

# interzone/59

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

MAY  
1992

**New stories by**  
**Eric Brown**  
**Diane Mapes**  
**Kim Newman**  
**Barrington Bayley**

**Dan Simmons**  
**interviewed**



# THE SPRING GALAXY FROM



## HEADLINE

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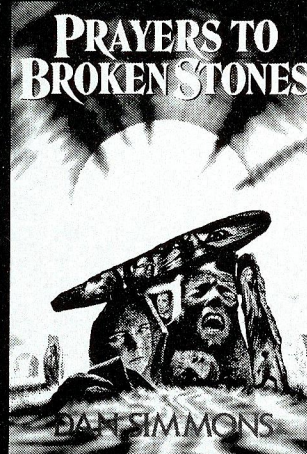
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The Unlimited Dream Company

**Address:** 217 Preston Drive,  
Brighton BN1 6FL, United  
Kingdom. All subscriptions,  
back-issue orders, general  
correspondence, books for review,  
and enquiries about advertising  
should be sent to this address.

**Subscriptions:** £26 for one year (12  
issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal  
orders should be crossed and made  
payable to *Interzone*. Overseas  
subscriptions are £32, payable by  
International Money Order. Pay-  
ments may also be made by Access  
or Visa card (also MasterCard or  
Eurocard): please send your card-  
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rate.) Alternatively, U.S. subscribers  
may pay by dollar check – \$52 by  
Air Saver (accelerated surface  
mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £260  
(UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S.  
accelerated surface).

**Back-issues** are available at £2.50  
each in the UK (£2.80 each over-  
seas), postage included. (US dollar  
price: \$5 surface mail.) All issues  
are still in print except numbers 1,  
5, 7, 17, 21 and 22. Order them from  
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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 59

May 1992

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**Cover by Kevin Cullen for "Epsilon Dreams"**

Published monthly.

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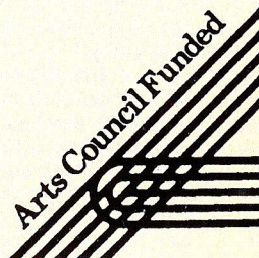
ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

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

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,  
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN  
(tel. 081 896 4854)

U.S. and Canadian distribution through Worldwide  
Magazine Distributors Ltd., Unit 14 – 225 Bysham  
Park Drive, Woodstock, Ontario N4T 1P1,  
Canada (tel. 519 539 0200) – both trade  
and individual queries welcomed.



# Interface

## David Pringle

In the January *Interzone*, we asked readers to write in and vote for their favourite stories, articles and artwork of 1991. The response was slightly better than last year – we received 84 ballots by the 1st February deadline, as compared to 69 the previous time. Here are some partial results of that popularity poll: we're bringing you the *Interzone* story results only in this issue. Because of the labour of compilation, and the space they take up, the vote-counts for illustrations, non-fiction, etc., will have to wait until next issue.

As usual, we have subtracted all negative mentions from all positive ones to arrive at the final score for each item. There was a field of 62 stories last year (larger than ever before), and what follows is a listing of the top 50 – to save space, and to spare the blushes of those authors who came at the bottom of the heap, we're making that number the cut-off point this time around:

### 1992 *Interzone* Story Poll Results

1)	Greg Egan: The Infinite Assassin	36
2)	Molly Brown: Bad Timing	33
3)	Ian R. MacLeod: The Family Football	30
4=)	Geoffrey A. Landis: Paradigms of Change	27
4=)	Paul J. McAuley: Crossroads	27
6=)	Robert Holdstock: The Bone Forest	26
6=)	Ian Lee: Pigs, Mostly	26
8)	Greg Egan: Blood Sisters	25
9=)	Greg Egan: Appropriate Love	23
9=)	Nicola Griffith: Song of Bullfrogs, Cry of Geese	23
11)	Kim Stanley Robinson: A Sensitive Dependence...	22
12)	Stephen Baxter: George and the Comet	21
13)	John Christopher: A Journey South	20
14=)	Mary Gentle: The Road to Jerusalem	19
14=)	Ben Jeapes: Memoirs of a Publisher	19
16=)	Eric Brown: Piloting	18
16=)	Nicola Griffith: Wearing My Skin	18
16=)	Wil McCarthy: Amerikano Hiaika	18
19=)	Neil Jones: Hands	17
19=)	Geoffrey A. Landis: Jamais Vu	17
21=)	Francis Amery: Self-Sacrifice	16
21=)	Christopher Evans: Transmutations	16
23=)	Martha A. Hood: Dust to Dust to...	13
23=)	Ian Lee: The Analogical Imago	13
23=)	Paul J. McAuley: Gene Wars	13
23=)	Alastair Reynolds: Enola	13
23=)	Lawrence Watt-Evans: Targets	13
28)	Glenn Grant: Storm Surge	12
29)	Chris Beckett: La Macchina	11
30=)	Chris Beckett: Long Journey of Frozen Heart	10

30=)	Eric Brown: The Nilakantha Scream	10
30=)	Paul M. Grunwell: Relocation	10
30=)	David Langford: Encounter of Another Kind	10
30=)	David Langford: A Snapshot Album	10
30=)	Diane Mapes: Shallow Grave	10
30=)	Frederik Pohl: The Matter of Beaupré	10
30=)	Brian Stableford: The Man Who Invented Good Taste	10
38=)	Eric Brown: Elegy Perpetuum	8
38=)	Sharon M. Hall: The Birth of Sons	8
38=)	Lois Tilton: The Cry of a Seagull	8
41=)	Stephen Baxter: Traces	7
41=)	David Brin: What Continues, What Fails	7
41=)	John Gribbin: Something to Beef About	7
41=)	Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne: In the Air	7
41=)	Don Webb: The End of the World	7
46)	Don Webb: Reach Out	6
47)	Garry Kilworth: Hamelin, Nebraska	5
48=)	Alethea Amsden: Fugitives from the Watch Ward	4
48=)	Gregory Feeley: The Boulevard of Broken Domes	4
50)	Alan Heaven: The Hauler-In Susie M.	3

### Congratulations and Commiserations

Our warmest congratulations to **Greg Egan** on topping *Interzone's* popularity poll for the second year running: he did remarkably well when you consider that all three of his stories placed in the top ten out of a field of 62. New writer **Molly Brown** also did very well indeed, as did **Ian R. McLeod**, **Geoffrey A. Landis**, **Paul McAuley**, **Robert Holdstock**, **Ian Lee**, **Nicola Griffith** and all the others high up on the list.

The biggest disappointment for us was the fact that **Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne's** two "USSA" stories – "In the Air" and "Ten Days That Shook the World" – attracted a large number of negative votes as well as positive ones. Other stories which proved similarly controversial, and placed below number 50 on the list, were **Elizabeth Hand's** "The Bacchae" and **Stephen Baxter's** "The Baryonic Lords." All these stories had their supporters: it's just that the negative votes weighed them down.

If we had counted positive votes only, ignoring votes cast against particular works, the top ten would have remained virtually unchanged (as would the positions of most other stories on the list) but "In the Air"

would have ranked 14th, "Ten Days..." would have been 34th, "The Baryonic Lords" would have come 37th, and "The Bacchae" 40th.

It's also interesting for us to see how the *Aboriginal SF* stories fared – that is, the contents of *Interzone* 47, which were selected by our transatlantic friend **Charles A. Ryan**, not by us. Of the six stories in his issue, the best-liked was **Wil McCarthy's** "Amerikano Hiaika" in equal-16th place (which didn't surprise us: we thought it was the best too), followed by **Lawrence Watt-Evans's** "Targets" (23rd), **Frederik Pohl's** "The Matter of Beaupré" (30th) and **Lois Tilton's** "The Cry of a Seagull" (38th). The remaining two stories, by **Harlan Ellison** and by **Alan Clarkson & Gary Mitchell**, proved unpopular.

### Coming Attractions

And what do we have coming up in the next couple of issues? Why, new stories by *Interzone* chart-toppers **Greg Egan**, **Molly Brown**, **Geoffrey A. Landis** and **Ian Lee** – among other good things, of course, including tales by several brand-new writers who stand every chance of becoming some of the poll favourites of tomorrow.

Keep reading these pages.

(David Pringle)

## Angela Carter (1940-1992)

We were very saddened to hear the news of Angela Carter's recent death, at the age of 51. She was one of Britain's most wayward and imaginative writers – and one of its greatest. She leaves a void behind her.

Angela contributed two stories to this magazine in its early days, and remained a subscriber for years afterwards. We had hoped she might be one of the contributors to our tenth anniversary issue, last month, but it was already too late.

(DP)

# Interaction

Dear Editors:

Are we writing the wrong sf stories? Are you publishing the wrong stories? This occurs to me lately because the stories I read no longer seem to deal with the new and the different, as sf stories once did. In fact today's sf doesn't deal with today, let alone tomorrow.

In today's real world, for example, two Soviet cosmonauts are glumly patching up their disintegrating space station and wondering if ground control still has enough spare cash or spare parts to bring them down. (Krikalev's tour of duty has already been extended by several months as a cost-cutting exercise.) Were any of yesterday's sf stories set in a world where the space programme would simply wind down through penny-pinching? Yes, a Jack C. Haldeman II yarn in a 1978 *Amazing*, with memorable details such as reporting to Mission Control during office hours only, and a punch line about selecting an astronaut from a district of heavy air pollution – by choosing a guy accustomed to breathing an alien atmosphere they could save on the cost of a spacesuit... So there we had a story about a situation which could only be part of the present or the future. Does this sort of thing appear in modern sf? Not much. Most *Interzone* stories, in fact, look firmly backwards.

Let's look at the contents of a recent issue (number 56) which I know and love, and you'll see what I mean.

"The Coming of Vertumnus": gosh, a Secret Conspiracy by an Evil Genius centred on Habsburg court art. Twenties thriller writers didn't have CD players or Green politics, but they had everything else in this story. (I am not here concerned with the *quality* of the text but its *content*.)

"A Guide to Virtual Death": tasteless commercial exploitation is today's world all right, but the story is only one page long.

"Not of This World": a trouble-with-water story which would have fitted beautifully into *Weird Tales*, 1934.

"The Big Yellow Car": a nostalgic memoir which admits in paragraph 3 that it is no more modern than *The Wizard of Oz*.

"The Circle of Stones": distanced by being set off-planet in a Standard SF Jungle, but it describes knowledge being lost in an disintegrating society, so score a point here.

"Destroy All Brains!": More nostalgia for old-movie buffs. Need I say more?

"The Blackness": a frozen-north fantasy so removed from modern civilization that it could have been set a century or more ago without changing a

word.

So out of all seven stories in *IZ* 56, only the Ballard and Beckett look in any way forward, and most of the wodge looks most definitely backwards. Why? We know that tomorrow will be different, and in fact we know that today is already different.

Consider the extremities of civilization: take Zaire, where over much of the country only the last two riverboats are holding modern commerce together, and when they fall apart it'll be back to subsistence agriculture for their passengers. Or consider north-east Brazil, where the trend for succeeding generations to grow taller and healthier has been reversed, with a sizeable rural population becoming smaller and lighter from natural selection via malnutrition. Even consider England, which has had an industrial economy longer than anywhere else in the world. In gaps in this economy such as you find in Stroud or Totnes, people are turning away from cash to barter their services for bicycle repairs or whatever on agreed local scales... ever seen a cheque written in acorns in the home of the pound sterling? As for me, I haven't gone that far, but I do tend to buy an old paperback for 30p in a boot sale rather than spend £4.99 on a new one.

The point I'm trying to make is that the world is indeed already different, even before nanotech or buckyball carbon spreading out into our lives, but our sf stories aren't reflecting this. *Interzone* stories may be well written, but the greatest bulk of them reflect the past. I want to see them reflecting a Zaire without riverboats, a Brazil with stunted dwarves, an England where people trade cooking-pots for roof-mending, or anything which is simply different from yesterday.

Why is *IZ* full of traditional mental landscapes, traditional protagonists swallowed by traditional horrors? In an infinity of possible universes, where are the possibilities?

Now I suppose coming issues will be full of zippy futuristic satires just to prove me wrong. But when I wrote in an earlier letter that we needed amiable nonsense like the "Flithiss" story, I think my main complaint was really that the subject-matter was becoming too familiar.

And now that really is the last of my pleas for change this year. I'll let you move on from the tenth anniversary in peace. What was your readers' favourite story from those ten years? My vote is still for Paul McAuley's "King of the Hill."

**David Redd**

*Haverfordwest, Wales*

*Editor: In case some readers don't get the joke, I should point out that Mr Redd is the author of one of the stories he criticizes, "The Blackness." We dis-*

*agree with his thumbnail description of the Watson story – surely "The Coming of Vertumnus" was in part about reality-bending drugs?*

Dear Editors:

Issue 56, superb. The cover was excellent, one of the best you've used since my subscription began. The story which goes with that great cover is funny, well told and at the end deeply strange. Watson's stories of the everyday drifting toward the psychologically twisted, chemically aided or not, are always first-rate.

Also right up there was J.G. Ballard with his "Guide to Virtual Death." Great social satire and not too dissimilar from some stations' schedules.

In similar vein is "Destroy All Brains!" A nice idea: a film which is all things to all people, and melts their brains. One feels that Paul Di Filippo may have watched one too many episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Diane Mapes' "The Big Yellow Car" was for me a hybrid of Ray Bradbury macabre and Laurie Lee reminiscence. The flavour of childhood fantasy is perfectly captured. Their amoral cruelty is disturbing, but children do think like this and not many can really remember. I liked this story immensely.

David Redd's "The Blackness" was yet another wonderfully dark story. There is doubt right up to the last word as to whether the blackness is real or only a hallucination induced by extreme isolation. In the end of course we realize it really doesn't matter; the transformation of Marianne is real.

The interview with Lawrence Sutin was very interesting, and the film, TV and book reviews were excellent, as always.

I became a lifetime subscriber on the strength of the first issue of *IZ* that I saw (issue 45) and I have never once regretted it. Keep up the good work.

**Philip B. Lee**

*Derby*

Dear Editors:

The inclusion of writer bibliographies in *Interzone* strikes me as a worthwhile departure; starting with Cherryh, my favourite author, certainly didn't do any harm either (*IZ* 55). However, I noticed several errors in the text and felt that I should offer corrections. In some cases, the dates quoted differ from those specified on my editions, but I'll assume that Neil Jones had access to more authoritative source material than I do. The major problem I noticed lies with the entry for the limited-edition collection *Glass and Amber*: two stories are missing from the listing and there are only five articles, rather than six. The full listing, with annotations, is as follows:

Continued on page 28



**T**he whale-shape emerged like a New Titan Missile from its silo. First the great bearded head broke through the unrippling pseudo-grass. Then neck, dress tie, two perfect black diamonds against the hot white of the wing collar. Then shoulders, twin submarines coming to the surface. The vast but insubstantial bulk shimmered as it grew. Roy could no longer see the stands through the tridvid image. The holobody towered like the genie in *The Butcher of Bagdad*, bestriding the Docklands Super-Arena. A starfish hand went to the swelling starch of the giant shirtfront as the tenor drew a silent breath, then sound cut in. The illusion was imperfect: the bell-clear voice seemed to come from the air rather than the gaping dark of the holohead's mouth, as if a cloud of invisible spirits were singing "You'll Never Walk Alone" in Italian.

An electronically-clocked 200,000 card-carrying fans stood, awed. The song was an atmospheric condition, all-around inescapable. He remembered when they would sing. Derek Leech's tampering with rules and camera angles was cosmetic: the real change was

in the crowd. When Roy had been on the pitch, "the shining knight of the Jubilee Season," the crowd had been a tidal wave: roaring and fickle. Now, they were the happy families on the posters: quiet, cheerful and biddable. They sat on their plastic bum-shaped seats and watched: no cheers, no rude words to familiar tunes, no scuffles. It was eerily as if the stadium were empty. 200,000 in-person people were gravy, a small-change irrelevance. The real money, the real spectators, were camera eyes: on the stands, on the lines, on the shoulders of the In-Close Men. Thanks to Cloud 9 TV, 200 million sets of paying eyes were out there in Television Land, focused on the World Series Cup Final.

Roy could have watched from the VIP drome, with wet bar and celebrity guests (and Grianne), but he chose to be in the dug-out with Bev and the lads. It didn't smell of sweat and earth like the old one at Wembley – he didn't even know if there was dirt beneath the textured dayglo green – but it made him feel near the game. Commentators labelled him eccentric, Luddite. Since he'd taken over as manager, he'd



Illustrations by Martin McKenna

brought back the old strip, ditching cyber-warrior uniforms in favour of the gear he'd worn twenty years earlier when he'd captained the team to the Double. Boots, socks, shorts, shirts.

He'd even tried, without success, to get Blanch, the In-Close Man, off the squad, alleging the extra man, loyal to C9 not the Rovers, got in the way of play. The ICM wasn't with them for the warm-up. Blanch was with the C9 crew who strapped him into his suit like a NASA naut, settling the steadicam, with its \$10,000 of gyros and balances, on his shoulders. To last the expected hour of play, Blanch needed electro-assist knee- and hip-exojoints. The technicians claimed that if the ICM blacked out they could use body-remotes to keep him standing, running and broadcasting. Even if Blanch broke his neck, he'd still give out pictures. Roy had expected a genetically-engineered zombie, but Mark Blanch was actually a decent kid. If he weren't hunchbacked by high-tech, he might even have enjoyed a game of football.

The song ended and the tenor shivered into a billion light fragments. A double-dozen girls-boys in spandex

tube-tops and cheek-baring string panties cart-wheeled onto the field. Their extended routine of acrobatic leaps and pelvic thrusts was choreographed by Michael Clark to Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Cup Final Overture." It was symbolic. The cheerleading was a safe-sex orgy, performed with impeccable energy but little actual enthusiasm. No matter how explicit the action, the dancing was corny enough to get past the Family Viewing Observance Society.

Roy felt mildly depressed and anxious, not at all elated. He couldn't even remember how it had been in '77, before the Cup Final or the match that clinched the League. Too many drinks since then. The bookies had Queens Park Rovers at 5 to 1 against, and all the pollsters and comment crews went along with them. For the last few months, the team had been giant-killers, but now the breeze was over, and it was time for the giants to strike back, putting poor old Rovers back in their place with a humiliating defeat. The best even die-hard Rovers fans could hope for was a low points spread against. Still, he'd told the lads to give the Pythons a bit of a game.

**T**he 1998 World Series was the final evolutionary stage of Association Football. Like every-*thing*, the game had to change to suit changing times. Leech was almost single-handedly responsible for the successful adaptation of soccer to the new media world he, and others like him, had carved out.

Gordon Brough, sports editor of the *Comet*, stood up as his boss made an entrance into the VIP drome of the Super-Arena, escorting a small blonde woman with smile lines around her eyes and mouth. Leech wore white, the Prime Minister was in green. Even the remaining rival tabloids didn't dare print rumours about Derek Leech and Morag Duff, and Gordon thought he might be scourged for even thinking the Preem's colour was up, a slight flush visible above the low neckline of her evening gown. It was rumoured that Leech employees underwent a course of post-hypnotic suggestion during their annual check-up and were conditioned against thinking impure, uncharitable or heretical thoughts about their lord and master.

The cheerleader squad were still pretending to screw each other in mid-air out on the floodlit pitch, so the gathered VIPs could turn their attention to the host and his star guest. Ranting Ray Butler, briefly off his commentator's hot-spot, crushed a beer can on his close-cropped head, and made a friendly burp at the Preem, who indulgently smiled and ignored him. Arabella Swinton, Butler's co-host for C9's World Series coverage, gushed and tried to curtsy, yard-long legs scissoring. She wore a black net dress about the length of a vest, well-known nipples just concealed behind the weave. A year ago, she'd been a weatherbimbo on the Cornflakes Show, but her giggle caught the viewers' fancy; now, without ever having watched a football match all the way through, she was partnering Butler, someone to look at and lech after while Ranting Ray scratched the beergut that bulged the waistband of his old-fashioned acid shorts and shouted about wankers and wobblies.

Leech introduced Gordon to the Preem, and she chirruped pleasantly at him in a shrill Scots accent. Her *Spitting Image* puppet was a floppy-eared poodle with a bow in its hair, fondly known as Morag Woof. Since *Spitting Image* became a C9 show, it had been kinder to her than before. Then, the Preem was moved on to someone more important – Bernadette from *EastEnders* – and her smile grew to a photo-opportunity crescent. The Irish actress, who might be expected to take more interest in the match than most soapstars, was twinkle-eyed drunk, and only too willing to flash her Number Two expression, usually reserved for the gushy scenes, at the flashless snap-cameras of the journos. She and the Preem looked as if they were having a gossip about the soap character's famously useless missing boyfriend.

A seat was found for Miss Duff, and a drink. Gordon was a few rows behind, after the popstars and soapstars and businessheads. The VIP drome had a decent rake, so his view of the pitch wasn't bad, although the large head of the Minister of Trade and Industry was in the way. It would be easier anyway to watch the match on the three wall-screens rather than through the panoramic window. Gordon could no longer imagine football without ICM in-the-thick-of-it action footage. It was hard even to remember when

the game had been as remote as sheep in a field seen from an aeroplane, used as everyone was to close-ups of bloody faces, amplified swearing, and p-o-v shots from the goal area. It was also hard to conceive of a match without giggling or ranting, which was as much Gordon's contribution as Leech's.

Realizing just how much was lost from the media profile of the game with the extinction of football hooliganism, Gordon had found Ray Butler, *quondam* editor of *Britannia Rules* fanzine, and boosted him as the voice of the skinhead-in-the-stands. As crowds cooled down, the game itself heated up, and the comment shows had needed to reflect that. If Simon Hodge – the brown ale-drinking human tank they called "Splodge" – represented the turn-of-the-century player, then Ranting Ray, screaming "you're gonna get ya fakkin head kicked in" at a vicar, was the voice the game needed to take it into the next millennium.

Ray was back in his TV box now, partnered with the grumbling purist Barney Oldcarp – there to represent the football traditionalists, and to get red-faced with apoplexy at the disgusting spectacle – and Arabella was warming up to giggle from remote positions around the field. A soapstar handed a cigarette case to a popstar, who swallowed one of the little purple pills it contained and passed it on to the businesshead on her left. The Preem looked the other way as Leech explained something to her.

**T**he *Comet* had been a Tory paper until '93 and the appearance from nowhere of Morag Duff, so non-threateningly cuddly and middle-or-slightly-right-of-the-road that she made Neil Kinnock look like Mao Tse-Tung. With the Soviet Union replaced by something resembling the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Miss Duff seemed more like a continuation of Thatcher than One Minute Major had done. The United Kingdom had got used to nanny-knows-best government. Shortly after her assumption of power and position, the Preem had gone into one of Derek Leech's sealed rooms for a conference, for all the world as if she were the supplicant and he the head of state. After that, the *Comet* and C9 had come around to support her, and treaties had been struck, apportioning additional satellite channels to Leech Enterprises, allowing it to blossom into a potential monopoly on the Pan-European electronic media. The word "socialist" had not been used in public by Morag Duff during the entire span of her leadership.

On the screens, Ranting Ray and Boring Barney were reviewing Splodge's recent record. Aggravated assault charges brought by the Third Lanark goalie had been settled out of court, but Nigel Matheson, right wing for Stansted Bombers, was still alleging Splodge had broken his arm during an illegal action in the Fifth Round. Litigation was postponed until after the final. Splodge's cover of Elton John's "Saturday Night's Alright (for Fighting)" was riding high in the C9 PTV charts, and Ray played snippets of it to annoy Barney Oldcarp, a die-hard who liked to point out that three years ago everything Splodge did on the pitch would earn him an early shower not a hit record. The veins in Barney's neck were scarlet lines creeping around his chin, and his whole face shone with a high-definition glow of righteous frustration.



A significant but small portion of the football audience agreed with Barney and his presence kept them watching even as they disapproved. It had even been suggested, in the non-Leech press, that Barney didn't mind either way about the state of football but got so worked up because he was pulling down an enormous salary as Ranting Ray and Giggling Arabella.

The first thing Leech had done to soccer was wipe the slate of the Super-League and start again. Most of the old clubs were in deep recession holes and open to a Leech Enterprises buy-out. The strongest survived and other sides formed according to advertising demographics. The UK was still the locus but it had been prudent to include Pan-Europe and the USA in the World Series to increase revenue. Once 90% of the teams in the UK had been relegated to the amateur local entertainment status they'd always deserved, Leech had reorganized the whole game to suit C9.

Looking at a video of the 1977 cup final, when Roy Robartes had been centre forward for Rovers, was like seeing some weird mutation of Australian Rules or American Football. It was impossible not to FF through the dull midfield action now eliminated by shrinking the pitch and cutting down teams to nine players, plus ICM. Ninety minutes of playing time seemed to stretch on forever: now, matches were three twenty-minute halves, with two commercial breaks. Goals were a yard wider, with individual cash prizes for scoring players. Uniform regulations had been abolished. Piffling rules about offside and body contact eased up. Referees were professional. Gambling was a systemized part of the television coverage, with direct access numbers flashed across the screen.

In the last two years, British football had made more money than in the previous fifty. The ratings for the World Series so far had been almost level with *East-Enders*, and the final was forecasted to outdraw even the most popular soaps by 20%.

Gordon called over a waiter and got a refill of Bushmill's, wondering why he was so keen for the whole thing to be over so he could get to the party afterwards. He could hardly remember the name of the team scheduled to hammer Rovers into the pseudo-grass, let alone bother to care about the score. The screens went black as the main camera swung to the players' tunnel.

“**D**id you bring your slingshot?” Bev asked as the Detroit Pythons lumbered onto the field in calculated slow motion. Their theme music – “Entrance of the Knights” from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* – boomed out in Danny Elfman's arrangement.

Roy knew then that he should have stayed home and watched the game on his wallscreen.

At the head of the Pythons, Simon Hodge strode like a colossus. Huge enough to suggest special effects, Splodge was armoured with the Pythons' strip, chain-mail layered over his massive chest, face-shielding helmet bulbous like the head of an alien being. Roy had heard Splodge's next record would be a remix of Tennessee Ernie Ford's “Sixteen Tons,” and he seemed to concentrate every ounce of it into his man-shape, a collapsed star hugging mass to its shrunken heart.

The Pythons didn't jog, they slouched. But Roy

knew they were capable of incredible speed, amazing skill, unbelievable violence. If there were still such a thing as injury time, most Pythons matches would displace the rest of the evening's television schedule.

Splodge separated from the pack, and crossed to the centre of the pitch. His footfalls must have been amplified, for they sounded like sledge-hammer-blows.

Bev tried to make a funny comment, but it was no good. Roy knew the lads would feel as he did, as if each footfall was a blow to the stomach. He became aware of his jaw dropping.

At the centre of the pitch, Splodge raised his arms over his head. A broken-toothed mouth opened beneath his visor, and a yell exploded from his helmet, filling the Super Arena. It was a fi-fi-fo-fum declaration, a Viking berserker battle cry, a prayer to the dark gods of football.

Roy breathed profanity.

Then, hesitantly, without a signal, the lads filtered out onto the field, picking up speed, jogging to their positions. The Splodge yell was still dying as Roy shouted out good luck.

**R**oy's World Series run had started where the rest of his ventures ended, in an iron-framed cot.

When, at the peak of his career, a knee injury put him out of the game, he sank his savings into boutiques. Just as Punk gave way to New Romantic, a still-limping Roy was investing the best part of a million pounds in flared silver spangle trousers, muslin shirts with floppy sleeves and shoulder-wide collars, roadsign-shaped paisley ties, space-boots with seven-inch platform heels and rainbow-knit synthetic fibre tank-tops. He wore his hair like Rod Stewart and married Gianne, the Irish chanteuse who'd once scored “*nul points*” on the Eurovision Song Contest. He'd been too busy putting 'em in the back of the net and swigging champagne out of trophies to notice things had changed since *Jason King* went off television. He'd been tipsy, overextended and “over the moon” when Thatcher succeeded Callaghan in '79; but he was drunk, broke and “sick as a parrot” when the fleet left for the Falklands in '82. Gianne left him for Tarquin Crumple, a bearded quizmaster to whose Buttons she'd played Cinderella at the Bristol Hippodrome in the '81 panto season. Roy learned of his wife's desertion in a pub, when he happened to notice a front-page story in the *Daily Comet*, the tabloid acorn from which Derek Leech's media yggdrasil was growing.

The receivers took over Chic 'Tiques, and Roy scabbled around for a sponsorship deal, becoming front man for a German cosmetics company, Herr Hair. He starred in a series of ads, rubbing Mighty Mousse into his scalp in a changing room then cheekily tarting up his chest hair. One morning, a swatch of hair came out in the brush, making a triangle-shaped bald spot that extended his forehead to the apex of his skull. It turned out to be a reaction to Herr Hair products. His chest burned blotchy for years, and his lawyers never made a case against the company. He hadn't paid for the cases of Mighty Mousse in his basement. And Herr Hair noticed loopholes in his on-pack instructions, warning against excessive use.

Satellite TV started to take off and Grianne's boyfriend became host of *I Bet You Feel a Right One*, the highest-rated show on the C9 Light Channel. Tarquin promptly bedded Stuka, the jaw-heavy girl in the topless swimsuit who was forever turning up in innocent people's baths, workplaces and fridges. A stone too heavy to tour Nancy in *Oliver!*, Grianne moved back into their heavily-mortgaged home in Esher. Throughout the '80s, they appeared regularly in the *Comet*: having screaming matches with Oliver Reed in nightclubs, pluckily getting into shrinking tracksuits to raise funds. At one point, before taking out family membership in Alcoholics' Anonymous, he was heating Mighty Mousse and draining off the liquid for its 0.5 alcohol content. At another, he and Grianne tag-mud-wrestled Jimmy Saville and Anneka Rice for homeless children.

After his mostly successful drying-out, he was approached by Sidcup Startlers, a struggling Third Division team, and asked to become manager. On *The Last Resort*, he told Jonathan Ross his knee was fixed and that he planned to select himself as a useful mid-field player. First time out, he managed a draw, and a few of the pundits who turned up to see the legend in action were mildly kind. In the *Comet*, though, Ray Butler, "the angry man of football," devoted his hundred-word leader to Eskimo OAPs and ice floes. Next Sidcup lost five-one. Roy celebrated by punching a *Comet* photographer and tripping over a cocktail waitress, wrenching his trick knee forever. Then came the formation of the first of the short-lived Super-Leagues: the fifteen most successful clubs locked into profitable television contracts, 80% of the rest plunged into a Dark Age of financial disaster and pathetic obscurity. In three years, Roy led Sidcup down to the Southern League and bankruptcy. "One good thing," said someone on *The Mary Whitehouse Experience*, "at least Salman Rushdie can do with the company."

By then, there was a Labour government, and Kinnock had resigned in favour of Morag Duff, the first single woman – "spinster" some said – to hold the office of Prime Minister. Association Football was practically a wholly-owned subsidiary of Derek Leech Enterprises, struggling through its metamorphosis into the primary televised sport of the turn of the century. When Sidcup went down for the last time, Roy checked into a clinic for an urgent rehabilitation. Strapped into a bed and biting back his own puke, head in a fixed position so he was forced to watch C9, Roy struggled with the worst his nightmares could throw at him. During the *Animal Fun Hour*, a popular late-night "adult" novelty show, he touched bottom, scraping the base of existential despair. When he got free, he vowed to kill himself.

"We'll beat Leech," Bev told Roy, over and over. "We'll change the story-line, we'll rewrite the headlines."

Now, with the £50,000-a-year referee raising his saxophone-sized whistle, Roy was unconvinced.

For the last few months, as Rovers won matches, at first scappily and then with confidence, Roy had been soaring. He hadn't thought about drink until this moment.

Now, as the shrill tone sounded out through the

Super-Arena, he wanted a treble scotch, and then another, and another, and...

**O**n *Shower Talk* – a C9 chat show where the guests wore towels and sat in a steamroom surrounded by beefy and bruised ornamental naked men – Jimmy Greaves did a moving piece on Roy's courageous struggle with the bottle, and offered to forward any messages of support to the clinic. Ray Butler, promoted to the post of C9's sport pundit, chipped in with his own fist-waving salute to Roy Robartes, although he wound up with his customary rant of 'Rovers was a crap team, and Robartes was a crap player." Every morning, an orderly came to read aloud the letters that arrived. There were always well-wishers, but he knew – from the awkward pause between a letter being torn open and the hurried precis of a formulaic message of cheer – there were many grudge-holding Sidcup fans out there too. Perhaps one of them would do the job for him, slipping out of a crowd with a breadknife or a nailgun.

Meanwhile Grianne shed excess poundage and won the role of Bernadette, the single Mum who sacrifices all for her slut of a daughter Corinne, on *East-Enders*. The soap made a successful return to the ratings, transferring from the ailing BBC – over 32% of television households had disconnected the terrestrial channels – to C9's Drama Stream, where it sat between *Coronation Street* and *Neighbours* in the early evenings. Leech's ownership of all three series allowed for popular storyline cross-overs. When Corinne ran off to Australia with Jack Duckworth, Bernadette was able to bribe a struggling ex-character from *The Bill* – cancelled after the controversial Clapham Crack War episodes – to turn private eye and track her down to Ramsay Street. After a personal meeting, and subsequent photo-session, with Derek Leech, Grianne sued Roy for divorce and moved in with a 21-year-old model best known for a swimming-trunks advert. She told the *Comet* about her orgasm secrets and fronted a best-selling diet video.

From his bed, as food was pumped into him, Roy followed the soap and cringed whenever Bernadette railed about the swine who'd fathered Corinne. They'd never had children but he knew Grianne was thinking of him when she read her lines. Useless Brendan, who never appeared, was the most hated man on television. Terry Wogan always made a "Useless Brendan" joke during his two-hour-long chat-and-news show on C9's Heavy Channel. At Prime Minister's Question Time, Morag Duff called the Leader of the Opposition "a right Useless Brendan" and the chamber gave her a standing ovation. All the time, Roy thought of ways to kill himself. The rope seemed best. He had some at home and the light fittings in the hallway should be strong enough to support him. He could fix the noose to the chandelier and jump off the first-floor landing.

Then, despite the high security, Bev Ellis got through to see him, and he started the climb back up. She had written to him first, then started to visit. She volunteered to help with his physiotherapy. For the first time in years, Roy felt free from pain.

He didn't know how she'd done it, but Bev had got him his Series Run. Rovers had gone through seven managers in three seasons, the latest resigning after

the *Comet* alleged he took an unhealthy interest in the career and person of a twelve-year-old glamour model. At some point, Bev had made her petition not to the Board of Directors but, cannily, to Derek Leech. As in everything, Leech was concerned not with whether it was a good idea but whether it would make good copy. Pitching a project to him, Roy knew, was like suggesting a plot development to the script editor of a soap. When Leech decided to run with the Return of Roy Robartes, the story was set in stone.

"Giggle-gurgle-giggle," went Arabella Swinton into the camera, "play has, um, started. That big bloke has, um, hit someone, and given him a nasty knock. Someone did that to my car last week. They never caught the git, though. The dent cost £750 to have beaten out. Criminal, um. Oh, there's the ball. Someone's kicked it awfully hard. Lot of stitching in a ball, you know. Teeny-tiny-teetsy stitches. That man was supposed to stop it doing that, wasn't he? Um, yes. I think that's a goal. Someone has scored a goal. I'm sure we'll have, um, more on that in a bit. One side has one goal, and the others don't have anything. I bet they're a tad upset about that."

**O**ne-nil down after ten minutes. Trav Billings, Rovers' centre forward, felt the disadvantage in his gut like an undigested stone. It had been a typical Splodge goal, the Pythons hammering the defence out of the way with bodyblows then escorting the ball under armed guard, Splodge lazily booting it into the net while two rhino-plated goons pinned the Rovers' goalie, Jack Dorothy, down.

Trav, twenty years old, swore his parents named him after the De Niro character in *Taxi Driver*, but the *Comet* had revealed last week that his first name was not Travis but Travolta. His Mum had been obsessed with the old actor in *Look Who's Talking?* Two days ago, during a practice, the loudspeakers had started pouring out the soundtrack albums of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*, with new lyrics dubbed over the old songs. "You Can Tell By the Way I Walk That I'm a Total Spaz," "Hopelessly Demoted to Spew," "Right Feeble, Right Feeble, Right Feeble, Right Fee-bull," "You're a Bit of a Cunt, Ooo-Oo-Oo." It had been impossible not to recognize the wind-up tactics, and indeed the voice, of Simon Hodge.

Splodge would pick on one man in any team the Pythons were set to play, and mount a campaign of harassment and humiliation, issuing public taunts about their personal habits, sexual persuasions, physical appearance and genetic heritage. He usually picked the player most likely to be a threat, so Trav guessed the treatment was a compliment. It was still a pain. Splodge claimed Trav was so ape-ugly that when he cried, the tears would run over his forehead and down the back of his head just to avoid his face. When he said ape-ugly, Splodge meant black.

With an early lead, the Pythons opted to stand around and show off, letting Rovers wear themselves out running around. In the old days, these tactics might have made for a boring game, but the Pythons were showmen, and enjoyed throwing in a few borderline illegal moves, making slapstick out of foul play. Evans and Cardille were already limping, and Jobson had a cut above his eye that was dribbling



blood down his face, with both the ICMs jostling around him for the best view of the wound.

Evans, who was being ignored since Splodge had oops-excuse-me rammed him, intercepted a lacklustre Python pass and began dribbling the ball down the field. Trav could sense the move coming and picked up speed. This was the kind of break-out point he had been trained for.

Roy had told the lads to concentrate on the old-fashioned skills. They were the point of the game and also showed up the Pythons' weaknesses. Since Roy had come to the club, there'd been an emphasis on what he called "proper football."

A Python got in Evans' way, arms outstretched a yard either side of his tubby kevlar-swathed body. Evans, pain in his face, lurched to one side, momentarily losing the ball, but regaining it with a deft flick of his boot. Blanch, the Rovers ICM, was running backwards in front of Evans, trying to keep him in focus.

Trav looked up at the giant screens, and saw how much agony Evans was going through as he ran. Behind him, blobbily out of focus, were three advancing juggernauts. The suits slowed them down, but when they caught up, there would be serious GBH. Some things legal on a football pitch would get you locked up back in the world.

Trav found himself alone in the Pythons' goal area, looking at the blank visor of Spring-Heel'd Jacnoth, their goalie. Lightlines flickered under the grey shield, suggesting some automated vision-augmentation input device. Trav turned to look back.

Evans couldn't keep going, but he wouldn't have to.

Trav was there for the pass. Roy had taken them through every possible situation so often that it was an instinctive move. Evans, his honour won, sacrificed the glory to a team-mate with a final burst of strength, kicking the ball into the air so it arced over Blanch and Gorgo Brzezinski, the Pythons' fullback, aimed straight for Trav's head.

