

# interzone/64

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

OCTOBER  
1992

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Molly Brown, Ian R. MacLeod,  
Storm Constantine, Charles Sheffield



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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 64

October 1992

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# Interface

## David Pringle

Three issues ago, in the editorial of *Interzone* 61, I wrote: "Prospective contributors continually ask us for the addresses of other British magazines to which they can submit science-fiction and fantasy short stories. We tell them: read *IZ* – other magazines advertise in our pages from time to time, and you'll see some of them mentioned in our editorial and review columns... Of course, the trouble with other folks' magazines is that some of them come and go rather rapidly."

Sure enough, the two British sf magazines which I then went on to recommend as possible alternatives to *Interzone* for aspiring writers – **Far Point**, published by Charlie Rigby, and **New Moon SF**, published by Trevor Jones – have since been put on hold. Both, we are told, may resume publication within the year; but, at this time of writing, neither of them is appearing. This is a sad outcome for readers and writers alike.

There may be specific personal reasons for the suspension of a fiction magazine – Mr Rigby cites pressure of other work, and Mr Jones is said to be ill – but one can't help thinking that the *real* reasons for the failure of British sf/fantasy magazines are, at root, always economic. Writing in *IZ* 57, **Brian Stableford** pointed out that the founders of *Interzone*, back in 1982, "shared a deep conviction that there really ought to be a British sf magazine, to celebrate the Britishness of British sf and to function as a forcing-ground for new domestic talent. In this they were carrying forward a tradition; almost all the British sf magazines which have existed were born of similar uncommercial enthusiasms... If we are to understand the strange and rather sad history of these entities we can only do so if we see them in their true light: as starry-eyed ventures launched into a cruel and unpredictable world where the laws of supply and demand have worked in an exceptionally wayward fashion."

### On the Economic Margin

Much later in his essay (and I think it worth repeating his words at some length here, because they are so true) Stableford said: "So it goes – and so it goes on. Year in and year out new enthusiasts come forward, with missionary fervour, to found new British sf magazines. Somewhere on that economic margin, they feel certain, there must be money to be made – or, if not, there must at least be the opportunity to survive, without losing so much that it will become impossible to continue to serve the cause. And sf is, after all, a cause as well as – or perhaps rather than – a publishing category. Even those who pounded the stuff out in the early '50s for next-to-nothing, with little hope of ever raising themselves from the literary gutter, had stars in their eyes.

"*Interzone*, like all its predecessors and all the other sf magazines – including the so-called 'semi-professional' magazines – which exist alongside it, owes its existence to the simple determination of the people who produce it. None of these people draws a living wage; in effect, they pay for the privilege of doing what they do. What they do is important not only to themselves, but to all the people whose work finds an outlet in their pages. The writers who appear in *IZ* do not make more than a tiny fraction of their income from their sales, but that fraction is more important than the marginal difference it makes to their bank balances; a magazine is a display window, a training ground, and something of which one can be proud to be a part...

"There will probably be many more British sf magazines in time to come, but it's highly probable that none of them will ever make any real money. Let's hope that there will always be people who are prepared to produce them anyway."

### Subscription Campaign Update – Again

I have repeated Brian Stableford's remarks in this editorial not only as a comment on the suspension of *Far Point* and *New Moon*, but also for the benefit of the 500 or so new subscribers that *Interzone* has gained in the last few months. As I said last issue, our recent leaflet campaign (paid for by a special Incentive Funding grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain) has brought in many new subscriptions, a majority of them from the readerships of *New Scientist*, *London Review of Books* and *Granta*. We are delighted to gain these new readers.

However, this apparent boost to our fortunes should not make us (or our longtime readers) complacent: before the campaign, the effects of the economic recession were eating into our subscription base, and we were about 300 subs down on the equivalent period last year. Over the last six months and more, we have received a number of letters from regular subscribers saying that they simply cannot afford to renew their subscriptions, due to unemployment, debts, or a general tightening of economic belts. It's good of these people to write rather than letting their subs lapse in silence, and we hope that most of them will rejoin us when they feel more financially secure. For the time being, the Arts Council campaign has enabled us to make up the loss, and a bit more – but the future, as ever, remains uncertain.

Keep with us!

(David Pringle)

### CORRECTION

Oops! David Langford inadvertently made a small but crucial error in his reference to John Brunner's royalty income in his column "Ansible Link," last issue. The phrase which read "During the whole of 1992" should have read "During the second half of 1991."

# Interaction

Dear Editors:

I was surprised to see in the letters section (IZ 61) Greg Egan's "Before" and "The Hundred Light-Year Diary" described by David Logan as "story telling at pretty near its worst." So, somewhere out in the far reaches of the galaxy there exists at least one person who doesn't appreciate the Master. How remarkable!

The funny thing is I myself hate "bloody-hard-to-read sf" as much as the next man, but in Egan's lucid fluent prose, the painterly quality of his imagery, his sharp characterization and dialogue, and the high seriousness expressed by his physics and metaphysics, I consider I've found the *exact anti-thesis* of this.

Sf and fantasy is often criticized for having little to offer beyond its otherworldliness, and therefore not doing much to enhance our understanding of the human condition, as serious literature does. Egan's sf is so good precisely because it is serious literature at the same time as being sf, and thus gives the genre a whole new range of relevance alongside say, magic realism and metafiction.

Greg Egan possesses a totally original imagination, which is a rarity in any branch of literature. I'm sure when his books are published he will attract high criticism and quickly gain a following far beyond the shores of the bedrock sf and fantasy community...with at least one exception, that is.

**Roger Keen**  
Bath

Dear Editors:

Re issue 60 – June, 1992; is there a market for fantasy? Of course there is! Have a look at the best-sellers lists any week and you will see fantasy way ahead of "straight" sf. So if it sells by the truckload in novel form surely there is room for a fantasy magazine. But you already know this, so why bother to ask?

Next question; do I want a fantasy mag? No way. At least I won't be subscribing to it. And while I won't make any stupid threats to cancel my IZ sub if you publish much more fantasy, I really would be grateful if you didn't.

Let's have some constructive criticism, I hear you say. Certainly! How about Robert Forward's stuff on space-flight? OK it's not fiction, strictly speaking but then neither was Bruce Sterling on the Cyberpunk Bust.

How about (expanding on that) a short series on cutting-edge science fact? Something along the lines of the *Analog* science column? And yes, I agree that *Analog* fiction is mostly poor.

The stories in IZ 60 were fair to good but the thing that really hit me after reading them, the thing which probably most turns me off fantasy in general, is the sheer ordinariness of it all. There was a definite paucity of ideas in those stories, all done before umpteen times, and I would go so far as to say that the Brian Stableford story really had nothing in it at all. By the way, I usually love his stories. Compare that issue with your tenth anniversary one, where the stories really stood out, even Storm Constantine's slightly-fantastic piece set in the flying city.

Love the book, TV and film reviews; belated congrats on your first ten years; keep it up!

**Declan Fox**  
Newtownstewart, N. Ireland

Dear Editors:

Being a newcomer to *Interzone*, I thought I had missed an interview with one of the most important British sf authors, Bob Shaw. But lo! when you published a list of all interviews you'd done so far, it turned out you hadn't got around to Bob Shaw at all – even though he has contributed short stories. (I had thought with the release of *Orbitsville Judgement* you would have done something, but I waited and was sore disappointed.)

**Andrew Guy**  
Panfield

Dear Editors:

Is there any specific reason why, in 60-plus issues there has never been any story or article by, or interview with, Harry Harrison (my favourite science-fiction author)?

**Brett Gordon**  
Ilford, Essex

**Editor:** Queries such as the above two reach us fairly frequently. Of course there is no specific reason

why we have never had a story by (or an interview with) Harry Harrison. If he sends us a good story one of these days, we shall be delighted to publish it – but we suspect, as with many of the older sf writers, he writes few short stories now and concentrates instead on novels. As to interviews, there are numerous sf authors of distinction whom we have yet to interview (for example, we have never interviewed our frequent contributor Ian Watson). We hope to run interviews with all three of these writers soon (i.e. Messrs Harrison, Shaw and Watson), and perhaps even to devote a "special issue" to one of them – you'll have to wait to see which one!

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If you can afford to do so, why not consider supporting this magazine by taking out a very long-term subscription? (We define a "lifetime sub" as one which lasts either the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the magazine.)

We have already been going for ten years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifetime subscribers" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £260 (UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S. accelerated surface mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

# THE MOTHER LODE



“It’s down there, Khali: the mother lode, the keystone, the reason for everything in crystalline form. Solid logic, just waiting to be mined.”

I gazed sceptically at the asteroid my mother, Elena, insisted on calling Chalmer’s Rock: a heavily cratered, reddish-grey oblate lump, one hundred and sixty kilometres wide, orbiting a K0 star unlisted on any of our catalogues – except for the one we’d bought from Chalmer himself, of course. Obscurity itself, made stone.

“The spectral analysis says nickel-iron, and assorted silicates.”

Elena nodded, without looking away from the screen – missing my sarcasm, or choosing to ignore it. “That’s right. This is the one. Size, composition, orbital parameters... they all fit.”

