic Born**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31370-3, 696pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; contains three linked novels first published in the USA as *The Warlock in Spite of Himself*, 1969, *King Kobold Revived*, 1984 [a revised version of *King Kobold*, 1971], and *Escape Velocity*, 1983; a US-published omnibus, entitled *To the Magic Born* [1986] contained just the first two novels.) *3rd August*.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. **Brian W. Aldiss: A Man for All Seasons – A Working Bibliography**. 2 vols.: Part 1 – Fiction and Part 2 – Non-Fiction. 2nd edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 26. "Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 0-1-871133-21-1, 138pp, paperbound, £5. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1987.) *Late entry: March publication, received in July*.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Philip José Farmer: Good-Natured Ground Breaker – A Working Bibliography**. 2nd edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 23." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 0-1-871133-22-X, 63pp, paperbound, £2.75. (Author bibliography; the first edition appeared in 1987.) *July*.

Taylor, Bernard. **Sweetheart, Sweetheart**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20711-2, 351pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1977.) *26th July*.

Taylor, Roger. **Into Narsindal: The Fourth Chronicle of Hawklan**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3353-5, 533pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *19th July*.

Vance, Jack. **Lyonesse III: Madouc**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13396-1, 358pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *9th August*.

Ward, James M., and Jane Cooper Hong. **Pool of Radiance**. "Forgotten Realms Fantasy Adventure." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014584-2, 316pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) *August?*

Watson, Ian. **The Embedding**. "VGSF Classics 44." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04784-4, 254pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1973.) *19th July*.

White, James. **Federation World**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8335-4, 283pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) *July?*

Williams, Raymond. **People of the Black Mountains II: The Eggs of the Eagle**. Postscript by Joy Williams. Chatto & Windus, ISBN 0-7011-3564-6, 330pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Historical story cycle, set in Wales from 82 AD to 1415 AD; first edition; this was left unfinished by Williams at the time of his death; although it deals in Celtic mythology, it's unlikely that there's any fantasy element.) *30th August*.

Wingrove, David. **Chung Kuo, Book One: The Middle Kingdom**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN0-450-51610-5, 726pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1989.) *2nd August*.

Winter, Douglas E., ed. **Dark Visions: All Original Stories**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04711-9, 381pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror

anthology, first published in the USA *Night Visions 5*, 1988; the book has also been reissued in a US paperback edition as *The Skin Trade*; contains stories by Stephen King, Dan Simmons and George R. R. Martin, whose names feature prominently on cover and spine.) *19th July.*

Overseas Books Received

Aldiss, Brian. **Last Orders**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-617-1, 223pp, paperback, $3.95. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 1977.) *15th August.*

Anthony, Piers. **Hard Sell**. Tafford Publishing [PO Box 271804, Houston, TX77277, USA], ISBN 0-9623712-1-1, 187pp, $18.95. (Sf novel, first edition.) *September.*

Bova, Ben. **Orion in the Dying Time**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-93111-5, 356pp, hardcover, $18.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Orion* and *Vengeance of Orion*; proof copy received.) *August.*

Card, Orson Scott. **Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85047-6, 675pp, hardcover, $19.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; a massive gathering of all Card's best-known stories from the late 1970s to the late 1980s; an accompanying note states that it also contains "nearly 40,000 words of original material, autobiographical notes and commentary.") *November.*

Feeley, Gregory. **The Oxygen Barons**. "Terry Carr's Ace Science Fiction Specials. Edited by Damon Knight." Berkley/Ace, ISBN 0-441-64571-2, 264pp, paperback, $3.95. (Sf novel, first edition; the author's debut novel; this is the last of the "Ace Specials," and it has already been delayed by a couple of years.) *July.*

Giorgi, Piero. **Jack Williamson: Una Vita Per la Fantascienza**. Editrice Kronos [Via Toniolo 22, 31022 Preganziol (TV), Italy], no ISBN shown, 958pp, $84 [$109 including surface mail postage]. (Critical study of a leading American sf author; first edition; in some ways this is the most astonishing book which has ever crossed our desk: it's certainly the heaviest, as it's almost 1,000 pages, printed on art paper, with plenty of illustrations; consisting of a detailed, story-by-story account and critique of Williamson's career as an sf writer from 1928 to 1986, it's written entirely in Italian – with no English-language edition promised, so far as we know; clearly a labour of love.) *Late entry: it says "1989" on the copyright page, but was received by us in July 1990.*