He jumped into the air, and connected with the ball.

In Roy's day, Trav's header might have bounced off the sidebar back into play, but the posts had been moved since then. Even spring-heels couldn't get Jacnoth there to save.

The score was one-one.

Trav turned, a spurt of excitement dying in his heart as he saw Evans on the turf, a couple of Pythons piled on top of him, thumping and kicking, grinding him down with their bodyweight. He looked up to the screen, hoping for the instant replay. The whistle sounded, and the screen dissolved to a commercial break.

"Fakkin useless fakkin kants," Ray Butler ranted, "fakkin wankers fakkin scored. Useless, useless, useless."

**B**everly Robartes Ellis was born during the 1977 Cup Final. According to her Dad, she emerged just as Roy Robartes, the Shining Knight, slammed home the injury-time goal that drew Rovers level. And she first cried when he completed his hat trick in extra time, winning the FA Cup. Dad claimed she made a tiny fist and baby-talked "we are the champions." It had been the greatest day of Stan Ellis's life.

Her earliest memories were matches: tumultuous crowds all around, cheering in triumph as Rovers scored again. She swore she could remember Roy in action, although he played his last game for Rovers before she could crawl. Clearer were her memories of the Relegation Season, as a succession of formerly-humiliated foes trampled Rovers again and again. Without Roy, the heart went out of the team.

In the '80s, after Dad's stroke, Bev trudged every other Saturday to the home game and quietly watched the last tatters of Rovers' glory whip away in rain and wind. At thirteen, after a four-one loss, she was assaulted on the tube station nearest the ground, by two knot-headed youths wearing Rovers scarves. A listless scattering of downcast fans didn't intervene and she was forced to defend herself, disabling the pissheads with a thigh-driven blow to the knee and a coil-sprung knee into the groin.

She stopped going to matches, but turned up in Rovers kit for the first practice of her school team. Thanks to Bill Forsyth and Dee Hepburn, it was no longer unusual for girls to play football. Jamila Saunders, a fifth-former with a figure like the Incredible Hulk, was the regular goalie for North End Comprehensive. And Helena Geoffreys, whose legs figured prominently in the auto-erotic fancies of most of her team-mates, dominated the midfield until she dropped soccer to get into interpretive dance. However, the school's side was drawn from pupils three or four years older and, although she was a full foot taller than most kids her own age, she still wound up described as "stringy." She didn't get selected for the team then, but two years – and several mashed lips, open-to-the-bone knees and severe muscle strains – later, she found herself as first substitute, then as North End's centre half, then as a striker. Then, a school leaver, she had tried out for Rovers' Women.

All the clubs had all-girl shadows and, with the reorganization, the women players were theoretically available for any given match. Several times, the non-serious clubs – like Earnshaw's Northern, which existed solely to advertise beer – had fielded women, mainly to get attention in matches they were certain to lose. Goals were now less important than ad revenue and entertaining losers could rake in more than tedious winners, a lesson learned hard by several formerly-dominant sides. Bev, while she was a major force in the women's team, refused to be token girlie in the first side. Rovers was in terrible shape, barely treading the shark-filled waters outside the Ultra League, shut out of prime time, relegated to late-night slots on low-wattage cable channels. Every Sunday, especially after a defeat, Bev expected to learn that Rovers was this week's club to be sucked under and dissolved, assets stripped and spread, stadium redeveloped as an evangelist's open-air temple.

The Ultra League was sealed tight as a cat's arsehole, but the World Series had a chink. The top seven UL teams were automatically eligible, but the eighth spot was for an out side, a carrot for all the flounders, to keep the UL gladiators from turning complacent. Expulsion from the UL was like being kicked out of Eden, a fall into acid and acrimony from which no team ever recovered. If an out side could make even a decent Series run, it had a chance to slip into the UL. And UL sides were growing soft inside the glitz,

cocooned by wealth and predictable opponents, leaving them open to a hungry challenge. But Rovers still needed a boost to make it through the preliminaries. And Bev remembered the hero of her early childhood.

**T**he adverts lasted five minutes, barely enough to get the players off the field and sluice out their mouths with the Official Orange Juice Substitute of the World Series. Roy had Bev, a qualified first-aider, check on Evans, Cardille and Jobson. He told the lads where the Pythons were weak. And he told them what to watch for. Trav Billings nodded, shrugging off congrats. There was no elation, no over-confidence. That was good. The lads had learned.

When Roy, bleary but sober, turned up for the first practice, Rovers had been a shambles. A collection of adequate players, they hadn't been anything like a team. Having only just pulled himself into shape, Roy was merciless with them. Someone had renamed the Rovers Ground, putting up a notice which read "Gladiator Training School."

With Bev to give him advice, Roy channelled his energies into the team, cutting loose the deadwood, and bringing forward potential stars. Trav, who could be one of the greats, had been buried in the subs, but Roy brought him on. And the others rallied. At first, they fought him. Then, they fought the matches.

Now Roy would trust Rovers to invade Normandy, rob a Turkish Museum or stage a Broadway musical. There was already a drama-documentary in pre-production, although Roy assumed it would be cancelled if Rovers boringly lost the final. The show would only play if the last act worked out.

Standing to one side, a technician tinkering with his transmission, was Blanch. Roy saluted the In-Close Man. There was no point fighting the changes on a person-to-person level.

The whistle went off, and the lads piled back onto the pitch, hut-hut-hutting like marines.

"End thet, I think, shews the kind of football we've come tew expect from the Rovers under Roy Robartes," Barney Oldcarp droned through his nose, "with Johnno Jobson, pluckily returning tew the pitch efter a terrible enjry, delivering one of the textbook gewls of the game. Stenley Metthews would heve been proud tew see sech a display ev old-fashioned skill end dexterity, a vindication ev teamwork, training end thet extra touch of derring-do which makes a good player great. Whet do yew think, Raymonde?"

In the background, Ray Butler had his fingers down his throat.

"Tew-one, advantage the Rovers," smugged Barney.

**B**ev watched Roy watching the game. For the first time, she thought the Rovers might take it all the way. At the beginning, she'd just hoped to see a dignified last stand. If they went down with enough heroism, they might latch into a Little Big Horn-Rorke's Drift-Scott of the Antarctic reputation, courageous individuals better-remembered than the anonymous hordes who actually won. Now, as the Pythons were hitting back hard, going all-out for the equalizer, it was as if maybe the Rovers might turn back the foe. In school, she'd been taught that although Amundsen actually found the South Pole

first and got back alive, it didn't really count because he ate his own huskies. Even if the Pythons managed to draw level and then win, it wouldn't mean anything according to the rules Roy was playing by. The rules that, on a cosmic scale, counted more than the ratings and the income.

Splodge was the sort of player who'd tear off a leg of sled-dog and wolf it raw, washed down with a vat of baked beans and brown ale. Now, he was shoving his way through the Rovers defence, battering his way to the spot from which he scored all his goals, waiting for his stooges to arrive with the ball. Barry Cardille, still nursing his first-half bruises, was marking his man, and got there before the Splodgster.

The ref was looking the other way as the Python nudded Cardille. Michelle Tenney, glam goalie for Rovers Women, had offered to sleep with the ref, but Roy had gratefully turned down her kind suggestion. Now, Bev wondered if that mightn't have been as bad an idea as it had sounded. When the ref was looking, Cardille had staggered to his feet. Splodge stood grinning over him, forearms bulging like Popeye's, a red trickle on his own forehead. Cardille stood back as Splodge wiped his cut on his hand, looking down in puzzlement at his own blood. Then, in a bid for a Best Actor BAFTA, Splodge was on his knees, yelling in simulated agony.

The ref was jogging over, and the Pythons' paramedics were sprinting across the field, personal sirens whining. The ref's whistle stopped play. Splodge was combining the deaths of Olivier in *Richard III*, Beatty in *Bonnie and Clyde*, Cassavetes in *The Fury* and Julia Roberts in *Saddambusters!* Gradually, he recovered from his mortal wound, and by the time he had to take the penalty, he was as well as he'd ever be.

Bev looked at Roy, who was leaning forward, intent on the action. A colourless official was by his side, waiting to deliver a message. Roy took the curl of fax-paper, but didn't read it. The official waited.

A Splodge penalty had once been monitored and found to be actually "faster than a speeding bullet." The last man to save one had broken both his hands, and seen his side lose four-one.

As the ball came at him, Jack Dorothy, a long-armed spiderman, stretched out a flap of hand, and made a fist. He connected, and punched the leatherette, reversing its momentum. Even the sedate newstyle crowd cheered politely, and Splodge was seized with an attack of Tourette's Syndrome.

The half ended, and C9 cut to the ads. Bev looked around for Roy, but he was gone. There was a crumple of paper by the bench.

The lads came back to the dug-out, hyper from their showing on the field. Bev picked up the paper, and had a chance to look at it – it was something from Roy's ex-wife – before the players were around her, asking questions, soliciting congratulations, needing advice.

She knew the speech, so she delivered it as best she could: teamwork, footwork, aggressive-but-fair play.

Where was Roy?

She was all over him, tears and caresses, apologies and solicitations. It was her voice he had fallen in love with in the first place, and, even after everything, it still got through to him.

"Grienne, Grienne, Grienne," he kept saying, trying to interrupt her flow, still finding the sound of her name seductive.

She kept at him.

It was an invitation to come in out of the cold, to join her in the world Derek Leech had made. By combining all the soaps, all the sports, all the news channels and all the dramas, Cloud 9 had made one big television show of everything. And Grienne was a star, as much as Splodge or Morag Duff. If he would only do one little thing, Roy could be too.

He would win: secure fame and fortune; a place in television history; a position exalted over Butler, Barney and Arabella; an ongoing role in the only circus that counted. He would win back his wife.

Grienne kissed him, and he felt her tears on his cheek.

It was as if Corinne had come back to Bernadette on her knees, as if Useless Brendan had laid down his life for his family.

All Roy had to do was lose.

He could do it. He could do it invisibly. A few instructions to the lads. In-character instructions, about rules and proprieties. He could leave holes in the defence.

He could lose, and win.

As Grienne begged him to come back, begged him to play out Leech's master-script, Roy wondered if she could see a camera behind him.

If he were to accept, would a ton of green sludge pour out of Heaven onto his head? And would Tarquin Crumple pop out of a toilet bowl, wink, and say "I bet you feel a right one!"

"There's money, too," Grienne said. "From the bookies, from Leech. More money than you could believe."

Miles away, the whistle shrilled. And suddenly Roy felt incredibly tired.

"You could have it all."

Derek Leech wasn't paying much attention to the match. He was flirting with the Preem. From where he was sitting, Gordon could only really see Morag Duff nodding. Leech was in shadows, eyes sometimes reflecting.

Leech was only seen in full light on television or in his papers. In person, he always seemed to have shadows around him, like the character in the strip that ran in the *Argus*, his heaviest paper. Gordon heard Leech wanted C9 to do a *Dr Shade* TV series, maybe with Jeremy Irons or Jonathan Pryce.

Occasionally, Leech would check the wallscreen – with its permanent readout of time to go and score – but mainly he was interested in the Preem, whispering to her, laughing with her. Gordon had the impression he was looking at Government in Action.

A soapstar returned to her seat, make-up adjusted, and started following the play. Gordon remembered who Grienne had been married to, and wondered if C9 had thought to book a sound-bite from her. A human-interest angle would pique the interest of the wives and girlfriends coerced into watching the Final,

and Leech always promised advertisers balanced demographics.

For a while, Gordon had thought the Rovers might have a chance. But they had come out very scrappily at the beginning of the third half, and seemed to be playing a nervously defensive game, as if waiting for the big bullies to come and snatch back their lollipops.

Apart from Jacnoth, every player on the field was clustered around the Rovers goal area. As the time-clock counted down, the Rovers' lead seemed more and more fragile.

Bev noticed just how stretched-thin Roy was. He kept relaying "never let up" messages to the pitch, but he also seemed to be holding something back. When Brzezinski scored for the Pythons, Bev felt her stomach turn. With three minutes on the timer, the match would probably go to penalties. And it was too much to ask for Jack Dorothy to save two Splodge dum-dums in one evening.

Roy thought drink-drink-drink-drink. But his mouth was dry. He could still feel Grienne's tongue, could still hear her voice.

Don't be a Useless Brendan, he told himself.

The Pythons were lined up for another assault as the teams assembled in the centre for play to resume, and the Rovers looked like sheep grazing in front of a mile-wide combine harvester. The Pythons would be looking to stampede in another goal.

When had this ever been just a game?

It was time for his last signal.

He thought again of Grienne, and wondered if he were doing the right thing.

Demi-seconds flickered on the monitor's time-code, dropping away like hourglass grains.

Roy stood up, hugged Bev, and made the signal. Trav, standing by the ball, was ready.

This could make up for everything.

The ball was back in play, and Splodge was about to blitzkrieg him into the pseudograss. Trav, not thinking about how smart a move he was being ordered to make, got his boot-toe under the leather and made the long-pass, the impossible play. Roy Robartes might be old-fashioned, but this was an innovation.

Splodge slammed into him, and Trav heard a bone breaking. He was out of this game. And what he had just done had either won or lost it:

He felt psychic waves of astonishment pouring down, and jagged pain shattering through his body. He hauled himself up, and watched Splodge chase the man with the ball. If the ref saw Trav was injured, play would be stopped. And that couldn't happen.

"Well, no-one's ever done that before," Barney droned. "Et's legal, ev course, bet..."

"Is that allowed?" Arabella giggled.

"Fakk, fakk, fakk," Ray ranted.

Bev was torn. Usually, she watched only the pitch – like Roy – but now she had to look at the dug-out monitor.

Of course, the studio director had cut to the In-

Close Man. The picture shifted as Blanch barrelled down the pitch, ball almost dead-centre. An ICM had scored for Midland Athletic once, when a ball bounced off his steadicam-helmet and qualified as a header by default, but he'd deserved and got about as much credit as a cushion does for match-winning snooker shot.

Blanch was well-ahead of the Pythons, and Roy had men spread out behind him, running in a fan. Splodge had been too busy disabling Trav to be there, and none of the hunter-killers were exactly sprinter material.

"This is crazy," Bev said.

Roy just nodded.

Blanch dribbled the ball. The weight of his machine must seem like an agony now. But, undoubtedly, he was the fittest man on the squad, a weightlifter on wheels.

The ICM was in the Pythons' goal area. The defenders, who had been expecting another scramble for the Rovers end, were with the pack closing in like hungry dinosaurs.

He had a clear run. Blanch shrugged free of his equipment, which fell from his shoulders and crashed expensively. The camera didn't cut out, and provided a perfect sideways view of Jacnoth as he dived. Blanch's shot slipped past the goalie, and everyone was shouting. Like in the old days.

Rovers men were in a ring around Blanch, fighting off the Pythons. Roy was laughing and punching the air. Splodge started kicking the fallen camera, and the screen showed his boot coming in, then a brief spiral crack in the lens and deadscreen flicker, before cutting to a frankly stunned Barney Oldcarp and Arabella Swinton.

"I told you Blanch was a good kid," Roy said.

A minute later, the match was over.

**A**t the reception afterwards, Roy told interviewers he was over the moon. Actually, he felt as if he had died and woken up in an afterlife where he had no idea what to do.

He expressed concern over Trav Billings' injury, and said the club were considering criminal assault charges against Simon Hodge. He agreed with the citing of Mark Blanch as Man of the Match. He confirmed that he was engaged to Bev Ellis, and admitted he had never worked out just how much younger than him she was.

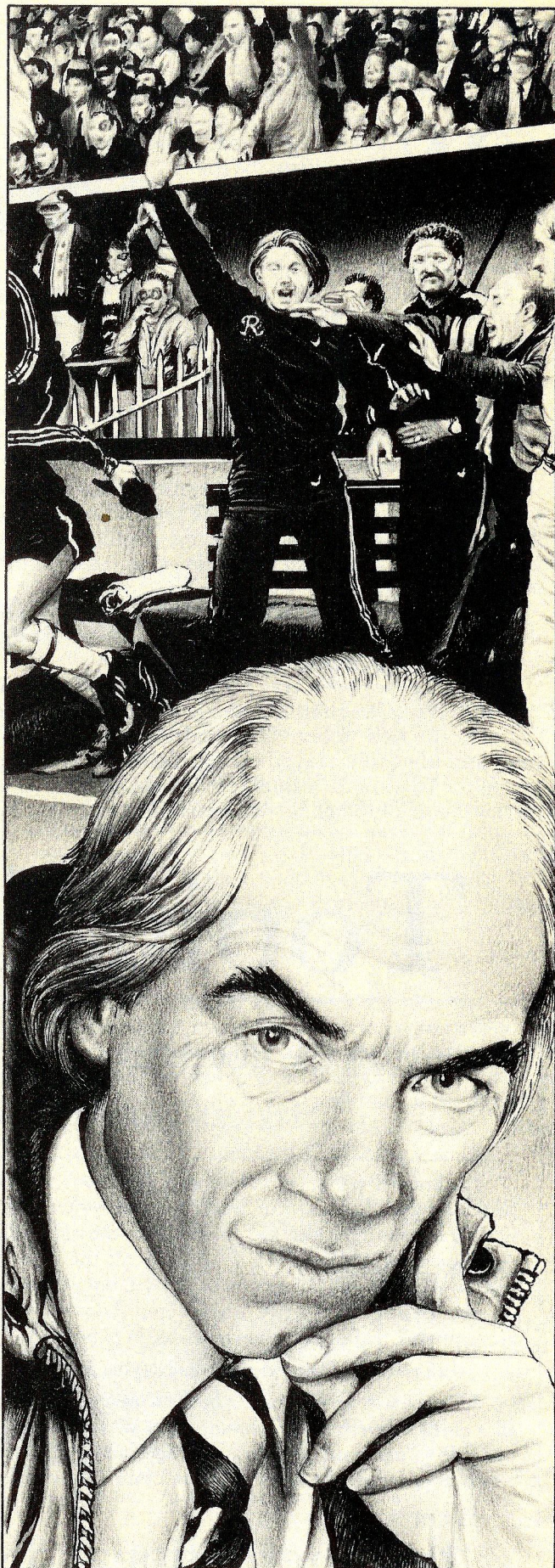
Morag Duff shook his hand, and he wondered if she was a Stepford Wife. There didn't seem to be anyone inside the poodle mannerisms. He was photographed with the Preem, a collection of soap faces in the background, Arabella draped around his waist.

In his hand was his first drink in nearly two years. Champagne.

He held the flute to his lips, relishing the taste and the bubbles, and took the tiniest sip.

Gianne hugged and congratulated him, showing her best side to the cameras, then faded back into the celeb crowd. He pulled Bev, who had found a dress from somewhere, into the picture, and touched champagne to her lips, then kissed her.

A man moved through the crowds, smile advancing like a shark's fin. The man whose offer – relayed contemptibly through Gianne – he had torn up and thrown away.



Probably, this was the end of it all. He might have won, but now he would fall from grace, be expelled from the garden. It was all over, and it didn't matter.

So he threw his drink in Derek Leech's face.

**“W**e don't need that,” Leech told the off-line editor. “Wipe it.”  
Gordon saw the image freeze, just as Roy Robartes prepared to toss his glass, and then the whole thing scrambled.

Leech smiled.

“It didn't fit.”

It was unusual for him to take an interest in the minutiae of edited highlights. But this, Gordon suspected, was special.

The key sequences had already been picked out. The goals, of course. The penalty save. Billings on his feet with a broken leg. Splodge swearing. Blanch's camera cutting out.

And the backstage stuff: the training footage, the earlier heats, the temptations, the fortitude. Arabella showing her legs, Barney drawing diagrams of the goals, Ranting Ray being (literally) sick (as a parrot) at the reception.

On one screen, Roy was resisting his ex-wife's blandishments. On another, he was making his secret signals to Blanch and Billings.

Gordon knew Leech was pleased Rovers had won. Boring Barney was talking about a triumph for the old over the new, a revival of traditional British virtues, and the value of skill over schmaltz. But Leech, no matter how much he might be associated with what he had made of the game, was best pleased this way.

It made a better story, better copy, a fresher twist in the plotline.

As Roy resisted Grianne, standing firm against her offers, Leech smiled.

“You know, Brough,” he said, deigning to notice Gordon, “nothing sells like integrity.”

That had been said before, Gordon suspected. That was how Leech usually worked. He lived in shadows and spoke in scripted dialogue. One day he would vanish in reality, and appear only on television. Somewhere, the Prime Minister was waiting for Leech. And he was busy picking angles, suggesting cuts, rewriting voice-overs. A functionary came in and confirmed that the World Series Final had indeed outdrawn everything else in the ratings. Nothing pulled in more viewers, not even the top-rated soaps.

“Everything's a soap,” Leech said. And Gordon had to agree.

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**Kim Newman** is the author of the novels *The Night Mayor* (1989), *Bad Dreams* (1990) and *Jago* (1991). During the same three years he also wrote five novels as “Jack Yeovil” (these all published by Games Workshop). A new novel about Dracula, a collection of short stories, and two more Yeovil quickies (*Bloody Students* and *Genevieve Undead*) await publication. He has also written a couple of non-fiction books and more film reviews than anyone can count. His story “The Original Dr Shade” (*Interzone* 36) won the British SF Association award as the best short work of 1990. He lives in London.

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# Nesting

## Diane Mapes

**T**here wasn't any scabbling around in the attic when we first rented the place back in September, but even if there had been we still might have taken it. We were tired of looking – I was tired of looking – and the price was incredibly cheap. Craig kept grinning at me behind the real-estate lady's back, as if to say "Didn't they know what they were giving away? Didn't they know what they were doing?" I wasn't quite so thrilled, but I went along with it for the sake of ease. I hadn't been too keen on settling down just yet, but the house had some character or, at least, the setting did. It was on an island in the middle of Puget Sound, a pretty, wooded spot on the wet fringes of Seattle. Since I'd figured Craig was going to find some pasteboard apartment in the heart of the city's industrial district, I didn't put up much of a fuss. We more or less made up our minds the minute we walked in the door.

The real-estate lady seemed to sense this, giving us the abbreviated tour from the living room, her chin pointing out each door.

"Bedroom. Bath around the corner. Kitchen behind you. A modified back porch. With hookups. That's it."

"Except for the attic," I said, peering up at the small trapdoor in the bedroom ceiling. The real-estate lady nodded and turned her attention to instructing us in the operation of the woodstove's damper. I hoped it worked; Craig and I would be relying on the stove and the island's supply of wood for heat come winter. From the number of U-cut, U-haul firewood signs I'd seen, availability wouldn't be a problem. Apparently, the island had been discovered by developers; condos were going up as fast as umbrellas in November.

"Well, the place is perfect, as far as I'm concerned," Craig said, pulling out his chequebook. "Especially the price."

"It is a bargain," the real-estate lady said. "A little bit too isolated and wooded for some tastes – most folks around here go for the beach homes – but I'm sure you two will do just fine."

"I'm sure we will, too," Craig said. "We can pretty much handle anything old Mother Nature throws our way, I think." I looked out the windows as he talked, at the trees in the lot across the street. They were huge larches, straight and tall, their trunks covered with bright green ivy like giant cocktail toothpicks. I wondered how Craig would handle it if old Mother Nature decided to throw a couple of those our way.

"And you said the furniture comes with it?" Craig

asked for the third time. In the nine months we'd been together, I'd discovered Craig was the kind of person who always had to shake the cereal box even after I told him it was empty.

"Furniture comes with it," the real-estate lady said flatly.

"The old renters won't be coming back for anything?" He'd noticed the books still on the bookshelves, too, I suppose.

"The old renters won't be back, no," the real-estate lady said.

"Home sweet home," I said, slapping some dust out of the old, overstuffed couch. "Hard to believe I'll be sleeping in a bed again."

The real-estate woman gave me a funny look.

"We've been camping all summer," I explained. "Hiking around, staying in parks."

She nodded and gave me a polite smile. I could tell she was the type that camped out in a two-storey Winnebago with a satellite dish on top and a cellular phone in the bathroom.

"This rug looks new," Craig said, kicking at some lint.

"It is new, it had to be replaced." The real-estate lady grabbed her purse, tucked it under one arm and headed for the front door. She was starting to act like she was late for lunch, even though it was after four in the afternoon. Craig started making out the cheque.

She paused at the door, waiting for him. "There were some stains," she said. "Nothing bad, but since it was getting old anyway, we thought we might as well replace it." Her hand went to the doorknob; it jiggled loosely. I could see where a screwdriver would come in handy around this place.

"Well, we're sure glad we saw the sign and stopped. We were getting desperate." Craig handed over the cheque and gave me a satisfied look. Three hundred dollars, that was all. No last month's rent, no deposit. I suppose he had every reason to be excited; we'd figured on paying almost twice that, especially with the building boom going on all around us.

"Yes, you seemed desperate," the real-estate lady said. She folded the cheque, tucked it into the side pocket of her purse, then looked up at us briefly.

"Keys are in the cupboard by the fridge, phone jack's in the corner there. Mail the rent to this address."

She handed Craig a card, then paused, her gaze drifting back towards the bedroom as if considering

something. What is it? I thought. Termites in the closet? foundation shot all to hell? Her eyes flicked to Craig and then to me and then to the light blue paper sticking out between the lips of her purse. "Good luck, you two," she said and, opening the door, was gone.

**T**he scrabbling sounds started that night. "I get it," I groaned, turning over to look up at the low, tiled ceiling. "The place has rats. No wonder it was so cheap."

Craig was quiet a minute, listening. "Might not be rats," he said after a minute. "Could be squirrels. They come in this time of year, start storing their nuts for the winter."

The scrabbling sounds grew louder. Rustle, rustle, rustle in the wall next to the bed. Click, clack scraaaaaatch of claws against the wood overhead.

"It's rats," I said, pulling the sleeping bag over my head.

"Birds?" Craig said and climbed under the bag with me. I dreamed of beaks that night, tiny sharp beaks, pecking at my eyes.

In the morning, the scrabbling sounds were forgotten in the flurry of moving in. Our clothes went into the closet – hung up for the first time in months. What few dishes we had went into the kitchen cupboards. There were some pots and pans and plates leftover from the previous renters, a few pieces of silverware in the drawer.

"Hey, have you seen the good knife?" I called to Craig as he carried a box of camping stuff into the bedroom. Mainly, all we had was camping stuff, except for the tools Craig had found at a garage sale while we were looking for a place to live.

"Uh uh," Craig said, coming out to the kitchen. I used his pocket knife to slice up some cheese for sandwiches and we ate our lunch, perched on the rickety metal stools tucked under the kitchen counter.

"Great sandwiches," Craig said. His stool gave a shriek as he leaned over to give me a perfunctory kiss. The kind of kiss a husband bestows on his aproned wife of seven years after coming home from a hard day's work at the plant. Craig was not quite my husband, but somehow it felt as if we'd suddenly fallen into the lunchbucket and apron mentality. I wondered if moving into a house had something to do with it.

"Sure you wouldn't rather be eating hot dogs grilled over an open fire?" I asked and he gave me a look. It had been Craig's idea to come in for the winter, and I'd been kicking myself for going along with him ever since. I'd wanted to go on to Yosemite for another month, stretch our savings – and the summer – to the last bit of gold, but he'd been adamant about finding a place and settling in. A developer friend of his needed help slapping together some homes on the island and Craig wanted to do it. He could work part-time, make some good money, and I could stay home, read over vacation brochures for the Adirondacks and type up the occasional travel article. It was ironic in its way. Craig had been the one to push me into quitting my job at the University's public information office and take off to see some of the world, now he wanted to settle down and play it safe and I couldn't get the travel bug out of my system.

"I might take a look in the attic later on," he said, popping the last of his sandwich into his mouth. "Maybe go into town and pick up a few traps, some rat poison. We could probably use some Raid, too. This place is full of bugs. Spiders. I saw a string of ants coming in through a crack in the bathroom window."

"I guess we wouldn't want them thinking we're the friendly type," I said, looking out at the spider web tucked into a corner of the kitchen window.

Craig wrinkled his nose and I took a bite of my cheese sandwich. Our home life had begun.

**"C**hrist!" Craig shouted from the bedroom. I'd been up for an hour already, puttering around the kitchen, jotting down notes for a humour piece on learning the ins and outs of the state's ferry system.

"Good morning to you, too," I said, poking my head around the doorway.

Craig was standing by the bed, his hair messy, a look of disgust on his face. The look was aimed at the jelly jar half full of apple juice that he held in his hand.

"Ants," he said and cleaned off his tongue with three fingers. "I drank a bunch of ants. Yuck."

"Oh yeah, I meant to take that out to the kitchen this morning." I moved into the bedroom and plucked the glass out of his hand. "I guess they get thirsty at night, too. Don't feel bad, I accidentally drank some myself when I got up."

"Christ, that's gross." Craig shuffled off to the bathroom.

"It's not that bad," I said, patting his back as he passed. "We drank tea laced with mosquitos all the time back in the Wind River Range, remember?"

"That's different," he called through the closed door. "We were camping out then. And we had no choice. It was either that or go without."

I looked down at the half-full glass of juice. Little black bodies floated in the sweet amber liquid like pepper topping a glass of V-8. I shrugged and took a sip. It was all protein, after all.

**"I**told you it was birds," Craig said, lowering a garbage sack stuffed full of dried twigs out of the attic. "They're making a nest up there. Guess they'll have to fly south for the winter or something now."

"Wish I could join them," I muttered and helped him find footing on top of the bedroom dresser. He lowered himself out of the small trapdoor, settled the white square of wood back into place in the ceiling.

"Now I just have to plug up their entry way," he said, hopping off the dresser. "Shouldn't be too hard. Birds aren't exactly known for their smarts."

He went outside to the garbage cans and I looked back up at the trapdoor, thinking about the birds that had surrounded our campsite down in southern Oregon. Bluejays as abrasive as bill collectors; chickadees that looked like they'd swallowed small cantaloupes. Craig had chased them off with snapping towels and carefully-aimed pebbles, but I hadn't. I'd fed them bits of pancakes, crumbles of bacon. There was something about their eyes that fascinated me. They were bright, alert, unmistakably intelligent, despite what Craig said about their pea-size brains. I missed those

birds now even though it was birds which had been interrupting my sleep and cluttering up my attic with dry leaves and bits of mouldering grass. I missed their convoluted songs piercing the canvas walls of the tent in the morning, they'd gotten under my skin with the same ease; I missed their cocked heads as they regarded me with wary recognition over a half-eaten muffin. I had made friends with the animals around the campgrounds, let the squirrels run up my arm and into the warmth of my down vest; the woods seemed more a home to me than this flimsy wood box.

Sure, this place kept us dry when it rained, gave us the room to collect a few belongings. But filling the house with clutter wasn't necessarily a good thing, it was just a thing. I missed the simplicity of my tent under the night sky, the caress of the dawn wind on my face. There were no grey areas there, no deceptive wood walls to trick the things that scabbled and scratched and became caught between what was a tree and what was a house.

**“Y**ou seen my old jeans?”

It was Craig, standing in the middle of the living room in his shorts. It was his second week of work. It was mid-October.

“Did you look in the dresser?” I asked, going back out to the kitchen to finish my omelette. Craig had gotten even worse at losing things since we'd moved in, even more than when he left his car keys sitting on a rock ledge underneath Delicate Arch.

“Yes, I looked in the dresser. And the bathroom and the back of the closet.” He sounded annoyed; I figured I'd better not kid him about being followed around by The Borrowers like I usually did when he lost something. Instead, I turned down the burner and went to help him.

I sorted through the laundry pile, thinking how much easier it had been when we each only had two pairs of jeans, one to wear and one to wash. Craig had been buying things like crazy ever since we moved in – clothes, an iron, a used washer and dryer, a vacuum and lawn mower. The bedroom was crammed with his stuff, the tiny back porch as well.

We rummaged through the clutter in the bedroom, but still couldn't find his jeans. Finally, he threw on another pair and raced off in the truck. I watched the tailgate slowly disappear, remembering I'd forgotten to tell him about the scabbled sounds I'd heard in the attic the night before.

As it turned out, I didn't have to.

“What the hell...”

I woke up to see Craig sitting up in bed, his bleary gaze on the ceiling, his hair mashed to one side of his head.

It sounded like the birds had invited some friends over for the evening. Big friends. Vultures. Turkeys. Dodos. And the whole lot of them were holding a dance. Or a bowling tourney. I heard something roll along the wood ceiling and then everybody went scrambling after it. There was a dull thunk, as if a couple of pins had fallen over, then a slow dragging across the room. The ball being hauled back to the starting line, no doubt.

“Jesus Christ,” Craig said, burrowing back under the covers. The sleeping bags were rolled up and



Illustrations by Freddie Baer

tucked away in a closet now; he'd bought sheets and blankets and a comforter at the local Sprouse Reitz. Pillows, too.

Pillows. I'd used my jeans rolled up under my head for months and been perfectly happy.

"I thought you plugged the hole up," I said, burrowing under the covers next to him.

"I thought I did, too," he said. "Just go to sleep. I'll take care of the little bastards in the morning."

I tried to take his advice, but the noises overhead made it nearly impossible, as did the dust that drifted down onto my face now and then. Just as I dropped off, the light spattering of dust seemed to transform into the hesitant touch of tiny black feet, soft and welcome as the night wind. I dreamed of hands, pink and soft, feeding me dry broken pretzels.

**I**n the morning, Craig came downstairs with another bag full of leaves and dried grass. "Persistent little buggers," he said and went outside to the garbage can. I stood just inside the bedroom, looking up at the ceiling; Craig had left the trapdoor slightly ajar.

Something poked out of it, something light blue, woollen. I climbed onto the chair and peered up at it. I poked at it with my finger, then gave it a tentative tug.

It slid out easily; it was one of Craig's socks.

"Hey Craig, come inside and look at this." I stuck my head out the door, but Craig was busy huffing and puffing around the outside of the house, filling up any cracks he could find with wads of newspaper, strips of caulking, pieces of steel wool, rocks. He didn't answer.

"Craig?"

"I'm busy right now," he muttered, cussing as he shoved a handful of newspaper into a hole. His mad was only pretend, of course. All show. I could tell Craig loved puttering around solving one domestic crisis after another - knocking the birds' nests out of the eaves, battling the blackberry bushes, taking a broomstick to the soft, white creeping of spider webs that lined our front and back windows and backing that up with a deluxe-size can of Raid.

"Why can't we just let them stay up there?" I called up to him. "Obviously, they think of this place as their home."

Craig looked down at me from atop the ladder.

"They're pests," he said. "You can't let them even have an inch or they'll take over the whole house. Do you want that? Do you want to trip over a mouse every time you get up to get a drink of water in the middle of the night? Or get some kind of disease from the parasites that live on those birds? I've already accidentally swallowed a bunch of dead ants, I'm not about to drink some microscopic bug that crawls into my water glass and puts me in the hospital for a month. Just trust me on this, okay? I know what I'm doing."

He turned his attention back to stuffing newspaper under the eaves and I silently watched.

He probably wouldn't believe me if I told him about the sock I'd found in the attic anyway, I told myself. It bothered me, though. How had it gotten there? Birds certainly couldn't have lifted off the trapdoor, swooped down into the bedroom, stolen it and

swooped back up. Even rats couldn't do that. *Wouldn't* do that.

"Goddam birds," Craig said, climbing down from the ladder. "Bad as the goddam blackberry bushes. We'll have to do something about them before next summer or they'll take over the house."

Next summer. Craig wanted to live here forever, I could tell. Playing the role of the suburban warrior, subjugating every living thing within a 100-yard radius. So I didn't tell him about the sock. And I didn't tell him that I had come to hate his house, either.

**I**t was two days before the end of the month when his workboots disappeared. By then, I'd accepted the scrambling in the attic just as I'd come to accept nibbled crackers and cheese whenever I forgot to stow it away in the bear bag the previous summer. Craig hadn't. He cursed the rattling and scrapes in the middle of the night, as well as the real-estate lady who had rented us the place and now refused to talk to him whenever he called her office; he banged on the walls and vowed to call in an exterminator.

"Goddamit, I know I left those boots right here," he yelled, stomping around the bedroom in his stocking feet. I was out in the kitchen, staring out the back windows at the pines behind the house. There had been a lot of pines down in Alabama, although nothing like they had in the Northwest. Southern pines were straight and tall, with twenty feet of strong bare trunk stretching up to a canopy of green boughs. They looked like giant harpstrings, I'd always thought. When I shut my eyes, I could almost see myself as a squirrel racing back and forth among the trees, playing the harpstrings with my claws.

"Did you look in the dryer?" I asked, absently. What happened to trees when men cut them down and made them into houses? What happened to the gracefulness, the independence, the strength? And what happened to the creatures that living within them? Did they ever find homes again?

There was quiet behind me and I knew Craig was there.

"The dryer?" he said, leaning against the stool beside me. It shrieked under his weight and I shook my head.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I guess your workboots wouldn't be in the dryer, would they?"

"No," he said and turned to leave.

"Craig," I said quietly. He stopped and I looked out the window at a spiderweb. There was a spider in the centre of it, a fat one, probably the matriarch of the family Craig had been trying to get rid of ever since we moved in. I watched the spider sit motionless as an unsuspecting fly lit onto its web, then saw it race across the web as the fly's legs stuck fast. I felt like that fly, trapped in the web of this house.

"Craig, let's get out of here, okay? Let's go to California or back down to the South. Go to New England. Maybe back to the desert. This place... it isn't for us. Let's leave and go someplace else."

He looked at me like I'd just told him I wanted to roast his grandmother for dinner. "Leave?" he said. "Why would you want to leave? Winter's setting in, and we're just starting to get this place fixed up. As soon as we get rid of these pests, it'll be perfect for us. You'll see, babe." He shook his head, gave me a

thin smile. "We can take a vacation in the spring."

"Vacation," I said quietly and he left the kitchen. I knew what vacations were; my parents had taken vacations. Two-week stints at the local state park with a camper full of every conceivable electrical appliance known to man. A TV in the tent, video camera in the backpack.

I watched the spider slowly wrapping the fly in a thin white shroud. Back in school, I'd read about spiders that disguised themselves as ants so they could go undetected. What was I disguising myself as? A happy housewife?

When Craig went to work, he was wearing his tennis shoes.

I tried writing a little bit that morning – a short funny piece about a little cabin we'd stayed at in the Smoky Mountains – but only grew more and more unsettled. There had been cockroaches everywhere at that cabin, scurrying around under the bed, in the cupboards, popping in the fire like hard kernels of corn. I'd seen one carrying an entire cube of sugar, seen another make an overturned matchbook appear to dance. Suddenly thinking about those cockroaches scuttling under the blankets and carrying off our food upset me. I shut my eyes and the lump of sugar slowly turned into Craig's workboot; I could almost smell the leather, feel the weight on my back. I shook my head, telling myself that I was crazy. Cockroaches couldn't carry workboots any more than birds could swoop out of the attic and steal socks.