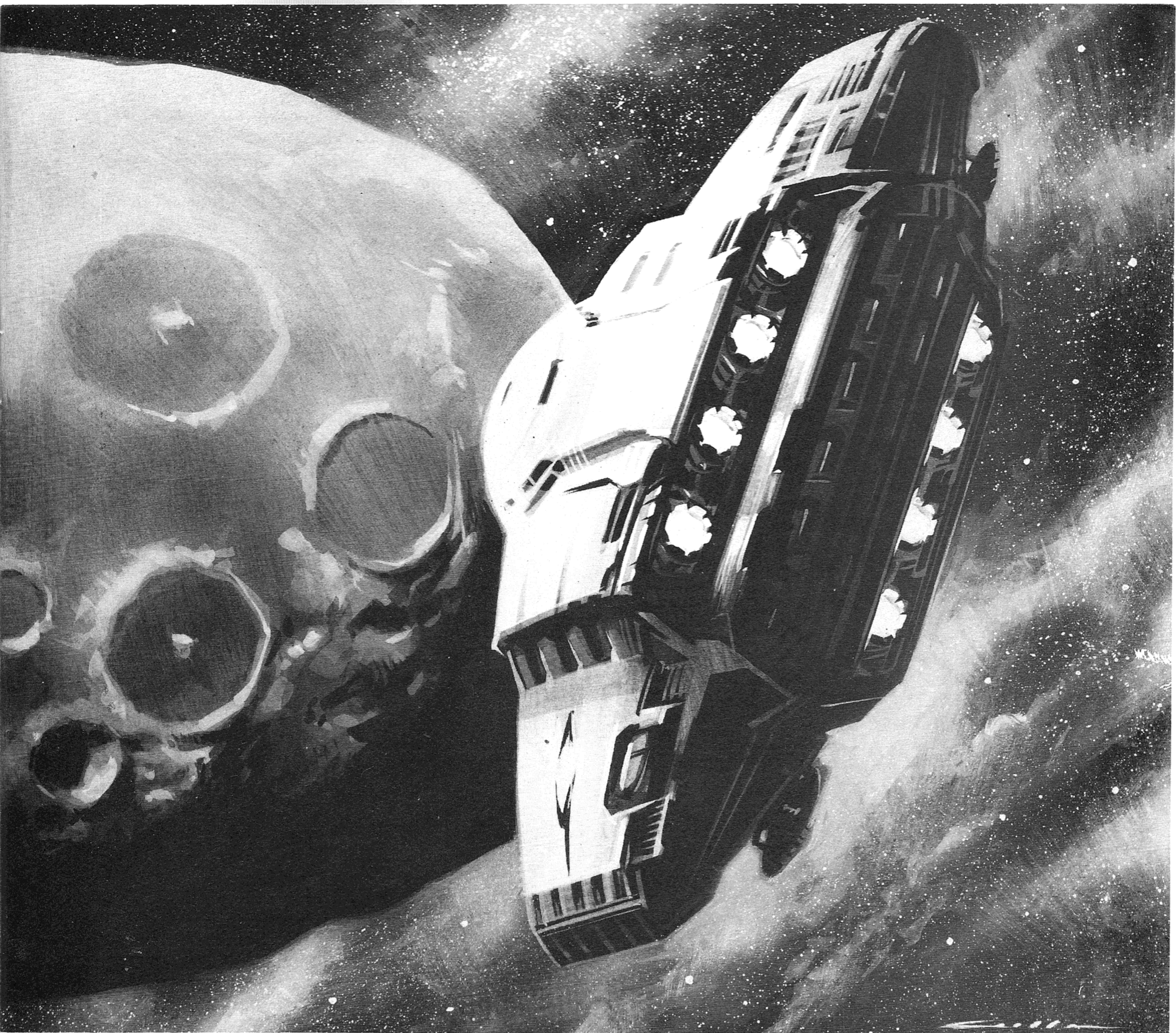
“More or less. Like how many other pieces of debris in this system? And we might not even have the right star.”

Elena turned to me and laughed, convinced of her good fortune, refusing to be goaded into anger. “It’s

the fourth-closest star to the coordinates. The age-corrected spectrum is a near-perfect match. And –” She hit a few keys and brought a contoured radar map of the asteroid’s surface onto the screen beside the real-time optical view, then she summoned up Chalmer’s own map of his Rock, and had the computer compare them. Aligned and superimposed, they did look similar, for what that was worth. “Seventy per cent of the topography coincides to within fifty metres. There are a couple of hundred craters missing, a couple of hundred extra ones here and there. If this universe contains the same object at all, *this is it.*”

I thought: *And one of those missing craters is certain to mean that the logic deposit is missing, too.*

It wasn’t just adolescent perversity; I had every reason to be pessimistic. Planets of reportedly unsurpassed beauty had turned into grey airless rocks, for me. Entire, allegedly glorious, civilizations had vanished, or collapsed into premature barbarism. One way or another, everything in the galaxy that I’d ever heard lauded had turned out to be a disappointment, once I’d reached a version of it, myself.



That's the catch with FTL: travelling faster than light in one reference frame is the same as travelling backwards in time in another – and you can't travel into your own past, only someone else's alternative. If you speed away from a planet at sub-light relativistic velocity, and then wormhole-jump back towards it, you can arrive before you left...but you don't end up on the same world, with the chance to prevent your own departure. Every would-be closed time-like loop turns out to be a helix instead, winding its way across the multiverse, side-stepping any possibility of causality violation – and it makes no difference whether your intention was to travel back in time, or “merely” to cross a few hundred light years in an instant. There are no round trips – not even hypothetical ones made by joining up the paths of different travellers. Not only can you not go back, you can't go where anyone you've ever met had been before you met them.

So, even if this “was” Chalmer's Rock, it certainly wasn't the one that the Robert Chalmer we'd done business with had personally visited, and gutted.

Which was why the information he'd sold us wasn't – necessarily – worthless. And if he ever chose to “return” to the region, in the hope of making a second fortune, it was highly unlikely – although not quite literally impossible – that he'd arrive to find that Elena and I had been there before him. Which was why he'd been willing to sell her the coordinates and other details for a microscopic fraction of the worth of the deposit he'd found the first time.

As for the likelihood of this particular version of the Rock containing anything of value – let alone the biggest logic deposit I'd heard of in all our travels – that was unknown. We'd made fifteen jumps to the region over a period of five ship years, and this was the first time we'd come across anything bearing even the slightest resemblance to the asteroid in question – so I could understand, begrudgingly, why Elena was hopeful. But the shape of the Rock alone couldn't tell us whether or not a nugget of reified logic was buried here; a few tens of kilometres, a few seconds of orbital motion, could have turned the crucial impact into a near miss, and the prize we were seeking could have

sailed on for another ten thousand light years before encountering ordinary matter again.

Elena said, "It's down there. I'm sure it is."

I said, "I doubt it. But let's go see who's right."

**T**he Rock had negligible gravity, about a hundredth of a gee – but fortunately, a slow enough spin at forty hours for centrifugal force to be orders of magnitude less. On a body with negative surface attraction we would have used remotes, and although I wasn't expecting to find anything, I was still glad to get out of the ship.

*Stalker* set down near the first, and most promising, of six suggestive mass anomalies. I followed Elena out onto the fissured red plain. We were on the night side, starlit, many-shadowed. My exoskin thickened in the vacuum, all but blotting out my sense of touch, but walking barefoot across the jagged ground on this space-cold mote, twenty thousand light years from Earth, still gave me a thrill of vulnerability. Twenty thousand light years from Earth, if there was an Earth; for all we knew, we might have been the only two humans in this universe.

I didn't feel lonely, though. I'd spent thirteen years crisscrossing the galaxy, leaving everyone but Elena behind with every jump. Nor did I feel intimidated by the void. Space was barren, life was rare, everything of beauty seemed to flee from me – but here I was, standing on this ugly rock, defying the odds with my presence. I opened my mouth, raised my membrane-sealed oesophagus to the stars, and yelled wordless electromagnetic defiance.

Elena set a surveying machine tracking across the surface, bombarding the rock below with neutrons, and looking for the gamma rays that came back in response – or rather, those that didn't. Reified logic wasn't made of atoms, and had no nuclei to absorb the neutrons, then decay. It experienced gravity, and electromagnetism – allowing it to embed in ordinary matter, and making it possible to handle – but it didn't feel the strong force, so neutrons passed right through it. A mixture of metallic nickel and iron in the right proportions might have the same density, but would return a characteristic gamma ray signature.

Elena hummed to herself. The bioelectronics in her lips and pharynx interpreted the action and broadcast the result to me; the receiving organs in the flesh of my ears made their own "acoustic" sense of the signal, giving it distance and direction. If the Rock had had an atmosphere, the effect would have been almost the same.

The surveyor announced its findings: nickel, iron, silicon, oxygen, magnesium, aluminium. Traces of uranium and gold. Gravimetrically, everything added up. The rock below us was denser than the average for the asteroid as a whole, but the anomaly was made of ordinary matter.

Elena said, "What did you expect? Success at the very first site?" Her sheathed eyes glistened in the starlight. I said nothing.

*Stalker* lifted, almost imperceptibly. I sat in the open airlock, holding on to a safety strap, swinging my legs and looking down as the Rock receded and turned slightly, then loomed towards us again.

We were equipped to take the asteroid apart if we found anything, even though we'd done very little

mining in the past; there was no point in exploration if you weren't ready to follow it through on the spot. But we were traders, really – exchanging gadgets, works of art, and invariant knowledge between worlds separated by distance and history, worlds whose ordinary inhabitants had good reason to stay put. We didn't need a lot to survive; *Stalker* fed on stellar radiation, and our adapted bodies could recycle their own metabolites almost endlessly, phosphorylating ADP by an alternative pathway powered by alpha decay. Inside specialized liver cells, clusters of plutonium atoms were wrapped in giant multi-layered enzymes, which stole energy from the alpha particles in small enough increments to avoid being torn apart. The repair mechanisms which kept us safe from cosmic ray damage dealt with any leakage, but there wasn't much. We were about as independent as any living creatures could be.