Herbert, James. **Haunted**. Berkley/Jove, ISBN 0-515-10345-4, 338pp, paperback, $4.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1988.) *1st July.*

Leinster, Murray. **The Forgotten Planet**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-616-3, 209pp, paperback, $3.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1954; actually, it's even older than that would suggest, being a fix-up of three magazine stories which first appeared in 1920, 1921 and 1953; "Murray Leinster" was a pseudonym for Will F. Jenkins.) *18th August.*

Michaels, Barbara. **Wait for What Will Come**. Berkley, ISBN 0-425-12005-8, 280pp, paperback, $3.95. ("Gothic" thriller, first published in the USA, 1978; "Barbara Michaels" is a pseudonym for Barbara G. Mertz, who has written books on Egyptology under her own name and has also written mysteries as "Elizabeth Peters.") *1st July.*

Womack, Jack. **Heathern**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85078-6, 215pp, hardcover, $16.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1990; proof copy received; Womack is American, but it seems the Unwin Hyman edition of this book precedes the Tor one by about a month.) *September.*

Magazines Received
July 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by Interzone during the month specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seamail.)

Australian Science Fiction Review no. 23, "Autumn" 1990 (i.e. spring, from an Antipodean perspective). ISSN 0818-0180. 32pp. Eds. Yvonne Rousseau *et al*, c/o Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Quarterly journal of sf criticism. A4 size, sans illustrations. Contributors: John Foyster, George Turner, Cherry Wilder, etc. $15 Australian per annum; £15, UK airmail (the latter payable to Joseph Nicholas, 5A Frinton Rd., Stamford Hill, London N15 6NH).

Australian Science Fiction Review no. 24, "Winter" 1990 (i.e. summer, from a Down-under point of view). ISSN 0818-0180. 32pp. Eds. Yvonne Rousseau *et al*, c/o Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Quarterly journal of sf criticism. A4 size, sans illustrations. Contributors: Bruce Gillespie, Michael J. Tolley, etc. $15 Australian per annum; £15, UK airmail (the latter payable to Joseph Nicholas, 5A Frinton Rd., Stamford Hill, London N15 6NH).

Critical Wave no. 17, July 1990. No ISSN shown. 28pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly news magazine. A4 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Joseph Nicholas, D. West, etc. (interview with Chris Claremont). £5 per annum, UK; £7, overseas (payable to "Critical Wave Publications," 24A Beech Rd., London N11 2DA).

Dream Science Fiction no. 24, Summer 1990. No ISSN shown. 80pp. Ed. George P. Townsend, 7 Weller Place, High Elms Rd., Downe, Orpington, Kent BR6 7JW. Quarterly small-press fiction magazine. A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Bruce P. Baker, S. M. Baxter, Peter T. Garratt, etc. £7 per annum, UK; £8, overseas, payable to publisher Trevor Jones, 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE. (Note: this magazine is a member of the New SF Alliance clearing-house; write to the address of BBR for further details – c/o Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbys. S40 3LA.)

Fantazia: The Definitive Superhero Magazine no. 2, no date shown (received July 1990). ISSN 0955-6931. 68pp. Ed. Jonathan Clark *et al*, 2nd Floor, 69 Hurst St., Birmingham B5 4TE. Monthly comics-and-media review magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: various. £18 per annum, UK; £28, Europe; £38, elsewhere. (Note: this is a new British professional magazine of some sf interest; it appears to be juvenile in orientation and carries no fiction, though there are a few reviews of sf and fantasy books.)

Fear no. 20, August 1990. ISSN 0954-8017. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, c/o Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Monthly horror-fiction and film magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and many internal colour illustrations. Contributors: James Herbert, Andy Oldfield, etc (interviews with Herbert, Colin Greenland and Freda Warrington, among others). £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; $49.50, USA (North American subscribers should write to British Magazine Distributors Ltd, 598 Durham Cres., Unit 14, Woodstock, Ontario N4S 5X3, Canada – who also handle *Interzone*.)

Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction no. 48, Spring 1990. ISSN 0306-4964. 112pp. Ed. Edward James, c/o The SF Foundation, Polytechnic of East London, Longbridge Rd., Dagenham RM8 2AS. Thrice-yearly critical journal of high standards. A5 size, perfect bound, sans illustrations. Contributors: Frances Bonner, Sam Moskowitz, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, etc. £8.50 per annum, UK; $17, USA. (Note: this issue appeared just a month after the preceding one, so it seems Ed James is keeping his promise to get the journal back on schedule.)