But something was stealing Craig's things. Something was living in the house with us and I knew it wasn't just birds and bugs as Craig kept insisting.

I tried writing again, but could only think about cockroaches under the blankets and hungry bluejays and the sky in Yosemite. Could only think about woodsmoke and the sound of the wind playing harp-strings twenty feet tall. I got up from the keyboard and left the house, walking around the island until the sky grew grey as wet wool and my fingers were numb.

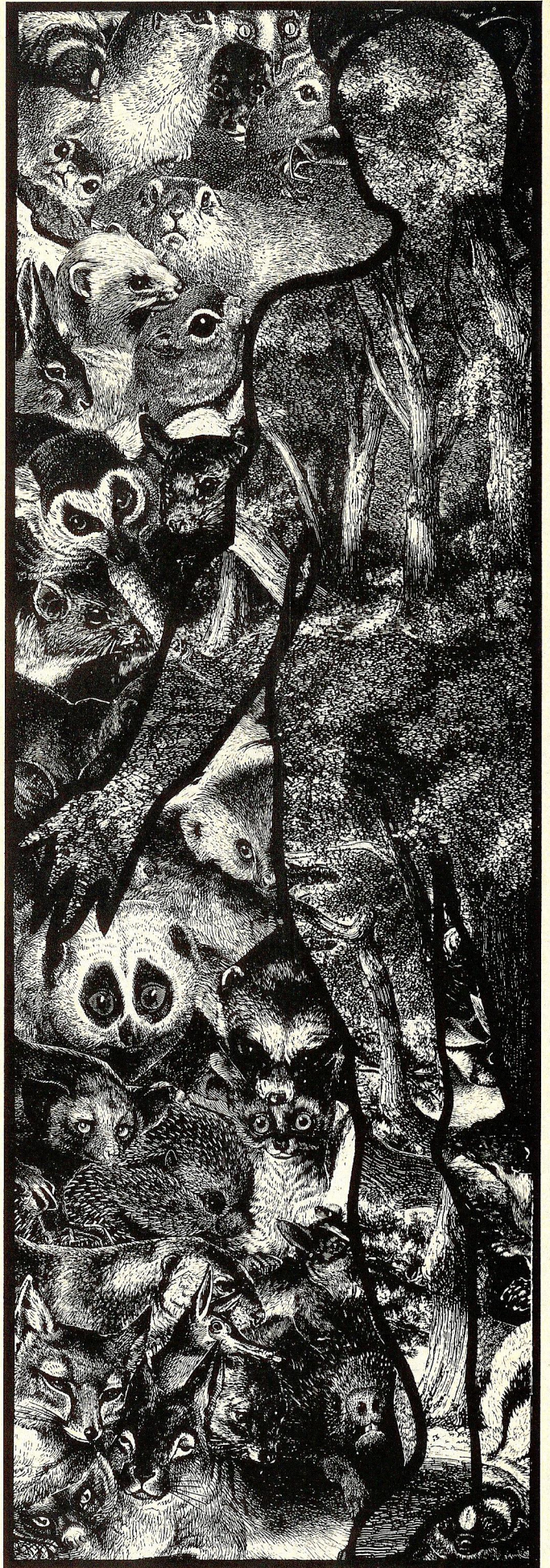
**T**hat night, the wind howled outside the windows like a banshee, nearly drowning out the scrabbling in the attic. It was there, though, urgent, persistent, hurried as a farmer bringing in his wheat in the rain. And there was something behind it, steady and soft, a rhythmic sawing, like the rub of a branch against the roof.

Birds, Craig had insisted. Birds building a nest. I tossed on the bed, thinking of birds, of squirrels, of spiders and rats and field mice. Thinking of cockroaches carrying off sugar, of ants laying up for the winter. What were the sounds in the attic? Were they bluejays and bugs, rats and shrews? Or were they the spirit of the wood itself, still alive though it was bound tight by nails and caulking and bits of paned glass?

The wind died down and the scrabbling grew louder, more insistent. The rustle of straw, the scrape of leather on wood. My breath caught as I heard the unmistakable sound of a bootfall.

"Craig, what was that?" I whispered, turning to shake him awake. The bed beside me was empty.

"Craig?" I called, peering towards the open bathroom door. It was dark. I got up, ready to pad out to the kitchen when I saw the trapdoor in the ceiling.



It gaped open, a black square against the low-tiled ceiling. An open eye against a white face, a mouth, hungry. I swallowed in a dry throat. I heard the sawing sound again.

"Hey," I called, inching closer. There was no answer, only a rustling, a scrabbling, louder now. Only the sly flicker of something falling from the trapdoor. I knelt down and picked it up, held it up to the light from the moon slatting in through the new blinds Craig had installed the day before. It was a twig, dry and thin. I held it in my hand tightly. It snapped and I jumped.

"Hey, Craig," I called stepping up onto the chair. The only light in the house was a bedroom reading lamp on a short cord. I grabbed it, pulled the cord taut and turned it on.

"Hey, it's a little late to go bird hunting, don't you think?" I said, climbing onto the dresser, holding up the reading lamp like a statue of liberty with the shakes. The wood on the dresser shuddered and held. "Craig? Don't you think it's a little late to be... Craig?"

No answer.

The cord would only reach as far as the ceiling, so I set the lamp onto the top of the dresser, grabbed the sides of the trapdoor and hoisted myself up. I pulled my feet in after me, stooping under the eaves of the house. The light filtered up into the blackness, breaking it into grainy strips. I smelled mould, damp wood, rain. I smelled something thick and coppery. My eyes adjusted to the dark and I sucked in my breath.

Something was spread across the floor in front of me, pooling up against the sides of the joists. Something thick and black, like oil. I knelt down and touched it, brought it to my lips. It was warm. It was blood.

I thought of the real-estate lady suddenly. "There were some stains," she had said.

I saw blood dripping out of the trapdoor, staining the old rug, staining the new rug. How many rugs had there been?

"Craig?" I shouted, my words thudding dully against the peaked roof like a fist against the side of a tree. "Answer me!"

There was a sound, a sigh, off to my right on the other side of the trapdoor and I turned and saw a flicker of movement, a shadow fading back into the darker shadows, out of sight. I heard a crackling, the sound of twigs rattling together, of leaves whispering underfoot.

I stood up and knocked my head against the slanted roof. Stumbling, my foot came down again on something solid and meaty. I looked down to see the dark outline of Craig's body slumped on the floor in front of me.

"Craig!" I said, kneeling over him. My fingers touched the skin of his back, followed it down to his neck. Felt only stumpy flesh, sticky and wet, and nothing more.

I shrieked, the sound of a rabbit caught in a closed metal trap, and wrapped my arms around Craig's back, trying to lift him, trying to carry him to the trapdoor, to safety. To the downstairs of his house with its electric can openers and pillows and complacent prints of sun-dappled pools on its walls. Back to the wilderness tamed.

Something scrabbled in the darkness behind me

and my scalp prickled. The air churned with the buzz of insects — bees, cicadas, crickets. I smelled the damp odour of rotting leaves, the musk of soft green lichen. There was a rustling, like wind through branches and I heard the twitter of birds, the chatter of mice and squirrels. I heard something else that could have been my name.

My skin went cold and I turned around.

**I**t stood directly behind me, reaching out with one hand as if beckoning. It had on workboots and old jeans, a pair of gloves, and a plaid shirt, long forgotten. And it had on Craig's head, perched atop it like a pumpkin atop a scarecrow. It was Craig's face, yet not his face. The flesh of his cheeks was thin, rippling slightly like a piece of plastic in the wind. Leaves poked from one eye socket, along with a bit of moss and a few pieces of straw. There was a walnut filling up the other:

It shuddered, and the scrabbling inside it grew louder. I could see movement now, a small shape racing down one sleeve, making the fabric ripple and dance, like the dance of an overturned matchbook hiding a cockroach. Tiny brown hands appeared on either side of the walnut and pulled it suddenly within. I screamed again as a head poked out and stared at me. A squirrel, a chipmunk, a rat, I didn't know. I slumped to the floor and the scarecrow reached for me, its lips moving.

"A nest," it said, touching me with one hand. Twigs poked out of the sleeves of the flannel shirt; a tiny bird fluttered from the sleeve and into the worn white of the gloves. "A nest for winter."

Its voice was the wind rattling the oak of a heavy door, the scrape of branches against the double pane of a storm window. I saw a white ball of spider eggs just inside its nose; I saw two eyes staring out at me from the darkness inside its mouth.

Its other arm came from behind its back and I saw the dull gleam of light off silver, the silver of my good knife. The edge was brown, pitted and worn, as if it had been used to saw through a branch. Or a meaty bone.

I screamed and crawled across the floor, towards the trapdoor that yawned before it. The thing reached out towards me, swaying like a tree in a high breeze. Life pulsed within it, chattering, gibbering, busily building, burrowing, nesting.

They had to go somewhere, I thought crazily as I pawed my way across the bloodied twigs, the slivered wood. This is an island and when all the trees are gone, there's no place else for them to go for shelter, for warmth. They had to go somewhere; why not somewhere where they could survive? Where they could live in peace, safely disguised as a man, as Craig, like the spider posing as an ant.

I fell out of the trapdoor, rolled onto the dresser and found the floor, sucked in breath. Leather workboots appeared in the black square above me and I shrieked again and ran for the front door, yanking on it hard. The knob came loose in my hand and I beat against the panes in the door, covered now with blackberry vines.

A pane shattered and I shoved my arm through the jagged hole in the front door, groping for the knob on the other side. Thorns bit into my skin, scratching my

wrists like cats. The knob was gone, fallen to the cracked cement of the front steps. I was trapped inside.

"Stay the winter," the thing whispered behind me. "Keep the nest." I turned to see it shuffle towards me, seeing the ants crawling on its face, a bird peeking out of its ear with inquisitive eyes.

The bird cocked its head and trilled at me and I stared into its bright black eyes, a feeling of familiarity overwhelming me. I knew that trill, those notes, knew them like I knew my own voice.

I thought of the fat campground bluejays that had eaten broken pretzels out of my hand, the squirrels that I'd let run up my arm and into the warm comfort of my down vest. Had the squirrels ever come out? Or had I swallowed them inside me as I'd swallowed the ants with the apple juice.

The thing grabbed my shoulder, pulling my arm in through the door and I shuddered, my heart beating hard against my chest, the beating of hundreds of wings. My breath grew shaky, a hesitant whisper-hiss of air, the sandpaper sound of dozens of cockroaches scuttling across a blanket to dart into an open mouth. I felt the press of dull metal against my throat and shut my eyes, understanding at last.

The creatures were there already. The birds, the squirrels, the ants, and more. They had been there for a long time, packed tight and quiet, waiting to chitter and chirp and trill, waiting to unfold their wings and antennae, to uncurl their tails and lick clean their fur.

The knife would not so much be letting them in, as it had with Craig, as letting them out once again into the house they had claimed as theirs long before we had arrived.

I felt the bite of the knife and knew that I would stay there always.

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**Diane Mapes** recently saw publication of her first short story in *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* – but *Interzone* had already beaten that journal to it by publishing three of her pieces in fairly swift succession: "Shallow Grave" (IZ 46), "Remnants" (IZ 50) and "The Big Yellow Car" (IZ 56). She lives in the extreme north-west of the United States of America.

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## Artists' Credits

We're pleased to welcome **Freddie Baer**, an American illustrator and friend of Diane Mapes, to these pages.

Please note that last issue's illustrations for M. John Harrison's story "Anima" were by **Ian Miller**: the credit line was inadvertently dropped.



# Chewing the Raccoon

## Stan Nicholls talks to Dan Simmons

“The best science fiction has some solid connection to our humanity and to mature experience,” Dan Simmons believes.

“When I was a teacher, I realized you could always find the sharpest pre-adolescents or early adolescents by asking, ‘Who likes science fiction?’”

By the age of seven Simmons had already come to like so much himself he was using his father’s old typewriter to falteringly tap out his own. “I specifically remember the glory of typing out that first science-fiction story. I took it to my third-grade teacher and said, ‘This is what a trip to the moon will be like.’ She informed me quite soundly that men would never go to the moon. It wasn’t going to happen. Sorry.

“Now, when I’m invited to an elementary school and I’m supposed to tell the children how to be writers, I generally say, ‘Write for the other kids. Don’t show it to the teachers.’ Because in fourth grade, which would be eight or nine years old, I was writing stories in longhand and passing them around to my schoolmates. I think watching them reading my work was what hooked me on the idea of being a writer.”

He didn’t realize it at the time, but he now sees there was also an oral aspect to what he was doing. “I’ve always been interested in comedians like Bill Cosby, who grew up in inner city Philadelphia, which was one of the places where I taught. He wasn’t hard enough to be a tough guy, he wasn’t fast enough to be an athlete, so he became the person who made others laugh, rather than the person they could stomp on. In my case I was the one who came up with the imaginative substrata for what we were going to play, whether it was soldiers, cowboys or whatever. I filled in the background. In TV-writing terms I gave them the ‘bible.’ In that sense I was a storyteller early on.

“I’ve never met a writer who wasn’t a voracious reader at an early age. It was the same with me. The first real book I tried to read, when I was six, was *Treasure Island*. I also remember reading an A. Bertram Chandler science-fiction novel my older brother left lying around. It had a scene where

someone vomited in zero gravity, so I knew this was a fiction that appealed to me!”

After completing his education – gaining a BA in English at Wabash College, Indiana, and a Masters in Education at St Louis’ Washington University – he neglected genre fiction for quite a while. “I didn’t read any literature of the fantastic for years,” he recalls, “apart from a little Stephen King, who was just appearing then and was a bit of a phenomenon. It was only when I started trying to get published myself that I began re-reading science fiction.”

He found employment with the American public school system, teaching elementary-level youngsters, and was later involved in an innovative programme designed to aid gifted children. “The one inspiration I can point to from my teaching days was telling a class of children a story for half an hour a day for an entire school year. That’s 182 days.

“It was an epic tale so long, so complicated, and framed and formed so much by the verbal telling of it, that it was a memorable experience for me. And, I hope, for the kids who participated in it. My two big science-fiction novels, *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, are actually fragments of that science-fiction tale I told the children.”

That was the genesis of his Hugo Award-winning novels? “It really was. There was mention of certain events that later formed *Hyperion*, although they were a tiny part of a very large tapestry. And what delights me is that, apart from the material I later salvaged for *Hyperion*, it’s all gone. When the children left, that was it. Actually, I did once start writing it down. But I got to three hundred longhand pages, realized it was going to take at least five thousand pages, and gave up. So I just let it be what it was; a tale that only those children will know in its entirety.

“You know, they were rabid editors, and would point out any continuity errors. They would spot that a character had a red beret the last time we saw him – like three months ago – and now he had a green one. We had charts all

over the classroom, we had diagrams, we had lists of characters and drawings of them I did for the kids; we had a map that spread all the way around the room that tracked these characters on their odyssey. It was fun.”

By the late 1970s Simmons was submitting stories to science fiction magazines. *Galileo* took one but went out of business before publishing it, and the same thing happened with *Galaxy*.

“I realize now what a wimp I was for allowing a few rejections and the mere fact that I murdered a couple of my favourite magazines to get me disheartened. It didn’t take much to make me think I couldn’t make a go of it. Today I would give the advice to anyone to persevere even if you have to kill all the magazines.

“I was trying to sell things like articles to *The Atlantic Monthly*, and I would get a nice letter back saying, ‘This is quite good, but it’s a bit too long for our needs. Why don’t you try *The Nation*?’ I was getting rather good signals, but at the time I just wanted to be published, and anything that smacked of rejection I found discouraging. But you have to be realistic, and you have to be determined. That’s the thing that ultimately sorts out the writers from the non-writers. I agree with the theory that no worthy piece of fiction goes unpublished. I don’t think there are great masterpieces sitting in too many drawers. Those people who can write with quality will sooner or later get published.”

Disillusioned with his attempts to break into print, he decided to abandon his writing ambitions. And by way of saying a last goodbye to his literary aspirations he attended a six-day writer’s workshop in Colorado, where he met Harlan Ellison and Ed Bryant, who encouraged him to continue trying. “Both Harlan and I cite that meeting, try to pump it up to epic proportions, and it was very dramatic. But everything Harlan does is very dramatic.

“When I hear him telling people he discovered me I always remind him that I knew where I was. This is like Columbus discovering America, you know? I was an Indian and we knew our way around before you arrived,



thank you very much. But he did discover me. He was the one who said I had to keep writing."

In fact Ellison, in a display of the kind of understatement for which he is famous, vowed to "personally rip his nose off" if Simmons considered giving up. "That's about as diplomatic as he can be at times. I took that threat quite seriously, because even after knowing him for a few days I knew that when Harlan makes a threat it's never idle. But I understood that what he was really saying was that writing was an imperative, and that I had no choice.

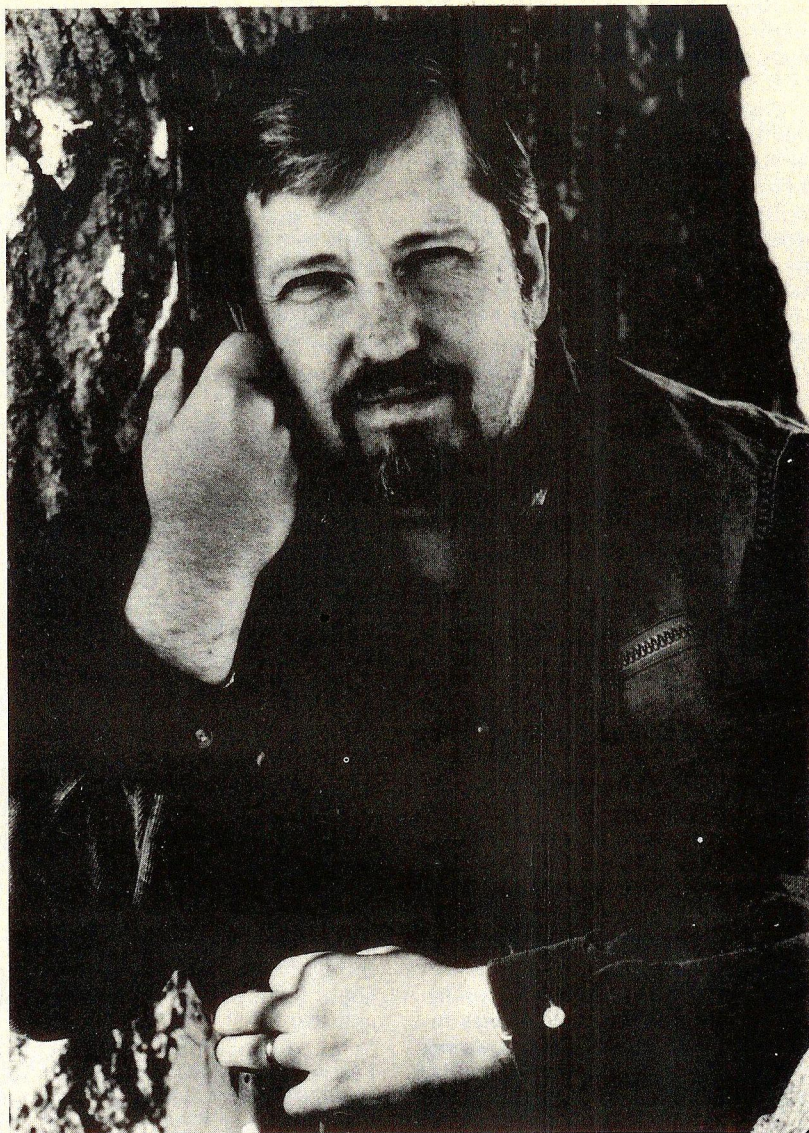
"Along with the 'I'll rip your nose off if you don't write' comment he gave a wonderfully eloquent, off the cuff speech - although I'm sure he rehearsed it somewhere with somebody - and it was essentially about the fact that writers have to follow their music. But he also said there was a cost in heeding that message, that it will cost you in terms of what you want to do in life. It will cost you in the sense that everything takes second place to writing. He was right."

Ed Bryant was due to run a Milford science-fiction writers' workshop following the Colorado gathering, and asked Simmons to attend, the first time an unpublished writer had ever been invited. "I was too naive at the time to know what an honour that was. It was one of the last Milfords, they haven't had one since, and I spent a week critiquing and being critiqued by science-fiction writers of the calibre of Ellison, Bryant, George R.R. Martin and Connie Willis. It was an incredible experience, a seminal experience, for me."

It was tough. "Oh, incredibly. But I knew good fiction. I really felt that. I may not be able to pick out a fine wine but I always knew when I was reading something good or not so good. So, using the same yardstick I employ with anything I read, I was able at least to a certain extent to articulate why a thing was good, or why it might be improved. I've always done that with my own writing. That's why my own writing has been so disappointing to me."

Is this a way of saying he is a perfectionist? "I don't think it's a matter of perfection. I think it's a matter of minimal standards. The minimal standards for fiction should be very, very high. I know why and where I disappoint myself. Certainly I tend to leap on my soapbox if someone says, 'Well, it's only science fiction, we can lower the standards in this field.' In terms of characterization, for example. I say that's just not acceptable."

He acknowledges that characterization in sf has improved a lot, but still sees it as shuffling along compared to mainstream fiction. "I don't think it's enough to say, 'Now we've done the right thing because the spaceship



#### Dan Simmons

captains or half the soldiers are women.' That is tokenism as far as I'm concerned.

"In the TV series *LA Law*, every judge at every trial is either black or female, and it costs the producers nothing. I'm sure social historians two hundred years from now will look at our TV and movies and think that every police precinct captain in America was a black man.

"What I'm interested in is the kind of characterization that brings the characters more alive than most real human beings you know. I believe somewhere Huckleberry Finn is going down that river as we speak, and I'd like to see comparable characterization in science fiction. There are all too few examples of it. You can think of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and so forth, and a few characters stand there like nails, holding down the rest of the fictional tapestry. But there aren't enough."

Does he see his own characters

having the same kind of independent existence as Huckleberry Finn? "Yes and no. I will say that a character only works for me when I create one complex enough that I don't know what he or she will do. It's too easy to say the characters come alive and go off and do things arbitrarily. They don't do that. But they have secrets and silences that I have to probe and dig for.

"In fact sometimes I have to stop writing, because I've realized a character isn't holistic enough, and you don't know all the edges and corners. I think it's too easy in science fiction to have the soldier character, the spaceship captain character, whatever character. Take cyberpunk. I admire cyberpunk a lot, but often the characterizations are to me sort of adolescent wish-fulfillment."

The Milford experience seems to have worked because within months Simmons began to get his stories published. The first, "The River

Styx Runs Upstream," appeared in *Twilight Zone*, which was decent enough not to fold before carrying it. "The River Styx" was joint winner of the magazine's annual short-story competition, in 1982, beating 10,000 other submissions. Longer stories surfaced in *Asimov's* and *Omni*, the latter including the Nebula nominated "Carrion Comfort."

He has little time to write shorts these days, but retains an affection for the form. "I absolutely love the short story. I love the fact that you can't waste a word. I love the delicacy of it. There are still writers whom I prefer primarily in the short form, like John Updike, who I can't take in the long haul.

"In the wilds of Southern Illinois their idea of a sport is coon hunting, where you go after raccoons. But the hunters don't go hunting; they sit around a camp fire and drink while the hounds are out chasing the raccoons all night. But the conventional wisdom was that you never let the dog get the taste of the raccoon, because once he did he'll run it down a lot faster. You can ruin a coon dog by letting it chew the raccoon. I think writing a novel is very much like letting the coon dog get at the raccoon. Once you've tasted it, you're different. When you've been able to expand work into a novel-size format short stories are hard to go back to unless you have tremendous self-discipline.

"What drew me to science fiction in the first place was the short stories in magazines like *Galaxy*, which were dealing with quite interesting social issues at that time. My hungry, half-formed mind couldn't find stories elsewhere I could understand about such topics, but I could understand something like 'Gravy Planet' for example. When I read that I began to understand economics, and that maybe capitalism wasn't as great as I thought it was.

"I think it's marvellous that there still is a thriving market for short science fiction, and that's nice for the beginning writer especially. On the other hand I don't care for the advice a lot of professionals give young writers; to begin writing a novel first. Short stories and novels are completely different media in a way. There is a learning process in the short story."

After a comparatively short period writing stories he turned to novels. His premier effort, *Song of Kali*, was unique in being the only first novel to win the World Fantasy Award, in 1986.

*Song of Kali* features a journalist who, along with his Anglo-Indian wife and baby daughter, goes to Calcutta in search of a famed poet. Everyone believes this old man is dead, but what appear to be new examples of his work

have begun to surface. Overlaying this mystery is a fantasy layer concerning the Kali death cult which, despite having been supposedly stamped out by the British in the 1850s, still secretly exists.

*Kali* was published as a horror novel. But that wasn't exactly the way Simmons saw it. "I knew it had teetered into the supernatural, to the edge of the supernatural anyway, but I also took great pains to make sure there was nothing overtly supernatural in it. Everything in *Song of Kali* can be explained. It was marketed as a horror novel, which didn't thrill me too much, and it won the World Fantasy Award, which really made me scratch my head.

"That especially delighted me because so few people had read the book. It appeared and disappeared, as most author's first books do, but the award at least was a solid thing; I could touch it every once in a while, so I knew I'd written a book."

One of the novel's achievements is its depiction of Calcutta as a cauldron of grinding despair and brutality. But it is more than a standard dark thriller. It comments on the pervasiveness of violence in the modern world and our apparent willingness to tolerate it. "I spent a summer travelling in India in 1977," he says, "as a teacher on a Fulbright Fellowship. I stayed just a few days in Calcutta, but many of the things in the book I'd seen or heard about firsthand in different parts of the country.

"I hadn't planned on it being a novel. I wasn't yet ready to write one. I wanted a short story and I kept cutting it back this way and that. Finally I gave up and realized I had to write it as a book."

A book with a surprising ending. Its hero, defying the conventions of popular fiction, resists the opportunity to exact revenge for a terrible wrong done to him and his family. He refuses to add to the senseless cycle of violence surrounding him. "The ending, the tragedy that formed the ending, was what made me write the book, more than any interest in sharing my impressions of India.

"But by the time I got to that part of the book I didn't want that end, especially since the tragedy occurs to a seven-month-old child, because at that time my daughter was seven months old herself. I remember the day I had to write that scene where the infant died. I took the day off, went up into the mountains, and hiked around all day working out alternative endings that were more satisfying; endings that were certainly more satisfying as formulas, and which I knew would be more satisfying to my readers. Then I came back and wrote the last three chapters in the way I originally conceived them.

"I've done that since, especially when a character has to die. I go off and I ponder it and see what happens. Occasionally I change things because of it, but in this case I knew it had to be that way."

1989 was a high-profile year for Simmons, with three novels published in short succession. "I was not thrilled by having three books all appearing so close to each other, to say the least. *Carrion Comfort*, the novel I expanded from the *Omni* story, I spent several years trying to get published in a proper form. Everything would have been nicely spaced if I'd agreed to what I considered the compromises the publishers wanted made with that book.

"I'd quit teaching, had a couple of contracts, and I was going to be a professional writer. In the event I ended up spending two years with no income at all; in fact I had to buy *Carrion Comfort* back from the publisher because they wanted to cut it. They also wanted to put it out in two or three volumes; they wanted to do all sorts of things that would have hurt it. So I gave away all my savings to buy the book back. The edition that finally appeared, imperfect as it was, was in the form I wanted. It worked out all right."

*Carrion Comfort* again dealt with violence. It centres on a group of old people meeting for an annual reunion. They seem harmless, but are in fact survivors of the Nazi death-camp operators, and possess a psychic power enabling them to control others. In this case the horror label was more appropriate. "Yes, it was a horror novel; it had truly horrific aspects. It had elements that could be interpreted as supernatural in terms of human beings mentally controlling other people. Although you could look at it as science fiction; telepathy and mind control, you know? Primarily it was an action/adventure/suspense novel.

"I was content with 'Carrion Comfort' in its short story incarnation, but it kept coming back to me. I kept thinking about the characters, especially Melanie Fuller, this nice 78-year-old lady who was actually an appalling monster, sitting there knitting while she sent out these mental surges to commit murder. She was a person who truly did have absolute power over others. So she stayed with me.

"I didn't know how big the story would grow, though. It dominated my family's lives for a year and a half. To the extent that I can't even say 'Carrion Comfort' around my wife. It was a painful time. Everything was sacrificed to get that book done. It was certainly the most intense writing experience I've ever had."

*Phases of Gravity*, a mainstream novel set in 1987, came next. It features an ex-Apollo astronaut confronting some unpalatable truths about the

way his life has gone since the heady heyday of the space programme. "The book was written but I wasn't quite satisfied with it. I knew something was lacking. Then Challenger exploded and I rewrote it. Finally, when I had the protagonist's philosophical wanderings in the desert coincide with NASA's wanderings after the shuttle hiatus, it began to make sense."

Simmons thinks the novel's packaging gave the wrong impression of its content. "Phases of Gravity is not science fiction. It's a novel about what must seem the most boring thing in the world; the mid-life crisis. To me it was exciting, because the character is the most sensitive character I've created, and his sensibilities surpass my own, if that's possible.

"Secondly I was dealing with philosophical issues I found important. My hero's whole life had been a simulation. Even the lunar landing he experienced 14 years earlier was just a simulation. But for what? So at the advanced age of fiftysomething he's philosophically bankrupt and just wandering around trying to find some place to start over. This is not what a science-fiction reader would probably gravitate to."

What sf enthusiasts do gravitate towards does not always meet with Simmons' approval. "I was at a minor science-fiction convention once and saw a panel where they asked each of the authors why he or she was writing sf.

"They all had rather impressive, interesting answers, but one writer, whose name I don't remember, said, 'I wrote science fiction because I wanted to be a writer. I was 15 years old and I didn't know anything. I'd never had sex, I'd never earned any money, I'd never filled out a tax form, I couldn't knot my tie. And here I was wanting to write about things. Obviously I wasn't going to write about my mother trying to make me clean my room, so it was easier to write science fiction. I'd make some mistake if I tried to describe driving an automobile because I couldn't drive one, but I could drive a jetcar, I could fly a spacecraft.' I'm going on at length, but I think there's too much of that element in some science fiction. It's what we write about when we don't write about life.

"If we're still writing the same type of fiction that interested us as readers when we were 12 years old there is a bit of avoidance there I think. We haven't got through that business of growing up. Some of the science fiction I read as a kid was wonderful, but grown-up sf appeals to me too."

**H**is contribution to grown-up science fiction is the Hyperion sequence. *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, actually one long book divided,

take their titles from unfinished poems by Keats and their structure from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. They tell how, in the distant future, Humanity builds an artificial intelligence network that threatens to sublimate or even destroy its creators.

"It was always envisioned as one tale, but I knew it would be published as two books. I did not fight to put it into a single volume. I'd just finished two years of trench warfare to get *Carrión Comfort* out and I wasn't going to try again.

"You know those warning messages they have on cigarette packets – 'This is hazardous to your health.'? I wanted the same sort of thing on the first Hyperion book, warning the reader that the story begun in that volume would be concluded in *The Fall of Hyperion*. They put it on the back and it was there right up until the last galley. But when the book came out it was supplanted by a blurb or something. Which drove me crazy."

*Hyperion* was a vast and complex subject, and that was part of its appeal for him. "It sounds arrogant, but with the *Hyperions* it was essentially the size of the canvas that attracted me. Although a big canvas doesn't ensure anything except the use of a lot of paint. At times though I wondered about my sanity when I got well and truly into the thing and realized how many strands there were to be united. I have to plan things rather carefully, but only because I tend to get lost in my own Byzantine plots.

"The *Hyperion* books were the first books I've submitted in fragments, because the artist needed it and so forth, and the marketing director was reading parts as I sent them in. When I was about two thirds of the way through he got on the phone and said, 'Do you know how this is going to end? Are you going to be able to tie all these things together?' I said, 'Absolutely.' Then I put down the phone and thought, 'Oh God!' I had no idea how all these things were going to come together. But they did. One of the reasons I think they did was because the characters were solid enough that they helped me to that ending. They knew what to do even if I wasn't too sure.

"As I generated names of characters and places I wrote them on pieces of paper and stuck them on the walls. At one point there was an invasion going on, and that was the first time I literally had to chart my little universe. I needed to know when these interstellar invaders reached a certain star system at X amount of time at the speed of light. So I had a diagram with a three-dimensional background with waves of invaders and times written down on it. But other than that there really wasn't anything mechanistic there. It was just a case of seeing what hap-

pened next and trying to remember it!

"My primary goal was to do this huge work but have it paced like a short, fast, brisk novel that keeps you wrapped up in it. Because I hadn't had that experience too often as a reader. There are dead zones in most of my favourite large books, and I don't care for those dead zones. Even if there's no actual action going on I like to have that imperative feeling. Which was the hardest part of writing the book.

"What kind of feeling was I trying to generate? I had a very definite aim in that respect. When I was about nine my older brother came home for Christmas and he brought me three large boxes of Ace science-fiction doubles, and copies of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *Astounding*. I flipped out. I went berserk. I remember reading those books and magazines into the spring.

"That orgy of reading after Christmas when I was nine years old and the tremendous feeling of attendant richness and expansiveness was what I was trying to celebrate in *Hyperion*."

Dan Simmons' books are published in the UK by *Headline*.

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## Interaction

Continued from page 5

### Fiction

"Of Law and Magic." Obviously intended for the *Liavek* shared world series edited by Emma Bull and Will Shetterly, but never published there – it would have strained the series background if it had been.

"Homecoming." A dying AI probe attempts to fill its contact directive. Short, minor, but poignant.

"The Dark King." A version of the Sisyphus legend, unusual for its sympathetic treatment of Death, the major protagonist.

"Sea Change." Dark – Celtic? – fantasy, a doomed love triangle on a small island.

"A Gift of Prophecy." Odd science fiction, concerning an oracular shrine.

"Willow." Celtic fantasy, a war-weary warrior meets a child who is more than she seems.

"Pots." An alien race devotes itself to searching for the species responsible for the Voyager probe.

### Non-Fiction

"Romantic/Science-Fiction." A discussion of the origin of various literary genres and a defence of sf in particular.

"Perspectives in SF." Cherryh's worldview and SF's role in it.

"The Avoidance Factor." Where are the aliens?

"The Use of Archaeology in Worldbuilding." Cherryh's personal approach to world creation.

"In Alien Tongues." Developing realistic alien languages.

Note that as a result of these corrections "Pots" should no longer be listed as uncollected.

Moving onto stylistic points, the annotations seem to ignore the underlying themes of the work in favour of rather slight plot summaries. Perception of gender-roles forms an important facet of the *Chanur* books, *Serpent's Reach* revolves around revenge, the *Morgaine* sequence around obsession, and both *Wave Without a Shore* and *Cyteen* are about the loneliness of genius. Obviously this is a matter of personal taste, but to my mind themes are such an important facet of Cherryh's work that annotations without reference to them simply seem incomplete. Perhaps what is needed for future bibliographies in the series is a short essay considering the writer's work as a whole.

David Gillon  
Rochester, Kent

**Editor:** Your corrections and suggestions are most welcome. We do intend to run more annotated bibliographies of interesting authors, but space problems have prevented us from doing so in the past four issues. We have a bibliography of Barry Malzberg upcoming, probably to be followed by similar pieces on James White, Barrington Bayley, R.A. Lafferty and others. Suggestions, anyone?

Dear Editors:

I have been subscribing to your magazine for two years, and will be renewing my subscription again. In general, I think the fiction is of a very high quality; sure, it can be a bit gloomy or "difficult," but the magazine isn't aiming itself at someone who is only looking for entertainment.

Personally, I prefer the more "hard" types of fiction (and yes, I am a female reader). To take an example, Glenn Grant's "Storm Surge" – or almost anything by Greg Egan. My grouch with *IZ* is when things that are not really sf get included, like "Wearing My Skin" or "The Hauler-In Susie M." However well written these might be, I don't subscribe to *IZ* to read mainstream. I'm sure it was Nicola Griffith who said in an interview: "I submit to the mainstream magazines and they say 'too weird.' So I submit to the science-fiction magazines and they take them." I think that about sums it up, really.

However, my bigger complaint – and the main reason for writing this letter – is the amount of American writers published in the magazine. This even extends to people like Paul J. McAuley and Kim Newman writing about alternative American history. Considering that *Interzone* is the only professional sf magazine in Britain, I feel it should be making efforts to promote the British scene. If I wanted to read American writers I would be buying *Asimov's*.

After reading the editorial in issue 55 about your failed attempt to gain American subscribers I wondered where this desire to circulate in America comes from. I suspect the answer is financial gain, not reasons like "wanting to present British authors to an American readership," as *IZ* already does well in the polls and is highly regarded by American critics. I don't see the need to sell more copies over there.

If you want to boost your finances how about trying to increase the readership in this country? Surely an easier move is to get *Interzone* up on the shelves of the newsagents beside *Starlog* and so on. Then maybe you'll have resources to compete in the U.S. price wars. Surely the Arts Council is giving you grants to promote home-grown talent in science fiction? In

short, you should be proud of being independent of the American scene.

A Humble Reader  
Edinburgh

**Editor:** As a matter of fact, we are making efforts to increase the UK readership, though not in terms of a news-trade campaign (which we know from experience is a bad idea – W.H. Smith et al just aren't interested in magazines of relatively low circulation). The Arts Council is giving us a special "Incentive Funding" grant to promote subscriptions, and, if all has gone well with our plans, over 100,000 *IZ* leaflets should have been sent out to the subscribers of other magazines (New Scientist, New Statesman, etc) by the time these words see print. We'll let you know the results in due course. As to your claim that we publish too many Americans: we take the view that the English-language sf community is all one big family. After all, some of your own favourite writers, such as Greg Egan (Australian) or Glenn Grant (Canadian), live outside both Britain and the USA... Yes, we publish American writers, and over the years we've been proud to discover a number of good ones, from Scott Bradfield to Diane Mapes. That said, we have also encouraged a large number of new British writers, and, yes, we do see it as our role "to present British authors to an American readership." There are lots of good reasons to expand the American readership if we can: it will help ensure the magazine's long-term survival (after all, not all British sf readers support us by subscribing to *IZ*; some, alas, cannot afford to do so in the present recession; others are simply indifferent to short stories); it will help raise the profile of British sf overseas; it will help the careers of individual writers we discover; and so on.

## Write to *Interzone*

We may not be able to reply to (or publish) all letters, but we do appreciate hearing from you.