So, what would we do with a Chalmer-sized fortune? Give up trading, and settle down somewhere? Elena had talked about that; I hated the idea. In any case, this kind of treasure hunt was no sane way to try to get rich. When Elena had swapped a cargo of rarely invented non-Turing computers for Chalmer's record of his find, I'd been dumbstruck. The mining log was certified in ways that would have been difficult to fake – but genuine or not, it was still contingent information, tied to a specific history; the antithesis of invariant knowledge.

And, worst of all, it was insidious. We could spend our lives returning to this place again and again, never finding anything of value – but however many times that happened, the search would not be over. There'd always be the chance that if we came back one more time, our luck would change.

**T**he second site was shinier, smoother than the first, probably melted by a more recent impact. We'd come down close to the terminator; a dazzling sliver of the nameless K0 sun showed on the horizon when I stood on my toes, although the light didn't reach the ground. I crouched down to make the sun vanish, then stretched up again to find that it had set. A bright point of light just above the horizon might have been Chalmer's "home world" – uninhabited here. "This" asteroid belt hadn't been the boon-docks, for him – every last pebble had been mined by the people of his planet, who'd colonized the system generations before. He'd made his fortune before making a single FTL jump, and he'd never told us why he'd chosen to leave everything he knew behind – but then, translated through an ancient common root language, it had been a stilted exchange.

I closed my eyes and willed the ground beneath us to be nothing but rock. *How could we ever give up travelling? How would we ever choose a planet to live on?* Much more than language diverged with variant history and colonial isolation. When I was seven years old, Elena had let slip that she'd had a father, and had had to explain what that meant – and why I hadn't been conceived the same way. "Even if I ran into someone with whom I wished to have a child, I'd hardly be likely to be fertile with him, *in vivo* – not unless we pre-infected our gametes with translator viruses to patch up all the differences. Why bother?" I wasn't quite Elena's clone, though; her



cells, transformed to produce male gametes, had been edited with alternative traits selected from a database she'd brought with her from her home world. My "father" was a composite, assembled from a digital version of the planet's entire gene pool.

The surveyor announced the results I'd been hoping for. Elena smiled. We moved on.

**T**he third site was on the day side, peppered with small craters, and broken up by deep cracks. The surveyor abandoned its six-legged gait, and hovered above the ground on helium jets, blowing up a small red dust storm. I stayed in the airlock and watched, and Elena walked only as far from the ship as she had to, to stand apart from me and my expectations of failure.

If we did find the cousin of Chalmer's deposit, we would be rich. Solid logic was the one commodity that was valued almost everywhere – all the more so if it hadn't been discovered and exploited before, because then you could sell the accompanying technology as well. Nobody knew how the abstractions of the propositional calculus became reified in the first place; the formative process was generally assumed to date back to the Big Bang, although I'd heard of theorists insisting that even that cataclysm was insufficient. The unknown origin didn't keep anyone from using the stuff. Each kilogramme – magnetically restructured into a variant of its natural state – could bring a chosen nonstandard logic to bear upon a region extending a few cubic millimetres beyond its own boundaries. Applied to the right apparatus, the altered logic could undermine almost any law of physics – although most often, it was simply used to pump out a quantity of energy limited only by the ingenuity of the logic engineers. When exploited this way, it slowly decayed (although not before yielding far more than its mass equivalent of energy). I found that a little sad; in spite of all the paradoxes and wonders it could perform, most logic was simply burnt as fuel.

I'd once asked Elena, "How can logic be a *thing*?"

She'd laughed. "The test is, imagine removing it. If logic went away, would that change anything?"

"Of course."

"Then it's a thing. It exists, it makes a difference – whether or not you can hold it in your hand. Neutrinos are *things*, aren't they? A few billion might pass through your body unnoticed, but beta decay couldn't happen without them. And matter interacts with logic – reified or not – far more intimately than it interacts with anything else. Think of all the atoms in the universe, endlessly 'making sense.' Why? We hypothesize a few 'fundamental' laws, and then 'deduce' their consequences – but why should matter care about *deduction*? Why should P implying Q have the slightest effect on what happens in reality? *It does, though.* Even quantum physics obeys standard logic; so long as you don't try to express its results in terms of naive macroscopic concepts, it gives rise to no inconsistencies, no contradictions.

"There's a certain pattern to events, a set of restrictions so pervasive that our entire reasoning process evolved around them. Logic is the *thing* which mediates that aspect of the world – and that's an effect far more powerful than any force."



"Then how can it end up less powerful – obeying gravity and electromagnetism?"

"Nobody knows. But...nothing's immovable, nothing's infinitely strong. If logic influences matter, that's an interaction, a two-way process. It must be affected itself, however slightly. Maybe under extreme conditions, the effect can be strong enough to drag it halfway into the material world."

At the time, I'd nodded understanding – but thinking it all through again, there on the Rock, I wasn't so sure that I'd really grasped anything. Logic forced matter to behave "consistently"...but what controlled the behaviour of logic – and allowed it to be reified? Another *thing* altogether? Or did logic act as its own metalogic, controlling itself? Could it do that? I had no idea – because I had no idea what *thing* controlled whether or not it could.

You could always keep asking *why*. The succession of explanations and rules had to be either infinite, or circular – and yet somehow matter, logic, and however many levels of metalogic there were, still managed to get things done.

Watching the surveyor probing the ground, I was sure that I didn't want Elena to become wealthy, to stop trading, to anchor us to a single world. I didn't want our lives to change at all.

But I couldn't help half wishing for a chance to touch the solid reason why the universe made sense.

**B**y the fifth site, Elena was so defiantly cheerful that I couldn't bear to look her in the eye. By the sixth, I was desperately trying to think of something I could say to cushion the blow – although I knew that anything I said would sound insincere.

When the surveyor announced its final negative verdict, Elena ordered it into its bay, and marched into the ship without a word to me. I followed at a prudent distance – but not so prudent as to risk being left behind.

In the control room, I found her sitting at the main console – but she was looking at a gravimetric map of the Rock, not plotting our next jump.

She mused, "If it's buried deep enough – deeper than Chalmer's version – it could be hard to detect from the surface."

I said, "Buried how? It would have blown the whole asteroid apart before it dug a hole that deep."

"It might have started off close to the surface of a smaller body. One of the bodies which eventually aggregated into *this*."

I put a hand on her shoulder. "No, Elena. Think about it. In Chalmer's version, the deposit was near the surface of a body the size and shape of this one. If you're going to say that the impact might have occurred on a completely different asteroid, that's true...and that asteroid might have ended up part of a larger one. But why should the final resting place of the deposit end up looking the same, with two such different scenarios?"

She stared at the map in silence. I wanted to tell her that it just didn't matter, that our lives were fine as they were, that the best thing by far would be to forget that we'd ever heard of Chalmer's Rock. *Write it off*.

She said, "There's some kind of cave system here."

"Asteroids don't have caves."

"Call it what you like." She pointed to a pale blue zone on a hypothetical section through the Rock, close to one of its rotational poles. "The lower limit on the density is zero. There's an extensive hollow region here, however it formed."

Gravimetric maps are full of ambiguities; the external field of a body isn't enough to reveal the precise mass distribution. Still, according to the mapping software, constrained by some plausible assumptions, Elena was probably right.

She traced the extent of the blue zone with her finger, following it to greater depths, and greater uncertainties. "It could go for tens of kilometres. If we collected data from in there, we'd have a far better picture of the whole Rock." She turned to face me squarely. "Isn't that right?"

I sighed. Obtaining more data was pointless. The Rock had no secrets to yield; I was sure of that.

But I'd never gone spelunking on an asteroid before. We were here for one and only one visit; it seemed a waste not to make the most of it.

And if this was what it took to make Elena understand that her search was in vain, then it would be time well spent.

**T**he entrance was a hole about ten metres across, but the cavern beneath spread out rapidly to five or six times that width, before narrowing again: a near-spherical bubble, sliced open at the top. We descended, harnessed to a polymer cable unwinding from a winch I'd anchored to the rock with nano-ware glue. Elena, a few metres below me, carried a portable surveying unit, constantly logging gravimetric data; I had a backpack full of pulleys for the cable, with my hands free to work the remote control of the winch. We could have gone in untethered, using helium jets alone – the gravity was so low that we needed occasional bursts from the jets pushing us down to make reasonable headway – but going ballistic in the bowels of an asteroid might have been a little rash, and I liked the security of a tangible connection to the surface.

The walls of the cavern were the same greyish-red as the rocks around the entrance. I'd hooked a light bulb to the cable just above me, the underside shielded so as not to dazzle us, and there was a second one below Elena, shielded on top. Everything around us was illuminated starkly; no shadows, no surprises.

Long before we reached the floor of the cavern, it was clear that there was an opening in it, about half the size of the top entrance, and some distance off-centre. When we touched down, I anchored two pulleys in the rock – one directly below the entrance hole, the other cantilevered over the centre of this second opening – and guided the cable onto them.

We descended into another spherical cavern, larger than the first. Below us was yet another opening. *What was this?* The fossil of a chain of intersecting bubbles, formed by gas coming out of solution in molten rock a billion years ago? My lithochemistry was hazy; I didn't really know if that was plausible or not.

I said, "This is something, Elena. This just about makes it worth being here."

She said, "We need to go much deeper than this, before we'll get any useful data." She stared at the screen on the surveying unit, which displayed an

updated gravimetric map. "We'll have to go down three or four kilometres, at least."

Three or four kilometres sounded optimistic; we weren't carrying the means to blast our way through if we met with any obstructions. I kept waiting for us to hit a dead end, to reach the last cavern, but it seemed there was always one more, scarcely different from the ones before it – although the walls grew smoother, less rocky, more metallic-looking. By the seventh cavern, the cable told us we were five hundred metres deep, and the surveyor still read hollow space beneath us. I pictured a chain of bubbles stretching on down to the centre of the Rock, eighty kilometres below.