FTL: The Magazine of the Irish Science Fiction Association no. 5, Summer 1990. No ISSN shown. 56pp. Ed. Michael Carroll, 30 Beverley Downs, Knocklyon Rd., Templeogue, Dublin 16, Ireland. Quarterly small-press magazine of the Irish SF Association. A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: John Kenny, Robert S. Neilson, etc. 95 pence per copy (no subscription information shown).

The H. G. Wells Newsletter vol. 2, no. 14, Spring 1990. ISSN 0306-5480. 10pp. Ed. Christopher Rolfe, The H. G. Wells Centre, School of Literary and Media Studies, Polytechnic of North London, Prince of Wales Rd., London NW5 3LB. Irregular (?) newsletter of the H.G. Wells Society. A4 size, black and white (or, rather, black and green) throughout. Contributors: Sylvia Hardy, Patrick Parrinder, etc. No subscription information given.

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine no. 159, August 1990. ISSN 0162-2188. Ed. Gardner Dozois, c/o Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, USA. Monthly (13 times per year) fiction magazine of high repute. Digest size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Terry Bisson, Ian McDonald, Keith Roberts, etc. (this issue has a long essay by Harlan Ellison in which he bemoans the fate of famous writers who are plagued by their "fans"). $34.95 per annum, USA; $39.65, overseas.

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine no. 160, September 1990. ISSN 0162-2188. Ed. Gardner Dozois, c/o Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, USA. Monthly (13 times per year) fiction magazine. Digest size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Greg Egan, Charles Sheffield, Walter Jon Williams, etc. $34.95 per annum, USA; $39.65, overseas.

Locus: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field no. 354, July 1990. ISSN 0047-4959. 76pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colur cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Edward Bryant, Dan Chow, Mark R. Kelly, etc. $32 per annum, USA; $37, overseas surface mail; $60, overseas airmail (UK subscription agent: Fantast [Medway] Ltd, PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU).

New Pathways no. 17, September 1990. ISSN 0886-2451. 56pp. Ed. Michael G. Adkisson, MGA Services, PO Box 863994, Plano, TX 75086-3994. Bimonthly fiction magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustra-

tions. Contributors: Ronald Anthony Cross, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Richard Paul Russo, etc. $27 per annum, USA; $36, overseas (payable to "MGA Services").

Skeleton Crew no. 2, August 1990. ISSN 0959-8006. 64pp. Ed. Dave Hughes (*since replaced by Dave Reeder*), Argus House, Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead HP2 7ST. Monthly horror-fiction magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: Shaun Hutson, Philip Nutman, etc. £23.40 per annum, UK; $56, USA.

Speakeasy: The Organ of the Comics World no. 111, July 1990. No ISSN shown. 68pp. Ed. Nigel Curson, c/o John Brown Publishing Ltd, The Boathouse, Crabtree Lane, London SW6 8NJ. Monthly news magazine for comics enthusiasts. A4 size, with colour cover and black-and-white internal illustrations. Contributors: various. £12 per annum, UK; £25, overseas airmail.

Starburst no. 144, August 1990. ISSN 0955-114X. 52pp. Ed. Stephen Payne, Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly sf/fantasy media magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: John Brosnan, etc (includes an interview with David Brin). £22 perannum, UK; $40, USA.

TV Zone no. 9, August 1990. ISSN 0957-3844. 32pp. Ed. Jan Vincent-Rudzki, Visual Imagination Ltd, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly sf/fantasy-on-TV magazine. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: various. £18 per annum, UK; $34, USA.

Winter Chills no. 4, no date shown (received in July 1990). No ISSN shown. 36pp. Ed. Peter Coleborn, 46 Oxford Rd., Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 6DT. Small-press fiction magazine produced on behalf of the British Fantasy Society (it's normally mailed with the society's newsletter, but this issue came on its own). A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: David Bischoff, D.F. Lewis, etc. £1.50 ($3) per copy (no subscription details shown).

Works No. 6, no date shown (received in July 1990). No ISSN shown. 52pp. Ed. Dave W. Hughes, 12 Blakestones Rd., Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UQ. Quarterly (?) small-press fiction magazine. A5 size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Duncan Adams, Christopher Evans, etc. £5.50 per annum, UK. (See our Small Ads for further details, which are curiously lacking in the magazine itself. This issue shows an improvement in production quality, with laser typesetting and glossy paper.)