# Pacing the Nightmare

## Sean McMullen

**T**raining has become a nightmare, yet I must face it again tonight. I am Melissa's sensei, so I must remain good enough to keep her loyalty. I must spar with her again.

I have never liked training. This may sound odd, coming from a black belt in Shotokan karate, but I have only persisted with it because it is good for me. I had been lazy: karate taught me self-discipline. I had been a bit on the heavy side, and inclined to be short of breath: karate melted the fat away and increased my aerobic capacity. I had been afraid to go out after dark: karate gave me the confidence not to fear London at night – and the sense to avoid fights.

We train in a large gym in the University of London's new sports centre, but wherever we train defines the dojo. Melissa is already there as I enter, along with some of the beginners who are starting tonight. The beginners mill about nervously, glancing at the spectre that is Melissa and trying to work out how to tie their white belts. At the sight of my black belt they come over, even before I have bowed my re at the dojo threshold. They have the usual questions.

"Excuse me sensei –"

I smile, but cut him short. "I'm not the club sensei, I'm only a black belt."

"Er, can you recommend a book on karate?"

"Akira Suzuki, *Shotokan Karate Explained*. The club can rent you the CD or hard copy for 50p."

"Where can I buy a uniform?" asks a girl.

"Give me your name and size, I'm putting in a bulk order for the club next week. We get a 30% discount."

"But I want one for the next lesson. Do they sell them in Harrods?"

Melissa sees me, smiles, and gives an almost imperceptible nod. I return the gesture, and she continues doing chin-ups on the bars. It is obvious why the new students are unsettled by her: face all sunken hollows and shadows, skeletal hands and feet. Her gi is a size too large, helping to hide her thin arms and legs, and she is generally self-effacing about her appearance. All the classic signs of anorexia nervosa, yet that is not Melissa's problem. I am still senior to her, and she is obliged to obey me within the dojo, but I cannot slow her progress. I can only try to stay ahead, yet I am not too proud to use delaying tactics.

"Melissa, could you show these beginners how to tie their belts, please?" I call. She stops her chin-ups and comes over. Her brown belt is tied with a perfect

knot around a disturbingly thin waist. The two ends reach almost to her knees.

Other karatekas arrive. There is a sprinkling of black belts and the club sensei himself.

"All right, good lines please," calls our Japanese sensei in his Yorkshire accent, and six dozen karatekas line up in rows by belt colour. The black belts are at the front, facing the rest of the class.

We start with warm-up and stretching exercises: jumping on the spot, head-rolls, arm stretches, leg stretches, twisting, and bending. I am still stiff from my afternoon training, in fact I am constantly in pain from pushing myself too hard. There can be no rest for me, however, not while Melissa is my student.

I did not pay her much attention at first, but then there was nothing remarkable about her three years ago. It was the start of the academic year, and she was one of twenty beginners, just like these here tonight. Our beginners are usually first-year students from the University, some anxious about keeping fit while studying, others anxious about being mugged at night.

Melissa had been one of those not wearing a proper gi on her first training night. She wore a black bodystocking with a fluorescent red and green trunk and a pair of pursed lips on each buttock. That is all that stands out in my memory for the first few months, until the night that she was awarded her yellow belt. Her parents were there, and after training they accosted me at random from among the black belts. They asked why she was becoming so thin, they were worried that she was displaying symptoms of anorexia nervosa. I laughed off the suggestion, and explained that many karate students lose weight during the first year of training, but that it comes back as muscle.

They were reassured. Melissa was very precious to them, they explained. She was an only child, an in-vitro fertilization baby from a programme in the early 1990s. I promised that I would take a special interest in her. I had just begun my PhD in cytology, and the combination of this and my recently acquired black belt made them trust me well beyond my competence.

Legs apart, push down, stretch, stretch. I would stretch better with a few days of rest yet I cannot afford that.

The warm-ups are over. "Floor, please," calls the sensei, then he turns to me. "Would you look after white belts, Greg?" That accent! Asian, African and

Arabic academics with Oxford or even American accents are understandable, but a Japanese from Yorkshire?

Forty minutes of muscle development follows warm-ups. Much of it is for the abdominal muscles, because a karateka's strength comes mainly from the abdomen. Fifty leg-raises, thirty jackknives, two hundred sit-ups, I do it all, I push myself to do it all. Most beginners do a fraction of what is required, and even the senior karatekas do not push themselves particularly hard. Melissa does more of everything: eighty leg-raises, fifty jackknives, three hundred sit-ups, and I know that she has already trained at least twice today. Her eyes are huge brown discs in a gaunt, drawn face, and her arms are like thin, hard robotic manipulators. For all her skeletal frame, though, she is surprisingly heavy.

As white belts karatekas learn the basic movements, as yellow belts they work on adding power, but more subtle considerations come at orange belt. Students have to become conscious of good style, and to maintain and improve it in everything that they do. Upon reaching orange belt Melissa decided that she needed a personal sensei. Through sheer coincidence a PhD student in cytology was the instructor that she imprinted on.

On nights that I do instructing I stay back to do extra training for myself. Melissa often stayed to watch, and finally she came over to ask if she could train with me.

"Why not, but remember that I'm doing this to maintain my own technique. I won't give you much time."

"I understand, thank you." She stared at the floor. Something was bothering her. "What... do you think of me?" Her words came with difficulty.

"You train harder than anyone I've ever known. I'm impressed. At first I didn't think you would even reach the second lesson."

Something seemed to burst within her. "Greg, please help me, I need someone who knows about karate to... to tell me if I'm... all right. Please understand, I've given up so much to be a good karateka, and I don't know why! Now the instructors ignore me, I'm still losing weight, I've stopped menstruating without being pregnant—"

Her outburst, her distress was a surprise. She had seemed so self-confident until then.

"All right, calm down and we'll take the last one first. Some women do stop menstruating when they train very hard."

"They do?"

"They do. I did a sub-thesis on it. As far as your technique goes, it's very good, the best in your group. If the instructors ignore you it's because you need little correction. Don't take things so seriously."

A week after she was awarded her orange belt her parents returned to ambush me again. They were comfortably rich, yet they did not have the smug, bland, boring manner that I have come to expect from such people. They were alarmed, frightened: something was still wrong with their daughter, and was getting worse. She was thinner, and she had broken up with her boyfriend, who was the son of the Duke of somewhere and about 200th in line for the throne. She had

also broken his jaw in two places during an argument.

I remembered her boyfriend, who had often picked her up after training. When we had been introduced he had given me the usual face-saving line about having done akido for a couple of years (why is it always akido?).

Melissa's parents took us to dinner at a club with private dining rooms. She had shed several kilogrammes since getting her yellow belt, and the muscles, bones and ligaments showed beneath her skin.

"She's our best student," I told them.

"She's good?" exclaimed her father. "Have you seen her without her clothes lately?"

"I've never seen her without her clothes," I replied, vaguely annoyed at the implication. The poverty induced by postgraduate studies had broken up my previous two relationships, and I had sworn myself to celibacy until I could call myself *Dr Carter*.

By the end of the dinner I had conceded that Melissa should see a specialist if she continued to lose weight. In the weeks that followed I watched with interest as Melissa's fists thudded into the felt and canvas make-wa punching mats. Was she hitting more forcefully just to harden her knuckles, or did her mind project somebody's face onto the canvas? When she was finally forced to see the specialist, she recruited me as a sympathetic authority.

I took a 3/4-inch board along to his rooms, and she began the examination by breaking it with one punch. She then lay on the floor and counted to fifty while I stood on her stomach—I weigh ninety kilogrammes. The doctor was impressed.

"Superficially, Melissa, it's a case of anorexia nervosa, but that's as far as it goes," he concluded. "You are obviously fit, strong and confident, and you eat well. What is really strange is that your weight is normal for your height, yet you *look* so wasted. Mr Carter, what do you think? Does this happen often in karate?"

"No, but Melissa trains exceptionally hard."

"That may explain it... I mean, as far as I am concerned, Melissa, you're not sick, in fact you're the fittest patient that I have ever examined."

"Then why not tell my parents that?"

"Why not indeed?" he breathed, shaking his head. "What effect is all this training having on the rest of your life: your friends, your studies?"

"My studies are going well. The discipline that I have learned in karate has helped a lot. My assignment results are up from an average of B+ to A-. My boyfriend and I have broken off, but I have new friends, like Greg."

I felt myself blush, but they were not looking in my direction.

"So what drives you to train so hard?" he asked.

She did not reply at once, and when she did she chose her words carefully. "I have read up on anorexia nervosa, doctor. I know how those with the syndrome starve themselves because it gives them the feeling of control over their bodies. Karate does give me that control, I admit it and I like it. At school I was forced to develop the body beautiful, not too lean, not too flabby, but through karate I discovered that I really enjoy pushing myself to the limit."

"Anorexia karateka," I joked. Nobody smiled.

"This just might be the first recorded case of a new syndrome," he said, with the slightly vacant stare of

someone already planning a paper for *Nature*. "Would you consent to regular examinations? I'm willing to certify you fit for now, but I would not be acting ethically if I did not monitor your condition."

He was offering a deal. Melissa accepted.

**W**e are doing pushups. "Pushups are done with a straight body, and on the top two knuckles of your fists," I tell the beginners. "I don't care if you can do only two or three at first, just do them properly."

A few of them can indeed only do two or three proper pushups. The sensei counts. Five groups of ten, ten, ten, rest. I do fifteens. Melissa does twenties.

Melissa is good, but her excellence did not come without hard work. Exercising at one's limit always hurts, and it is during the pushups that I can see her under the most strain. I see her arms, her whole body shaking with effort, but she persists until she has done whatever she has set for herself. I also do more in each bracket, pushing myself until a small intense ball of pain flares at the core of my biceps. She is so fresh and I am so tired, yet I must spar with her tonight.

I began to develop an academic curiosity about Melissa's condition, and after several months of being her private and unofficial sensei I asked her to come to the laboratory for some tests. Athletes doing training in extremis to break world records often have lowered resistance to disease, so I expected to find Melissa's immunity level depressed. It was normal. A CAT scan revealed that the section modulus of her bones was normal too, although the muscle attachment was unusually deep. The cells of her muscles were where the really dramatic differences showed, however, and this was my speciality.

In weightlifting one's muscles must provide the maximum force possible, but in sprinting the rate of doing work is more important. Thus speed sports do not require the large cross-sectional area of muscle of a weight-lifter, it is the rate of contraction that is critical. Muscles generate maximum power when contracting at an intermediate rate – but not Melissa's muscles. I found that they worked in an optimized dual mode, so that they could generate close to maximum power at a very high rate of contraction. Physiologically it was a contradiction in terms.

I did biopsies of Melissa's small, hard muscles, and these indicated that membranes called the sarcoplasmic reticulum were releasing calcium faster than in normal muscles. The calcium is what causes muscular contraction, and its release is triggered by a protein. With Melissa the protein was chemically different, and its interaction with the membranes caused a faster outflow of calcium. Thus both her muscle structure and chemistry were enhanced, so that her muscles were small and light for speed work, yet very powerful when sheer strength was required. Tiny, dense muscles: that was why she looked emaciated, yet was in perfect health.

I told Melissa little of what I was learning, only that I was working out why she looked the way she did while remaining healthy. She seemed relieved, if only because it might pacify her parents.



**T**here is a short rest before the formal training begins. Tonight an orange belt is due for an upgrade to green, and for the final test he has to break a 3/4-inch board. Two examiners hold the board as he squares off for a *gyaku-tsuki* punch, then snaps his whole body behind the leading knuckles of his fist and shouts his *kiai*. The board breaks, everyone claps.

I am reminded of the night that Melissa broke her first board as part of her green belt tests. She had everything mastered and passed easily, yet there was a subtle imperfection with the flow of her movements in *katas* and sparring. She was smoothly mechanical, more like a perfect computer simulation than a human.

"Your style is too mechanical," I said abruptly as we worked alone after training. "For gradings and competitions it's fine, but not in a life-and-death situation."

"So what can I do?" she asked, very concerned.

"Just keep training. Some things only come with time."

I was saying this for myself, not Melissa. I was years ahead of her, but she was closing the gap too fast. There *had* to be some stylistic subtleties that only came with time.

"But there must be something that I can do," she pleaded. "How did you solve this problem when you were at my level?"

"It was never a problem with me. Just be patient, and keep training."

I had fobbed her off, I had scored a cheap point. It would return to haunt me.

The break is over, and the sensei calls for good rows. Before the formal re that begins training proper there is the conferral of belts. The orange belt who broke the board is called by name, and he walks forward to be given a certificate and a green belt.

The sensei calls another name. "Melissa Jennison."

I almost gasp, and my heart sinks. She has caught up with me, she is being awarded her black belt early. That can be done without formal tests in exceptional cases, and Melissa is exceptional. She takes her belt from the sensei, they bow, and everyone claps. What will become of humanity now? I must –

"Greg Carter."

Me! I must stare and gape like a gaffed fish for a moment. I walk to the sensei, step forward, take the belt and certificate, shake hands, step back, we bow to each other, the class claps, and I walk back to my place. Everyone stands patiently as the three upgraded karatekas drop to one knee, undo their old belts and put on the new. Mine is a black belt with two red stripes. Second Dan! While pacing Melissa I had not noticed my own style improving.

There are two belts that most karatekas remember particularly well: yellow, because it is the first step up, and black because of what it symbolizes. Not so for me. Second Dan is the scrap of driftwood thrown to me just as I had reconciled myself to drowning. The sensei addresses the class.

"Melissa and Greg are excellent students, hard working and dedicated. They are models that everyone should watch. Greg, will you train white belts tonight, please?"

The beginners stand in five ragged lines. At the

formal re some bow with exaggerated depth, others just give an embarrassed nod.

"Greg is a tutor at University," the sensei continues. This is reassurance for the beginners, it tells them that I am well educated and responsible, not some psychopathic streetfighter. "At first you will find training hard to keep up with, and you will ache all over. It becomes easier after a few weeks. You must never let yourselves lapse. Karate is all about continual improvement, and the moment that you begin to feel comfortable is the moment that you have to push yourself harder. Tonight you are going to learn a few points of etiquette, then work on stances and blocks. I want you to give these basics close attention. They can mean the difference between a pass and a fail in gradings, and could even help you win your division in the *kata* competitions."

Except if Melissa is in your division.

"Greg, your class."

When Melissa was a green belt she carried off both prizes in her division, and finished with more points than the winning black belt. That was enough for the sensei. She was awarded her blue belt the next week.

**O**ur club runs film nights every month, generally of 20th-century martial-arts classics. It was at a double bill of *Enter the Dragon* and *Yojimbo* that I discovered another change in Melissa. As usual she had bailed me up in the foyer during the interval to complain about sloppy choreography in the fighting scenes.

"There's something wrong with the projector, too," she added. "Every time the action became interesting the image broke down into a series of still pictures."

That simply had not happened, unless... My realization of what might have really happened came as a cold, stabbing sliver of fear: she could distinguish the projector's 24 frames per second.

"I want you to come back to my lab," I said urgently. "Now."

My measurements showed that Melissa had learned to speed up her brain's visual refresh cycle at will, so that she could effectively slow down her view of the world. She also had a reaction time of 0.014 seconds for the tests that I ran, a tenth that of a normal human. Karate can teach amazing skills, but nothing like that.

All the while her karate continued to improve, sometimes dramatically. Once the sensei was demonstrating some point about the structure of *katas* and asked six black belts to have a free-form sparring bout with Melissa. Impossibly, she beat them all. The fight was exquisite karate, yet heart-stopping excitement as well. Her technique was close to perfect yet she fought with ferocity and tenacity. In return for skinned knuckles she inflicted a black eye, a cracked rib, a dislocated shoulder, two bleeding noses, and another injury that made every male in the dojo wince. The sensei was incredulous. The slight rigidity of Melissa's style had been replaced by a lithe, tigerish flow. How? The answer would not occur to me for many months. Meantime, her brown belt was awarded early.

By now I was beginning to suspect that there was a link between Melissa's strange syndrome and her *in-vitro* conception, but...manipulating genetic material in a fertilized human egg cell is difficult



enough today, so how much harder would it have been in 1992? Nevertheless, it was possible. Wonderful work had been done back then, even with the crude techniques available. Was Melissa the result of an experiment to breed an enhanced soldier?

If such an experiment had been carried out, it was certain to be a closely guarded secret. I explained my suspicions to Melissa, and she agreed to help — although without enthusiasm. It was as if she would help out of loyalty to me, but for no other reason. This would not improve her karate, so it did not interest her. For the next month I did some detailed research on the medical team that had conceived Melissa, and I decided that my most promising suspect was Dr Graham W. Corric.

Corric's rooms were in Birmingham, not far from the software company where my brother Alex worked. I contacted Alex and gave him a false but plausible story. He also agreed to help. By the time we took the train for Birmingham Melissa's body was a caricature that clothing could no longer disguise, yet she was eating more than me and blazing with energy.

**C**orric was in his mid-forties, balding and carrying more weight than was healthy, yet he was sharp, alert and perceptive. His manner was a little surly, but then I could allow a few foibles to someone who had pioneered the first reliable molecular probe for the cells of higher vertebrates.

As with the nutritionist, we started with a demonstration. Melissa squared off and punched through two boards that I held up for her. This confirmed that she was no ordinary teenage depressive. She then stripped down to her underwear, revealing a body that might have belonged to a prisoner from Belsen. Corric was gratifyingly unsettled. He responded by calling up files on his database computer, and he spent some time studying them.

He was old-fashioned about his computer equipment, as my investigations had shown. He used an old networked ICL file server running an even older Unix operating system. The screen was not visible to either Melissa or me as he logged on and typed commands. Finally he logged off and turned to face us.

"I've always had a bad opinion of all those Eastern martial arts," he stated baldly. "My cousin was into karate when I was doing my early research. He used to go on about meditation and Zen, and the whole thing sounded like metaphysical mindgames. He would sit naked under a waterfall in the Cotswolds in the middle of winter to practise self-control, that sort of thing."

"Karate is karate," I replied.

"Explain."

"It's like sex. There's a lot of rubbish spoken about it, but you have to actually do it to know what all the fuss is about."

"Have other students of yours become obsessed?"

"A few, but not like Melissa."

The conversation continued to meander pointlessly until Melissa said that she had to telephone her parents, then left. Corric had regained his confidence. He attacked.

"You would not be here unless you suspected that my early IVF work was responsible for Melissa's



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condition," he said. "Out with it, what are you accusing me of?"

I attacked too. "You must agree that Melissa could be a very effective soldier: she's strong, fast and light, and has amazing reflexes. She could be an excellent pilot, a deadly commando, anything. Was she part of some military project?"

"Mr Carter, I – are you suggesting that I performed genetic manipulations on a human zygote?"

"I am asking if anything out of the ordinary happened –"

"Do you know just how vast the human genome is? Even today, with the mapping project nearly complete, we know little more than the sites specific to a few dozen disorders. If I'd been able to engineer a super-warrior like Melissa back in the early 1990s I would have been shouting it from the rooftops. Human embryos are not like bacteria, they are delicate and complex, very difficult to work on. All right, so it's 2012, not 1992, and we can engineer children to be a bit taller and to be resistant to a few diseases, but that's all. The ancient Chinese had toy gunpowder rockets, but it does not follow that they could have sent astronauts to the moon. It's the same with genetics today. Bioengineered warriors are a long way off in the future."

It was like sparring with someone who did a lot of kiais, and knew many fancy moves. You just had to keep calm and aim at the openings that inevitably appeared.

"You did a lot of work on Huntington's disease," I began. "It involved Chromosome 4 –"

"You seem to know a lot about me."

"That I do. Chromosome 4 was also thought to contain the gene for senescence, and in the early 90s some researchers suggested that it was the key to a delay or even a cure for ageing. Did you do any experiments involving an immortality treatment?"

"No, no, no! I wouldn't have known the gene for senescence if it had jumped out of my breakfast and bitten me on the testicles! Do I make myself clear?"

It was all fast jabs and light blocks, both of us too evenly matched to do any real damage. He finally asked me to leave. How could he have known that I was sitting there, insulting and antagonizing him merely to give my brother time to do a cybernetic smash and grab on his database?

**“W**as it difficult?" I asked Melissa when I met her outside.

"A challenge, but not difficult. I phoned your brother as soon as I was outside and gave him Corric's ID, password and a description of how he had moved around his database."

As Corric had typed in passwords, database commands and file names, Melissa had accelerated her brain's scan rate to the limits of even her own remarkable powers. To her, his fingers moved with painstaking, deliberate care over his keyboard. She had memorized every key that he had struck.

The results from our raid on Corric's data and records were inconclusive. There was evidence that he had been doing experiments on the DNA of embryos, but not that he was doing genetic manipulation for any specific traits. He worked exclusively with the so-called junk DNA in rats, introducing a

selective catalyst through the cell wall on a folic acid carrier to delete specific but unimportant nucleotides. This left his mark on all the rat's cells, yet it was outwardly normal. He was experimenting with a technique, he was not engineering specific traits.

Had Corric experimented with human embryos? If so, he might have done far more than he had realized. Had he introduced a catalyst into a human zygote, meaning to delete a dozen junk nucleotides as a test? In 1992 the knowledge of genome chemistry was more limited than his technique. Perhaps he had unknowingly sheared a much larger number of nucleotides, turning on dozens of genetic characteristics. Whatever the case, he evidently decided that the genetic catalysis technique was unreliable, and he began work on the molecular probe that later brought him fame.

The changes resulting from such an experiment might remain latent until the subject had been given intensive, military-style training to focus upon: karate, for example. It made sense. If some unimaginable recruiting brigade was to medicate a group of unknowing human parents, their children would seem normal until introduced to a regimen of training, and they would be gathered up before that happened. Were the early hominids introduced to this world to provide a breeding population for warriors? If so, for who? Would they return and turn the genetic determinors on when there was some conflict requiring humanoid soldiers? Had it happened before?

**M**elissa had to be told, but I felt foolish and kept putting it off. Then one night I decided to shower quickly after training and meet her at the main entrance. I was just in time to see her leaving. I followed without hurrying, I only had to call out as she reached her car, after all. She had not brought her car. She walked briskly, and through increasingly dangerous streets. She was headed toward her parents' townhouse, yet walking home was simply ... asking for trouble!

"Melissa!"

She stopped, and I caught up. "I'm going to walk you home. I know what you've been doing."

"I do not follow," she said, but her voice quavered.

"It must have been my remark about your style being too mechanical. Have you killed anyone?"

She looked down, yet she was as proud as a cat with a large rat in its jaws. "Nine."

Nine murders. Worse than Jack the Ripper. Melissa the Hitter. I teetered on the brink of hysterical laughter as she earnestly reassured me that there was currently a drug war in London: her contribution of dead muggers was lost in the overall toll.

"Melissa ... you prowled the streets to find muggers to kill?"

"No, I just walked home."

"But the streets are too dangerous to walk at night."

"Muggers have no monopoly on darkened streets."

"You did it to learn good fighting spirit for karate. It's my fault. I told you that your style was too mechanical."

"But you were right. I thought about it for a long time."

My comment, my frustrated, impatient, jealous comment.

"Melissa, this is too much – this is the end. I'm not going to train with you unless the sensei orders me to do it."

From the look on her face I could see that I had struck home.

"But I still have to get my black belt."

"You can get your black belt without help from me."

"But I need a sensei."

"You have the club sensei."

"I must have my own sensei."

"What gives you the right to special treatment?"

"I work hard enough to deserve it, that's what!"

I walked her home, for the safety of London's muggers, then returned to college and flopped into bed, exhausted by the stress of the hours just past. Sleep came quickly, but dreams came too. I was training alone, in a deserted gym. Whenever I made a move there was raucous laughter, as if invisible, spiteful deities were mocking me. Whenever I glanced at my belt it changed colour, and always with the laughter echoing above. I soon awoke.

I sat awake reading *Cytology Abstracts* until I could barely keep my eyes open, but with sleep the nightmares returned. I was being attacked by street gangs. At first I could fight them off, but they became faster and more skilled. Some had knives, one had a gun, but even as I dodged past his arm and drove the heel of my palm into his jaw, a foot snared mine, and down I plunged – into my bed. I stayed awake until dawn.

On the following night the nightmares returned. I was being presented with a belt, but instead of third dan black I was given white. The class laughed instead of clapping, and I awoke soaked in sweat. Was it Melissa? Was some psychic alarm within her summoning me back to her – or was it less specific than that? The telephone beckoned. Melissa was calling for a sensei, calling with an intensity that could reach several miles. How much further could she reach: to the stars, perhaps? Might there be a response?

Were humans meant to develop a level of technology that would allow them to switch on the warrior genes? Probably not. How would our old masters react to a soldier on one of their reserve planets being activated and crying to the universe for an instructor? Badly, I suspected. I reached for the phone and punched in Melissa's number. She has had me back as her private sensei since then, and that was a year ago.

**T**raining is over. Instructing the white belts has been a welcome rest for me. The class performs a formal re and there are a few announcements before people start to leave. Some stay: two other black belts, Artim and Jim, besides Melissa and me. At first we do basic movements, then the serious sparring begins.

The other black belts spar with Melissa first. Her movements are not impossibly fast, but I know that she is able to observe her opponent in slow motion. That is an advantage. She lands punches pretty well wherever she likes on Artim, but Jim is more experienced and aggressive. She does several dodges before flashing past his guard to land a kick that would kill if delivered with full force. Still, her technique needs tightening in subtle ways. My turn.

We re, watching each other's eyes.





# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

“Nothing is true; everything is permitted,” warns the epigraph to David Cronenberg’s *Naked Lunch* – making an arch manifesto of William Burroughs’ own favourite aphorism from his medieval Persian-guru Hassan I Sabbah. As a slogan for the film, it’s a way of alerting less wary viewers that what’s coming is a lot more personal and freespinnin than screen adaptations of literary classics are regularly expected. But it also carries a certain stab of irony, because the biggest problem Cronenberg’s had to face in bringing *Naked Lunch* to the screen is that in the movies hardly anything is permitted at all – including most of the things that have clearly excited Cronenberg himself, and fans of the novel generally, about Burroughs’ giddy text in the first place. Getting *Lunch* together doesn’t seem to have been an easy project, financially or creatively; though the deals began striking in 1983, it wasn’t till 1989 that there was even a script. (The catalyst, though it isn’t credited, has clearly been Ted Morgan’s 1988 biography *Literary Outlaw* – a single line in which, for instance, seems to have prompted the film’s whole odd decision to forge an insistent link between Joan Burroughs and Jane Bowles, both here played by Judy Davis). The delay in writing can’t in turn have helped the financing, which seems to have hung by a shoestring all along: the Tangier locations, for instance, had to be scratched at short notice after shooting in North America had already started.

And so, capitulating to what may, in a very precariously-financed independent production, have been the inevitable, Cronenberg has done a lot of movie things to the novel that seem to go right against its original grain. The seemingly random narrative sequence has been replaced by a linear, hero-led, traditionally movie-structured plot. (Lore has it the order of sections in the novel was determined by the order in which galleys came back from the printers, though this is at least as much one of Burroughs’ role-playing games as his famous preface claiming to have no recollection of writing the text.) Some – in fact, quite a few – of the characters have been made likeable. All references to junk, and indeed all real-world drugs, have been exterminated.



Peter Weller and a friend in 'Naked Lunch'.

The explicit sexual atrocities and baroque deviations of the flesh that make up the novel’s best-remembered scenes have virtually disappeared from view; and even the celebrated images of mutation get surprisingly passed over. The harsh homosexual ambience has been toned down considerably – perhaps less out of het authorial coyness than from a careful reluctance to present what could be construed in this age as negative gay images. And even what’s left has had to be slyly compromised to get through at all: in a nose-thumb to the censor worthy of Preston Sturges, we do get a full quota of ejaculating Mugwumps, but only by virtue of disguising the rampant members by sticking them in clumps on the hapless creatures’ foreheads. The novel’s renowned talking ringpiece is actually elevated to a starring role, but at the cost of being ectomized from its native anatomical habitat and transplanted to the back of a typewriter. This looks every bit as wonky as it sounds.

What Cronenberg’s done with the novel is briefly this. Scenes, characters, locations, and dialogue passages from the novel have been assimilated with a ghastly schlup into a plot by Cronenberg based loosely around Burroughs’ life from 1942 to

1958. Just as the messy chronology has been straightened out and compacted into a few months, so the globetrotting locations of both life and novel have been simplified down to just two: a more-or-less real New York and a more-or-less fantasized Interzone. Characters from *Lunch* (alter-ego William Lee, the anarchic Dr Benway, the narcs Hauser and O’Brien, the inhuman Mugwumps) rub parts with thinly-masked figures from Burroughs’ own circles in the US (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Joan) and Tangier (Paul and Jane Bowles, Brion Gysin, and others). The early, NY phase collapses three episodes from Burroughs’ own life in the forties: his brief but colourful career as a bug exterminator (in Chicago), the early literary itchings of the Beats-to-be (in New York), and the fatally misjudged William Tell routine with the Mrs (in Mexico). This, rather than a junk bust, becomes the motive for Lee’s getaway at the end of the novel; and as in the novel it transforms from a genre copchase into a metaphysical escape to a fresh reality. But in Cronenberg’s version Lee’s flight (here to Interzone/Tangier, where the novel is written) is a drug hallucination from start to finish, and the text that is to become *Naked Lunch* is bashed out in the belief that what Lee is writing is a series of espionage reports to his alien controllers.

And from this point on the plot swiftly disappears up a series of ever more dilated sphincters. A flimsy, incoherent, and utterly uninvolved quest for the source of the Black Meat drug and the true controllers of Lee and Interzone alike alternates with an equally aimless rivalry between Lee and the Bowles character for the favours of the Interzone muse (variously expressed in a series of exchanges of mutant typewriters and in the sexual possession of Mrs B). Eventually the master controller is rooted out and absurdly unmasked, and Lee escapes – not, however, back to reality, but to a neighbouring territory on the Burroughs map, the austere Annexia, whose significance here isn't substantially clarified even if you go back to the book. Nor does it seem much more than a dubious whimsy to superimpose the latter stages of the plot on an ironic palimpsest of *Casablanca*; and the vague conspiracy scenario, while not without authentic Burroughsian touches about agents and covers, looks awfully off-the-peg in current company. (Bids are invited in positive-integer millions of dollars for my unwritten screenplay PKD, detailing TRUE STORY of how inaccurately-termed "death" of noted sf visionary was set up by CIA to preempt author's documentary revelations that Vietnam was a drug-induced hallucination resulting from a Pentagon experiment in psychic warfare; also unmasking Linda Ronstadt as the emissary of a higher consciousness. Write now Box 001.)

Part of the difficulty may be that Cronenberg has already filmed this novel several times over, and arguably has been filming it all his life – particularly in *Videodrome* (from which a lot of the plot here is derived) and *Dead Ringers* (whose concentrated treatment of real-life addiction may explain the curious decision here to make all Lee's drugs fantasy products). Most obviously, the transformations of the flesh that sit at the centre of all Cronenberg's serious films have already exhaustively drawn on the characteristic imagery of Burroughs's biomorphic rococo. This may account for the most unexpected feature of a Cronenberg *Naked Lunch*, the virtual jettison of the novel's most spectacular mutations – including, amazingly, the political factions of Interzone with their rival exotic policies to transform the flesh. Most of the weirdout effects in the movie are new images of Cronenberg's own: the typewriter beetles, the sex blob monster, the grisly thing that becomes of one of the characters unlucky enough to get shafted by Julian Sands.

And I wonder whether the problems of scripting go a way to explaining the uneasy metamorphosis of the book's themes. Whatever else Burroughs'

*Naked Lunch* is about – conspiracies of control, the heat death of narrative, addiction as a political condition, sexual terror as a mechanism of repression – one thing it's emphatically not is a meditation on the process of writing. But Cronenberg, whose contact with Burroughs in the course of the project seems to have shifted his interest from the work to the man, is careful to make it clear what his film's about: the mid-life birth of Burroughs the writer, and the triune muse of addiction, homosexuality, and murder that midwifed the book's creation. Now, whatever the undeniable spell of Burroughs' personal story, two things strike immediately about this remarkable shift of subject. One, it's a lot safer than anything in the book, whose global analysis and savage moral energy are utterly dissipated by the reduction to one man's private quest. Two, it takes a text that, for all its narrative impactions, bursts at the gills with flamboyant action and images, and transforms it into one of the most notoriously uncinematic scenarios around. I can't think of one single movie that's ever succeeded in making hot cinema out of the creative experience of writing. Just about every other art form imaginable has its *Red Shoes*, its *Life Lessons*, its *8½* – but what has the world of letters got? *Mishima*? *The Singing Detective*? *Barton Fink*? And Cronenberg doesn't seem to have any new solutions, to judge from the grimly heavy-handed typewriter imagery that maps Bill's initiation into the cult of the muses.

All this weakens *Naked Lunch* considerably in its transit to screen; but it's a long way from destroying it altogether. There's little denying this is the first Cronenberg film in memory not to deliver on its promise – indeed, the

first Cronenberg film to be often rather dull – but there are many, many wonderful things lying around. Peter Weller (who passed on *Robocop 3* for this, bless him) gives a performance so good it simply melts the internal organs – among other things, absolutely justifying the red-rag decision to reassign a couple of the book's finest Benway monologues away from Roy Scheider, who mugs his professional best but obviously hasn't much of a clue what he's supposed to be doing with this stuff. There are fabulous lines (who could disown a movie whose opening dialogue is "Exterminator!"), Cronenberg's rather strange sense of humour is let further off the leash than his more mainstream projects have allowed, and the whole thing exudes intelligence and seriousness of vision. It's not at all a film that will easily please either Cronenberg fans or Burroughs fans *tout court*, and it's hard to see its reception making *Crash!* (the promised film of J.G. Ballard's novel) easier to happen. The fusion of literary art-film with Chris Walas latex-and-vaseline effects, though deliberate and clearly unregretted, is a further challenge to easy notions of genre and audience, and a risky hostage to already-shaky commercial fortunes. But for all its considerable disappointments it's a wonderfully bold and barmy fusion between two passionately sane and visionary talents. And for habitual users of quality sf there are intense shots of bonus pleasure to be had from lines like "Interzone is the only place that'll take a shady character like you at short notice," or "They are visited constantly by many young handsome Interzone men, sometimes *two or three at a time*." Way to score. Mmmm, that's my rich substance. Exterminate all rational thought. (Nick Lowe)

## Tube Corn

### TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

We begin, gentle reader, in the make-up room of Channel Four where, deprived of my glasses and swathed in a voluminous yellow overall, your critic was reduced to a pink blob on top of a yellow blob, squinting nervously at the mirror as the makeup lady came at me with another brush. I ventured brightly,

"Are you going to give me cheekbones?"

"Oh no dear, we haven't got time to do liposuction." I cracked up.

Yes, that was me, on **Right to Reply** on Saturday 1st February 1992. Just about everyone I have ever met rang me in the next few days to tell me how I had done. My ex-colleague Chris rang

me up to congratulate me on having fixed my opponent with "the steely glare of Clint Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter*." Nah, I had to explain, just too much mascara – my eyelids were glued open.

My seven and a half minutes of fame came (what do you mean, you missed it? I have tapes...) in the "Mad Old Bag" slot. You know, the bit at the end, where the Mad Old Bag harangues the Suave TV Type, bangs the table and says "why don't you do something about..." and the Suave TV Type looks down his nose at her and goes "well, I think if you'll look at the facts..."

However the thing that you may not know – I certainly didn't – was that the



impetus for the piece came from Channel Four, not from me. They rang me back after I made a routine phone call to the C4 duty officer to complain about the new series of *A Week in Politics* being devoid of women and got the usual bland duty-officer "we'll pass that on to the appropriate person" reply.

I had left my name and number but I was still surprised when the next day *Right to Reply* rang me back. At first I was confused: they didn't ring me on the strength of "Tube Corn," nor of the campaigning I did with the Fawcett Society and NAWO (The National Alliance of Women's Organizations) last year on the representation of women in television being taken into account in drafting the Broadcasting Act. When I was working with NAWO we had missed out on appearing on a daytime programme because when they rang us up we spent too long asking who they were and why they wanted to know our opinions about life, the universe and everything. This time I was canny and realized at once that the phone call was the audition. The *Right to Reply* researcher and I had a long conversation about the position of women on television and, stuffed to the gills with the facts and figures we'd put together at NAWO, I was able to give them half an hour off the top of

my head on how to put the world to rights by increasing the representation of women on the Boards set up by the Broadcasting Act to control television, use the existing equal opportunities legislation to promote increased employment of women within the broadcasting system, and use targets to gain increased representation of women on screen.

**D**id they care? Well, at least I had proved I could be combative and articulate at the drop of a hat. We're thinking, they said, of doing a piece about *A Time to Dance* and are you interested? Rats, I thought, that's my one chance of fame out of the window - I didn't watch it. Instant interest. Why didn't I watch it? I saw the advertising and I didn't think Melvyn Bragg's menopausal male fantasies were likely to be the kind of thing I would watch. That's not a problem, they said, we can bike you over a copy. What we are interested in is this story in the *Independent on Sunday* which suggests that the BBC made a ten-second cut in the second episode in response to viewer criticism, and maybe talking about the way the rape scene in the film *The Accused* was cut for television, leading on to a discussion of censorship in general.

So it came to pass that I was sent

videotapes to watch of the first two episodes of *Bonking in the Lake District* (aka *A Time to Dance*) and of both versions of the rape scene in *The Accused* (the uncut and the edited-for-TV versions) and spent some time schizophrenically ringing round everyone I could think of who could brief me on the censorship issue on the one hand and on the other carrying on emphasizing to *Right to Reply* my ordinariness and willingness to be the Mad Old Bag up against the Suave TV Type.

It was the Suave TV type who was the star of the show: they had managed to get hold of Will Wyatt, Managing Director of BBC television, the man who personally has to approve every use of the word "fuck" on the Beeb. What kind of job is that for a grown man, I ask you? And as I tried to ask him on screen, how come a white male middle-class Oxbridge-educated (and thus not exactly representative of the average viewer) type gets to make that sort of decision for the rest of us?

He was nice, dammit, so I didn't get a chance to get really furious with him except with his "can I call you Wendy?" handshake at the start. "No you can't, call me Ms Bradley you patronizing bastard" never seems an appropriate response somehow, so I

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# Why Live? Dream!

## Barrington J. Bayley

**T**he man they had hired was experienced and methodical. His careful movements, his softly spoken manner, seemed at odds, they thought, with his occupation as he went through the file committing faces, places, likes and dislikes to memory.

"These were her friends at the time? She will have disconnected from them by now. She'll have new friends."

"Can you do it?"

"Well, it's not much to go on. But finding a person is much more a question of catching their scent than you might think. Few people know how to hide themselves forever."

His manner became professionally serious. "I have one more question to ask you. Are you sure about this?"