The eighth cavern was different, though.

The hole in the floor of the eighth cavern was dead centre, perfectly circular – and it didn't lead into a ninth. It was the top of a vertical shaft, a smooth cylindrical tunnel, which plunged straight down as far as we could see.

It was, almost certainly, an artefact. I was astonished – and delighted – but Elena looked crushed. Finally, she said, "Miners. Someone's been here before us. Someone's beat us to it."

"You think so?"

She laughed miserably. "Of course!" She crouched down and ran a finger along the tunnel wall, pressing hard to feel the surface texture through the nerveless layers of her exoskin. "You think some natural process made this?"

I said, "If it's a mine shaft, where are all the tailings?"

"I don't know. Maybe they pumped them up to the surface, took them away to be refined somewhere. To extract every last fragment."

We stood at the edge in silence. I thought: *Now that she knows that someone else besides Chalmer struck logic, she's never going to stop searching, she's never going to stop coming back.*

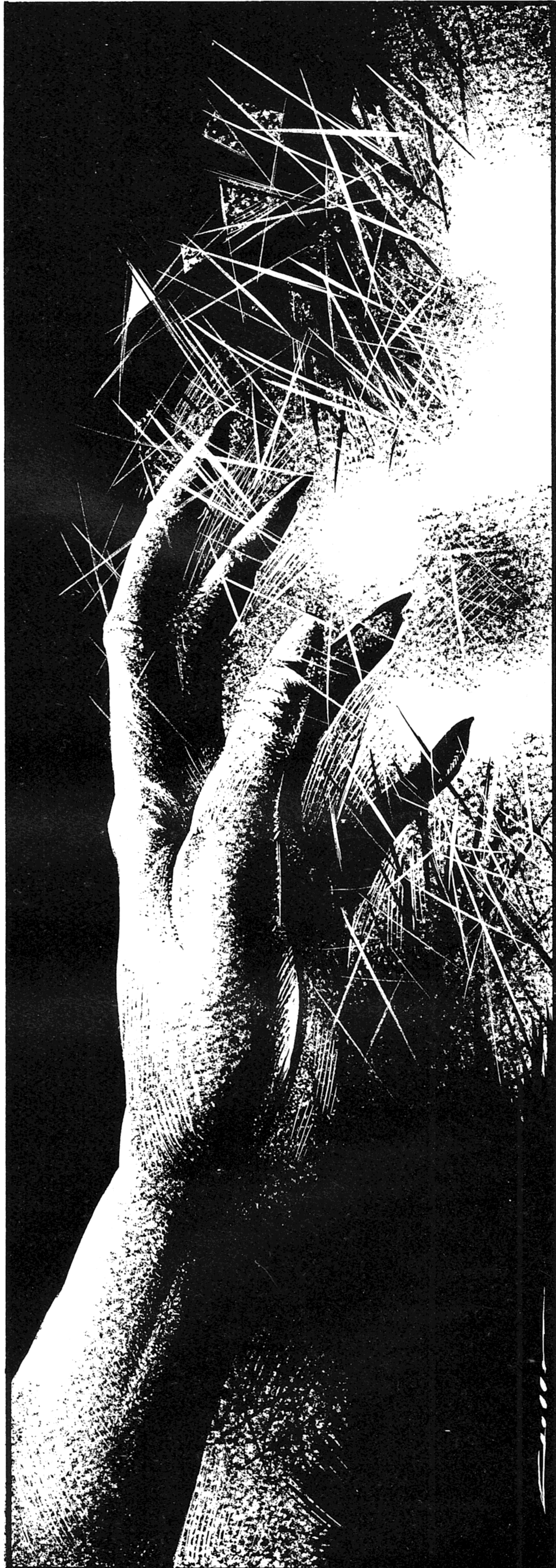
She said, "We might as well go down a bit and check it out. There could be some clues as to who it was, how they worked. What they found."

I hesitated, then nodded. I set up two more pulleys, to keep the cable running smoothly, and then we began our final descent.

**N**o two civilizations perform the same task in quite the same way. If we'd found anything of value, we would have seeded the Rock with nanoware replicators, and then stood back and let them digest and separate the entire asteroid...but some cultures consider replicators too dangerous to use, even in the middle of nowhere in a universe you're certain never to visit again. Mining by boring through the rock with macroscopic machinery seemed quaint, but it wasn't unthinkable.

Of course, the tunnel might have been purely exploratory, rather than extractive – dug for the sake of data collection... which revealed that the Rock had nothing worth taking. There was no evidence that any mining had gone on here; no cross-shafts full of discarded machinery, no evacuation instructions in incomprehensible languages. Just the one, unmarked vertical shaft, looking as if it went down forever.

A kilometre below the surface, I said, "Elena, this is crazy. We're not going to find anything. And even



if we did, it would be no more use to you than Chalmer's log."

She said, "Do you see that?"

I hit the STOP button on the controller, and the brakes brought us smoothly to a halt. "Do I see *what*?"

"On the wall."

At first, it looked the same as ever to me; a dull metallic red-grey. Then I raised my hand to block the harsh light, and in the penumbra of its shadow, I made out a glistening, transparent patina, like a thin coating of ice.

I didn't dare touch it. "Is that it? Logic?"

Elena said, "I don't know. Logic crystals are blue, in bulk—but a thin layer might not show the colour."

I absorbed that, then said, as gently as I could, "Then how do we know it's not just frozen volatiles?"

She took an infrared spectroscopy probe from her backpack, and aimed it at the wall.

"What does it say?"

"Unidentified. It's not any kind of ice."

"Unidentified? But the logic spectrum is —?"

She looked up at me. "Known? On file? Of course. If it's unidentified, it isn't logic."

"So... we've found a completely novel molecule?" That seemed unlikely — although perhaps the would-be miners had left a trace of some organic substance peculiar to their own adapted metabolism. "What now?"

"Let's go down a bit further. Slowly. See how far it extends. Whatever it is."

I started the cable unwinding again. I thought: *The probe is broken — or confused by the thinness of the layer, or conflicting spectra from the rock beneath. The wall is coated with methane, carbon dioxide, water — nothing more exotic than that.*

I was wrong. As we descended, the substance took on colour; it started as a faint, uncertain tinge, then suddenly deepened into a vivid emerald green, strong enough to mask the colour of the rock. We stopped, so Elena could use the probe again — but the reading was unchanged.

I stared down the tunnel; still no end in sight. The green colour seemed to fade out just beneath us, though, giving way to the usual red-grey.

We continued — and the wall around us remained emerald green. A few metres below us, the tunnel appeared to be uncoated — but if I fixed my gaze on a point on the wall, its colour seemed to change as we approached it, and by the time it was level with my eyes it had taken on the same hue as we'd seen for the last twenty metres.

I pointed this out to Elena.

"Yes, I noticed. It must be some optical effect in the crystal — the colour depends on the angle of view."

"But... look above us! At the same angle to the surface, in the other direction, it still looks green!"

Elena looked up, then shrugged. "I don't know, Khali. I expect it's some trick of the light." She sounded tired and dispirited. None of this had anything to do with the reason she was here; it was all just an annoying, confusing distraction.

I was baffled, but I couldn't think of a serious explanation. I laughed. "Maybe we're exuding the stuff. Maybe our exoskins are leaking — and this is nothing but frozen perspiration." Elena ignored the joke; nothing I could say would cheer her up.

Soon after that, the emerald green gave way to a stretch of bright cherry red — not remotely like the rusty ferrous colours of the surface rock — and then, in rapid succession, bands of indigo, yellow, a darker green, a startling azure. Each time we stopped to investigate, the probe declared the substance unknown. The tunnel below still looked like bare rock — until we reached it — but above us was a strange mineralized rainbow, vanishing into the darkness.

When the coating changed to a glistening silver, it hardly seemed worth pausing, yet again; I was ready to sail right through, eager to reach the end of the tunnel, still hopeful that the miners, or whoever, might have left some interesting machinery behind.

Then Elena said, "Khali, do you see —?"

I hit the brakes.

The thin silver layer on the tunnel wall was growing before our eyes. Feathery needles appeared on the surface, branching out, thickening and overlapping until they formed a solid substrate, upon which the whole process began again. It was like a crystalline mass coming out of solution — but out of solution from *what*? I racked my brain for some half-sensible explanation. A transparent organometallic gas filling the tunnel, breaking down and depositing solid magnesium or aluminium? *Gas coming from where?* Some machine at the bottom of the tunnel, which had just happened to spring a leak as we arrived?

Even as I rotated my harness and reached out to touch the growing encrustation, my next guess was: *replicators, after all?* The thought came too late for me to pull back, though; before I could think seriously about the perils of coming into contact with an unknown culture's nanoware, I'd grabbed a handful of the fine silver needles, and —

*A wave of bittersweet hope flooded through me. Elena's insane pursuit of Chalmer's lode across the multiverse, her need to have this unreachable goal hovering forever on the horizon, suddenly made the most compelling sense.*

I understood —

I let the crystals drop from my hand.

And the electrifying clarity of sharing Elena's private logic fell away with them.

I cried out in surprise, but I couldn't speak. My heart raced. I stared at the glittering mass condensing out of the vacuum onto the wall, precisely where we hung, and nowhere else; thickest and fastest around Elena — *What had happened here?* Something had struck this version of the Rock. Something much stranger than Chalmer's find. Something more primordial. It had ricocheted eight times within the rock, blasting out the caverns above us, before forming *this*.

A place where hope could solidify like logic.

*And what else?* What else within us had been reified? What coated the walls above us? I looked up at the crystalline rainbow we'd left in our wake, chromatograph of our souls.