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XENOS: new science-fiction/fantasy "forum" magazine. Details from S.V. Copestake, 29 Prebend St., Bedford, MK40 1QN – 0234 49067.

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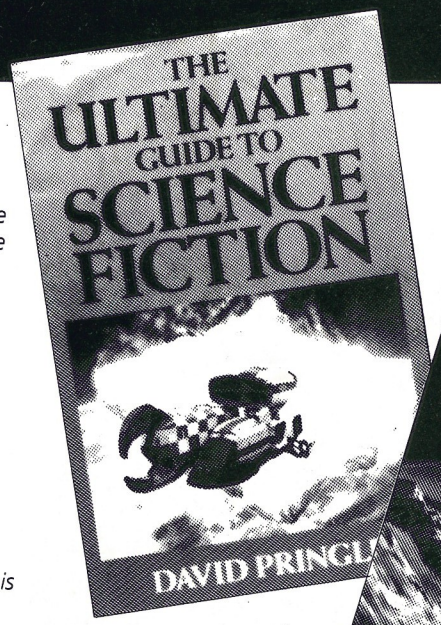

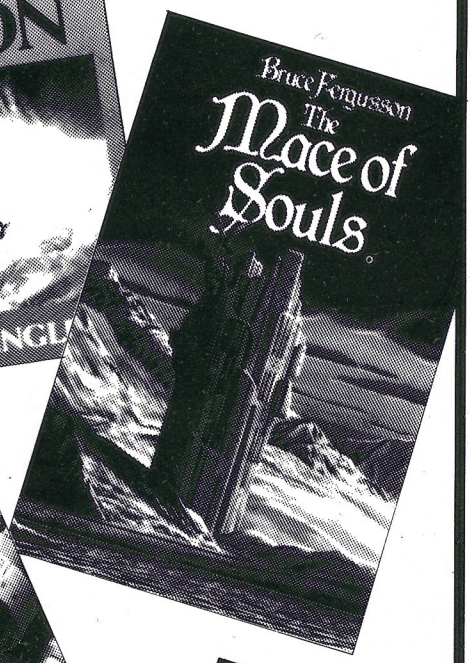

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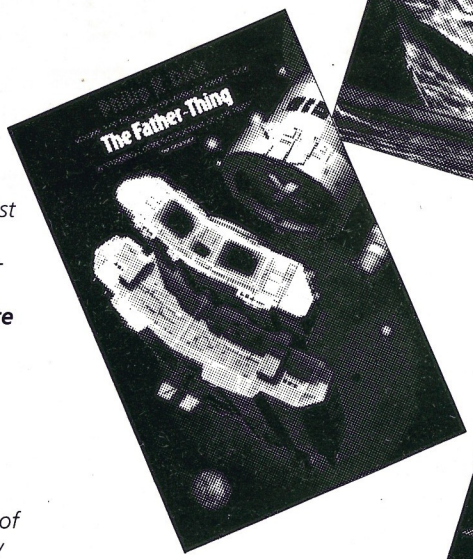

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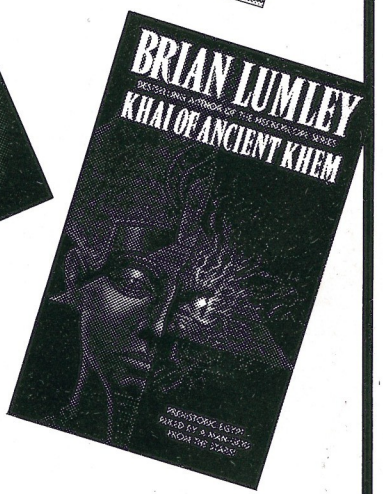

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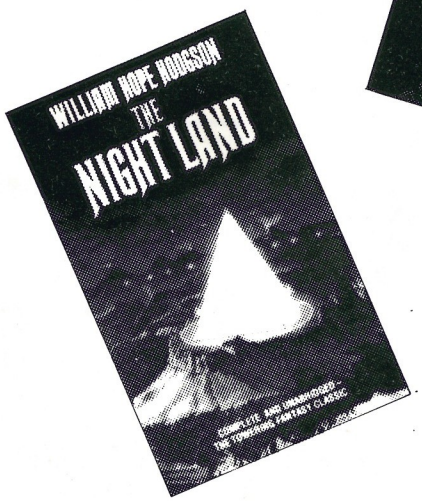

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