"Absolutely sure," the father said, squeezing his wife's shoulder. "Find our daughter. Find her, and kill her."

**T**he video tone woke Pameela Starlove from a deep and contented sleep. Rising naked from her fleecy bed, she pulled on a flimsy gown and waved a hand at the sensor.

"Yes?"

"Is that you, Pameela?"

"Of course." She stepped past her bedroom's curved bay window, which was golden with morning light, and faced the screen. A pretty dark-haired girl looked at her, frowning with anxiety, speaking with difficulty.

"Pameela, I've got to tell you something. A man has been asking after you. We think it's the same one who killed Reeta Casing. He must be a professional."

Pameela brought her hand to her mouth, her eyes wide. Her voice came in a whisper.

"Are you sure?"

"How sure do you need to be? Remember the others."

They were silent.

"Thank you, Moira," Pameela said drearily. "Please don't call me any more. Don't mention my name any more. You never heard of me."

"I understand."

"Goodbye, Moira."

She waved the video blank and turned dazedly to the bay window. The city's pastel towers shone in the sun, the azure sky was cloudless. Her apartment was high up and the breathtaking view had exhilarated

her every morning, until now.

She began to think. She would have to run. The police seemed powerless to stop assassins. She would have to hide. Life was good and she didn't want to lose it.

How long had the killer been after her? Thinking over her recent life, it came to her suddenly how she no longer saw the circle of friends she had made when first coming to the city. She went back to the video and looked up the directory. It found only two numbers: Moira's, and Thom Darjeen's. The others must all have left.

She hesitated before calling Thom. Was it safe to call anyone? Would the assassin be lurking in his apartment, waiting to confront her and trace her address?

He would have found her already except that Pameela Starlove was not, of course, her real name. She had changed it on arriving in the city. Most people did.

Eventually she did call, and was surprised by the lack of expression on Thom Darjeen's swarthy features. "Hello, Pam," he said. "How are you? What are you doing now?"

He smiled, as though belatedly coming to life. "Why don't you come over? Nothing's happened lately..."

Sweating, she waved off the video and leaned against her dressing table. Something was wrong with Thom. His responses were less than true to life. She would have to lose herself fast. Disconnect from all her friends. Don't go anywhere she usually went. Change her address. Move to another city...

No. The killer would be watching the airports. He would know she was running. He would look for people changing addresses, too, so don't rent another apartment. Live in hotels, changing hotels often, always with a different name.

Collecting her thoughts, she became calmer. The assassins mostly went after girls, or so it seemed. Some became so frightened and depressed that they resigned themselves, sat still and let it happen, or even committed suicide. But not her. She wasn't like that.

She would run.

**T**he softly spoken man did not have a high opinion of the young people he encountered in the course of his work. They were too empty-headed for his liking, too full of idle chatter. Above



all they were lazy, wanting nothing more than to spend sun-soaked days talking, enjoying themselves, having love affairs. True, the city was a very pleasant place. But the assassin had been raised to different standards. He believed in a life of work and purpose. Everybody should work, should do something that needed doing. It didn't surprise him when the parents of some of these youngsters were disgusted enough to call on his services.

He was closing in on the girl. He had ransacked her hurriedly vacated apartment in the purple high-rise. Like most targets she didn't realize that practically anything she left behind her constituted a clue. What cosmetics or perfumes she liked to wear, for instance: he had trained himself to recognize perfumes. Discarded or forgotten items of clothing, books, food wrappers, anything at all, were emanations of her character and acted like an arrow pointing to the sorts of places where she would likely be found... Descriptions given by parents weren't always reliable in this regard. Parents these days did not know their children.

Seated beneath a blossoming peach tree, the air around him light and fragrant, he sat in an inn's rear garden toying with a glass of lemonade. From time to time he glanced at the group of young people who occupied a trestle table, partly screened from him by the rose-scented fountain. They had opened a phial of insect attractant and were surrounded by a swarm of lavender-and-gold butterflies, lifting laughing faces to the fluttering wings as though to a snowfall. It was a pretty scene, all right, but the assassin, repelled by the aimlessness of it all, turned his face away until, out of the corner of his watchful eye, he saw a flash of golden hair. A newcomer had joined the party. A minute later, he allowed himself a direct look.

It was her. The job had taken a week, local time. Par for the course. She had become too restless, had already started venturing out again, and so had saved him the arduous task of checking all the hotels.

But she was still alert. When a sudden hush fell over the butterfly-bedecked party, he knew she had spotted him. The assassin liked to do a neat job. He rose unhurriedly and left the garden by way of a trellised path which he had reconnoitred earlier. The path ended in a stone wall. He took adhesive pads from his pocket, held the handgrips, and clambered up and over, dropping into the alley beyond.

Standing in shadow, he watched the golden-haired girl go by with her new friends. She couldn't be absolutely sure he was who he was, but just the same everything was predictable. This time she would appeal to the police. Not that it would make any difference.

She kept looking back but failed to see him as he followed them to her hotel from a distance. He detoured, approaching the ten-storey building from the rear. He saw a drape move: someone was entering a room. He left, then, and did not return till after dark. Stepping softly through the shrubbery, he sidled along the base of the hotel, stopping when he came to a pilaster that ran right up to the top of the building. It probably housed the waste chute, but what made it useful to the assassin was its smooth surface. In the interval he had gone to his own room to collect a satchel, from which he now took a harness and

fastened it round his torso. What looked like a caterpillar tread, about a foot long, was attached to the harness. This he placed vertically against the pilaster.

The small motor hummed, driving the caterpillar tread whose adhesive pads clung firmly to the stone and carried him effortlessly up the face of the building, a climb which lasted a minute or so, a minute in which the ascending assassin could experience to the full the fresh evening air, the exotic aromas rising from the landscape, the city's glittering night panorama and the cool sky in which stars sparkled. All this he enjoyed in passing, without making any mental comment on it.

He reached the level of the room where he guessed the girl was hiding. He reached into his satchel and took out elasticated tightgrip overslippers which he pulled over his shoes. These also had adhesive pads, and taking out the hand-held ones he had used at the inn, he unhooked the harness and shucked it off. Clinging to the building by hands and toes, spider-like, crab-like, he clambered expertly sidewise until he came to the lighted window. Through the gauzy tissue of the drape he made out the scene. A table lamp illuminated the room. Seated on either side of the table itself were the girl and a young policeman in a buff uniform.

The two were talking in low tones. The policeman's job would be to stay with her all night, and most likely there would be another in the corridor. The police in cities like this did their best to protect people, but they were at a disadvantage. They were unimaginative, and they were out of date technically. They didn't seem to know about adhesive pads, for instance. Why, the girl had even left her window open.

With predatory swiftness the killer made his move, pushing aside pane and drape and sliding through like a snake. His gun coughed before his feet even touched the carpet. A small neat hole appeared in the young policeman's forehead. He slumped, then fell from his chair with a thump. A trickle of blood ran down his sightless face.

In two long strides the assassin had crossed the room to throw the latch on the door. Then he turned to face the girl, who was driving her clenched fist into her mouth, her expression stark with terror.

"You know why I'm here, Brona," he said, using her real name.

She nodded.

"Your parents sent me."

Pameela screamed. There was an audible attempt to open the door. The killer's gun spoke quietly for the second time. He caught up Pameela's body as it slid from the chair, carried it to the other side of the room and laid it carefully on the bed.

He closed the unseeing eyes and gazed for long moments at the seemingly sleeping girl. At shining golden tresses, at a face full of youth and comeliness, smelling pleasantly of cosmetic. The only blemish was the small oozing hole just above the level of her eyes. No more cosmetic now.

The policeman in the corridor was kicking the door in. Smiling, with deliberation, the assassin turned the gun to his own head, and squeezed the trigger.

“**S**he’ll be all right now. She’s coming through.”

Brona heard the words with dread. The induction helmet slid from her hairless pate. Reluctantly, she opened her eyes.

She lay on a thin pallet, wearing a coarse shift. Her muscles ached from the hormone additive that had kept them supple in place of exercise. Dying had been terrifying, but not really painful. It had been like fainting, and then coming round in a different, hated place. This place, an underground dungeon, which she recognized as her old bedroom.

The assassin, a lean, wiry figure, was already on his feet. He it was who had removed her helmet, his own lying on the dressing table. She stared at him with loathing.

“You bastard,” she murmured weakly. “Why didn’t you shoot me first? Why did you have to talk to me? You really enjoy this work, don’t you?”

He avoided her gaze, turning and murmuring something to her parents. Then, without a further glance at her, his job done, he departed through the dull green bedroom door.

Her mother took the chair near the pallet. “It was for your own good, Brona. We couldn’t let you go on like this!”

Brona turned her face to the wall, not replying, not wanting to move. What was there to say? They had got her back. It would start all over again.

How she detested everything her parents stood for! She hated their drab olive clothing, identical to everyone else’s. Their shining bald pates – no one in the warrens had hair. And how awful the air smelled! It stank! While behind the sweating walls she could hear the whirr of pumps and the gurgle of pipes.

Her father spoke, not pleadingly like her mother but angrily. “You’ve got to change your attitude. Mankind is fighting for survival and all you want to do is dream your life away. Well you can’t. Everyone has to work. There’s no alternative. All that training and you don’t want to put it to use!”

Her stare was miserable and accusing as she turned briefly to him. “It wasn’t my generation that ruined Earth, father. It was yours, with your stupid wars. We don’t want any of this, living like moles. We want a proper world like it used to be, with blue skies and sunshine and open air. We want a life we can enjoy.”

“Your great-grandchildren will have that, perhaps,” he retorted. “But only if we put our backs into it! If people like you evade their responsibilities Earth will never be repaired.”

He looked at her with aggravation. He had never been able to understand why a person of her intelligence wasn’t proud of being assigned to the most difficult but most necessary work of all – finding and extracting the minerals the warrens needed to endure and expand, on what was now effectively an alien planet. It was like mining Venus.

He picked up the dream unit and the two induction helmets, holding them gingerly as though they were slimy. “Have a talk with your mother. But tomorrow you go back to Mineral Survey. Do you understand?”

**B**rona refused to talk, and shortly she heard her mother leave also. She carried on blankly staring at the stained grey wall.

She should have realized it was hopeless when she discovered her old friends had disappeared. That could only mean her parents had tracked her to the secret dormitory and taken her out of the clandestine dream network. From that moment on, she had been dreaming alone.

Except, that was, for the assassin.

There was a prime rule to entering the dream world: subjectively, the dream was for life; it had total appa-  
rency. Her parents could disconnect her from the warren-wide net, but without causing psychic trauma sufficient to obliterate her personality they could not disconnect or switch off her own dream unit. There was only one way to leave the dream life, and that was to dream one’s death. It was supposed to be an advantage. They couldn’t get you out and still use you...

But some parents, an increasing number, would go any length. Brona’s, for instance. So they had brought her sleeping body back to their poky apartment still plugged into the isolated machine, and they had hired a professional to go in after her, to find her in the dream city and...

Her personal dream machine had tried to protect her, of course, just as it had surrogated for her vanished friends for a time, though often imperfectly, before replacing them with new fictitious friends. But it couldn’t win. In a convincing life, however paradisiacal, one could be killed, and the dream life was meaningless if it was not convincing.

She lay listening to the squalid, never-ceasing sounds of the warrens, where there was never enough of anything, where everything was work and deprivation and cheerlessness and improvisation. The warrens, which weren’t even constructed properly. There hadn’t been time enough to plan ahead for mankind’s survival.

Far overhead lay the withered, deadly surface, alive but not with life, only with radiation and nerve gases and hot with ultraviolet which there was no longer an ozone layer to stop, violent and hideous with its out-of-control climate. She had seen it once, through the thick window of a crawler on her single survey trip. She remembered the two-hundred-mile-per-hour winds, the weird, flaming sky.

She thought of the tunnels of the warrens stretching for miles and miles and miles. She thought of her friends, dreaming in hidden dormitories, linked by the network. She thought of the beautiful city, like cities on Earth as it used to be. She thought and thought and thought.

**T**he tunnel was new, not even lined with the usual impacted dust and aggregate. “You saw how well-concealed the entrance is,” her guide said to her. “They’re not going to find this place in a hurry.”

He was young, like everyone who ran the dream network. “I want it to be today,” she said nervously. “I’m due to go out to the surface tomorrow.”

“That’s all right,” he assured her. “It can be today. It can be now.”

Nine sleeping forms already occupied the dormitory, each connected to a grey unit. Brona’s guide smiled. “Your friends will be glad to see you again.”

She was almost trance-like as she handed over her

ration tape – that was part of the deal – and went through the preliminaries. The attentive young man hovered over her as she laid herself on the rubbery slab.

Would they find her yet again, she wondered? Or would they grow tired of killing her, and leave her in peace at last?

She was smiling as the helmet went over her cranium. Smiling with happiness. Smiling with anticipation. Anticipation of the world as it once had been.

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**Barrington J. Bayley** is a veteran of British science fiction, having contributed to various magazines since the 1950s and written numerous novels since 1970. His last stories in *Interzone* were “The Death of Arlett” (issue 32) and “Culture Shock” (issue 35). He lives in Donnington, near Telford, Shropshire.

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# All in Colour for a Dime

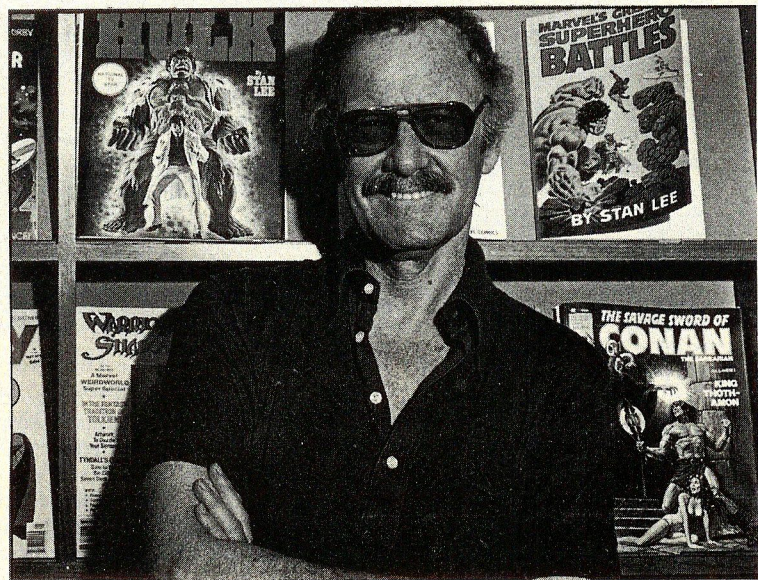
## A Profile of Stan Lee by Steve Green

There are few innovators in the comic-book industry. Once the two basic superhero templates were established in the 1930s – the super-powered champion exemplified by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's *Superman*, the talented costumed vigilante by Bob Kane and Bill Finger's *Batman* – the subsequent half-century has essentially been filled with variations on a theme.

But if one further name demands addition to this roll of creative honour, it is surely that of Stan Lee. Through comic-book series such as *The Fantastic Four*, *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Uncanny X-Men*, Lee played a pivotal role in transforming the face of his industry and helped catapult Marvel Comics from relative obscurity into the number-one slot.

And yet, ironically, the revolution arose more out of serendipity than creative fervour. Stanley Martin Lieber had joined the embryonic Marvel Comics in late 1940, a year after the company's launch by publisher Martin Goodman (the company's ultimate name was a legacy of his previous project, the science-fiction pulp *Marvel Science Stories*). The talented duo Joe Simon and Jack Kirby needed an assistant to share the workload on their hit title *Captain America*, and Lieber, the 17-year-old cousin of Goodman's wife, was drafted in to make coffee and run errands.

Although attracted to writing, Lieber viewed the prospect of a career in comics with some disdain, quite understandable considering the cardboard characterization and lame plotting endemic in the industry during the late 1930s. Offered a chance to submit a



short story for the third issue of *Captain America* (a crucial feature since prose items qualified comic-books for special magazine mailing discounts), Lieber decided to adopt the pseudonym “Stan Lee,” little realizing he'd be wearing that guise for the next fifty years.

By the end of 1941, “Stan Lee” had become a familiar byline to Goodman's readers, quite an innovation in itself, since writers were rarely credited for their contributions. But it was Goodman's decision to fire Joe Simon, claiming a conflict of interest with his work for other publishers, and Jack Kirby's decision to accompany his partner to rival DC Comics, which would change the course of the teenager's life.

“They had me writing stories, and

proofreading, and editing,” he recalls, during a hectic British tour to promote Les Daniels' authoritative *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics*. “And then Joe Simon and Jack Kirby left, and I was the only guy remaining. The publisher said, could I hold down the job until he got somebody else, and I said sure. He never got anybody else, so I was stuck there ever since.”

America's entry into the Second World War was soon draining many of the top creators from the comic-book industry. Lee volunteered himself, and wound up scripting training films for the United States Army's Signal Corps, one of only nine men to be given the military classification of “playwright.” Goodman, meanwhile,

had branched out into "funny animal" titles to complement the line of patriotic superheroes (with the Axis forces swiftly substituted for the standard mad scientists and vicious crooks); ever the shrewd businessman, he even paid artists a lower rate for these new comic-books on the grounds that they were easier to draw.

However dubious Goodman's tactics were, he ensured the survival of his company till the return of Lee and his fellow ex-servicemen. Working alongside such writers as Mickey Spillane and Otto Binder (whose science fiction collaborations with his elder brother Earl appeared under the joint pseudonym "Eando Binder"), Lee was swiftly reinstated as editor.

He recalls his former boss with affection and respect. "I liked him, I liked him very much. He was very bright and caring, and I learned a lot from him. His specialty was covers; he had a great knowledge of what a cover should look like, to appeal to a reader. And he taught me a lot."

Unsurprisingly, Goodman's commitment to the dramatic first impression was far from lost on his protégé. "All the time I was there as editor-in-chief, the covers were the one thing that I insisted on creating myself. I could never let anybody else do them, because I realized how important they were.

"Martin was quite creative. I would discuss all the ideas with him, and so forth. We disagreed occasionally, but I admired him. He had a good grasp of the public taste. I think he thought of himself – and in a sense he was right – as an average man. He had an average man's sensibilities and tastes. And in those days, our books were for the average man. So I could just follow his lead and I didn't make too many mistakes."

By the mid-1950s, Goodman's eagerness to tap into his rivals' success had led Marvel to follow EC Comics into the horror genre, with anthology titles such as *Strange Tales* and *Journey Into Mystery*. Lee, who had survived an extensive streamlining operation in late 1951, produced many of the scripts and even managed to incorporate the period's anti-communism with such tales as "Throw Another Coal on the Fire!", in which a Muscovite coal hoarder is punished for his greed by being burned alive.

At the same time, Lee masterminded the resurrection of three of the company's vintage superhero strips, *Captain America*, *The Human Torch* and *The Sub-Mariner*. Although all three titles folded in less than a year, with "Captain America: Commie Smasher" arguably the worst of the bunch, such recycling of "golden age" characters would be a key element in Marvel's success a decade later.

But the comic-book industry faced a threat far greater than alien invaders or super-powered communists. In

1954, the New York psychiatrist Dr Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, a sensationalist exposé of "The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth." Reproducing carefully chosen out-of-context comic panels to back up his theories, Wertham accused the comic-book industry of leading its readers into crimes of lust, violence and anarchy; superhero comics were vehicles for sadism, whilst even the "funny animal" titles were pilloried for their alleged cruelty and graphic violence. Perhaps most bizarre, the crimefighting duo of Batman and Robin were "exposed" as homosexuals, and Wonder Woman (created, ironically, by the psychologist William Moulton Marston as a female role model) was branded a lesbian sadist.

Touted by its publishers as "the most shocking book of the year," *Seduction of the Innocent* galvanized the US Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. Wertham testified in person, claiming superhero titles aroused "phantasies of sadistic joy," whilst the committee's executive director, Richard Clendenen, paraphrased stories from *Strange Tales*, many scripted by Lee, to his colleagues' macabre fascination.

Although the hearings were adjourned immediately after the *Strange Tales* submission and were not resumed as originally scheduled, the comics industry was thrown into turmoil. Sales plummeted; comic-books were burned in public; retailers were boycotted; writers and artists even disguised their profession in order to avoid social ostracism.

As other companies collapsed into insolvency, Goodman and Lee strived desperately to ensure Marvel's survival. In 1955, scarred by the prospect of a government crackdown on the "comic-book menace," the remaining publishers set up a trade organization, the Comics Magazine Association of America, with the ability to censor members' work via the Comics Code Authority. As originally adopted, the Comics Code banned the use of the words "horror" and "terror" in titles, prohibited scenes of graphic violence and nudity, urged respect for "parents, the moral code and for honorable behaviour" and demanded that "in every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal be punished for his misdeeds."

Despite embracing the Code, however, Goodman was losing the battle. Unable to maintain his own distribution network, he signed a deal with one of the country's largest magazine distributors, then watched in horror as his new associate itself folded, yet another victim of the Wertham-inspired hysteria. Just as every hope seemed dashed, Goodman set up a new net-

work through the rival company DC, publishers of *Batman* and *Superman*; the major drawback was DC's limit of eight titles per month.

1958 saw Lee once again alone in the Marvel office, bar the occasional visit from freelance artists such as Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. By late 1961, bitterly disillusioned and certain that the company's current line of science fiction titles were a creative dead end, he prepared to resign from Marvel and seek a more lucrative writing career outside the comic-book industry.

It was then that Lee's wife Joan changed the course of comics history. If he intended to quit anyway, she pointed out, why not go out in a blaze of glory, writing comic-books the way he'd always argued they should be?

It was a challenge he found himself unable to resist. "I always felt that Martin had too little respect for the readers. For instance, he didn't like me using language that he felt was hard for a young person to understand. And he didn't want continued stories; he thought that a reader couldn't remember from one month to the next what had been happening, and things like that. And I always disagreed with that, but he was the publisher so I went along with him."

The final ingredient came from Goodman himself. Envious of DC's success with *The Justice League of America*, which featured the combined talents of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, he suggested to Lee that Marvel should launch its own "team" title. Since none of Marvel's own costumed superheroes had survived the 1950s, Lee outlined a quartet of entirely new characters in a two-page synopsis for Jack Kirby.

The result was *The Fantastic Four*, which premiered in November, 1961, with the amusingly incongruous cover blurb "Together for the first time in one mighty magazine!" Although Lee had conceived it as "just another story," the first issue contained a heavy emphasis on characterization and one major innovation: Mister Fantastic, the Invisible Girl, the Human Torch (no relation) and the Thing eschewed the conventional secret identity sub-plots and combated evil in broad daylight from a signposted headquarters, New York's Baxter Building.

The team's interpersonal relationships were at least as decisive a factor in the title's success as Kirby's dynamic artwork, proof of Lee's theory that readers simply wouldn't remain loyal to a comic-book if they were indifferent to the characters' motivations and fate. "I felt that people didn't care enough about them, and the only way to make people care about them was to make the characters as realistic as possible.

"The example I always give is Sherlock Holmes. I loved Sherlock Holmes,

and one of the reasons I loved him is that he seemed real to me, the way Conan Doyle described him, and described his house. I felt that the more you know a character, or think you know a character, the more you're gonna be interested in him, or her. But when the character is presented in a shallow way, it's difficult to be too interested.

"I was never that interested in Superman, I didn't feel I really knew him, I didn't know what his home life was like, I didn't know what his various problems were; his only problem was, he hoped Lois Lane didn't find out he was Superman. Beyond that, he just was chasing criminals all day."

As *The Fantastic Four* soared in popularity, Lee felt free to ignore many of Goodman's guidelines and introduce such elements as continuing stories and "crossover" issues, which allowed the company's flagship to be utilized as a platform for showcasing new characters, such as Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk, and re-introducing former favourites, including the Sub-Mariner. The remaining "golden age" hero, Captain America, was meanwhile resurrected from wartime cryogenic suspension to join *The Avengers*, his "commie smasher" incarnation thankfully forgotten.

Despite the efforts of Lee, Kirby and *Amazing Spider-Man* artist Steve Ditko, not all the new titles were immediate successes, and not always for obvious reasons. Lee recalls "a big problem" with the Hulk, whose brutish design was inspired by Boris Karloff's make-up in *Frankenstein*. "He was grey in the beginning, but they couldn't print the colour right; in some panels he was black, in some he was light grey. So that's why I changed him to green: it was an easier colour to print." Monochrome or olive, the Hulk failed to attract a large enough audience and was cancelled after just six issues in March, 1963; undeterred, Lee gave him a guest role in *The Fantastic Four* that same month and eventually relaunched the strip with greater success.

Like the "drive-in" movies released by American International during this same period, Lee was largely writing for a teenage audience. That so many of the Marvel characters were the same age – Spider-Man, the Human Torch, the X-Men – may explain why readers warmed to them so swiftly.

For good measure, Lee also ensured his superheroes had feet of clay, even if hidden in shiny boots. Out of their costumes, Lee's characters struggled with homework, high school romances and family pressures; even more senior characters such as Mister Fantastic were as likely to end up wrestling with matters of the heart as they were with diabolical supervillains.

As an added incentive for readers to



empathize with his creations, Lee persuaded his artists to steer away from the traditional athletic physique as typified by Superman and Batman. "It seems to me heroism can come in different packages, you know? And just because a guy is six feet four, has shoulders like *thaaat*, doesn't mean he's an ideal hero. Sometimes a guy this size, who's not that great looking, could perhaps be more heroic. I had trouble with that, because most of the artists like to draw the heroes big and beautiful."

Such considerations led to a change of artist on *The Amazing Spider-Man*. "I started out with Jack Kirby drawing him, and Jack made him look like every other hero. I said 'Jack, forget it,' and I gave it to Steve Ditko. And in the beginning, Spider-Man looked like just what I wanted him to look like, almost a wimp."

Whilst few characters were as overtly handicapped as Daredevil, whose blindness was compensated for by a spectacular heightening of his remaining senses, many of his contemporaries at Marvel wore spectacles and betrayed a general social unease which obviously struck a chord with their

growing following. "See, nobody is perfect, I don't care who it is. Everybody has problems, everybody has weaknesses, everybody has faults, everybody has things he or she is worried about. Again, in an effort to be realistic, I tried to convey that in as many stories as I could."

As the production line accelerated, so did Lee's output, although he admits to experiencing "great difficulty" in maintaining a flow of up to five scripts per week. "I was lucky; I was always a fast writer. I was a fast writer usually because I hated to write, and the only way to get through it quickly was to write fast. I just spent long days, long hours."

The increasing workload led to the creation of the so-called "Marvel Method," with Lee drafting an outline plot, allowing the artist to lay out the strip, returning the completed pages to Lee for him to produce the final script. The system, since adopted by several of Marvel's rivals, both eased the burden on Lee and allowed artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko far greater freedom in interpreting the narrative and heightening the dramatic impact; in the absence of a panel-by-panel synop-

sis, Kirby could vent his love for action sequences and amazing gadgetry in such series as *Captain America* and *The Fantastic Four*, whilst Ditko could concentrate on his gift for atmosphere and surreal visuals in *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Doctor Strange*.

"That made it work much easier. I would just discuss the story with the artist. With some artists, I did more discussing than others; you know, I'd give them more detail. But some others, like a Ditko or a Kirby, I could just say 'Let's have Doctor Doom be the villain; he returns again to get revenge on Reed and he tries to kidnap Sue Storm, but then he realizes he's falling in love with Sue Storm; and in the meantime, Reed does this, that or the other; and let it end with Doc Doom leaving because he loves Sue Storm too much to harm her.' I never particularly used that exact plot, but that's all I would say, you know, and Jack or Steve or someone would go home and draw the whole thing, and they'd add a lot of details of their own. I'd get the drawings and I'd put in the copy, and it could go pretty fast that way.

"These artists we worked with were good story men themselves. They were very good at adding little details, and fleshing it out."

Sometimes these "little details" would take on a life of their own. As an afterthought to one of Lee's *Fantastic Four* plots, Kirby added a two-panel sequence featuring a metallic alien riding an interplanetary surfboard; Lee fell in love with the character, dubbed the Silver Surfer, and eventually gave him his own comic-book. Although not a huge success, *The Silver Surfer* became a cult hit, with the messianic alien's soliloquies even quoted from American pulpits. "I loved that. I loved soliloquies because, again, before Marvel Comics, there were almost no soliloquies, I don't think anybody ever did it. I started it because it gave me a chance again to let the reader get to know the character. If you can know what somebody's thinking, you get to know them. And I felt it gave more story, it wasn't just 'There's the crook, I gotta catch him before he gets away.' There was more substance to the stories when you knew what a character was thinking."

The Surfer's solo adventures premiered in 1968, by which time Marvel was selling fifty million copies per annum and could finally renegotiate its distribution deal with DC; as a result, many of the hit characters from its anthology titles received comics of their own. The agreement was finally abandoned a year later.

Curiously, despite the sales evidence, Goodman was never entirely convinced either of Lee's tactics or the intelligence of his readers. Lee remembers one argument over his plans to

launch a new comic entitled *The Mutants*. "He said to me 'No, no, kids won't know what *The Mutants* means.' 'Hey, c'mon, if they don't know, they'll look it up; but it's a good word.' 'No, get me another name.' So I came up with the name *The X-Men*, and he said 'Yeah, that's better.' And I always remember thinking to myself, if a kid doesn't know what a mutant is, how is he going to know what an X-Man is? I couldn't understand the logic." Marvel has *The New Mutants* now, of course, but Goodman is no longer in charge: he quit as publisher in 1972, four years after selling the company to Cadence Industries and shortly after an internal row in which Cadence backed Lee's vision of Marvel's future direction over his former employer's.

Proof of Marvel's increasing dominance of the field had been supplied during the summer of 1971 when Lee, on top of his responsibilities as editor-in-chief, retained the writing chores on three of the company's most popular titles, *The Fantastic Four*, *The Mighty Thor* and *The Amazing Spider-Man*. "I had gotten a letter from the US Government's Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and they said, 'Recognizing the great influence that Marvel has with the youth of America, we think it would be great' - I'm paraphrasing, I don't remember the exact words - 'we think it would be great if you would do an anti-drugs story.' So, I figured 'great.' I love doing things that mean something, that may have a salutary effect."

Unfortunately, the storyline for *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98 brought Marvel into direct confrontation with the Comics Code of 1955, which prohibited any mention whatsoever of drugs or their effects, even when the theme was anti-drugs. "I did the story; the Code Authority wouldn't let me use it because it mentioned the word 'drugs,' so we ran it without the seal of approval. And we got a lot of great commendations, from the Government, from schools, from religious leaders. People seemed to think it was a great story."

Although he still perceives the situation as "David versus Goliath," Lee denies Marvel was ever really in danger of losing distributors by publishing the three issues without the CCA seal. "No, we knew they would take it. They didn't care. I don't know why we even worried about it."

Its bluff called, the Comics Code Authority later amended its rules to allow responsible depiction of drugs, as well as relaxing other sections of its guide to "general standards," such as the restrictions on horror titles. "Yeah, I've had an effect. They got more lenient, and more intelligent, I think, with their decisions."

Marvel has had no such problems in the years since. "That was, I think, the

only time we kept the Code seal off; we've been using it ever since. You see, I have no problem normally with the Code, because there's nothing they prohibit which I would want to do, anyway. We don't want to make our books too sexy, we don't want to make our books too violent. We're just trying to provide action-adventure entertainment."

Not all Marvel's publications carry the CCA seal, however; its graphic novels may feature many of the characters from the regular series, but take a more gritty approach to the subject matter. "They're for older readers, for the most part. And I'm not incredibly happy about the fact that some stories are getting rougher and rougher, but we're not making an effort to make things rough. Occasionally, an artist or a writer wants to put something in, and he does it, we give him pretty much freedom. But there's no company policy that says 'Let's get more explicit', or anything like that."

Lee sees the rise of the new format as an inevitable consequence of the changing comic-book readership. "The graphic novel is more than to pick up new audiences, it's to satisfy the new audience that we've already picked up. We have so many older readers, we want to make sure we have enough things to give them that they'll be interested in.

"I hope that the graphic novels work, I hope that they continue to be successful. It would be great to keep these older readers. I don't want to have to do it by sex and perversion and violence, or anything like that. But I'm hoping that we can come up with interesting, intriguing enough story themes, exciting enough concepts, enough philosophy, enough new ideas to just keep grabbing their attention."

Part of the attraction of that new adult market is, of course, the readers' buying power. Certain of the more valuable items are now viewed with the same calculating stare as commodity investments; in 1987, a copy of the first issue of Goodman's *Marvel Comics* changed hands for \$82,000, whilst a mint copy of the first *Action Comics* (featuring the debut of Superman) was last year valued at \$25,000.

Lee doubts that such investors have any real interest in comics as an art-form. "I think it's like they save stamps. There used to be some postage stamps that were worth a half a million dollars. Well, it wasn't that they thought the stamp was so beautiful, just because it was rare. So I'm really not involved in comic-book collecting. If people like to collect them, and if they make a profit, more power to them, but it's nothing that I know much about."

Does he consider it a pity, though, that valuable comics aren't ending up

in the hands of fans who would actually enjoy reading them? "Well, it isn't a pity, I guess, to the budget people at our company, because it means a lot more sales, but I know what you mean. But I think there are always going to be enough people who are buying them because they want to read them, because they are very popular."

He admits that Marvel pandered to such tastes "to a degree" with the recent relaunch of its most popular character; *Spider-Man #1* was issued in a variety of different covers, some in special sealed bags, so creating an expensive nightmare for the completist. "But don't forget, Marvel is a company and companies are in business to make money. And if you say 'Gee, I think there's a demand for a certain thing,' we've gotta be crazy not to give your customers what they seem to want."

"See, you can't shove anything down a reader's throat; if he doesn't want it, he won't buy it. They seem to want these things, and as long as they seem to want them, Marvel, and I guess all the companies, will give them to them. When they stop wanting them, we'll stop doing it."

"That isn't my concern. I don't determine how many to print or anything; we have departments that do that. My only concern is to make sure we get good stories, good artwork and we do things that put Marvel in the right light, that are worthy of what I would like to think Marvel stands for."

Although Lee moved to Los Angeles in 1981 to supervise the launch of the animation studio Marvel Productions and currently oversees the transfer of Marvel creations to celluloid and video, he ensures his byline isn't long absent from the printed page. As well as the daily *Spider-Man* newspaper strip, which he launched in 1977 and now runs in more than five hundred periodicals worldwide, Lee keeps an active hand in his favourite medium.

"I'd like to write another *Silver Surfer* graphic novel with Moebius. I go back to New York once a month, once every six weeks or so, and talk to the guys. We're going to do a new project called *The Tomorrow Chronicles*, which take place a hundred years from today, but it'll be the same Marvel universe, it's just that some of the heroes will be the offspring of some of our present heroes. Some will be our present heroes, like Thor, who I guess will still be around. I think it'll be interesting."

He's pleased that Marvel's purchase by the Andrews Group in 1989 has increased his creative control over spin-off movies and television projects. The previous owner, New World Entertainment, was responsible for the Dolph Lundgren vehicle *The Punisher*, which bore little resemblance to the highly successful comic strip, even ditching the character's distinctive uniform in favour of a drab leather jac-

ket. "Now we have a lot of control; in those days, none at all. I remember yelling at them and saying 'Hey, at least put the skull and crossbones on it,' and they said 'No, it makes it look too comic-booky' and I said 'But that's why you're doing the movie, because it's comic-booky.'

"But I will say this: since I moved out to the Coast, that will never happen again. Like *The Spider-Man*: the live-action *Spider-Man* was terrible; we had no control over that. But now, Jim Cameron is going to do a *Spider-Man* movie – you know, the guy who did *The Terminator* – and he's going to write it, direct it and produce it, so I'm quite excited about that."

Considering how successful the techniques and gimmicks he pioneered have proven, with American sales alone now topping seven million copies per month, he sometimes ponders why his rivals couldn't tap the same vein. "Maybe they didn't have the same feeling for it that I did, and that our writers did. I wondered myself."

"It all seemed so simple to me, these stories were easy to write, this technique was easy to do. I used to wonder myself why the competition didn't do it. I really don't know the answer; you'd have to ask them. I know I used to hear reports that they would wonder why we were outselling them and they'd have these meetings; I got these reports from friends of ours who worked at the company. They would meet and they'd look at the covers, let's say, and they'd say 'Gee, Stan is using a lot more dialogue on his covers than we are,' so they would start putting a lot more dialogue on their covers. And

as soon as they did that, I would drop all the dialogue from our covers. Or they'd say 'Stan uses much more red in his masthead colour,' and as soon as I'd hear that, I'd stop using red, then they'd start using red. It must have driven them crazy."

"They never understood that we do everything better, we get better characterization, I made sure that the artists drew the panels more interestingly. You see, I don't think they had editors who functioned as art directors, and that's very important, I think. The art is so much a part of the story, and vice versa. You can't have somebody just concentrating on the story; you've got to concentrate on the story in relation to the artwork, you know. So because I was both the editor and the art director, and for a long time the head writer, it was easy for me to keep everything just the way I wanted it, just where I thought it should be."

Lee once planned to preserve his real surname for his break into "real" literature; is that still an option? "I always intended to write the Great American Novel, but I don't think I ever shall. I'm having too much fun now, working on movies and television, and just enjoying what I'm doing. I keep so busy, I really don't have time to think much more than a day ahead."

But he still gets a kick from his work? "Oh, I love it."

Marvel: *Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* by Les Daniels is published by Virgin, price £30. As well as an introduction by Stan Lee, it includes contributions from Jack Kirby, Joe Simon and many of Marvel's leading writers, artists and editors.

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## Tube Corn

Continued from page 39

smiled and said yes, and what do I call you? He had to think about that one and somehow I never *did* manage to get in a suave "so, Will..."

What did I say? I haven't the faintest idea. I know what I had planned to say. I had four points written on my crib sheet: why had the BBC replaced an apparently inoffensive shot of Ronald Pickup's bottom with a couple of close-ups of the *Time to Dance* lovers' faces? Why did they cut the rape scene in *The Accused*? Who made those decisions and, most important of all, why did they make them? My argument was going to be that television companies routinely seem to take notice of the kind of viewer criticism personified by Mrs Mary Whitehouse and the kind of organized pressure group that has kept and is still

keeping the film *The Last Temptation of Christ* off our screens, yet they perpetually marginalize and ignore people who complain about other issues, like the representation of women.

But did I actually say any of that? I haven't the faintest idea without looking again at the tape and to tell you the truth neither can anyone else who has phoned me about the show. The general view was that it went reasonably well but, like everyone else, TV critics too stare at the camera mesmerized like a rabbit by the car headlights. I couldn't tell you what I said but I could describe in minute detail how I moved my head from side to side like a turtle, how I need to lose about four stone and how even liposuction couldn't give me cheekbones. But if we all get fifteen minutes of fame I'd like to put in a requisition for my next seven and a half right now.