Elena said, "Khali, we have to move. Quick, take us up!"

I heard her, but I was still in a daze. *Our souls?* Our brains were matter, nothing more; *hope* was a property of a system of neural pathways, ultimately explicable in terms of the simplest laws. But...if matter

could form such elaborate structures, perhaps logic could too. Levels of explanation corresponding to the emergence of "higher" laws.

I turned and gazed into the depths of the tunnel. Down there, what would be reified? Consciousness? Simpler animal drives? Organic growth? Finally, pure inanimate logic itself?

It was a horrifying prospect – but a strangely seductive one, too. Everything was a *thing*, after all; everything that made a difference. I said, "Take us up? No, take us down! We don't have to look for the mother lode any more. We can become the mother lode!"

Elena, thankfully, didn't understand what I meant. If she had, she might have found the suggestion tempting.

Instead, she hoisted herself up the cable, hand over hand, grabbed the control from me, and hit the button to winch us up.

**I** was hysterical and incoherent most of the way back to the surface. As we passed by the other layers, I tried to reach out and touch them – to discover what they were – but Elena pinned my arms to my side, and talked about abandoned mining replicators; mutated, unpredictable. I tried to tell her what I believed had happened, but I doubt that anything I said made the slightest sense. She hurried me across the floor of each cavern, deftly tugging the cable free and leaving the pulleys behind.

And outside the ship, it finally hit me: we'd left part of ourselves behind, too. Reasons, motives, emotions; whatever the arrangement of neurons inside our skulls, the mental phenomena they gave rise to had taken another – equally tangible – form in the tunnel. If manipulating primitive, solid logic could break the laws of physics, what would happen if we were separated from the reified abstractions of our own minds?

I said, "We have to go back. Scrape it all off. Take it with us."

Elena said, "You're delirious. You're infected." She held me by the wrists, glancing with horror at my right hand.

I laughed. "You think I'm swarming with nanomachines? Then don't take any risks. Leave me here."

"Don't be stupid, Khali. Come into the ship and get treated –"

"It's not worth the risk, is it? I might contaminate everything. Leave me. Go make a jump. Leave me behind. I'll live. Go find Chalmer's lode. If you still want to."

*If you still want to.*

I was a child. I was thirteen years old. I was in shock, I was hysterical. I didn't know what I was doing – or at least, I could hardly be sure.

I pulled free. "I'm not getting into the ship. I'm staying." I backed away, but not far. And I didn't turn and run.

Elena said quietly, "Do what I say."

I took a step backwards, not quite out of her reach, then said, "Do you really think you can make me?"

Elena gave no warning – or if she did, I managed to blind myself to it, because I know I didn't flinch. She moved in a blur; punching me in the face, knocking me to the ground. The exoskin over one cheekbone ruptured, spraying red mist in front of my eyes. It

must have resealed in less than a second, but by then I'd lost consciousness – and given up any chance of explaining what she'd be leaving behind.

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**Greg Egan** was born in Perth, Australia, in 1961. His first sf novel, *Quarantine*, is out this month from Century/Legend, although it was preceded by a non-sf novel, *An Unusual Angle* (Norstrilia Press, 1983), which he wrote when he was in his teens. He was educated at the University of Western Australia, and used to have aspirations as a film-maker – he completed a 65-minute 16mm movie in the early 1980s. However, he is now rapidly making his name as one of the very best sf writers of the 90s. About half his published short stories to date have appeared in this magazine, beginning with "Mind Vampires" in 1986.

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# Built on Blood

## Storm Constantine

**T**he morning of the Carnival of Day. Long Green Meadows Estate waking up again. The grey is kissed by dawn, a red light stains the wind-screens of the auto wrecks sagging along the kerbs. Even the two burnups, a derelict pub and a deserted grocer's shop, crooked black relics of last week's riot, are lent a certain gothic grandeur by this innocent radiance. Scrawny animals – cats or rats or some weird estate-bred hybrid of both – slink along the walls of the alleys. Somewhere a child begins to cry, then another and another. The dawn chorus; infant human despair.

Sallyann wakes up from a dream. The moment she opens her eyes the image fades, but she is sure it was terrifying. There is the beginning of a shout in her throat. She stretches out her arms from the bed and touches both sides of her small room. It is a morning ritual with her. She doesn't know why she does it, but she can't stop. The day can't begin without it. She rolls onto her side in the narrow bed, shrugging back the new Community Care-supplied sleeping bag (courtesy of registered charity number 5,000,123). Everyone in Long Green Meadows has been given these recently. Sallyann has to admit they're warm, but she doesn't like the flowers on them. It seems cynical somehow, because there are never any flowers in Long Green Meadows, unless you count the ones in those big tubs at the shopping mall, but they're always being burned by the kids and, anyway, they're artificial. Sallyann's clothes cover the small space between bed and wall, and it takes her a few minutes' rummaging to dig out the two precious roll-ups her friend Danny gave her last night.

Danny lives in the fortress three streets away; two houses knocked into one and windowed by iron. Motorbikes are parked in the yard behind the house; one of them is Danny's. She met him in the vaccination clinic, of all places.

He was sitting across the waiting room, frowning at the muzak speaker overhead; a fierce, forlorn warrior, constrained with embarrassment in an inappropriate setting. His head was shaven, but for the tangle of dreads at the back, his scalp covered with curling blue Celtic tattoos. Sallyann, pretending to read a pamphlet on sexual hygiene, covertly admired his facial bone structure with its thin fringe of Lucifer beard, until he asked her what she was staring at. They started sparring then, a ritual of mutual circling and snarling. She thought he didn't like her and covered her disappointment with expletive gusto, but

he was waiting for Sallyann when she came out of the nurse's booth. They ended up going to Elli's Drop-In together to drink de-caf and share complaints about life, their right arms aching from the needle and beginning to swell. They were friends; nothing else. Neither of them felt the need for anything else.

Last night, Danny and Sallyann climbed out onto the roof of the biker house to watch the sky. They were looking for stars because earlier Sallyann had heard on t.v. that shooting stars would be visible at 11 p.m. All they saw, however, was the orange sick-light of the town and the ghost of the moon, but somehow the air seemed sweeter up there. There was a breeze to muss their hair. The rotors from uptown provided a lightshow of sorts. They carried cautious police units, who never set foot in Long Green Meadows, or else inner city rich kids, raving out in the sky, hovering over the sickpit for a perilous thrill. Somewhere sirens howled and at midnight, a Health Company flyer winged silently over the estate, distributing Dominic Blair photopics, with the lyrics to his latest song on the back. "Dominic Blair is King!" declared the slogans. "See him live at the Carnival!"

Danny read the lyrics aloud and said, "Lucky world. Tomorrow, there's Carnival." And he and Sallyann laughed together, sharing a thin, bitter cigarette Danny had rolled earlier.

"Are you going uptown to watch it?" Sallyann asked.

Danny shrugged and gave her one of those weird, thinking looks, perhaps the thing she liked best about him. He screwed up his nose. "Nah..." Like her, he was intrigued by the prospect of the Carnival, but felt he'd be betraying some inner code by attending it.

"I am," Sallyann said defiantly.

"Why bother, Sal? It'll just remind you of all the things you hate about this country. Why bother?"

"I dunno." She hugged her knees and peered through narrowed eyes across the estate. Parts of it were completely without light. In a couple of places, dull fires were burning, indistinct figures dancing against the flames. She could see a gang of kids on the rooftops a few streets away, leaping from roof to roof.

**D**anny, in comparison to Sallyann, is a very rich man. He has the protection of his tribe, and members of the tribe are wolf-hungry and wolf-canny. They always have money, but Sallyann knows better than to ask how they get it. There are no police in Long Green Meadows; the bikers are the

nearest there is to such a force. They kill rapists, child molesters and psycho murderers, but are generally involved themselves in most other criminal activities, which they prefer to conduct off their own territory. Sometimes there are terrible battles with biker tribes of other estates; people are killed. And yet, Sallyann knows it's the only way to survive, and she appreciates the little luxuries Danny can provide for her: rolling tobacco, fiery alcohol, pure drugs. Still, she'd be Danny's friend whether he was rich or not because he can think, and sometimes she needs someone around her who can do that, just to remind her she can think as well.

Sallyann lives in Honeysuckle Crescent with her mother. All the tower blocks and tenements of the previous century are long gone, but the new houses, which were erected hurriedly in the first few years of the new century in an attempt to control public unrest, are tiny and drab. So, they had fitted kitchenettes and economy heating, and a government minister even came to open the estate, but now, ten years on, the houses are beginning to fall apart. The boom was brief and burnt itself out quickly. Now, urban decay has reverted to conditions last seen in the 90s – and worse. There is mould everywhere and big shadowy insects. The little gardens are full of tall yellow weeds and garbage. The road surfaces have broken up; the only cars in Long Green Meadows are stolen ones, used up quickly and trashed. All the patches of community lawn have worn away to dry, dry dust, where the gangs of feral children play. The place is cancered and dying. Danny once said this might be because Long Green Meadows has been built on the site of an old plague pit.

"Is it really?" Sallyann asked, quite perturbed.

Danny shook his head. "Doubt it. I saw something like that in an old movie once though."

He'd watched one of the riots from the top of the biker house and apparently that had been like the old movie too, when the ghosts of the angry dead had gone crazy and destroyed the estate that had scabbed their resting ground. Since then, Sallyann and Danny have made up an alternative history for Long Green Meadows. It passes the time.

"We could get someone to make a film of it!" Sallyann said, daring to fantasize optimistically.

It cued a look from Danny. "Lovey, this already is a film."

Sallyann laughed then, but he didn't.

**D**ownstairs, Sallyann's mother is boiling the kettle. Sallyann can hear every detail of her mother's movement; she clears her throat, her hip brushes the edge of the table as she sidles towards the sink. The house might as well be one big room, Sallyann thinks, and then wonders whether, if it was, they might have more space. Her mother is a young woman. She had Sallyann when she was fifteen. Now, she's thirty-two and her daughter is a woman too. She's called Mel. Even though Mel won't discuss her past with anyone, Sallyann knows her mother came from somewhere quite different to Long Green Meadows. She suspects that, contrary to most people's situations, Mel lives on the estate by choice. She is a survivor woman; lean and lined maybe, but strong as a rope. Sallyann has never seen her depressed.



Illustrations by Dave Horton

The pair of them live on welfare from the local community-care charity, and consequently have to spend a lot of time at the work centre putting useless information into computers, but Mel makes a bit of extra money for them, when she can, by dealing in speed and hash. Mel and Sallyann, like the majority of the people on the estate, are not without money. It's just that there isn't much to spend it on. Mel seems to know everyone in Long Green Meadows. She is called out to attend to would-be suicides, accidental overdoses, marital aggression, and has even delivered babies, although the local Health Company fined her for that. Everyone hates the Health Company. The vaccination clinic is covered in graffiti and scorch marks. The windows are heavily wired over. Mel also runs a women's group, which is a phenomenon in itself in such an environment. She believes strongly in female power, and has a planet-sized patience.

Some time ago a woman came to Mel's house who was dressed in a smart black suit. Sallyann believed her to be a Health Company employee. The woman stayed for an hour, during which time the two women talked continuously. Sallyann sat upstairs, confident she'd be able to hear every word, but Mel turned up the t.v., which drowned out the conversation. Sallyann was sure the woman must have come to offer Mel a job, perhaps working for the Health Company itself, for that was surely the direction in which Mel's talents lay. Also, people on the estate trusted her. Mel, however, refused to discuss the matter afterwards. She must have turned down the job.

**S**allyann doesn't know whether Mel will want to go to the Carnival or not. On those occasions when they've gone uptown together, Sallyann has always been alert for people in the crowds who might display some sign of recognition for Mel. So far, she has always been disappointed. Mel doesn't like going uptown. Is this because she envies Those That Have, the people who inhabit the dockside complexes, the Japanese garden condos, the air studios? Sallyann doesn't think so. She pulls on her clothes; ex-patrol trousers Mel bought from an emergency sale, and a thin black t-shirt with a deathhead design on the front. The bikers gave these shirts out to everyone who attended the funeral last time one of their tribe was killed. Sallyann always attends the funerals. Not just because of respect for Danny, although that is one of the reasons, but because there is always plenty to eat and drink. Sallyann pulls on her boots. She doesn't wear underwear, scorning the disposable stretch-paper knickers and bra supplied by the Health Clinic. Her hair is a dark red colour, dyed by the vitamin juice that comes with the welfare cheque. A lot of girls on the estate use the stuff that way. Her face is strong and square and, although pale, surprisingly clear-skinned.

Downstairs, Mel is reconstituting eggs using bottled water. Both Mel and Sallyann prefer the dried eggs, which come from the TruGen labs to the fishy, watery "real" eggs that they can buy at the mall.

"Coming uptown today?" Sallyann asks. She wants Mel to come with her.

Her mother gives her a sharp look. "Things to do," she says. "Sorry."

Sallyann shrugs. "Oh, well."

"Do you want to go?" Mel asks. Sallyann senses this is a testing question, perhaps to prompt a talk. Mel never tries to tell her daughter what to do, but sometimes can't resist criticizing her decisions in oratory.

"Yeah, I think so."

Mel nods. "Going alone?"

"Dunno. 'Spect someone else will be going."

"Then keep your eyes open."

"I always do." Sallyann thinks Mel is trying to imply there's something sinister about the Carnival. It's been a media event for weeks. There will be performance art, circus acts, music, novelty stalls, and fortune tellers. Dominic Blair will appear in public. He's king of the show, a divinely beautiful youth whose face appears everywhere. Teenage girls lust after him in their millions. Mel says he was grown in a vat. There are certain areas of the city where the estate dwellers can attend the carnival. Certain food companies have promised to donate free refreshments. The event is supposed to be a celebration to mark the latest scientific breakthrough; a discovery which means that poverty will soon be a thing of the past. Using the revolutionary method of molecular computers, old land will be reclaimed, machines will be built without human labour in a few seconds, food will be synthesized in any quantity. Sallyann and Mel have watched the cheery documentaries on t.v., in between the feminist broadcasts which claimed the world was in such a state because men were incompetent carers.

"This is a new day for humankind," the government announced with misty eyes.

"For us?" Sallyann asked her mother, turning away from the t.v.

Mel was tating lace from paper fibre; another subsidiary income. "I don't believe they've done it," she said. "I don't believe anything I hear coming out of that thing." Yet, despite this claim, she watches t.v. quite a lot.

At first, Sallyann wanted to believe it, but she found that nearly everyone on the estate, who held an opinion on the subject, agreed with Mel. Including Danny. Even if the breakthrough had happened, it couldn't possibly mean life would improve. The people dared not think otherwise. Hope was a thing of the past.

**T**he dividing line between the estates that ring the city (and Long Green Meadows is only one of many) and the inner city itself consists of an arid expressway, a place where human feet never walk. Sallyann always expects to see dead animals lying on it, but there is never any sign of life or death. Discarded rubber tyres lie in the emergency stop lane. Nobody ever stops there. She is riding the Sprinter-tram, along with a few other young people from Long Green Meadows who have also decided to sample the delights of the Carnival. All of them are making sarcastic remarks about it, because really they are embarrassed about wanting to go there. The tram slips down into sodium-lit tunnels, where eerie black cars slither past with hardly any sound. Soon, they will emerge from the comparative emptiness of estate-hugging roadways into the chaotic traffic jam of the city itself. It is eight o'clock in the morning. The journey will take two and a half hours. If someone were to walk



on foot, they could make the trip in half an hour, but no-one can walk across the expressway. If anyone tried, they'd be quickly picked up by surveillance monitors and arrested for jaywalking. That could mean a revocation of their city pass.

On the tram, there is a terminal where people can convert local currency into that of one of the city banks. It is possible to use estate currency in the city, in certain areas, but generally it is better to use one of the other banks, because it attracts less attention. Naturally, there is a charge for this transaction but, at least today, the exchange rate is favourable. Sallyann is only three shillings down on her original money. In city currency, the shilling is the standard unit.

The air inside the tram heats up as it eases its way into the city concourses. It is as if the vehicle itself is becoming steamed up with impatience. Hawkers jump on board selling tickets for city restaurants, distributing flyers for night-club venues and commercial whore-palaces. The tram crawls past gigantic hoardings: "The Temple is Built on Blood!" declares one advertisement. It is for a loan company. Gold lettering, ten feet high, superimposed over a photograph of a sunset, against which the stark, black silhouette of an ancient ruin stands. Sallyann cannot remember having seen it before. For a few moments, she ponders the meaning of it, before her friend, the fierce black girl, Terror (loved by many, a *femme fatale* of cruelty and claws), distracts her by biting her arm. Terror is very excited about the Carnival.

Finally, with the unseasonal heat scorching the polarized windows, the tram eases its way gratefully into one of the main city terminals. Sallyann and the others disembark, throwing themselves into the tide of humanity that is milling, in apparent confusion, among the tram stalls. An undeniable sense of celebration pervades the air. Brightly coloured balloons are bobbing against the green glass roof of the terminal. Streamers flutter from the fast-food booths, magazines and posters are on sale everywhere, telling people the best spots to visit, what they can find there. A few enterprising street entertainers jostle for space among the crowds, attempting to perform mime plays or juggle knives. A group of Dominic Blair fan-club operatives, dressed in white with artificial poppies pinned in their hair, are distributing leaflets offering cheap rates for club membership. Terror takes one, making the remark that she'd only join the club if her membership fee included a night with the King. The girl in white smiles, nods, and makes an escape. Terror laughs greedily.

Against the wall, by the passenger exit doorway, a row of maimed professional beggars are sitting in an untidy line. As Sallyann and her companions shuffle through, Sallyann notices that three or four of the beggars are listlessly beating another, who is lying prone, with their aluminium crutches. People are throwing them coins, smiling.

Outside, Sallyann and Terror link arms and decide to leave their companions behind and venture off alone. Terror thinks the other estate kids are too obvious about where they come from. Sallyann, on the other hand, is considered cool. The main street outside the terminal has been closed to traffic, although a number of cabs are parked along the kerb. Terror

buys a photocopied pamphlet off a couple of kids in fancy dress that explains where the main Carnival events are taking place, and which ones their passes will permit them entrance to. Most of the people around them are from other estates, although a few daring inner-city kids are there, in blue and green makeup. The hippest of that tribe will attend only the "alternative" carnival, hoping for a little excitement with the have-nots.

Terror wants to go and see Dominic Blair. His float is due to go down Government Drive at five o'clock. "We won't be able to see anything," Sallyann says; she has been hoping they'll be wildly drunk at the reggae festival by then, physically unable to go anywhere.

"Course we will," Terror insists, prodding the pamphlet in illustration. "See, we can follow the float to Ecstasy Common. There'll be a concert there. Dominic's ending the Carnival – with us, the scummers." She flutters her eyelids. "Aren't we lucky! Look, there's free food and drink. We can't miss it."

"But the reggae..."

Terror pulls a face. "Oh, come on! It'll be much better at the Blair gig. More for us to help ourselves to, anyway."