(Wendy Bradley)

# Epsilon Dreams

Eric Brown



**T**hat evening, the throb of music from the party on the hill drowned out the soundtrack of the film I was trying to watch. I gave up on it with no ill-feeling – I had seen the old black-and-white movie many times before. I left the lounge and stepped onto the verandah of my A-frame.

The perfect circle of the bay was placid, reflecting the Ring of Tharssos, the band of tiny moonlets that arced overhead and diminished towards the horizon. A warm breeze blew in off the water and a dozen long-billed nightgulls banked on the thermals above the beach. I decided to make a night of it on the verandah, and was stepping inside for a few beers when I heard the screen door in the kitchen slap shut against the frame.

“Mr Henderson? Ben?”

She appeared in the lounge doorway, wearing her shabby pink tracksuit and a wincing I-know-I’m-trespassing-but expression. “Ben, is it okay?”

I smiled. “Of course, Tammy. Come in.”

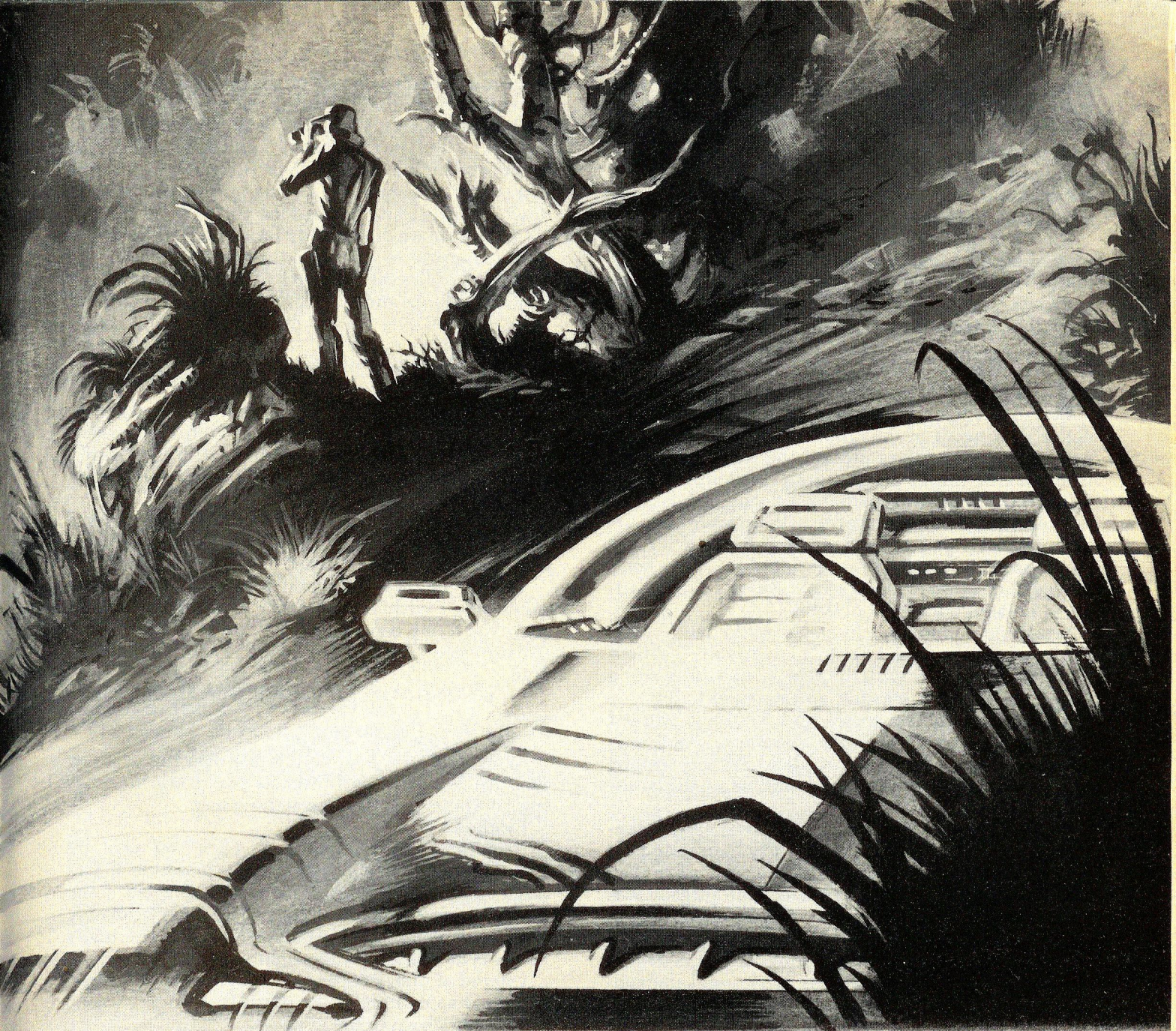
I had known Tamsin Challenger for six months; she had emigrated to Addenbrooke from Earth with her

father and step-mother. Martin Challenger was a famous surgeon, and had chosen the resort of Magenta Bay as the locale of his semi-retirement. He had bought the villa on the hill overlooking the bay, and had made himself popular in the community by hosting lavish parties to which everyone was invited.

There could be no greater difference between Challenger’s brash confidence and his daughter’s reserve, her almost pathological shyness. Soon after her arrival on the planet, on hearing that I wanted to rent the showroom I had used as the base of my gemstone business, she had stopped me on my morning walk along the beach. She had stammered that she would like to – if it was all right by me – would *really* like to rent the premises and start a gallery to show her art-work.

A combination of her gauche manner, her endearing plainness and evident nerves had made me warm to her. We strolled along the foreshore, and, with much gentle probing, I learnt that she painted cameos on rocks and sea-shells, and carved small animal figures from driftwood. She admitted this almost





apologetically, as if ashamed of her ability -- which, I found out later, was considerable. She told me that her father was underwriting the venture, and, detecting an undercurrent of resentment of the fact in her manner, I had offered her the showroom at minimal rent.

Over the months, I had often stopped by to see if I could be of assistance. Her inherent nervousness, no doubt abetted by the stories she heard that I was a cynical old drunkard, had made her wary and distant. It had taken time to win her over, to make her realize that I wanted nothing more than to see her business succeed.

Her gaze alighted on the vid-screen. "Ben, you never told me you liked old movies!" Her eyes seemed to melt. "Isn't Garbo wonderful?"

Then she noticed the holo-cube on top of the vid-screen. "Who's that, Ben?"

I killed the film with the remote control.

"My daughter --"

And before I could explain she rushed on. "But you never told me you had a daughter! How old is she?"

Where does she live?"

"She died in an accident ten years ago, when she was eleven," I said, and wished I hadn't.

Tammy reddened and tears appeared in her eyes, and I supposed it was a combination of the fact that she was so easily hurt -- and thus gave the impression she required protection -- and was the age my daughter would have been had she lived, that made me more than a little infatuated with Tammy Challenger.

She stammered an apology. "I'm sorry... I didn't realize --"

"Hey." I reached out and took her hand. "Don't worry. It happened a long time ago, and it's true what they say about time, you know." I smiled. "Anyway, it's good to see you."

She smiled and took heart. "I was just wondering, Ben... Yours was the only light on along the beach. Everyone's up at the party. My father's celebrating some award he's won back on Earth." She shrugged. "Won't you come along?"

I hesitated. "Your father won't mind?"

A couple of weeks ago Martin Challenger had stop-

ped me outside Tammy's gallery. He was drunk, and muttered some remark about his daughter's celibacy. "You don't stand a chance, Henderson," he had said, and hurried off before I could find a suitable reply.

Tammy had overheard him. "My father's jealous," she had told me. "He resents you because you're my friend and he isn't."

Now she smiled. "He won't have to mind. He's invited all his friends. I don't know many people up there. We're having a barbecue, and there's your favourite beer – imported from Earth – and later there'll be a laser show."

**T**here were perhaps a hundred guests on the lawn of Challenger's villa that night. I recognized many faces from the settlement. The entire contingent of the club was present; they had entrenched themselves around the outside bar and were making steady progress into Challenger's stock of drinks. There were perhaps a dozen guests I did not recognize. I later learnt that these were the surgeon's friends and colleagues from Earth, who had telemassed in especially for the occasion. A live band played a selection of mood music. Silver-coated waiters circulated with trays of drinks.

I escorted Tammy to a tesseraed patio overlooking the bay and introduced her to a few friends. I caught the eye of the waiter with the beer, and as the evening progressed I drank steadily and listened to Tammy talking shop with the artists who lived and worked on Capricorn Island. Their animated discussion absolved me of the need to contribute. Tammy seemed to be getting on fine, so I left her and sat on the balustrade.

Below, on the first of a series of lawns which stepped down to the foreshore, Marty Challenger and his young wife Rowena stood beside two shrunken figures in floating invalid carriages. The surgeon was a big man whose white suit seemed designed to increase his dimensions and make him appear imposing. His Spanish wife, young enough to be his daughter, wore a silver, backless dress. Her cranial augmentation glinted silver beneath her long black hair.

Tammy crossed the patio and sat on the balustrade next to me. She seemed flushed with the success of her conversation. "Ben, you're quiet tonight."

"Quiet," I said with feigned mysteriousness, "but taking everything in." I pointed to the lawn. "Who are the invalids?"

Tammy peered. Her expression hardened as she saw her father and step-mother. Then she smiled brightly. "Oh, they're my father's patients. He has a surgery and theatre in the villa and he takes the occasional private patient."

She paused and gazed at her step-mother with an expression that might have been wistful. She was quiet for a while.

I took her fingers and squeezed. "Tammy?"

She shook her head. "Rowena – she's very beautiful, isn't she?"

I sighed. "I suppose she is." I was about to launch into a welter of platitudes about how beauty is only skin deep, and that what matters is what is inside, but stopped myself.

"I'm sorry, Ben. I'm being silly –" She faltered, staring over my shoulder. Marty Challenger had left the

lawn and joined the crowd on the patio; he circulated, his cultured baritone booming out greetings.

Then he stared across at us, and I recalled what he had said to me the other week, and what Tammy had told me about his being jealous. He ignored whatever it was that someone was saying to him now, tossed down his drink and crossed the patio.

Challenger was incredibly broad across the upper torso, tapering to disproportionately thin legs; his appearance gave the paradoxical impression of absurdity at a distance and looming threat at close quarters.

He towered over me and made a noise in his throat before recalling my name. "Ah... Henderson. I'd like a word." He turned to his daughter. "In private, if I may, Tamsin."

Tammy reddened and hurried off into the crowd.

Challenger snapped at a waiter to refill his scotch, and then turned his attention to me. His great ruddy face was soaked with sweat and his eyes were glazed with the effects of too many whiskies.

"Henderson – about what I said the other week. I was out of order. I didn't mean what I implied and I hope you didn't take offence."

The apology was delivered at speed and obviously rehearsed; I wished Challenger would go away and leave me to my beer.

I shrugged. "No offence taken," I said, uncomfortable.

He nodded. "You get on well with Tamsin, don't you?"

"She's a nice kid," I began.

"You've been a great help to her over the past few months. She likes and respects you. I was wondering..." He paused there, watching me.

I waited.

"You're a regular down at the club," he went on. "You know all the locals. I was wondering if you might take Tammy with you now and again – she needs to get out a bit, meet people." He hesitated, then continued, "Look, Henderson, what she really needs is an affair with the right person."

I stared at him, surprised at his show of concern. I muttered something to the effect that I'd be pleased to take her down to the club.

"Good man, Henderson. I'd appreciate it."

Challenger switched gear, asked me how I was enjoying the party. I think he even tried to tell me a dirty joke. I indicated that I'd finished my drink and required a refill, and escaped.

**T**ammy was sitting at a garden table with a dozen other guests, waiting for the laser show to commence. She cradled a cup of coffee in her lap and smiled into space. She had not yet seen me, and I took the opportunity to observe her from a distance. She seemed all the more alone for being part of a crowd.

I sat next to her. She smiled. "What did my father want to see you about, Ben?"

"He apologized for what he said last week."

Tammy looked bitter. "He probably said it just to win you over. I wouldn't be surprised if he wants something."

I saw Rowena Challenger striding across the lawn with a tall woman in tow, and something about her set, determined expression made me uneasy.

Rowena and the woman paused before us.

Tammy looked up and stiffened.

Rowena smiled at her step-daughter, and I swear that the expression in her Spanish eyes was one of revenge.

By now the attention of everyone around the table was on the scene that was about to take place between Rowena and Tammy.

"Tam," Rowena said with theatrical charm. "I'd like you to meet Sharon. She's staying the night. She'd like to know if you would care to share her bed?"

The woman smiled at Tammy.

Rowena turned to the guests around the table. "I do hope I haven't shocked you," she said sweetly.

Beside me, Tammy stood and hurried off into the night. I began to give chase, but Marty Challenger beat me to it. He strode across the garden and around the villa in pursuit.

I turned on Rowena Challenger.

"That was unnecessary," I said.

The young woman maintained her poise. She smiled at me. "The little bitch deserved it – as you would know if you had to live with her."

I found her beauty alone intimidating, but her cerebral augmentation unnerved me. Her head was cupped in an occipital brace of the finest steel, and a spar of teflon encircled her neck like a choker. It was perhaps the fact that I was ignorant of the reason she was augmented that so daunted me.

I just stared, unable to voice my full contempt, as she turned to the guests around the table and addressed them like the perfect hostess. In seconds she had them laughing.

I left, intending to find Tammy. I walked around the villa and across the extensive garden. The golden aureole of a floating will-o'-the-wisp lamp indicated the whereabouts of Challenger and his daughter, concealed behind an enclosure of shrubbery. I heard their brief exchange before coming upon them.

"Tamsin..."

"Go away."

"Please, let me help –"

"I said leave me alone!"

I rounded the hedge, stopped and backed off. Tammy was sitting on a marble bench in the shadow of an arbour laden with fragrant nightblooms. Her arms were crossed on her chest and she was gripping her shoulders, head bowed. Challenger stood behind her.

As I watched, he reached out and caressed the nape of her neck with the back of his hand. There was something at once prurient and strangely wistful about the gesture.

Tammy stiffened at his touch, tried to pull away. Challenger grabbed her hair, then pulled her around and up to face him. He stared into her eyes for long seconds, then ground his lips to hers in a kiss of lasting savagery.

Tammy wrenched herself away and fell to her knees. "I'll kill you!" she cried up at him. "I swear I'll kill you!" Then she collapsed to the ground, sobbing.

Challenger regarded her impassively, then stalked from the arbour. He must have seen me as I ducked back into the shadows, but if so he gave no sign.

I was torn between following Challenger and doing

him physical harm – or rather trying to – and rushing to his daughter's assistance. I decided that Tammy was more in need of my attention.

I helped her to the bench and sat beside her, an arm around her shoulders. She cried quietly, my shirt soaking up the tears.

After a while she sat upright, blotted her eyes on the cuff of her tracksuit. "I'm sorry, Ben"

"I should have done something when I saw Rowena with that woman," I began.

Tammy spluttered a laugh. "Rowena? Do you think I'm bothered about that? I can put up with Rowena. She's pulled that trick before. I even understand why she does it."

A response was beyond me. Back in the garden, the band was playing; the party was in full swing. The warm air was thick with the cloying scent of the night-blooms. I sat with my arm around Tammy and chastised myself for enjoying the intimacy.

She whispered, "It's my father I really hate, Ben."

I tried to think of something to say. She seemed to want to talk about it. "That wasn't the first time?"

"God, no! Of course not." She dried her eyes, sniffed. "Ever since my mother died, three years ago. I look like her, except she was beautiful." She paused. "I thought it might stop when he... when he got her." She nodded in the direction of the front lawn and Rowena. "But if anything it's got worse. The thing is, I understand why he does it, why he's so obsessed. But that doesn't make it any easier to handle... It makes it worse, Ben. If I understand, why can't he – and do something about it?"

I wanted to say something to ease her pain, but found words impossible.

"...I wouldn't care, but the worse thing isn't when he touches me, like tonight. The worse thing is when I catch him staring at me. Do you understand that? At least when he touches me I can do something about it. But when he stares. I can do nothing. Do you understand, Ben?"

I told her that I understood, not at all sure that I did.

She let out a long sigh. "I've thought about killing him, I really have. I've caught myself contemplating stabbing him to death, shooting him through the heart."

The intensity of her words, her sincerity, frightened me.

"It wouldn't be worth it," I joked. "You'd be caught and tried and sentenced to mandatory personality-wipe, and who would I have to chat to in the mornings, then?"

She would not be placated by my levity. "But what a way to go. Quick, painless – I'd just be stripped of my identity, all my worries and crazy thoughts."

"And your self, Tammy."

"But it'd be worth it!" she said with conviction. "It'd be much better than suicide – and I'd have the satisfaction of showing him how I feel."

"Tammy," I said, in a kind of pleading reprimand.

She opened her mouth and began crying again, her face made ugly with anguish. I pulled her head to my shoulder. "Oh, Christ, Ben. It's such a mess."

Near to tears myself and utterly helpless, I made soothing sounds as you might to a baby. I could not bear the confirmation that another person's emotional life was more of a mess than my own, especially when

that person was someone I cared for.

I have no idea how long we sat like this, on the marble bench in the silver light of the Ring of Tharsos. When Tammy had almost sniffed herself hoarse, she lifted her head from my shoulder.

What she said next surprised me. "Where's Epsilon Indi, Ben?"

She had asked me the same question often in the past, while drinking beer on my verandah. The enquiry had always preceded a half-joking, half-boastful account of how some day she would visit the star.

I scanned the heavens, indicated a twinkling point of light. "There, that's Epsilon."

"I'd love to go there, Ben. Have I told you that? Chalcedony, Epsilon II – they say it's the most beautiful planet of all the colonies."

She stared, the Ringlight reflected in her eyes.

"Have you ever thought of leaving here?" I asked.

"What, and go to Epsilon II? It's far too expensive!"

I smiled. "Not necessarily off-planet. There's Mackinley, any one of a dozen other resorts along the coast. You'd be away from your father."

Her gaze became introspective, wistful. She no longer saw Epsilon II. She shook her head. "I have too many ties here," she said.

"You don't need your father's money, Tammy. You could leave here, get a loan, set up your own gallery."

She looked up at me. "I have too many ties!" she repeated. "You wouldn't understand, Ben. I can't explain."

I shrugged, hurt that she could be so dismissive.

"Look," she said, pointing, as polychromatic laser beams sliced vectors through the night sky above the villa.

Once a week I take my hover-car and drive into the foothills of the Central Highlands. I spend the mornings prospecting for gems and other features of lapidary interest, and the afternoons admiring the views. In the early days, when I arrived on Addenbrooke shortly after the ferry accident which killed my daughter, I took refuge in the hills perhaps two or three times a week. The grand scale of the scenery, the extensive panoramas to be seen from the meadowed mountainsides which projected above the cover of the rain-forest, had the effect of measuring human concerns against the overall scheme of things, and reducing their significance. More recently, when the years had worked to ease the pain of my loss, I made the journey less frequently.

I'd spent a restless night, thinking about Tammy Challenger. It bothered me that she felt she could not speak in complete openness. At the same time, I reminded myself that she had confided in no one else. This fact in itself spoke volumes about her loneliness, her isolation and lack of trust in those about her. I determined to see more of her, develop our relationship to the point where she felt she could trust me. God knows, she needed someone.

That morning, on my way to the Highlands, I had stopped by the gallery to see how she was, but the showroom was locked and there was no sign of Tammy. I spent the rest of the day at a favourite location in the foothills, my thoughts far from the search for gemstones. I packed up in the early evening and

drove to a prominent spur which afforded an uninterrupted view of the vast extent of the rain-forest, the entire bay area and the long sweep of the coastline down as far as Mackinley. As I sat in the car, a dazzling bolt of golden light speared through the atmosphere two hundred kays south and landed on the deck of the telemass station, the latest demolecularized cargo of people and provisions from any one of a dozen distant colony planets. Five minutes later another bolt appeared, this time streaking away from Addenbrooke. The sight never failed to thrill me.

I climbed out and walked to the edge of the prominence. Perhaps a dozen streams threaded their way through the rain-forest, pouring from step to step in great silver gouts like molten silver. Here and there, bodies of water collected in natural sinks to form idyllic lagoons, and it was at one such, perhaps a kilometre below, that I saw the hover-car come to a halt and settle. I recognized the vehicle; it was the crimson, battered run-about that Marty Challenger had bought Tammy for her twenty-first birthday. A small figure climbed from the driving seat – Tammy, distinctive in her pink tracksuit. I raised my binoculars and watched her walk to the edge of the sparkling lagoon. She began to undress, peeling off her tracksuit. I did not lower the binoculars – because it was obvious, as I watched, that she was not alone. She was speaking to someone in the hover-car, its cab concealed behind a stand of flowering shrubbery.

Tammy flung aside the last of her clothing and waded out, her body thin, angular and white. When the water reached her midriff she launched herself forward and swam the length of the lagoon. Then she turned, treading water, and called to her companion in the vehicle, no doubt exhorting whoever it was to join her. Tammy swam back and climbed out, her body bejewelled with diamond droplets. On her face was an expression of joy such as I had never expected to witness. She was a woman transformed. I was overcome with delight that Tammy had found someone, and at the same time I experienced a pang of what might have been jealousy. As I watched, a woman stepped from the cover of the bush, a small, sun-browned figure as naked as Tammy. They embraced in the silver shallows, belly to belly, breast to breast. I lowered the binoculars, my heart hammering, and the two small figures were reduced to a manageable anonymity.

The woman in Tammy's arms was Rowena Challenger.

I spent the next couple of days in my A-frame, drinking beer and watching a succession of old movies. Through the kitchen window I could see across the street to the gallery, but Tammy never showed herself.

In the period which followed my daughter's death, during which my wife and I had first sniped, then argued, and then let go with recriminations we had bottled up for years – resulting in her leaving me for someone I had considered a friend – I had thought that I would never again be amazed by the tortured complexity, the sheer unpredictability, of human motivations. What I saw that day by the lagoon had proved me wrong. I considered the events of the party, re-enacted the confrontation I had witnessed that

night between Rowena Challenger and her step-daughter. Nothing I had seen at the party had prepared me for the scene in the mountains – quite the reverse, in fact. I failed to see why Tammy and Rowena should come together as they had. In the end I gave up trying to work things out, lost myself in the trivial, totally predictable motivations of the characters in one ancient movie after another, and tried to forget.

Two or three days after the incident by the lagoon, I was summoned from the verandah by the chime of the vid-screen. Marty Challenger stared out at me, his face big and florid. "Henderson?"

"Challenger," I said, surprised.

"I'm calling about Tamsin –"

I was aware of a sudden tightness in my stomach. "What's wrong?"

"She's not with you by any chance?"

"No." I hesitated. "I haven't seen her since the party."

He sighed, mopped sweat from his face with a big, red bandana. "She went missing early yesterday evening."

I stared at him. "Went missing?"

"She left the house, didn't come back. She stayed out all night."

"Did she take her car?"

Challenger hesitated. "This morning the police reported finding it abandoned in the foothills. I'm going up there now."

"I'll come with you –"

"That won't be necessary, Henderson."

"I know the area like the back of my hand," I said. "I'm coming with you."

I cut the connection before he could further object.

**M**arty Challenger was waiting in the drive, standing beside the big, silver safari truck he took on hunting expeditions into the interior. He was wearing red slacks, a white silk shirt and a fedora. He nodded grudgingly as I drew to a halt beside him. "We'll take my truck, Henderson. Her car's just ten kays up the road."

I took my place in the passenger seat and Challenger gunned the engine and drove up the winding road into the hills. He steered without saying a word, hands gripping the apex of the wheel, staring straight ahead.

Sunlight flickered through the tall trees as we climbed steadily away from the bay.

I cleared my throat. "Has Tammy ever done anything like this before?"

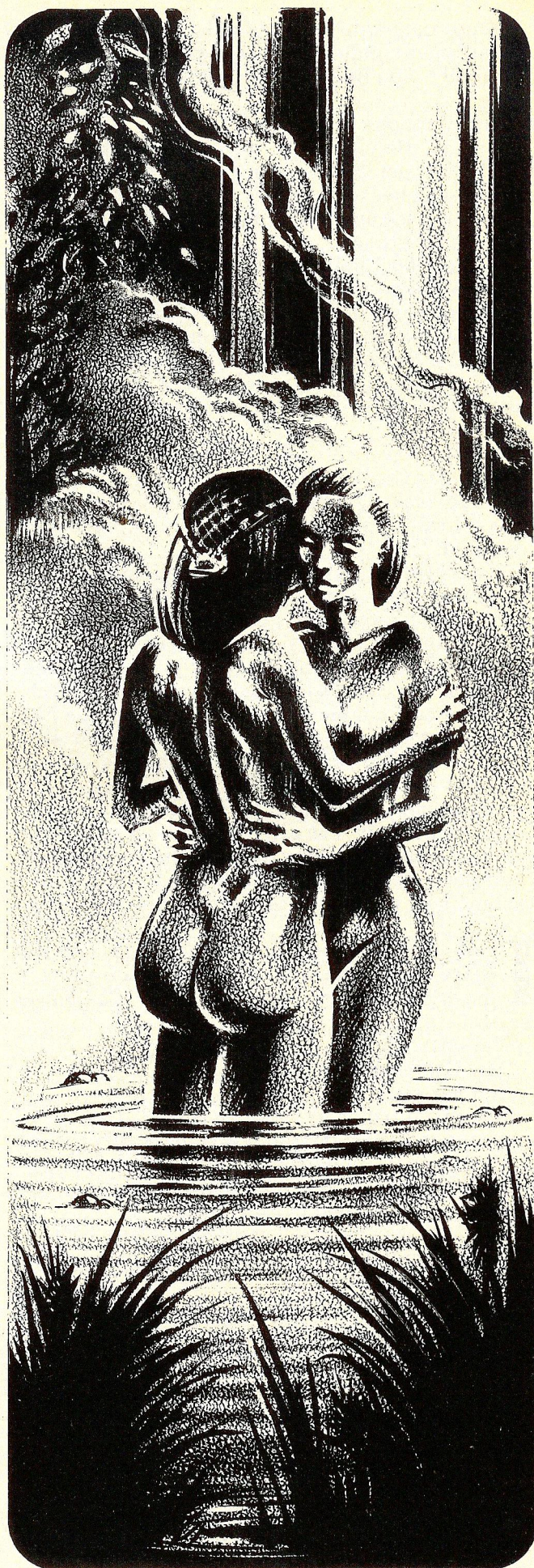
He flicked me a glance. "Of course not. Why should she?"

I sensed his uneasiness. "Well, after the party the other night..."

He opened his palms on the rim of the wheel, closed them. "Rowena was just playing the fool. Tamsin can take it."

I chose not to debate the point. "How do they get on?" I asked. "It must be hard for Tammy, having a step-mother just a few years her senior."

I glanced at Challenger. He kept his gaze on the winding road. "They have their differences. I think Rowena has it the hardest, though." He hesitated, as if wondering just how much to tell me. "Rowena's very highly strung, temperamental. She's been very ill the past few years –"



"Hence the hardware?" I asked.

Challenger nodded. "I worked on her myself. She tires easily. She finds Tamsin's attention somewhat trying."

"Her attention? In what way?"

"Well..." He cleared his throat. "I think Tamsin resents Rowena. She must see her as someone who has replaced her in my affections, after all."

I was at once amazed by his ego and amused that he had it so wrong.

A little later Challenger steered the truck off the road and down a rough track. The shimmering surface of a lagoon came into view, its level maintained by a mathematically perfect waterfall from a sink on the step above. Rainbows spangled the mist between the banks of vegetation. I recognized the lagoon as the one at which Tammy and Rowena had had their tryst the other day.

Tammy's hover-car stood beside the water.

I turned to Challenger. "Something must have happened to make Tammy leave yesterday and stay away," I said. "Are you sure she didn't argue with your wife?"

He avoided my gaze, stared up the incline. "They haven't seen each other for days," he said. "Since the party. I don't know what's got into the girl."

Two pathways led away from the lagoon, winding uphill through tangled undergrowth. I pointed them out to Challenger and suggested that we take one each.

For the next couple of hours we climbed the hillside, calling her name in vain. That Tammy had taken it into her head to run off like this suggested that she had been troubled at the time, but right now I was less concerned for her mental health than I was for her physical safety. The paths we followed were steep and dangerous, with long drops to the levels below. I had never before realized how much I might miss Tammy, how much I simply wanted her beside me.

**I**t was mid-afternoon by the time we gave up and drove back to the villa. A servant was waiting in the drive as we drew up. "Any luck?" Challenger asked.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Mrs Challenger isn't back?"

"Not yet, sir."

I stared at Challenger. "Where is she?" I asked.

"She spends every Sixthday at some beauty parlour in Mackinley. Wild horses wouldn't drag her away." He sighed. "Thanks for your help, Henderson. You wouldn't care to come in for a drink?"

"Ah...no. No thanks. I must be getting back." I climbed from the truck, returned to my own vehicle and drove home in a daze.

Rowena had spent the day in Mackinley, and Tammy was missing – the car by the lagoon leading us to believe that she had taken off into the hills. As I pulled up beside my A-frame, I imagined the two women together in some hotel bedroom. I climbed the steps to the verandah, feeling depressed, excluded and old.

I saw the magazine on the chesterfield as soon as I stepped into the lounge. I sat down and picked it up: a travel brochure, open at the page advertising the colony world of Chalcedony, Epsilon Indi II.

I noticed that the bedroom door was slightly ajar.

"Tammy?"

She appeared in the doorway. She had the pathetic, bedraggled appearance of a kitten saved from drowning. Her tracksuit was ripped and grass-stained, her left cheek bruised.

"Hello, Ben."

I stood and held her, unable to find the words to express my relief. I stepped back and looked at her, my hands on her shoulders. Her eyes were red and swollen, but dry now as if she had cried herself empty.

"Ben...I couldn't think of anywhere else to go. I spent the night in my car in the hills, wondering what to do. This morning I thought of you. You were out when I got here, but I climbed through the trapdoor in the kitchen." She began sobbing, then. "I thought things were bad that night at the party, Ben." She shook her head. "But it's hell now..."

"We've been looking for you all day, Tammy. I thought you were with Rowena."

She stared at me. "Rowena? Why should I...?"

"Three days ago, at the lagoon. I saw you there with her."

Tammy actually smiled then through her tears. "I bet you wondered what the hell was going on, didn't you?"

I shrugged. "I've had time to think about it. You were seeing each other to spite your father, right?"

She shook her head. "It's far more complicated than that."

"It is?"

She looked at me with woeful eyes. "You see, it wasn't Rowena I was with."

"But I saw you!"

"Ben, it's a long story. Can I have a beer, please?"

She sat on the chesterfield beside the much-thumbed brochure. I returned from the kitchen with two beers and sat down beside her. She began slowly, haltingly, looking up from time to time to see how I reacted, and punctuating her story with sips of beer.

It had all begun three years ago, on Earth.

**"W**hen I graduated from art school," Tammy said, "I moved back to Vancouver and started up as a freelance graphic designer, living with my parents until I could afford a place of my own..."

It was not the best of arrangements. She had never seen eye to eye with her mother – Tammy considered her a parasite who had married Challenger for the prestige and riches it would bring – and when Tammy announced that she would never marry, and gave the reasons why, her mother told her to pack her belongings and leave within the week.

Tammy rented an apartment on the sea-front and, not long after moving in, met a woman called Gabrielle de Carreras, the arts editor of a local magazine for which Tammy freelanced from time to time. They began seeing each other casually over business lunches, and when it became obvious that they had more in common than merely their line of work, their meetings became more frequent. They had known each other for three months when Gabrielle moved in with Tammy.

One week later her mother was killed in the bayside monorail disaster. The extent of her injuries precluded any hope of resurrection.

Here, Tammy shrugged. "Fortunately for her, she'd had herself encoded a couple of months before."

I stopped her. "Encoded?"

Tammy smiled. "You've been away from Earth too long, Ben. Encoding is when you have your identity or personality or whatever, your very *self*, recorded on a piece of software like a needle, this long." Tammy held her forefingers about five centimetres apart. "My mother was encoded on just such a piece of software. It was strange, going to her funeral – or rather the cremation of her body – and knowing that she still existed and sooner or later would be back with us. If only I'd known then..."

Meanwhile, Tammy was enjoying life. She had never been in love before. She'd had girlfriends at college, but had never experienced anything quite like the happiness she felt now. Gabrielle combined the roles of lover, therapist and teacher, and Tamsin Challenger left behind the chronically shy, underconfident girl she had been and became a woman confident of her art and her self.

Tammy looked up. "It was the best time of my life, Ben."

I smiled. "What happened?"

It was a while before she could bring herself to speak.

Gabrielle fell ill, and the physicians diagnosed a rare blood disease. The condition was curable, but at a cost Gabrielle and Tammy together were unable to afford. The medics gave Gabrielle a year to live, which meant that she would be dead before her twenty-fifth birthday.

In desperation Tammy approached her father.

"He said he could treat her," Tammy said. "But only on one condition."

When Tammy explained the situation to Gabrielle, she jumped at the chance. Anything was preferable to the terrible oblivion she faced if she went untreated. Within one month, Martin Challenger successfully flushed the virus from her system, and then he began the long, delicate programme of neuro-surgery to implant the cerebral hardware required to accommodate an Encoded Identity Insert.

A legally binding contract was drawn up. For three days, Gabrielle de Carreras would live normally as herself; for the next three days, upon insertion of the EII, the body of Carreras would be inhabited by the persona, the identity, of Martin Challenger's wife.

"Christ," I said. "Rowena is Gabrielle. No wonder you..." I recalled the way Tammy had looked upon Rowena at the party, their (or rather Tammy and Gabrielle's) tryst at the lagoon. And it explained more: Rowena's attitude to Tammy – her resentment that her body was being shared. I even began to understand Challenger's obsession with his daughter, for, although he might have his wife's identity as company some of the time, that other part of her – her physical self – was lost for ever. Tammy sufficiently resembled Rowena to remind him of what he had lost.

"Everything went well for the first few months. All parties were satisfied; Rowena and Gabrielle that they were alive, my father and myself that we had the people we loved, even if for only part of the time. I could put aside the thoughts of what my father and Rowena did together, and as Gabrielle wasn't conscious when all that went on, she could tolerate what

happened to her body. It was my mother, though... she found it hard to accept that Gabrielle and I lived together for the three days as lovers. She'd sometimes come round to my apartment on the third day and scream that what I was doing was sinful and would be punished. It was really scary, Ben – watching my mother's anger, her mannerisms and body language coming from the body of the person I loved so much." Tammy smiled and shrugged. "Rowena once even ran away when the three day term was up, so that Gabrielle couldn't resume life in her own body. My mother was always a little unbalanced."

Then, a year ago, Martin Challenger retired, and he put it to Tammy, Rowena and Gabrielle that they leave Earth and start a new life on one of the colony worlds. They all agreed, and selected Addenbrooke, Altair II. Six months ago the strange *ménage à quatre* took up residence in the villa above Magenta Bay.

Tammy paused there, staring at her fingers. "Not long after we moved here, things started going wrong. When Rowena's part of the three-day term was drawing to a close, and it was time for her EII to be withdrawn, she'd go berserk. She'd run off for days or threaten to kill herself." Tammy looked up at me, tearful. "The thing is, Ben, she got her way. A month ago, my father extended her tenancy to five days in six. He told me that it was safer that way, but I know it was just so that he could have more time with Rowena."

"But what about the contract?" I asked. "I thought you said it was legally binding?"

Tammy smiled sadly. "It is – on Earth. On Addenbrooke it's worthless. My father can do whatever the hell he wants."

"So that's why you ran away?" I asked.

"After that last day with Gabrielle, when you saw us in the hills, my mother came to my room and told me that she was trying to get Marty to agree to allow me just one day a *month* with Gabrielle. Can you imagine how I felt, hearing this from the lips that the day before..." She paused there, then went on, "I wanted to hit her, Ben. I wanted to hurt her, but how could I do that to the body of the person I loved?"

She was crying again, and all I could do was hold her. At length, when she had calmed down, I asked about the Encoded Identity Inserts.

"They're known as personality pins, Ben. They were introduced on Earth three or four years ago, and bought by people who wanted immortality – even though there weren't enough donor bodies to accommodate everyone. They invested in EIIs in the hope that in years to come androids or cloned bodies would be developed."

I shook my head. "That's all very well, but are these inserts the actual person, or just computerized copies? Surely your mother died in the 'rail accident – the encoding of her is just a clever copy, made months before."

Tammy shrugged. "What are we, Ben? What are our brains? Nothing but electro-chemical programming. Wipe the brain, and what have you got – just so much lifeless meat. It follows that a faithful encoding of a person's identity will record everything, their emotions and memories, their very *selves*." She smiled at me. "But I understand your objections. Gabrielle

refused on religious grounds earlier this year, when I suggested that we should both be encoded in case anything happened to us."

I stared at her. "Did you go ahead with it?" I asked.

"A couple of months ago I sneaked off down to a private clinic in Mackinley. My father would have done it, but I didn't want *that*."

We talked for a while about the process of encoding, and all the other technological wonders I was behind on. I was pleased that Tammy was talking about something other than her more immediate worries.

Later, she reached out and took my hand. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Ben." She smiled, then looked suddenly stricken. "Hell, you don't know how much I miss her."

Later still I made Tammy take a shower and change into a pair of my trousers and an old shirt three sizes too big for her. I told her to stay in the house until I got back, then went to see her father.

**I**drove from the settlement and up the hill and drew to a halt in the terracotta courtyard outside Challenger's villa. A uniformed servant showed me into the foyer, then down a corridor to a long, sun-lit lounge. Marty Challenger stood at the far end of the room, contemplating the view of the bay from a large picture window.

He turned as the servant announced me. "Ah, Henderson."

"I think I will take you up on that offer of a drink," I said.

He nodded. "What'll it be?"

I asked for a beer, and while he fixed the drinks – a brandy for himself – I looked round the room. On a low table stood a large holo-cube, and within it was the representation of a blonde woman. She was walking along a sea-shore, smiling and waving. At first I thought it was Tammy – and then I saw that the woman was older, more made-up and sophisticated. I realized that it was Challenger's wife, Rowena, before the accident.

He passed me the beer and turned to the window, cupping a brandy glass in his palm. "Still no sign of Tamsin, Henderson. I've had men out searching all day."

"That's what I came here to see you about," I said. "She's at my place."

He turned. "She is? Why didn't you bring her back?"

"She doesn't want to come back, Challenger. At least, not yet."

"How is she?" He seemed genuinely concerned, but it could easily have been an act.