Sallyann can't contain her irritation. "Hmmp! You should like the reggae better. Isn't it your cultural music or something? Why go to this pathetic commercial shit?"

"We can go to the reggae afterwards," Terror continues, unperturbed. "The Blair gig finishes at ten. That leaves hours until the last tram – and look, the two sites aren't that far apart." She then proceeds to indulge in some heavy-duty pleading and begging, which Sallyann can't resist.

**T**hey walk up to Harmony Mall, caged by the crowds. Here, a street market has been set up and everyone is wearing period costume from the 1990s. Memorabilia is on sale; magazines, clothes accessories, half-used plastic cases of makeup that are dim with age and the smell of old women. Sallyann wants to spend her money carefully; preferably on some gold standard hash at the reggae festival, good beer and a few luxury foods she wouldn't normally eat. Terror, however, spends her funds lavishly on tat. A p.a. system fills the air with the sound of joyous songs celebrating the Breakthrough. Video monitors are strung across the streets, displaying promos for all the new products that will soon be available. Terror and Sallyann pause to watch one about cosmetic surgery. There is a foul scene of cutting and slicing, depicting the past, followed by that of an already beautiful woman sitting up in a health-centre bed, being given a pill that contains the scientific magick that will transform her shape while she sleeps. And all this will be so cheap! declares a honey-soft voice as the woman sinks back gratefully into her bed and a uniformed nurse draws a gauzy curtain over the window, smiling gently over her shoulder at the patient.

"Man, it's so neat!" Terror says. "Come on, Sal. What'd you change if you got the chance?"

"My friends," Sallyann replies drily.

At two o'clock, they drift into a plaza where a play is being enacted. The play is a musical. It depicts an

historical event, the downfall of Christianity, when a huge conspiracy was discovered by the media. The headlines screamed that, in fact, all priests and nuns were really satanists and had been running the paedophile network for centuries. Even though everyone read the daily reports hungrily, they were aware the whole thing was a crazy invention, just like all the other wild exposés. But too much damage had been done by the time the media noticed the momentum of the event was slowing down, and decided to unmask the children who'd first informed on the church as liars.

A woman is standing on the stage, wearing a nun's costume, sweating in the hot smog. "I am a Bride of Christ!" she sings. To the side, child actors in the roles of lying protagonists stand in an impish line. Terror is tapping her foot to the tune, because the video's been on t.v. a lot recently.

"This is boring," Sallyann announces. "I want to go to the funfair."

Reluctantly, Terror allows herself to be dragged away. Unfortunately, by the time they reach the funfair, the rides have all been temporarily closed. An accident with the Shooting Star has put eight people in hospital. Funfair employees wearing stifling furry-animal suits are still hosing down the blood. The broken Shooting Star is a sprawl of huge metal limbs, crumpled over the fastfood booths, other rides, the ground. Loudspeakers are churning out the sound of a women's choir singing-in the New Age. "Sisters, sisters! It is up to us now!" It is a sibilant exhortation, somehow urgent. Sallyann, eating a pink floss of spun sugar, catches sight of a giant hoarding behind the spines of the Heavenly Spiral ride: "The Temple is Built on Blood!" She can see now that, in the photograph, the steps of the ruin are crowded with pale figures. Then, a troupe of aerial dancers, borne aloft by rotor suits, swarm across the hoarding in a blitz of red and yellow and neon purple. Sallyann watches them for a moment, then turns away. Daytime firecrackers, thrown by the aerial dancers, explode in unbearable brilliance overhead.

"So where now?" Sallyann asks, throwing away the stick of her spun sugar. She peers over Terror's shoulder, who is busy consulting the pamphlet again.

"There's another fair a few streets away," Terror says, "and there should be a parade along soon."

"What of?"

Terror laughs. "Working people through the ages!"

"How colourful! Where's the music? I want music."

Sallyann wriggles. "I wanna dance!"

In the next street, the crowds surge aside from a battalion of waste-consumption machines that are humming down the middle of the road eating garbage. "Mind your children! Mind your children!" yells the consensual artificial voice of the machines. Terror shouts abuse at a bunch of drunken city boys. "You want fucking? I'll tell you how to fuck!" she yells. "C'mere and say that." The youths are not aware of Terror's fighting prowess. Sallyann, however, certainly is and welcomes the prospect of a new diversion. Disappointingly, the youths only slink off uncertainly down the street, drawn by the more passive prey of a couple of younger girls in less aggressive costume further along.

"Shits!" Terror declares. A few months ago, gangs

of inner-city youths were making drunken forays into estate territory, in order to rape women. The biker tribes stepped up their vigilante patrols and sometimes there were bloody fights. Since then, the craze appears to be dying out.

"I'm gonna come uptown one night with the girls," Terror growls. "We're gonna kill some of them."

Sallyann laughs. "Here? How? You'd never manage it before you were arrested."

Terror snarls sideways at her companion. "Know nothing, lady! It happens. I heard about it. The Razor Bitches came into town from Sweet Pastures a few weeks ago. Killed ten. I heard it."

"Wasn't on the news," Sallyann says, aware even before she's finished speaking how naive that sounds. She laughs to compensate. "But of course it wasn't!"

Terror smirks back. "Well? Fancy some of that action?"

"Nah." Sallyann would rather just keep away, or hide behind the protection of Danny and his tribe.

**I**n the humid heat of a giant marquee, Terror and Sallyann drink away the afternoon. At least the beer is kept in refrigerators. This is a luxury Sallyann can't resist. It has been worth coming, she decides, if only for this. Never mind the sleek uptowners swanking their fashions, their accessories, their money before her eyes. Never mind the clean streets and well-stocked shops. She closes her eyes and drinks deep. This is good! Music pounds through the fibres of her body and she sways to its rhythm. Someone offers her a happiness pill, which she takes and swallows with a mouthful of beer. The pill is large. She can feel it lodged in her throat and swallows and swallows to shift it. Shortly, a pink and green ambience slides over her sight. She feels completely relaxed and content. Her whole world consists of music and movement. She dances with a girl who has waist-length hair, squeezing her hard, only to discover it is a boy. He grimaces and pulls away, having thought she was a boy as well.

"Come on!" Terror is yelling in her ear.

"Come where?"

"Dominic Blair!"

"Oh no! Terror, do we have to? I can't walk!"

Sallyann's protests are ignored. Terror drags her, protesting feebly, out into the daylight. She giggles at passersby as Terror hauls her along the street.

"What did you take in there?"

"Happiness!"

"Sal, you are a bitch. You wanna spoil my day for me? Is that it? Why couldn't you wait until later, huh? You're so selfish!"

"I love you!" Sallyann sings joyously.

"Oh fuck off!" Terror growls, tossing her head, and smacking Sallyann across the face with her long, beaded braids.

They jump on a tram which will take them to Government Drive. Hundreds of other revellers are crammed on board. Feeling at one with the whole population at that moment, Sallyann sings and shouts, accepting kisses and caresses. Terror grumbles with folded arms, her scowl as black as her skin.

The passengers alight in a colourful, sweating tumble at the north end of the Drive, in Eternity Circus. A company of fetishists are providing a pre-Blair

display, led by a band of hand-drummers who are being whipped by shaved youths in leather loin-bands. Towering dominatrices in different skin-tight costumes of red pvc, march along behind like robots on six-inch spike heels, their faces white, their lips a raw scarlet, their eyes concealed behind wrap-around shades. Men crawling on all fours in furry dog suits are being choked by tight leashes, wielded by women wearing rubber. One man squats to defecate, whimpering as the chain lead strikes home.

Terror is entranced. "Oooh! Lookit that! Lookit that!" Eternity Circus, in the late afternoon, is already berserk with flashing hoardings. Alone in the centre, a stark purity: "The Temple is Built on Blood!" Sallyann is beginning to wonder whether she's hallucinating that particular slogan. It seems to her as if the figures on the steps of the ruin are dancing. Her earlier euphoria is beginning to cloy. A headache is coming on. At the corner of her vision, zigzag patterns flutter and spark.

Terror bites and scratches a path for them to the front of the crowd. They step over an unconscious girl, whose dress appears to have ripped off. The tail end of the fetishist parade scampers by, running close to the crowd, holding out their spike-dappled arms. Most people are ducking, squealing, away from the spikes, but others don't: they aren't squealing at all. Sallyann can feel an urge to go home stealing over her. She feels a little sick. A man standing next to her is thoughtfully rubbing a ragged cut on his chest, painting himself with blood. She yearns for the care-free intimacy of the music marquee. She doesn't like the sight of blood.

Terror grips Sallyann's arm hard. "Listen, listen," she says.

"To what?" The sound of the day is an incomprehensible whirl around Sallyann's mind. It means nothing, but it smells of blood. "What?"

"He's coming!" Terror hisses.

Blinking, Sallyann tries to peer up the Mall. Thousands of young girls, uptowners and estate kids alike, have muscled their way forward to the front ranks of the bobbing crowd. Every female body is strained to the right, rising and falling like dancing snakes, trying to catch the first glimpse of the King of the Carnival. Silver balloons are released in a hectic cloud from the windows of a building opposite. Each one bears the grinning semblance of Dominic Blair. A sound comes down the Mall, passing along like a plague; the sound of female voices raised in adoring hysteria. The scream passes over and around Sallyann's body. She doesn't know if it is real or not, but is sure she can feel it slithering over her skin like electricity or a phantom cold.