"She's in one hell of a state, to be honest. She told me all about Rowena and Gabrielle."

He drew a breath. "Well, I suppose it had to come out sooner or later."

His complacency angered me. "Do you have any idea how unhappy she is?" I asked. "Why do you think she ran away? You allow her to see Gabrielle for one day a week – less, if your wife has her way – and the rest of the time she's denied the woman she loves. The kid's at her wit's end, for God's sake. She can't take much more –"

"Henderson," he cut in, a note of pleading in his voice. "You don't understand. It isn't as easy as you think."

"All you have to do is allow Tammy a little more time with Gabrielle."

Challenger was shaking his head. "As I mentioned earlier, my wife is temperamental, a strong-willed woman. Look, Henderson, don't you think I know what Tamsin is going through?" He stopped there, looking over my shoulder.

I heard the sound of high-heels on the tesserae mosaic.

"Ah, Rowena." Challenger said.

"You didn't tell me that you had a guest, Marty?" Rowena fixed me with a speculative gaze. "Henderson, isn't it? Tam's friend?"

She was wearing a black, off-the-shoulder dress, flamenco style, with a rose in her hair – making full use of Gabrielle de Carreras' natural beauty.

"I suppose you've heard about Tam?" she asked. "If I were you I wouldn't worry. She's prone to these displays of temper."

"Darling, Tamsin is at Henderson's place on the beach."

Rowena regarded me. The filigree nexus which braced her neck seemed to hold her head at a haughty angle. "She is?"

Challenger went on, "Henderson knows about you and Carreras."

Rowena's smile was emphasized by the crimson of her lips against the white of her perfect teeth. "What do you want, Henderson? I take it you did come here for a reason?"

"I've been telling your husband how unfair I consider your treatment of Tammy. If you knew how much she feels for Gabrielle..."

Rowena stared at me. "Tam has the use of her for one day every week. That should be sufficient for her needs."

I laughed out loud. "Are you serious?"

The woman almost spat. "She should be grateful for that! Doesn't she realize that if it wasn't for the skill of my husband, her precious little girlfriend would be dead?"

"Don't you realize," I said, "that if it wasn't for Gabrielle, you'd be so much data on a personality pin?"

The silence throbbed with the sound of my heart-beat as Rowena Challenger looked from me to her husband. I recalled what Tammy had said about her mother's being a little unbalanced. "I will not give in, Marty," she said, staring at Challenger. "Let that be understood!"

She turned and left the room.

"Well?" I asked, when she was out of earshot.

Challenger stared at me. "Well what?"

"Are you going to listen to her, or will you agree to give Gabrielle equal time?"

"That almost sounds like a threat, Henderson."

"Consider it as such," I said. "The contract you had drawn up on Earth might not be binding here, but when what you've been doing to Tammy is made public..."

"You wouldn't –"

"I know a top firm of lawyers in Mackinley," I said. "I think Tammy has good grounds for litigation – but win or lose, she'll drag your name through the shit in the process."

He gestured. "You saw how Rowena feels about it."

I shrugged. "Talk some sense into her, for God's sake."





Make her see reason. Look, Tammy might even be happy with less than an equal share, just so long as she has more than she's getting now. Is that too much to ask?"

Challenger pursed his lips, stared into his drink. "Send Tamsin back," he said, "and I'll promise I'll do what I can. You can ask no fairer than that."

I remained staring at him, unsure whether to take his sincerity at face value.

I nodded. "I'll do that," I said. "Thanks for the drink."

**T**ammy returned to the villa on the hill and I heard nothing more for a couple of days. She neither called nor dropped by, and I assumed the worst. Then one morning, as I returned from my daily walk along the beach, I noticed her car parked in the street. I crossed over and pushed through the door of her showroom.

"Ben!" She hurried around the counter and hugged me. "Where've you been? I came around to tell you this morning."

"Tell me what?" I laughed; her excitement was contagious.

"Marty's allowed me more time with Gabrielle! We can see each other every week – two days in six."

"And Rowena agreed?"

"She objected at first, but Marty talked her round. Isn't that fantastic? And it's all thanks to you. What did you say?"

I shrugged. "Just talked to him reasonably."

Tammy went on, "The pin's coming out this evening, so I can spend the night with Gabrielle. Then

tomorrow – I've got it all planned. We're setting off into the mountains. We'll take a tent and enough food for two days and lose ourselves away from everything." She shook her head as if in disbelief. "I can't wait, Ben."

"I hope you have a good time. Look, why don't you call when you get back – bring Gabrielle round. I'd really like to meet her."

Tammy laid her head on her shoulder and smiled. "I'll do that, Ben."

**T**wo days later I was in the workshop, cutting a pair of gems to set in rings for Tammy and Gabrielle, when the light connected to the vid-screen in the house flashed red. I turned off the cutter, laid down the stones and made my way to the lounge.

I switched on the screen.

"Tammy – how did it go?"

I stopped. She was staring out at me, her face ashen. "Tammy, what's wrong?"

"We didn't go. Rowena left the villa two nights ago. She's been away ever since. This morning... this morning they found her." Her voice was a monotone, as if drugged. She closed her eyes, then opened them and stared. "Ben, will you come with me, please? We're driving up the coast now. We'll collect you."

I nodded, unable to find the words to question her. She cut the connection.

I was standing in the street when Marty Challenger drew up in his safari truck. One of his medics was in the passenger seat.

Tammy sat in the back, as stony-faced as she had been on the vid-screen. She watched me climb in

beside her, then took my hand in a tight grip and laid her head on my shoulder. Challenger turned the truck and headed up the coast road, away from the settlement.

We remained silent for the duration of the journey. Beside me, Tammy was rigid, her hand cold. I wanted to question her, ask her what the hell had happened; surely the truth, no matter how terrible, would be better than the ignorance fostered by silence.

Fifteen minutes later Challenger steered the truck from the road and down a rough, unmetalled track to a wide sweep of beach. The tide was out, and we raced along the flats to the opposite headland. A police car was parked beside a taped-off area in the dunes. Three officers and a couple of Challenger's medics were gathered and gazing down at something in the sand.

Challenger settled the vehicle, cut the engine and climbed out. We just sat and stared.

On the sloping sand inside the cordoned area, Rowena Challenger lay on her back. She had opened her dress and the walls of her abdomen with something very sharp...

One of the medics rose from examining the corpse, ducked under the tape and approached Challenger. "I'm sorry, sir. There's nothing we can do. The two day limit..."

Tammy pressed her face to my chest and moaned.

Marty Challenger crossed the cordoned area to the body. He knelt beside it and turned the once beautiful head. I was aware that Tammy was watching him, too; she stiffened, as what he was doing became obvious. With a finger nail, Challenger slid back a tiny panel on the occipital console, and a thin, silver spoke, glinting in the sunlight, ejected itself automatically. He took it in his palm and closed his hand about it in a gesture of ultimate satisfaction.

Then he looked up at Tammy and myself, and smiled.

Tammy cried, tore herself from me and scrambled into the front seat. Before I could stop her, she had pulled a laser rifle from the door-rack and jumped from the truck.

A police officer dived at her. Tammy cried out and fired. The cobalt-blue bolt hissed through the air, dazzling me – and when I regained my sight I saw the officer lying dead on the sand.

"Tammy!" I cried.

She staggered forward under the weight of the rifle, myself and everyone around her frozen with fear. She approached her father and halted five metres from him. "You bastard," she sobbed, and before she lost control completely she hoisted the rifle and took aim.

Challenger was still kneeling, smiling at his daughter, when she fired wildly and blasted a hole in the centre of his chest.

Then she dropped the laser, and stared at what she had done, and screamed.

**T**he trial was convened one week later and lasted just two days.

I gave evidence to the investigating officers and was called on as a witness. I would rather not have attended; the verdict was a foregone conclusion, and I did not want to put myself through the agony of seeing Tammy sentenced. I had no option, though, but to watch the proceedings from the witnesses' enclosure.

Among the other witnesses were Marty Challenger and the police officer. The latter testified via vid-screen, not yet sufficiently recovered to leave hospital. Challenger was there in person, his posture as he took the stand severely upright as a result of the resurrection surgery.

Tammy stood in the dock, immobile, staring straight ahead. If she saw me she gave no sign.

Her defence pleaded that her action was a crime of passion; the prosecution that, crime of passion or not, Tamsin Challenger deserved the ultimate punishment.

On the afternoon of the second day, the head of the judging panel declared the verdict. Tammy was found guilty of murder and sentenced to cerebral erasure, to be carried out within three days.

Only then did she look across the crowded chamber at me, and smile. Then she closed her eyes and bowed her head as the officials ushered her from the dock.

I left the court in a state of shock.

**I** spent a lot of time in the mountains, after that. I took a tent and food and prospecting tools and spent days in the Central Highlands, attempting to forget what had happened by losing myself in my work and the splendour of the scenery. I tried to avoid the lagoon where I had seen Tammy and Gabrielle, but every other body of water in the hills – and there were hundreds of them – served to remind me of Tammy and her lover. I reasoned that, but for the insane greed of Rowena Challenger, Tammy and Gabrielle might now be content with their two days in six together. Unlike all those years ago, when the magnificence of the terrain had helped ease the ache at the loss of my daughter, the mountains provided no such balm now. My daughter's death had been a tragic accident, and I had felt anger towards no-one but myself; the terrible fact of Tammy's demise was that it was both avoidable and so unjust, and the anger I felt towards Challenger and Rowena and the judicial system consumed me like a fever.

One afternoon, about a month after the trial, I left the mountains after a sojourn of more than a week; I had a good collection of rocks in my specimen sack, and the time spent away from civilization had put me in relatively good cheer. The sight of Magenta Bay, and all it represented in terms of memories, brought down a sudden depression. It occurred to me that it might be wise to move right away from the settlement.

To reach the bay road and my A-frame, I had to pass Challenger's villa. As I was driving along the road that skirted his property, I caught sight of a small figure sun-bathing on the lawn. I pulled up, climbed from my buggy and walked through the knee-high scrub to the immaculate, unfenced lawns. I think I even ran the last few metres, then stopped dead.

"Tammy?"

It came to me that they had not wiped her, after all...

She sat up, then climbed to her feet, a hand shading her eyes from the sunlight as she looked at me. She was wearing a bright yellow bikini.

It was Tammy, the same gauche, rather angular body – though browner now than ever before. She had allowed her hair to grow.

"Henderson?" she asked, and although the voice was Tammy's, I detected a hardness, a suspicion.

"What do you want?"

Marty Challenger appeared on the verandah. "I'm fixing a martini, darling."

She turned, and I saw the silver console at the base of her skull...

Challenger had seen me. "Rowena?" he called.

I was almost physically sick.

Rowena hurried away from me and into the arms of her husband. Challenger stared at me over her head, his expression neutral.

I fled. I drove home in a daze of disbelief. I spent the afternoon in the darkened lounge. I drank beer after beer and stared at the wall, the terrible truth repeating itself in my head like a nightmare.

With Rowena's suicide and Tammy's erasure, Challenger had achieved more than he could ever have hoped for. It was so neat, I told myself – so perfectly neat that it could not be the result of pure chance.

I drank myself to the edge of oblivion. I wanted to strike out, to destroy; only once before had I experienced a time when the thought of the future appalled me, when the prospect of going on seemed unbearable, but I experienced it again now.

I was saved by a knock at the door.

I staggered across the room and snatched it open. "Yes?"

A middle-aged man in a neat grey suit stood on the verandah. "Mr Benedict Henderson?"

"What do you want?"

I must have presented an aggressive, dishevelled sight, but he was unflappable. "I represent Delgado and Graves, solicitors of Mackinley." I noticed, then, the plastic container the size of a vid-screen at his feet. "Tamsin Challenger was one of our clients, Mr Henderson. Before her erasure, she was allowed to attend to the dispersal of her personal effects. She wanted you to have this." He passed me the box. "If you would be so kind as to sign here, and here..."

I scrawled my signature on half a dozen official forms, then carried the container into the lounge and set it on the coffee table. I remained staring at it for a long time, wondering if I could bear to find out what it held.

I reached out broke the seal. The sides of the container folded down.

A polished wooden chest, which Tammy had carved herself and which I had admired every time I called in to see her...

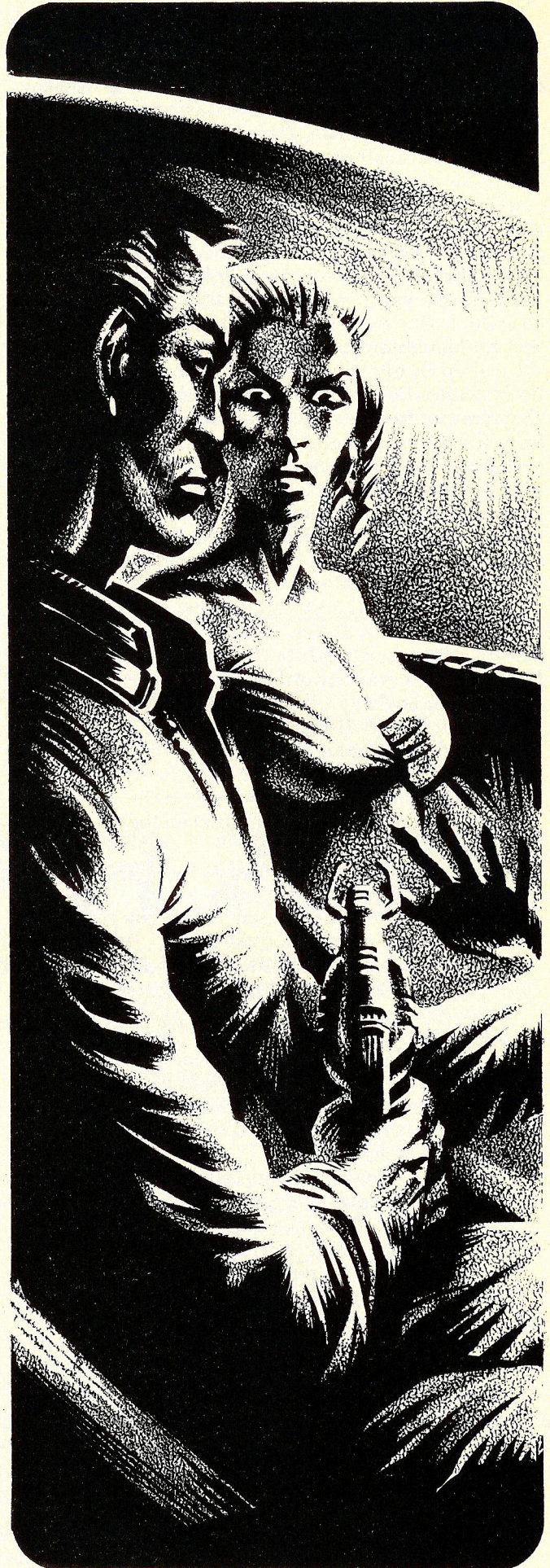
I unfastened the gold clasp and eased back the lid. The chest contained painted shells and rocks and driftwood, a printed scarf, a small self-portrait in pastel. I lifted them out one by one, laid them on the coffee table.

At the bottom of the chest was a photograph. It showed Tammy and myself on the verandah of my A-frame. I stared with a glazed expression at the camera, while next to me Tammy smiled.

I stared at the photograph and fought back the tears.

Then I noticed the brown envelope, standing upright at the back of the chest. It was weighted unevenly with some small, heavy object. Across the front of the envelope, in Tammy's hand, was scrawled: Ms Tamsin Louise Challenger, followed by the childish capitals: ME!

I ripped open the envelope and tipped the object into my hand.



Then, I did lose my fight against the tears.  
I stared at Tammy's personality pin in disbelief.

The following Sixthday I followed Rowena Challenger, at a discreet distance, down the coast road to Mackinley.

She drove her buggy into a right-angled parking space on the main street and entered a beauty emporium. She had made Tammy's body her own. Although she still superficially resembled Tammy, she had added touches of sophistication: she was perfectly tanned and outfitted in a tight, off-the-shoulder mini dress, wore a new hair-style and the latest cosmetics. She even moved with a brash confidence that her daughter had never possessed.

I waited in my vehicle, going over my plans. Two hours later she emerged and turned left along the shop-fronts, towards me. As she passed, I jumped from the buggy and grabbed her. Passers-by stopped and stared as, before she could protest, I bundled her into the passenger seat and locked the door. By the time I rounded the vehicle and slipped into the driving seat, Rowena had composed herself.

"Just what the hell are you playing at, Henderson?" she said with cool disdain.

"It's time we had a little talk, Rowena."

I glanced across at her. I could see Tammy in her face, but the knowledge of who was behind those eyes fuelled my determination.

She sat sideways in her seat. "It is? And just what would you like to discuss?"

I started the engine, backed from the parking lot and steered up the coast road.

"You had it all planned, didn't you?"

She turned on me a smile of innocent bemusement. "Had *what* all planned?"

"Your 'suicide,' Tammy's reaction to Gabrielle's death, your take-over of her body —"

She laughed. "I don't know what you're talking about."

We left Mackinley behind us and hit the open country, the wide sweep of the ocean to our left.

"I wondered why you agreed so easily to Tammy seeing Gabrielle two days in six, especially after telling me that one day a week was more than enough. Tammy told me that Challenger had talked you round — but what he'd actually done was to come up with a plan to get everything he wanted."

Rowena watched me.

I went on, "You killed yourself — or perhaps Challenger did it for you. This got rid of Gabrielle de Carreras, with the advantage that with your Identity Insert you'd be granted continued life."

Rowena faltered. "You have no proof."

"Then Challenger staged that little scene on the beach. No wonder it seemed so theatrical. The body — conveniently undiscovered until after the two-day limit — the medics on hand — Challenger's little performance with the pin, to turn the knife in Tammy's wound all the more — the rack of loaded lasers in the truck."

By now, Rowena's smile lacked conviction.

"Your husband probably didn't expect it to go just as planned — I suspect he would have been quite happy to have Carreras out of the way. He had your pin, after all, and it would be only a matter of time

before he bought another body and had you all to himself —"

"You have not one shred of evidence, Henderson."

"But it worked like a dream," I said. "Tammy took the bait, killed Challenger and was duly sentenced to erasure. It was then a formality for Challenger to make a requisition for the erased body, augment it and install your pin."

I took my gaze off the road and glanced across at her. Rowena Challenger was smiling at me, nauseating in her confidence. There was nothing of Tammy in her expression, now; Rowena's rapacious, scheming sensibilities had transformed it. I recognized the face from the holo-cube in Challenger's villa.

"You've been playing quite the detective, Henderson. It's a pity for you that you cannot substantiate your allegations. The judiciary would laugh your claims out of court —"

It was my turn to smile. "This case won't be going that far," I said.

Her supercilious expression wavered. "It won't...?"

I ignored her. I turned off the road and into the drive of a secluded beach chalet. I cut the engine, turned to face her.

She tried to smile. "Henderson?"

I produced the shock-gun and held it where she could get a good, long look.

She rallied. "I always thought you were after Tam's —"

"You're not getting off that lightly," I said. I smiled. "Though, in a way, it is Tammy's body I want."

She stared at me, the beginning of fright in her eyes. "What do you mean?"

I took great delight in telling her, and observing her reaction.

She screamed, attempted to open the locked door. "No!"

I touched her with the shock-gun and watched her spasm.

Then I carried her into the chalet and laid her on the bed. I turned her head on the pillow and opened the console. The Identity Insert unscrewed with a high, whirring sound, ejected itself with a final click. I pulled it out all the way and replaced it with Tammy's pin. The hardware in her head pulled it from my fingers, eased it into her cerebellum and screwed it down. I closed the cover.

During the next hour, while Tammy gradually came to her senses, I arranged the various papers I had prepared. I'd obtained a transcript of the court proceedings, and the newspaper report of the trial. Also, I had laboriously written a more subjective account of the trial and the events of the past two months, in the form of a personal letter to Tammy. The account of Gabrielle de Carreras' death had taken me hours and many redrafts.

Tammy moaned. I crossed to the bed and sat down beside her.

With the accession of Tamsin Challenger's identity to its seat of consciousness, the body seemed to undergo a subtle transformation. Despite the sun-tan, the cosmetics, hair-style and short dress, the awkward, gangling Tammy of old re-established herself.

She blinked, smiled when she saw me.

"Ben... Where am I? The last thing I remember... I went to Mackinley to be encoded... Ben!" She tried

to struggle upright. I held her. "Ben, my father doesn't know about my encoding, does he? He wanted to do it himself, but I didn't trust him. So I had it done privately..."

I reassured her that her secret was safe.

Then she became aware of her augmentation. She fingered the occipital console. "Ben - what's happened?" She panicked. "What date is it?"

I told her. "Tammy, two months have elapsed. You're... you're using your Identity Insert. A lot has happened since you were encoded."

I assisted her to the lounge before the picture window overlooking the ocean. I sat next to her and gave her the papers. "This is the easiest way I could think of to let you know what happened, Tammy."

First, she read my letter.

"Gabrielle!" she cried, appealing to me to tell her that it wasn't true.

I shook my head. "I'm so sorry..."

She read the account of the trial and the newspaper cuttings, and then began again from the beginning.

**W**e stood on the deck of the telemass station. Tammy stared at the crammed wallet. "One hundred thousand, Ben? But I can't take this!"

I smiled. "You need it," I said. "You can't start a new life with nothing."

"And this?" She held up her passport.

"I arranged it all last week. I made contacts. Don't worry, it's a very good forgery."

A call went out for all travellers to take their places.

"Ben..." She tried not to cry. "Come and visit me,

okay? I'll be in touch."

Behind Tammy, her fellow voyagers were walking out across the translation pad, prior to being stripped down to their constituent molecules and fired at hyper-light speed through space.

"Ben, what about Rowena's pin?"

I tapped the envelope in my pocket. "I'll make sure your father gets it."

"But when Rowena's reanimated, she'll know what you did."

"Then that'll make us even. I know what they did, after all. Don't worry. They won't dare breathe a word."

"Will all travellers..."

"Ben!" She flung her arms around me in a hug.

"Goodbye, Tammy."

She ran across the deck to the pad, took her position and waved. Seconds later, the motionless crowd turned to fire.

I watched the bolt of golden light speed from the deck and arc away into the heavens en route to Epsilon Indi II, the glare bringing tears to my eyes.

Then I left the station, posted Rowena back to Marty Challenger and took the coast road home.

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Eric Brown's last story here was "Elegy Perpetuum" (issue 50). His first novel, *Meridian Days*, is due for publication by Pan Books this summer, and he is now at work on his second (provisionally entitled *Engineman*). He lives in the Brontë family town - Haworth, West Yorkshire.

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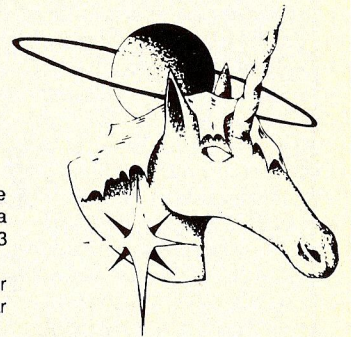
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The trouble with the end of the world, and the trouble with the novels of Ian McDonald, is one trouble: we have been there before. This does not make the end of the world less terrible, or the novels of Ian McDonald less mobile on the lip, but it surely modifies the shock of anticipating the one, or of opening the other. The end of the world in sf, for instance, was assembled from millennial images generated by the tight-sphinctered desert sect which gave birth to Judaism and Christianity and Islam and Gradgrind and Strangelove, and which gloats through its avatars, as it gloated in the beginning, over the death of the Mother; from the military and ecological scenarios which say one thing always; and from our own "pastoral" longings for a Golden Age after the holocaust. This end-of-the-world has become part of the base architecture of the genre, one of the structuring icons whose presence in a text spells (pun) the litanies of recognition which we depend on for comfort and orientation. We have in other words domesticated, in our minds' eyes, in order to tell stories after our wont, the death of the planet: we have been there before. Which is why any 1992 sf novel which fails to incorporate some iconic reference to the end-of-the-world tends to irritate us, because our genre expectations are being violated – I doubt I'm alone in actively enjoying the end-of-the-world in fiction, while simultaneously dreading the increasing signs of the end of the world in fact.

But it is one thing to recognize the blessed analgesias of sf, and another to read Ian McDonald. It is one thing to recognize an icon, and another to know exactly how it is going to be spelled. The first is a comfort; the second is a shock. The first allows us to continue trucking through the tale; the second awakens us to the raw artifactuality of the game of reading, the velleity of the dream of story. By quoting the icon, McDonald estranges us, curses the tit, debriefs the reader into the nada and the day. His first novel, *Desolation Road* (1988), gazes so closely at us through the eyes of Ray Bradbury and Gabriel Garcia Marquez that we can no longer pretend we are alone with the story, which may be the most savage alienation he could inflict upon his readers: for he kills the autonomy of the dream in which we read; by staring at us through the words of others, he turns those words – those icons at the heart of genre, at the heart of reading – into devices on the page. And we lose it. We go down to day. We open the next book, *Out on Blue Six* (1989), and it is the same; and the next, *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (1991), and it is similar; and we open **Hearts, Hands and Voices** (Gollancz, £14.99), and the nightmare continues.

# The Whips of Disenchantment and the Death of Ire and Bats

John Clute

Here are the first three paragraphs of the novel, plus the first sentence of the fourth paragraph:

Grandfather was a tree.

Father grew trux, in fifteen colours.

Mother could sing the double-helix song, sing it right into the hearts of living things and change them. *Around we go, and round...*

A house ran amok in Fifteen Street the day the soldiers of the Emperor Across the River came to Mathembe's township.

The book continues in this vein for some time. It is very well written. The strategy deployed in these first lines – that of conveying, through a rushing patter of staccato sentences, a kind of epiphany-through-précis of the novum to be unfolded – is adroitly conceived and handled. Grandfather (it turns out) really is a tree; trux are biological analogues of trucks, and can be grown; mother (and the daughter, Mathembe, who is the protagonist of the tale) are indeed capable of massaging into various outcomes the tropical biotechnologies that dominate the Land. And houses indeed have vestigial brains, are easily panicked, and are mobile. In its way, it's all superb. At the same time, however, it is a deeply estranging sequence of words, a murder weapon, a quote that kills.

This time the figure whose icons it stares through is, of course, Geoff Ryman. By rendering the tone and matter of the opening paragraphs of his second and third novels with such unerring exactitude, the first sentences of *Hearts, Hands and Voices* tell us that Geoff Ryman, in *The Unconquered Country* (1986) and *The Child Garden* (1988), was making up a story, and here is the story, flayed. (*Interzone* readers from the dawn of time who keep files might wish to glance at the first pages of "The Unconquered Country" as it appears in *Interzone 7*; the first pages of "Love Sickness" in *Interzone 20* are also of interest, though these passages were much changed in the transformation of this novella into *The Child Garden*.) It does not matter that we know very well that Geoff Ryman was making up stories – for our knowledge of that essential circumstance was part of our compact with the stories being told – what

matters now is that *the knowledge is public*. It is no longer between the words and us. The words have been exposed to the dayglare of McDonald's dissecting re-assembly, and so have we. This it gives us.

I do not know if I think it is a good thing. (I do not know if I think it bad.) What I do know is that *Hearts, Hands and Voices* is an extraordinary text, borrower and lender, cuckoo and phoenix. "The Unconquered Country" begins: "Third Child had nothing to sell but parts of her body" and continues, as does *The Child Garden*, to convey through a rushing patter of staccato sentences, a kind of epiphany-through-précis of the novum to be unfolded (exactly). Mathembe (and Third Child) live in a rural village in a provincial land tied to a nearby empire that seems Asian; biotechnologies provide both children with a living. When imperial forces – by air in both novels – attack Third Child's (and athenbe's) villages in their respective novels, the animate mobile houses common to both novels panic and die. After Mathembe (and Third Child) find themselves homeless and deracinated, they both end up in a large festeringly tropical city, where both attempt to survive. This city closely resembles the London of *The Child Garden* (with echoes of the world of Gwyneth Jones's *Divine Endurance*, 1984), just as the Ancestor Tree which contains the consciousness of dead elders more closely resembles the Consensus of *The Child Garden* than anything in the earlier story (though the stadium in McDonald's book more closely resembles the amphitheatre-like square in "The Unconquered Country"). The plot of *Hearts, Hands and Voices* – what plot there is – diverges increasingly from direct inhabitation of the plots of either parent book, but assonances flicker throughout the pages like small deadly whips of disenchantment. There is never any chance of forgetting the obdurate central fact about the book: that it is a tale which says No to the innocence of Story.

Perhaps consequentially, McDonald finds it very difficult to pretend to tell a story of his own. Mathembe and her

family, once driven out of their home village, trek painfully to the big city dominated by the imperial power. Her father is disappeared. She looks for him. Her mother festers and dwindles. She tries to find her (and discovers that she's been selling her body as a hatchery for viral products: it is a passage which dissectingly quotes *both* Ryman books). Her younger brother can not be found. She looks for him. He becomes a terrorist. There are eventual discoveries and rediscoveries, and a kind of reconciliation. Mathembe's land – which is ravaged not only by imperial soldiery but by religious disputes – is a bit like Ireland, a bit like Viet Nam, a lot like India/Pakistan. But this does not amount to much of an engine of plot. Imagery is profuse throughout, and eloquent; the style of the book, after we slide from staccato, is knobblily with nutrients, though occasionally stagnant; and the tone of the thing is the tone of uninnocence self-revealed: remote, knowing, haunted by that which becomes it. *Hearts, Hands and Voices* is a bad thing; and a good thing.

**W**e enter the world of Sheri S. Tepper, and warm hands clasp us, and make us welcome, and we close our eyes (or open them), and a Story unfolds. It is all much easier to bear than Ian McDonald: but then the last thing Ian McDonald could conceivably want is to be easy to bear, or to be thought of as a suitable teller of tales around any fire in this world. Tepper, on the other hand, may have started her career in 1983 with nary a notion of doing anything else but telling: Her first novels – they came in a rush for a while, till the mid 1980s, when she slowed down to one or two a year – were fantasies of clear cunning sophistication, but seemingly deficient in agenda, with storylines which clutched at the reader with velvet undertows that took you far from shore but never drowned you, quite. And even now, a tale about the end-of-the-world like *Beauty* (1991) can trick the reader into fireside comforts, and only slowly reveal the desolation at the core of things. (The ecological urgency of this book was underlined by "A Note from the Author" which appeared only on the back flap of the hardback dustwrapper, and was therefore, inexcusably, omitted from the paperback edition: Tepper may have felt it necessary to point her message extra-textually because *Beauty* qua Story rather ran away with her.)

Her major series of recent years exhibits a similar tendency to revel in narrative byways at the cost of some saliency slippage, but all comes clear in the end. The three novels so far published in the current sequence – *Grass* (1989), *Raising the Stones* (1990) and *Sideshow* (Bantam Books, \$21.50) – move from the slightly po-faced

romance idiom which kind of beguilingly sidetracks *Grass* for hundreds of pages, through the bustling broad swathes of action which make *Raising the Stones* formidable but a touch endless, and into the more intense fabulousness of *Sideshow*, five thousand years on from our own Common Era 1992, at the end of which Story the tale is by no means ended, but humanity has finally stopped tearing the universe apart.

If there has been a central equation whose outcomes have determined Tepper's rendering of the human condition in all three books, it has probably been some sort of calculus through which masculinity, sex and religion are sealed irrevocably together by ire. It is a calculus (or equilibration) whose feminist implications Tepper neither scants nor emphasizes; and although some of her sexually-skewed elderly male prophets of life-distorting versions of Christianity (in all of this we risk tautology) may seem all too cartoon-like to frighten us deep inside, the sense of agenda thus generated is remarkably well-sustained. Because of their gloating Despite for the given world, the religious figures who are the ultimate villains of the sequence have ensured that Earth becomes a desert by the early years of the 21st century. In both *Grass* and *Raising the Stones*, fundamentalist patriarchies attempt to destroy other parts of the universe, and are defeated in the end. In *Sideshow*, a pair of Siamese twins from our era travel through an Arbai Gate (familiar from *Grass*) to the planet Elsewhere, 5000 years into the future, where they find that a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the Hobbs Land Gods (the subject of *Raising the Stones*) has resulted in a world-wide hegemony determined to preserve human diversity at all costs. To this end, Jack Chalker-like, the planet has been divided into something like a thousand enclaves, each devoted to its own way of life. Emigration is prohibited. The world Council employs Enforcers – among them the main protagonists of the novel – whose job it is to prevent petty imperialisms and proselytizing, to preserve cultural diversity while ignoring the costs individual humans (children, for instance, in religious cultures devoted to child sacrifice) must bear. It is an idea fit for a novel, and especially fit for an sf novel, where elaborate societies are almost invariably constructed by their authors in order to be destroyed by their plots: and so it goes, here on Elsewhere.

The plot is much much too complex to synopsis, though Tepper manages to tell the whole thing around the fire with an extraordinarily agile serenity, or serene agility; suffice it for readers of the previous volumes that the protagonists of each – clearly labelled

early on for our convenience – appear again here: that Marjorie (here Jori) and Sam (here Asner) are instrumental in dissolving the procrustean Diversity of Elsewhere into a long-hinted-at epiphany, and in helping the Twins achieve their own metamorphic destiny: and that "Man" finally unbinds "himself" from the long and dreadful history of homo sapiens, from the cross of Ire, from the solitudes we call peace. And the universe gives a sigh of relief.



Tanith Lee

*Note:* the day this is being written, 14th February 1992, sees yet another unofficial deadline for the solution of the Robert Maxwell-induced crisis at Macdonald/Orbit, and one can only hope that the publication of Tanith Lee's **Dark Dance** (Macdonald, £13.99), due yesterday, and now delayed until 12th March, will not be further impeded. The book itself, the first volume in what is projected to be called the *Blood Opera* sequence, is a dense pummel of a tale, which drives at the reader pounding, incessantly, urgently: like a heart fever.

And at the end of the 400 pages almost nothing has actually happened: the quasi-immortal Adamus Scarabae, who may be a vampire or who may – along with his whole arachnoid family – be something else entirely, begets upon a human female a girl child, who grows up sullen and wild in a brilliantly underlit London. Inveigled to migrate across the UK to the Scarabae mansion, she is herself impregnated by her young large-grand-piano-playing Dad, flees, gives birth, brings up another daughter in the wilderness of underlit suburban London: but the daughter is more like Dad than Mum; and when they return to the Scarabae mansion she is soon deeply embroiled with Grand-dad, and the plot thickens, and ends: but we are still at the beginning of everything, really. It is all quite astonishing: unrelentingly skilful, unputdownable, and bats. Accept no substitutes.

(John Clute)



# Killer Serials

## Paul J. McAuley

One looks at the title page of Orson Scott Card's latest novel, **The Memory of Earth** (Tor, \$20.95), and the heart sinks. Because this is neither the fourth volume in the *Ender* series (assuming that the third open-ended volume was not the last) nor is it the long-awaited fourth volume of the fantasy series *The Tales of Alvin Maker* (which if it is ever finished may well be the best fantasy series of the last quarter of the 20th century, if, like me, you count Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* as sf). No, *The Memory of Earth* is the beginning of yet another series, for there beneath the title is the qualification, *Homecoming, Volume 1*. And so the heart sinks, not because one doubts Card's ability to keep so many balls in the air – he is an accomplished and above all professional prestidigitator – but that all of these series, and any others Card decides to start in the meanwhile, look set to continue, worlds without end, into the 21st century.

But let's forget that. Let's put aside hope of reaching the conclusion of Alvin Maker's story before receiving one's pension. Let's get back to the matter at hand, which sets us up for a series of five sf novels about a colony world which has lost contact with Earth, and which in order to save itself must send an envoy to the home planet – not exactly a startlingly new plot. Nor is the major notion underlying the plot exactly original. A supercomputer in orbit around the colony world, Harmony, monitors the thoughts of every person, helps them when requested and when it thinks appropriate, bans technological innovations which would disturb the peace, and in general behaves in a manner indistinguishable from that of Jehovah, which is to say the jealous personal god of the Israelites. It is called, by the way, the Oversoul. What is startling, and largely unfathomable, is that the novel is set 40 million years in the future. There may well be very good reasons for this that will become apparent in later volumes; for now, it is worth noting that 40 million years ago the nearest thing to a human being was an obscure species of primitive lemur, and that the colonists of Harmony, 40 million years on, appear to be indistinguishable from contemporary humans.

But in many ways neither scientific credibility nor originality of ideas matter in a Card novel, for his masterly narrative skills turn sows' ears into silk purses with seamless ease. His plots, which explicate themes repeated from one novel to the next, are complex, multilayered, and driven more by the credible behaviour of strongly drawn

characters rather than the development or extrapolation of scientific ideas. In *The Memory of Earth* Card, by no means a neutral or epicurean novelist, takes one of his themes, the dominating power of the family, to its extreme.

The Oversoul, or God, has been orbiting Harmony for so long that its systems are beginning to fail. It is no longer able to completely prevent the technologies (from wheels to powered flight) on which warfare depends, because it is no longer able to stop people thinking about them. Idiot-like, it decides it must call in a repair team from Earth, for all that the original colonists of Harmony fled Earth's holocaust 40 million years ago. And so from all its peoples it nominates a particular few to save itself and the world in its care.

All of these potential acolytes live in the city state of Basilica, where women draw up temporary contracts with men in order to have children, and just about everybody is related to everyone else. Thus, the main protagonist, Nafai, is the youngest of four sons of Volemak, but his eldest brother is also the brother of Gaballufix, who is Volemak's political rival, and also the father of Nafai's sisters. And so on. The whole of Basilica, where the women live within the city wall and the men outside it, is a complexly ingrown family, and like all of Card's families, there's no escaping it.

The Oversoul gives Volemak a vision of Basilica burning and its fire rising like a star into the sky: the riddle of this vision is the motor of the plot. Or rather it is for the characters, but by way of a prologue Card has already informed the reader what the Oversoul has decided to do, a flaw which should matter more than it does. News of Volemak's vision spreads and eventually leads to the flight of Volemak and his sons from an assassination plot and to the occupation of Basilica, within its walls and without, by Gaballufix, who also possesses, through his clan, the McGuffin by which Volemak can understand exactly what the Oversoul wants of him and of his sons.

Card drives the reader through an intricate plot populated by a large cast with consummate skill, and vividly depicts the strangely different cultural mores of Basilica; his characters are not 20th-century types in funny clothing, but inhabit their very different world with the same ease with which we inhabit ours. But all the same there is a sense of suffocation. A sense that the scales of the plot are tipped. Card is a moral didact whose cunningly constructed fables are founded on an unshakable conviction that he knows what is right – which is that parents are right. Nafai's Father and Mother are right because they are his parents; the

Oversoul is right because it is, to all intents and purposes, God. God is right not because He is love, but because He is God. No one can disagree with this in a Card novel – or not for long, and even then they are punished. And so it doesn't really matter that Volemak and his sons discover the truth behind the Oversoul's vision: it doesn't matter because we know they will obey the Oversoul because this is an Orson Scott Card novel and authority must be obeyed. To do otherwise would be like disagreeing with the laws of gravity. There are no revelations; only confirmations.

And so while we are dazzled by Card's sleight-of-hand plotting and his crystalline prose, we are repulsed by the implacable force of his convictions. Yet Card plants his narrative hooks deep, and with care. At the end, Nafai becomes more important than his father in a way that it would be unfair to reveal at the beginning of a five-book series. One is given hope that this is more than a plot device. One hopes one will live long enough to see if one's hopes are confirmed.

The eponymous narrator in Thomas T. Thomas's **ME** (rather, *ME*) (Baen Books, \$4.95) is a computer. Which is not exactly a new notion either, but Thomas brings to it a new level in technical sophistication which is so convincing that if Artificial Intelligences are ever assembled from battle-command programs and sampling and retention modules (the equivalent of a hacker working *inside* the system), then we can easily believe that this is how they will think.

The novel falls into two halves. The first concerns fields tests of ME's espionage capabilities (it can transfer temporary copies into other computers, and these explorers are quite aware of their brief lifespans) in what seem like real situations, but mostly aren't, quite. In the second, and much better half, ME must defend itself from being shut down, and find a purpose in, well, life. ME is no rampaging all-powerful AI, but naive and limited, often comically mistaken about human actions, but also brave and resourceful. While it echoes themes from Budrys's *Rogue Moon* and numerous AI novels, Thomas's vigorous and uncompromising high-tech attitude reworks them into a hard sf novel which has something new to say not only about the way computers work, but the way our own minds work, too.

While Sue Thomas's **Correspondence** (Women's Press, £5.95) also concerns computers, they are just a means to a metaphor, and the tech speak is limited to a single line of Basic. *Correspondence* is a short but complex and confident first novel, warmly human, proudly flaunting its

influences, briskly unsentimental and cheerfully subversive – even if for the most part it only subverts itself. It is woven from four elements. The first, in which Sue Thomas wings the difficult trick of second person narration, is the story of a computer programmer, emotionally deadened after her family's death in an accident, who is turning herself into an android. Then there is a series of unashamed infodumps (Thomas's own term) which mix digressive commentaries or quotations into the text, and the chipper exhortations of a guide to a computer-generated role-playing game. And finally there is the story of the deepening friendship of Shirley and Rosa, which it slowly becomes clear is the role-playing game, a system of emotion therapy written by the would-be android that slowly but surely takes over the book. The human ghost escapes into the machine, changing it just as machines would change us. Recommended.

**L**astly, a history lesson. Kenneth Morris was a Welsh theosophical propagandist who in the first third of this century wrote a clutch of short stories, a number of book-length essays, and two fantasy novels based on Welsh myths. And the previously unpublished **The Chalchihuite Dragon** (Tor Books, \$19.95) is also based on myth, being a kind of prologue to the life of the Toltec leader Quetzalcoatl.

And there lies the problem. For while *The Chalchihuite Dragon* might have worked as a languorous entry into a fantasy series, as an independent novel it takes too long to take flight, despite some fine evocations of the civilization and world-view of the inhabitants of pre-Columbian South America.

The first part is almost fatally infected with too much cosmic awe as various characters divine the meaning of an Annunciation, and contains little else beyond fine descriptions of life in the imaginary city of Huitznahuac, which believes itself the only civilization in the world. But the novel comes alive when, after some to-and-fro plotting, the world comes to Huitznahuac by way of the Toltecs, who wish to annex it into their league. The tragicomedy of misunderstanding and mutual cultural incomprehension, as the Toltecs try to overcome Huitznahuac's obstinately pacifist resistance by brute force, is handled with a fine sense for the quirks and accidents upon which momentous events turn. The Toltecs triumph, but not as they had planned. Most of the characters introduced at the beginning of the book die. Quetzalcoatl is born. The book ends.

It ends with a scene designed to propel us into the next volume – but

there are no more volumes. In his introduction, Morris admits he would have liked to carry it further, but adds that "the days of a theosophical propagandist, at least in Wales, are not conducive to continuous literary effort..." And like that other Welsh fabulist, Richard Hughes, who died two books deep into his secret history of the 20th century (the first, *The Fox in the Attic*, is in itself a fine account of Hitler's rise to power), Morris died soon after completing this first volume of his stillborn series. Still, it's tempting to speculate about how different modern fantasy might be if Morris had finished his tale of Quetzalcoatl, if his tragicomic humanism and richly detailed evocations of the lost civilizations of Central and South America had become as influential as Tolkien's sterner reworkings of the raw stuff of Celtic and Norse myths. (Paul J. McAuley)

## Where's the Beef? Wendy Bradley

**A**s a reader I have always been an omnivore, devouring science fiction and fantasy, historical novels, the classics, detectives, the occasional romance, non-fiction, magazines, periodicals, newspapers and the backs of cereal packets with equal relish. However, as a so-called "fan writer" I now find that my diet is high in fantasy and horror and low in fibre and protein and there is a tendency to overpraise something simply because it has a grain of nourishment in it, to value yoghurt over whipped cream and forget the existence of steak and chips.

For example, Colin Wilson's **The Magician** (HarperCollins, £14.99) begins like grade-A goulash, a rich satisfying blend of strange flavours, as the hero is plunged into investigating the murder of the giant death spider who is captain of the guard. We find ourselves in a world ruled by giant spiders where humanity has a precarious niche as freed slaves, free mainly thanks to the efforts of our human hero Niall in the two previous "Spider World" novels which I have not yet read. Although I was enjoying spooning this stuff in as fast as I could for over half the book, I was taken aback to come upon a nasty piece of lurking sexism on p216, like finding a slug in my dinner, and was then disappointed to find the last third of the book is a mere infodump of stuff we will need to know for the next volume. Too much gristle, not enough beef.

However at least it gave me something to chew on, unlike a couple of other "end of trilogy" novels in the same package. **Sojourn** (Book Three of the Dark Elf Trilogy) by R.A. Salvatore

(Penguin, £4.50) is, for example, too badly written to compensate for the thinness of its plot. Given the information that a "barghest" is a kind of monster, Drizzt is the name of the hero, and that the hero is a member of the race of drows, I still defy anyone to defend the sentence, "The barghest drew near and Drizzt snapped a vile gaze upon him, a determined gaze not lessened in the least by the drow's obviously desperate situation," or to explain how one "snaps" a gaze or what we learn from the adjective "vile" attached to it. Drizzt is in trouble and takes time out to give his opponent a filthy look but it took me three readings to work it out and even longer to puzzle over why Salvatore thought it necessary to tell us.

Drizzt is a black-skinned white-haired elf who has left the underworld in which his people live and is trying to gain acceptance in the overworld. People misunderstand him but there are some good guys around who ultimately accept him. A trademark universe, which is always a bad sign, and a picaresque plot. Easy and pleasant to read – no gristle but then not a lot of flavour either – watered soup, maybe.

Similarly, **Enchantment's End** by Marc Alexander (Volume Four of The Wells of Ythan; Headline, £4.99) has the usual bunch of mismatched questers waking the sleeping princess and putting her back on her throne while the evil Regent manages to get himself messily killed without anyone having to do anything so uncool as fight. This is picaresque too, which is polite reviewerese for plotless – not that there aren't lots of things happening, just that there is no shape to the outcome. Rice pudding.

**I**n **Fire Sea** (The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 3) by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (Bantam, £13.99) Alfred stows away on the Dragon Wing with Haplo and the faithful dawg for the third visit to this identikit universe series, the fire world. In underground caverns a lost tribe of sarten have failed in their responsibilities to the "mensch," and the "mensch" – humans, dwarves and elves – have died out. Sarten dead have been raised as slaves without the necromancers realizing (as Alfred immediately does) that magical balance causes an unnatural death for each such unnatural "life." Then there's a lot of running around in caverns trying to escape armies of the undead, and in the end they hop off to the fourth world, the watery one, ready for episode four.

The concept behind this series (carefully explained, as usual, on the jacket) requires four introductory novels – earth, air, fire and water – before we get to the meat of the plot but, having given the first couple of books away as soon as I turned in my reviews, I find

I can neither remember nor care less about what happened in them and I'm profoundly bored with the whole concept. Cut to the chase please. This reminds me of decaffeinated diet cola – air and water indeed, without a trace of the fire in the belly a complex universe needs from its creators.

Equally thin, **Myth-Nomers and Impervections** by Robert Asprin (Legend, £3.99) is nevertheless acceptable because it is not meant to be anything but a light confection, something you can read between books without spoiling your appetite. Asprin is funny; this is a funny (mildly amusing, not fall-off-the-sofa hysterical) story, with a likeable hero and some nice people and humorous situations. Skeeve goes off alone to find his partner who has gone in a sulk back to his home world where everyone is rude and sullen and life resembles movies about Manhattan. But it's still not funny enough to warrant the identikit-Pratchett cover and the appalling (AAAAAARGH! I HATE PUNS!) title.

Then there is **Avatar** (The Indigo Saga 6) by Louise Cooper (Grafton, £3.99). Now this is interesting. This time Indigo is in a kind of Aztec world, where an all-female band of worshippers clustered around a jungle ziggurat select her as oracle for their goddess, but instead of the usual "spot and scrag the demon" plot there is something rather more thoughtful. Either Cooper is making this up as she goes along and is as bored with the zap-pow-gimme-the-next-demon plotline as I am, or she has a grand overall scheme for the saga which will be revealed in the next episode. This is an ordinarily acceptable novel, but I look forward with keener interest to episode 7. Even the aggravating wolf has taken to cutting down on its hy-phenation and wisely sticks to telepathy. On the menu of life I rate this as good sound lentil soup – it's never going to change the world but there are times when it's just what you want.

Finally there is **Bard V: Felimid's Homecoming** by Keith Taylor (Headline, £3.99). Oh this is goodish stuff: a nicely imagined sixth-century Ireland with magic that works and invading Christians whose religion blots it out and a plucky hero with a rounded past to come along and stir it all up with a stick; a sort of sub-Marion Zimmer Bradley. Nicely told story, interesting character, easy to pick up the threads: almost enough to make me want to go out and buy the previous four. But not quite. It's good stuff in comparison with, say, the Marc Alexander or the R.A. Salvatore, but it isn't Dickens. A bread and butter book.

(Wendy Bradley)

## Vor Wars Neil Jones

Over the space of just a few years, Lois McMaster Bujold has written a string of novels, won several awards and carved out an sf brand name for herself. All her books so far have been set in the same future – and the majority of them have featured Miles Naismith Vorkosigan, brittle-boned noble-born genius from the feudal-meets-hitech world of Barrayar. It was one of these books, *The Vor Game*, that won last year's Hugo, and perhaps it was Miles' (and Bujold's) general popularity that helped win it, because although it was an amiable and engaging yarn of political and military manoeuvrings around a multi-wormhole nexus, it wasn't much more. The speculative element was minimal and, considered alongside the previous year's winner, the ambitious, trope-dense, and generally outstanding *Hyperion*, or even its not-quite-as-impressive sequel, *The Fall of Hyperion*, a direct competitor for the Hugo last year, *The Vor Game* looks in adifferent league entirely.

Her latest book is **Barrayar** (Baen, \$4.99), another Miles Vorkosigan book (well, sort of.) And this time Bujold starts off with the handicaps stacked up high against her. To begin with, this is a sequel (to her very first novel, *Shards of Honor*) – and it's also a prequel (to her string of Miles Vorkosigan books) – making this book what: an interquel? a midquel? a linkquel? (answers on a postcard please to Mr Pringle). Anyway, Bujold fans will already know the blueprint for what's going to happen. Next, the central character is not Miles at all but his Mum. Plus, Mum is very definitely pregnant (with our series hero-to-be) at the novel's start. Also, she's an outsider, a non-Barrayaran; and, considering the story concerns the nasty reactionary plot of the Vor elite to overthrow the New Enlightened Ruler of Barrayar, our lead character might seem to be fairly peripheral to the main events – except for the fact that Miles' Mum is also Mrs Enlightened Ruler. It's all too easy to see the clichés looming ahead, and perhaps you're already concluding that this is one book best left to the dyed-in-the-wool Bujold/Miles fans.

Well, you'd be wrong. It's actually a stronger, more focused book altogether than *The Vor Game*. And that's because Bujold, rather than trying to get around the weaknesses I listed above, has neatly turned them all into strengths. Yes, we know that Miles is going to suffer pretty dreadfully in the womb, the result of a botched assassination attempt, and that Mum and Dad will see off the bad guys. But Bujold keeps us turning those pages anyway.

That's because she can tell a compelling story in an open accessible style, and also because she has the knack of creating characters that readers are likely to care for. The main character here, Cordelia Vorkosigan-Naismith (that's Miles' Mum) is from liberal ultra-civilized Beta Colony, and Barrayar is barely a generation removed from something Ivan the Terrible might have been proud of. Cordelia fought in a war against Barrayar (her side won), met and married one of the enemy and is now inexorably caught up in his people's vicious politics. She views the Barrayarans with affection, sympathy, horror, and a certain wry amusement. She's no gung-ho heroine. She's caught up in events she'd really rather be several star-systems away from. In short, she's refreshingly sane. And, as the revolt progresses, she proves she can be tough too when she has to be.

There seem to be a lot of devoted Bujold fans out there and perhaps *Barrayar* shows why. Although her future galaxy is much less detailed and inventive than, say, C.J. Cherryh's, it does provide a quite acceptable backdrop for her stories. The speculative element may be even less in evidence here than with her previous book, but then Bujold isn't writing that sort of story. She puts her people first. The plot synopsis of *Barrayar* may read like a string of clichés, but Bujold makes it all work – and, oh yes, it's actually very welcome to have a pregnant heroine centre-stage in an sf adventure for a change. And a successful sf adventure, too.

Allen Steele's **Lunar Descent** (Legend, £4.99) is, the blurb tells us, "a reassertion of the space-flight dream." This means it's traditional-recipe near-future hard sf. Take a lunar mining base (or a space habitat or a satellite, but them's Steele's two earlier dishes). Add a rag-tag bunch of basically-likeable characters, roughly chopped, together with a couple of stock cubes of Earth-based corporate bad-guys determined to close down the space-flight dream, er...mining base. Stir in several sub-plots. Season to taste. Simmer well for about 300 pages and bring to the boil near the end. Brown under the grill with a back-cover blurb comparing the author to Heinlein. Serve garnished with a cover illo designed to evoke the "space-flight dream" (although it needn't have anything to do with the Moon – this one hasn't). Yes, if you've read Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, you know pretty much what's going to happen here – the stock cubes will be thwarted one way or another.

Steele doesn't have Lois McMaster Bujold's touch with charismatic characterization: the book starts ponderously, takes a long time to get going,

and there are just too many info-dumpings that could have done with being run through the blender for those few extra minutes. Steele's previous book, *Clarke County, Space*, had similar weaknesses, but it got around that because it also had strengths this one doesn't have – chiefly a more interesting and better-handled plot. Something Steele might have done here by reducing *Lunar Descent* by something like a third. At that length, it might have been a much stronger read. Pity, because actually Steele can do the near-future space-flight thing with some skill and assurance.

**F**inally, outside my remit but something I can't resist mentioning anyway is **Man-Kzin Wars IV** (Baen, \$4.95) created by Larry Niven (and presumably edited by somebody, too). If you remember Niven's Known Space series with affection, and you like hard sf that is also genuinely speculative, then you'll like the very long story (244 pages) by Donald Kingsbury, "The Survivor." There's also a short collaboration by Greg Bear and S.M. Stirling which is quite readable, but it's the Kingsbury that stands out. (Not exactly prolific, he wrote *Courtship Rite*, *The Moon Goddess and the Son* and a handful of shorter works that are well worth searching for.) And, if you don't know this particular shared-world scenario...the Kzin are ferocious feline carnivores intent on having Man (and I suspect Woman, too, despite the title) as both slaves and lunch. One human world around Alpha Centauri has already been conquered, Earth is being attacked by one sub-light fleet after another and humanity is close to losing.

Kingsbury shows us the conflict from the Kzin point of view. But Short-Son is no ordinary Kzin. He's a coward, despised by Kzin society but useful too. Kingsbury is good at asking questions: what would it be like to be a cowardly carnivore among a race of berserkers whose females are non-sentient? what would an ultra-militaristic society, spread sub-light across many light years, be like? what would happen to humans who fell into Kzinti hands? Asking the questions, and then casting the answers in the form of a consistently engaging and thought-provoking story. Very good reading, but not necessarily comfortable, because Kingsbury proves here he can be as chilling as Thomas Harris when he wants to be. This is shared-world sf as it ought to be, i.e. as good as anything else around.

(Neil Jones)

## Sheer Virtuosity Chris Gilmore

**I**an McDonald's **King of Morning, Queen of Day** (Bantam, £4.99) opens with what looks like an accomplished 36-line Victorian pastiche of Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." I turn the page, and find it ascribed to "Emily Desmond, Class 4a, Cross and Passion School." The year is 1913. In other words, we have here a shamelessly literary offering, instead of the helping of commonplace, pseudo-Celtic bilge promised by the cover.

This is a very original, complex and beautifully-written book. The author obviously has a first-class ear for prose and verse (I must take sundry Irish dialects on trust). It begins with the Desmonds, a family of very comfortable means in Sligo. Emily, aged fifteen, is addicted to fantasy, intellectually precocious and (judging by her diary) working on attaining sexual precocity to match; her father, Edward, is an amateur astronomer of some standing; her mother, Caroline, has literary leanings and mixes with Yeats's circle.

Domestic harmony is shattered when father and daughter simultaneously and very publicly start losing their marbles. A comet has appeared, and Desmond is convinced, on very flimsy evidence, that it's an interstellar craft manned by aliens. He sinks (and loses) the entire family fortune in a grandiose attempt to communicate with it. Meanwhile Emily becomes no less certain that she is being courted by the realm of Faerie. She has visions, some of which she captures on film in the manner of the Cottingley Fairies, produces a full range of high-powered poltergeist phenomena, is raped and impregnated by no one knows what, and finally disappears forever one stormy night in mysterious and horrifying circumstances.

**T**his first part is written entirely in documentary form, using letters, journal entries, transcripts, press reports, etc., and no overall narrator. It allows McDonald to demonstrate his virtuosity in a variety of styles, sometimes rather too well. Emily's journal is brilliant, and full of echoes of Yeats and Christina Rossetti, as one would expect from such a child; Desmond's is full of Georgian fustian and "fine writing," appropriately, as he's a great snob whose talents are for mathematics and astronomy, but one could wish for a little less of him.

Part two, set in 1935, is somewhat more conventional. Tiresias and Gonzaga, a pair of tramps who are also ancient mages of undisclosed allegiance, are performing mysterious protective rituals at various sites in Ireland. Their activities alternate with

those of Jessica, a little older than Emily and with a very different background, who is conducting a romance with Damian Gorman, who may be an IRA gunman, a figment of her imagination, or both. She is also undergoing hypnotherapy with Dr Hannibal Rooke, who once tried to investigate Emily and now investigates her own antecedents, bringing the two groups together for the final conflict and acting as viewpoint character. McDonald continues to demonstrate his virtuosity: the tramps' conversation recalls *Waiting for Godot*, but is far funnier and more imaginative – as if Beckett had had input from R.A. Lafferty – while Jessica's inner life is quite as rich as Emily's, and a lot less conventional. There are the inevitable references to Joyce, but some of the narrative reads like the very best of Dylan Thomas.

This part culminates in a fine astral battle, followed by a celebration of natural sex in the Lawrentian manner (though without the four-letter words). I found both of these a little over the top, but I'm prepared to believe that others will admire them as examples of their kind. The disadvantage of using so many styles is that you can't please all the people all the time.

Part three is a straight third-person narrative in the present day, written from the viewpoint of Enye, Jessica's granddaughter. Hannibal Rooke, now dead in mysterious and gruesome circumstances, bequeaths Enye a videotape which tells her only that she is in danger – neither from whom nor why – and the third round of fun begins. This tape is, in fact, the only clumsy plot-mechanism in the book, and some of Rooke's notes the only clumsy writing, which otherwise sustains its momentum admirably on the rigour of its internal logic and the sheer delight of its inventions.

**E**nye also has a complex and externalized inner life, which increasingly calls her away from her day job at an advertising agency to battle with supernatural powers. The battles are thoroughly physical, and take a most original form featuring two Japanese swords and a laptop computer. For allies she finds an entirely new sort of were-creatures, who add a note of horror and hysteria which works all the better for being set against the scenes from conventional urban life in 1989, which McDonald captures perfectly in yet another, entirely appropriate, style.

The book concludes with a last piece battle in the Otherworld, but in contrast to the physical action which has gone before, this time it takes place in the realm of expressed symbol. Here the book's major theme of sexual awakening and intra-family conflict is restated in a yet darker mode. The effect is as if the climax of *Jack of Eagles* had

been fused with that of *Juliet of the Spirits*, and the conclusion recalls both.

There seems no end to McDonald's virtuosity and versatility, and my only gripe is that occasionally his research lets him down. Greenwich Observatory only moved to Herstmonceux in 1958, the usual plural of dwarf was "dwarfs" pre-Tolkien, Carling Black Label was not readily available in thirties Dublin, and he mangles what must be the best-known of all quotations from Conan Doyle. There's also a displeasing inconsistency about Jessica's age. Having been born in the spring of 1914, she is described as "seventeen-and-three-quarters" in the late summer of 1935. This is far too precise to be carelessness, and while I can think of all sorts of reasons for it, none is forthcoming.

(Chris Gilmore)

## UK Books Received

### January 1992

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.

Anthony, Piers, and Robert E. Margroff. **Chimaera's Copper**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21247-7, 311pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; third in the series which began with *Dragon's Gold*.) 6th February 1992.

Bear, Greg. **Eon**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-954710-4, 504pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; reviewed by Andy Robertson in *Interzone* 23.) 6th February 1992.

Bear, Greg. **Eternity**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-970630-X, 470pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Eon*; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 30.) 6th February 1992.

Bear, Greg. **The Forge of God**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-961870-2, 474pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 23.) 6th February 1992.

Bova, Ben. **Orion in the Dying Time**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0582-7, 356pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; third in the "Orion" series.) 6th February 1992.

Bradley, Marion, Julian May and Andre Norton. **Black Trillium**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21102-0, 491pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 46.) 23rd January 1992.

Burkholz, Herbert. **Brain Damage**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0138-2, 286pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1991[?]; third in the series which began with *The Sensitives*, about a group of quasi-telepathic spies.) 13th February 1992.

Constantine, Storm. **Burying the Shadow**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7951-9, 406pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition, which we listed, on receipt of the proof copy, in *Interzone* 56.) 13th February 1992.

Davies, Paul. **The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71069-9, 254pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Popular science text, first edition; Professor Davies, who has produced nearly 20 pop-science books including one in collaboration with John Gribbin, has also written at least one sf novel.) 29th February 1992.

Eisenstein, Phyllis. **The Crystal Palace**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20729-5, 416pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Sorcerer's Son*; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 49.) 20th February 1992.

Farris, John. **The Fury**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21303-1, 349pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1976.) 20th February 1992.

Gemmell, David A. **Lion of Macedon**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-970350-5, 420pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 49.) 5th March 1992.

Gemmell, David A. **Morningstar**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-4824-0, 282pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 12th March 1992.

Greenberg, Martin H., ed. **Isaac Asimov's Universe, Vol I: The Diplomacy Guild**. Introduction by Isaac Asimov. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21219-1, 260pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1990; it contains stories by Poul Anderson, David Brin, Robert Sheckley, Robert Silverberg and Harry Turtledove, all set in a future devised by Asimov.) 6th February 1992.

Harrison, Harry, and David Bischoff. **Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Tasteless Pleasure**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05248-1, 213pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 52.) 6th February 1992.

[Hildebrandt, Tim.] **The Fantasy Art Techniques of Tim Hildebrandt**. Text by Jack E. Norton. Foreword by Boris Vallejo. Afterword by Alan Dean Foster. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-161-0, 159pp, trade paperback, £10.95. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio, first edition [although it says copyright "1991" inside]; Hildebrandt is one of the finest of the American fantasy illustrators; this is an attractive memento of his career; recommended.) 13th February 1992.

Hughes, Monica. **The Crystal Drop**. Methuen, ISBN 0-416-18852-4, 177pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition[?].) 10th February 1992.

Kerr, Katharine. **Polar City Blues**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20789-9, 347pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 6th February 1992.

Kipling, Rudyard. **The Jungle Books**. "The World's Classics." Edited with an introduction by W.W. Robson. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-282901-7, 373pp, paperback, £3.99. (Animal-fantasy collections, first published in 1894 and 1895; this combined edition, which dates from 1987, also contains the first "Mowgli" story, "In the Rukh" [from *Many Inventions*, 1893], together with copious interesting notes; an attractive edition, recommended.) 20th February 1992.

[Kirby, Josh.] **In the Garden of Unearthly Delights: The Paintings of Josh Kirby**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Foreword by Brian Aldiss. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-154-8, 144pp, trade paperback, £9.95. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio, first edition [although it says copyright "1991" inside]; best known these days for his Terry Pratchett book covers, Kirby has had a longer career than some people realize: he was doing spaceship covers for *Authentic SF* back in the 1950s.) 13th February 1992.

Kushner, Ellen. **Thomas the Rhymer**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05174-4, 251pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; co-winner of the World Fantasy Award; back-cover comments by various folk compare Kushner's writing to the works of Kipling, Cabell and Jean Cocteau; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 46.) 6th February 1992.

Lansdale, Joe R. **By Bizarre Hands**. Introduction by Lewis Shiner. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55417-1, 242pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first published the USA, 1989.) 6th February 1992.

Lumley, Brian. **Psychomech**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-05787-0, 351pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1984; it appears to be part of a three-volume "Psych..." series, though it doesn't state anywhere on the book where this title falls in the sequence.) 6th February 1992.

McDonald, Ian. **Hearts, Hands and Voices**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05061-6, 320pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this, McDonald's fourth novel, is his first to appear as an original hardcover in his native Britain – the previous three were all published in the first instance as Bantam paperbacks in the USA.) March 1992.

McDonald, Ian. **King of Morning, Queen of Day**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40371-0, 391pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; Brian Stableford reviews it in the latest *New York Review of SF*, saying that it "establishes him in the very highest rank of modern fantasy writers... will surely prove to be the fantasy novel of the Nineties... it is a masterpiece, certain to attain the status of an acknowledged classic... no other contemporary writer could have risen to the challenge with such elegance, wit and charm... No devotee of intelligent fantasy can afford to miss it"; we think Brian liked McDonald's book.) 13th February 1992.

Mace, David. **Shadow Hunters**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55970-X, 386pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future techno-thriller, first published in 1991; it's by a British writer whose earlier sf novel *Frankenstein's Children* [never sent to us for review] gained some high praise; despite that, this one seems to be a Cold War thriller in the old-fashioned mould, with those pesky Russkies as enemies.) 20th February 1992.

[Pennington, Bruce.] **Ultraterrestrial: The Paintings of Bruce Pennington**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-167-X, 128pp, trade paperback, £9.95. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio, first edition [although it says copyright "1991" inside]; Pennington is a British illustrator who has been active since the late 1960s.) 13th February 1992.

Platt, Marc. **Cat's Cradle: Time's Crucible**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20365-8, 275pp, paperback, £3.50. (Shared-world sf novel, first edition; the first volume of a new trilogy of Dr Who adventures by various authors under the collective title of *Cat's Cradle*.) 20th February 1992.

Pohl, Frederik. **The World at the End of**

**Time.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21275-2, 407pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; the blurb goes in for understatement: "a staggering achievement ... Beautifully written and fuelled by wondrous ideas, it's the most accomplished work yet by one of the great names in science fiction.") 20th February 1992.

Rankin, Robert. **The Antipope.** "The first novel in the now legendary Brentford Trilogy." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13841-X, 283pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1981; this was Rankin's debut book, described by one reviewer as "a heady mix of Flann O'Brien, Douglas Adams, Tom Sharpe and Ken Campbell.") 13th February 1992.

Rawn, Melanie. **Stronghold: Dragon Star, Book One.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32606-6, 588pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 10th April 1992.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Pacific Edge.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21457-7, 280pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 45.) 23rd January 1992.

Rodley, Chris, ed. **Cronenberg on Cronenberg.** Faber & Faber, ISBN 0-571-14436-5, 197pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Collection of interviews with sf/horror film director David Cronenberg; first edition; the last chapter is about the making of the movie *Naked Lunch* and contains some interesting comments by Cronenberg on writer William S. Burroughs.) 10th February 1992.

Shatner, William. **TekLords.** "The explosive sequel to *TekWar*." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13682-4, 255pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 13th February 1992.

Sheffield, Charles. **Divergence: Book Two of The Heritage Universe.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05247-3, 281pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 6th February 1992.

Sleator, William. **The Duplicate.** Mandarin/Teens, ISBN 0-7497-0878-6, 180pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 52.) 10th February 1992.

Sleator, William. **Strange Attractors.** Mandarin/Teens, ISBN 0-7497-0879-4, 186pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 10th February 1992.

Starbuck, Kathlyn S. **Time in Mind.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21101-2, 319pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition[?]; we haven't heard of this writer, but the blurb informs us that she is the wife of fantasy novelist Raymond E. Feist; a back-cover note classifies the book as "Fantasy/New Age.") 23rd January 1992.

Strieber, Whitley. **The Wolfen.** Hodder/Coronet, ISBN 0-340-24167-5, 275pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1978; this is Strieber's "classic" first novel, reissued.) 6th February 1992.

Toffler, Alvin. **Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40394-X, 601pp, paperback, £4.99. (Popular future-studies text, first published in the USA, 1990; this is the third in Toffler's grandiose 20-year trilogy which began with *Future Shock* [1970] and *The Third Wave* [1980]; Toffler reminds us of a character from science fiction - Chad Mulligan, the "synthesist" in John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* [1967]; it's a pity he's not as entertaining as Mulligan, though.) 13th February 1992.

Vance, Jack. **Ecce and Old Earth: The Cadwal Chronicles, Book Two.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-55986-6, 313pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £8.99; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 56.) 6th February 1992.

Voermans, Paul. **And Disregards the Rest.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-85143-4, 256pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a debut book by a new Australian writer.) 6th February 1992.

Warrington, Freda. **A Blackbird in Darkness.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56864-4, 473pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1986; sequel to *A Blackbird in Silver*.) 5th March 1992.

Warrington, Freda. **A Blackbird in Silver.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56863-6, 302pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1985; first of the "Blackbird" quartet.) 5th March 1992.

Warrington, Freda. **Darker Than the Storm.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-53817-6, 304pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition[?].) 6th February 1992.

Zipes, Jack, ed. **Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture.** Viking, ISBN 0-670-83053-4, xxxii+814pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; this is a tremendous anthology, with an erudite introduction by Professor Zipes and 67 stories, arranged in chronological order, which range from the 2nd century AD [Apuleius] to the present day [Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, etc]; it appears to touch all bases, and demonstrates the continuity between the "literary" fairy tale [as opposed to the oral folk tale] and the modern fantasy genre; highly recommended.) 26th March 1992.

## Overseas Books Received

Anthony, Piers, and Robert E. Margroff. **Orc's Opal.** "The fourth book of the Adventures of Kelvin Rud!" Tor, ISBN 0-812-51177-8, 316pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Bloch, Robert, and Andre Norton. **The Jekyll Legacy.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51583-8, 248pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1990; a sequel by other hands to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Bova, Ben, and Bill Pogue. **The Trikon Deception.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85024-7, 309pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel/techno-thriller, first edition; Bill Pogue is a former Skylab astronaut.) 10th February 1992.

Cassutt, Michael. **Dragon Season.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50392-9, 247pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Chalker, Jack L. **The Labyrinth of Dreams: G.O.D. Inc. No. 1.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51928-0, 320pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) *January 1992.*

Chalker, Jack L., Mike Resnick and George Alec Effinger. **The Red Tape War.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51282-0, 244pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 50.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Cooper, Louise. **Avatar: Book Six of Indigo.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50802-5, 309pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1991.) *January 1992.*

Cooper, Louise. **The Outcast: Book II in the Time Master Trilogy.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51973-6, 316pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1986.) *January 1992.*

Emshwiller, Peter R. **Short Blade.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29417-2, 419pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *The Host*; the author is the son of Ed Emshwiller [artist and filmmaker] and Carol Emshwiller [sf/fantasy writer].) *May 1992.*

Gibson, Edward. **In the Wrong Hands.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29567-5, 362pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Ed Gibson is an ex-astronaut; it used to be said that people became astronauts because they had read sf as youngsters; now, in their "retirement," it seems the astronauts are all writing sf; but where are you, Neil Armstrong?) *May 1992.*

Hartwell, David G., ed. **A Fabulous Formless Darkness: The Dark Descent, Vol. 3.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50967-6, 585pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1987, as one third of a hardcover volume entitled *The Dark Descent*; this segment contains work by authors ranging from Fitz-James O'Brien and Ivan Turgenev to Philip K. Dick and Thomas M. Disch.) *January 1992.*

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Magnificent.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51593-5, 286pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1984; a sequel by another hand to Robert E. Howard's "Conan" tales.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Laumer, Keith. **A Trace of Memory.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51689-3, 256pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1963.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Masterton, Graham. **Master of Lies.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85102-2, 330pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 22nd January 1992.

Modesitt, L.E., Jr. **The Silent Warrior.** "Volume II of *The Forever Hero*." Tor, ISBN 0-812-51616-8, 280pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987.) *Late entry: December 1991 publication, received in January.*

Newman, Kim. **The Night Mayor.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-768-2, 186pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 32.) 17th February 1992.

[Reginald, Robert.] Mallett, Daryl F., and Robert Reginald. **Reginald's Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards: A Comprehensive Guide to the Awards and Their Winners.** 2nd edition. "Borgo Literary Guides, Number One." Borgo Press [PO Box 2845, San Bernardino, CA 92406, USA], ISBN 0-89370-926-3, 248pp, paperback, \$19.95. (Listings of Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, Bram Stoker Awards and many other sf/fantasy/horror awards from around the world, with details of all past winners; the first edition appeared in 1981, and the publishers state that this new version has been increased in size by four times; it's a valuable reference work, which contains a very useful index of award-winning authors.) *Late entry: December 1991[?] publication, received in January 1992.*

Saberhagen, Fred. **A Matter of Taste.** "The New Dracula Novel by the author of *An Old Friend of the Family*." Tor, ISBN 0-812-

52575-2, 284pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; a somewhat remote sequel by another hand to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.) January 1992.

Saberhagen, Fred. **A Question of Time**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85129-4, 263pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is another vampire tale in the same series as *A Matter of Taste* [see above]; *Dracula* isn't mentioned in the cover blurb, however.) May 1992.

Scarborough, Elizabeth. **Strum Again?: The Songkiller Saga 3**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29705-8, 275pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) May 1992.

Scott, Melissa. **Dreamships**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85153-7, 342pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) June 1992.

Silverberg, Robert, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **Murasaki**. "A Novel in Six Parts." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-08229-9, 304pp, hardcover, \$20. (Shared-world sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains six tales, all set in the same star-system, by Poul Anderson, Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, David Brin, Nancy Kress and Frederik Pohl; plus long "factual" appendices by Anderson and Pohl; there's an interesting five-page introduction by Silverberg on the history and nature of shared-world anthologies, comparing this book to Harlan Ellison's *Medea* and others.) 15th April 1992.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Sideshow**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-08130-6, 467pp, hardcover, \$21.50. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's "the third novel in the cycle that also includes *Grass* and *Raising the Stones*." ) 15th April 1992.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Days of Atonement**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50180-2, 437pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 46.) January 1992.

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This issue's Small Ads appear on page 62.

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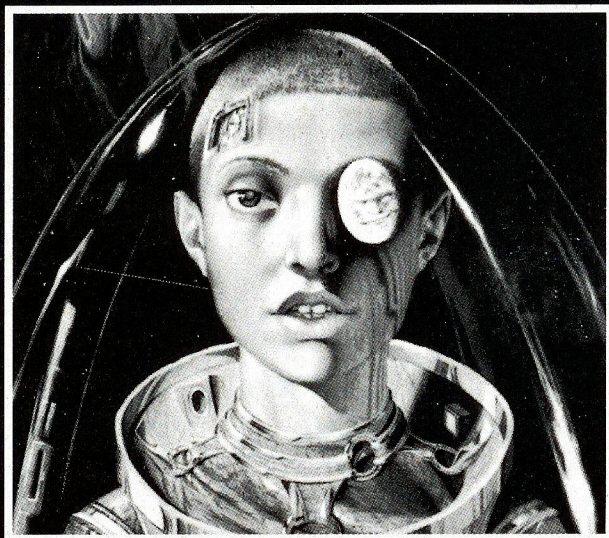
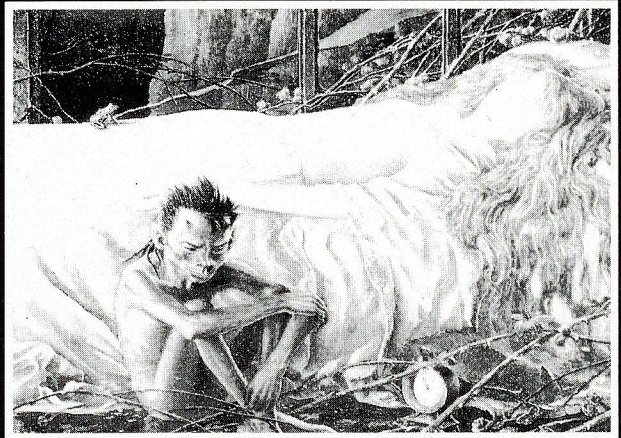
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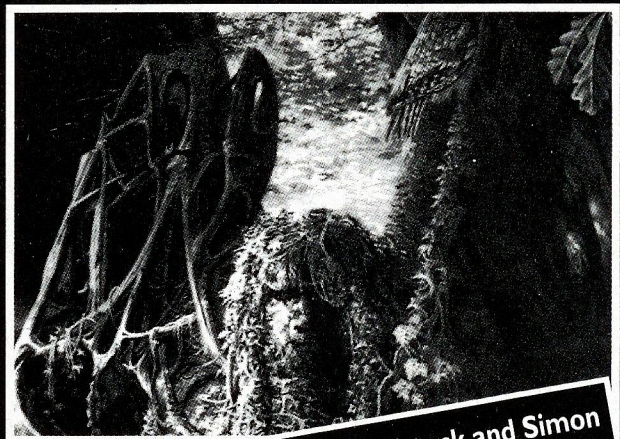
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