First come the dancers. They are dressed in transparent body suits of a dark green colour that are covered with fluttering rags of greeny grey and black. They whirl with tambourines, a soundtrack issuing from the powerful tiny speakers adhering to their bodies. Samples of African drums are sequenced through; it seems to shake even the atoms of Sallyann's body. Next come a group of running children. Every race of the globe is represented. The children wear t-shirts advertising various soft and alcoholic drinks; adverts placed by the sponsors of Dominic Blair. They hand out glossy holographic pictures of Blair to anyone



whose reaching hands they can thrust them into. Then come a choir of neo-pagan singers, dressed in white robes, carrying palm leaves and crowned with ivy. They are singing about a king. The crowd seems to know the words; soon, they are chanting too. And finally, the great float of the King himself comes into view. It is high; a leviathan of a vehicle, its wheels covered by yards and yards of pale floating material, so that it appears to glide rather than roll its way slowly down the Drive. It is covered with dancers and singers, fire-eaters, jugglers, and mime artists. From their midst rises a dais, and upon the dais reposes the King of Carnival: Dominic Blair in person.

As the float crawls forward, the crowds close in behind it, following it in a great shambling mass. Just before the vehicle passes the place where Sallyann and Terror are standing, a flock of black and white doves is released from behind Blair's throne. The youth stands up, raises both hands, salutes the crowd. Around him, the air is full of the sound of wings. Jets of perfume and dry ice are exuded from behind the wheels of the float.

He is beautiful, Sallyann thinks. Blair's body is lithe and slim. He is naked to the waist but garlanded with flowers. His honey-blond hair cascades over his shoulders, his perfect face reposes in a blissful smile. That smile encompasses the whole world. For a moment, Sallyann understands why people love him. Then Mel's voice grates into her consciousness: "He was grown in a vat. No-one's that perfect. If they've made the breakthrough they claim they have, then they've used it to grow Dominic Blair!"

Is that possible?

Against her will, Sallyann is gathered up into the enormous crowd that is now following the float down to Ecstasy Common. She couldn't escape if she tried. She can't even move her arms. The crowd carries her forward. She tries to look for Terror, and one of the huge hoardings at the side of the mall catches her eyes: "The Temple is Built on Blood!" Terror is nowhere to be seen.

**A**t the Common, a fleet of ambulances, supplied by various Health companies, attend to those girls who have fainted and who can afford the fee. Others lie discarded like abused whores around the edge of the boundary wire. Once she has been disgorged through the gates of the Common, Sallyann is free to move around a little. The crowd disperses into the wide space of green, while the float is now a distant speck, travelling towards the gigantic sound stage further down the field. Numbly, Sallyann follows the movement of the crowd. She is tired. She is beyond caring that her friend has brought her to this. She cannot be angry, or even annoyed. The estate, the roof of the biker house, Danny, all seem unreal to her. She can't imagine how she'll ever find her way back.

There are far too many people present, all of them girls, for Sallyann to get close to the stage. Looking round, she can't see a single male in the crowd. She helps herself to a free drink from one of the gratuity stalls. It is thin, sour wine that stings her stomach immediately. As she drinks, a paper flyer blows along the ground and sticks to her leg. She bends to remove it, reads it in doing so. "The Temple is Built on Blood."

"What is happening to me?" she asks aloud.

Then the p.a. howls into life and a thirty-foot video screen fizzles into action at the back of the stage. At first it plays popular commercials, the top ten; best-selling confectionary, clothes, beers and footwear. Company anthems are echoed by the crowd; bodies swaying, arms held high. A black-skinned girl dances past and waves her arms at Sallyann.

"How are ya?" she yells.

Sallyann can't remember if she knows the girl or not. "The Temple is Built on Blood!" she says.

"Go with it!" advises the girl and whirls away.

On stage, the music has changed; throbbing New Age afro-jive. The crowd of women rocks to its rhythm. Sallyann drinks her wine, leaning against the booth. She says, "It's crazy," to the young woman dispensing the drinks. The woman pulls a sour face.

"Yeah."

Sallyann grins. "Ask me what I'm doing here!" she says.

The woman shakes her head. "Kid, I know what you're doing here! You want another drink or are you going to knock my booth over? Move along will ya!"

Sallyann sneers, gives the woman the finger and strolls away. "Fuck you!" she adds, turning back for a moment.

**N**ight has come. It seems to Sallyann as if she has been walking through the crowd for hours. Everyone is wearing the same face. Lights blaze upon the stage, fireworks splinter the sky behind it, cupped by laser streams. Aerial dancers, neon-glowing, haunt the dark spaces between the sparks. Lesser acts cavort and cry out to the music, melding one into another as they pass across the stage. Sallyann feels she must have had one plastic tumbler of foul wine from every booth on the site. Thoughtfully, she vomits where she stands and finds her head feels better afterwards. She thinks she sees some girls from Long Green Meadows a few feet away and tries to push through the crowd to reach them. She finds only strangers. I must go home, she thinks. How? How can I get home? She cannot see the edge of the Common from here, but if she keeps walking in a straight line, keeps pushing through, she must surely reach it. The crowd is getting tighter, a tense euphoria is building up. It is nearly time.

And then the stage goes black. Sallyann is caught in a knot of straining bodies, held upright, held motionless. She finds she can relax utterly, make no effort to stand, and not fall over. That, in itself, is almost comforting. Her head rests upon the shoulder of the girl next to her. She can actually see the stage from here. Gradually footlights flower to reveal a line of white-clad singers. A woman steps forward from the line to exhort the crowd. She appears uncannily like the woman who came to visit Mel from the Health Company, but now she is dressed in a long flowing gown, her red hair loose around her shoulders.

"Is this the new beginning?" she asks.

"Yes!" howl the crowd. "Yes!"

"Then sing it with me!" She shakes a jubilant fist, gesturing with her mike.

*And we have it now*

*The new day, the new day.*

*It's dawn for all of us again.*

Sing it, sisters, for ours is the power  
We are building the temple here  
Where the new age begins,  
And the temple is...

"Built on blood," Sallyann says. She doesn't hear the real words.

As the music swells to a deafening crescendo, Dominic Blair appears on a dais that rises through the floor of the stage. The crowd goes berserk. The night becomes the sound of female baying, nothing more. Sallyann finds her own throat is making a noise, low and desperate. Dominic Blair steps off the dais. He is clad only in a skirt of leaves, or feathers; perhaps both. His image fills the video screen at the back of the stage, his beatific smile, his gentle blue eyes. One of the singers hands him a mike and his voice too is beautiful.

"I am just for you," he says, and a despairing wail rises from the crowd. "Yours alone," he says, and blows kisses out into the night. "We are lucky to be alive this day, for we are the future."

Maybe you are, Sallyann thinks. Maybe. But I'm not. How can I be? What will I ever have? She wishes she could raise her voice to proclaim this undeniable truth, but even if she screamed until her throat bled she would be unable to make herself heard over the din of the crowd. Only Blair can do that, because he has the p.a. behind him. Blair begins to sing. It is a facile love song that every girl in the crowd will believe is addressed to her alone. The words wash over Sallyann's mind: love, eyes, kisses, tenderness, baby, darling, angel. She begins to giggle. "This is unreal," she says. No-one hears her.

On the screen, real tears have gathered in Blair's eyes as he approaches the climax of his song. His baby eyes beseech the crowd: love me, I am yours. As the final bars of music play, the crowd roars and screams. Blair throws back his head, arms outspread. He holds this pose for a moment and then shudders in a strange manner. Sallyann blinks. She realizes, with drunken slowness, that Dominic Blair has just exploded. She wants to laugh. It is quite true. Her eyes are not deceiving her. His chest has exploded outwards in a splendid arc of brilliant red. Is this part of the act? The crowd, strangely, do not react at first. They are still swaying and crooning, arms above their heads.

He's been shot, Sallyann thinks. He's been...

Instinctively, she forces her head around, seeking the place where the shot could have come from. Behind her, the skeletal form of the mixing desk gantry rears against the sky. It is utterly dark, but for the canvas-shielded cabin where the engineer is sitting. Too far away to see, and yet... It seems to her that a lithe female figure is clinging to the scaffolding, and even as she looks the figure becomes more distinct. Light reflects off the chrome embellishments of an electronic crossbow, which the woman is holding in one hand. Sallyann's mind clears with realization.

*She used an explosive bolt! Yes, of course! But why?*

The woman's face is wrapped in a dark-coloured scarf, but her hair is whipping free. There is something so familiar about her. Slowly, she turns her head towards Sallyann, unwraps the scarf from around her face. It is as if she is only a few feet away, her face large and pale. "The Temple is Built on Blood," she says to Sallyann. It is the voice of her mother.

Around Sallyann, the crowd is beginning to stir. Dominic Blair has fallen to the floor of the stage, nearly cut in two. His singers stand motionless behind him, their white robes splashed with red, as if they are only robots and someone has turned off their power. Then, a helicopter shudders its way through the night, and from its side a rope uncoils downwards towards the woman on the gantry. Hooking the crossbow over her shoulder, she reaches for the rope, wraps herself around it, and the helicopter purrs upwards. Clinging to the rope with one arm and both legs, the woman is borne slowly across the heads of the crowd.

*My mother? Is that my mother? No! Someone will have a gun. They'll kill her for this!*

But there are no guns. Arms are raised, a crooning sound issues from every female throat. The woman on the rope waves to them. They scream. Then, they storm the stage.

On the video screen, spattered with blood, is a freeze-frame of a commercial. "The Temple is Built on Blood!" The figures on the steps of the ruin are Maenads. They are killing a man. They are devouring him. Of course. The King is dead. Long live the King.

Sallyann does not remember much of how she got home that night. She thinks Terror found her again and carried her onto the tram. In the morning, Mel brings her a cup of de-caf to drink in bed, and Sallyann decides it is safer to believe she suffered a terrible hallucination the previous night. She says nothing to her mother about what she saw, although Mel does say, "I did warn you about going, Sal."

On t.v., psychologists talk about catharsis and release. Sallyann just wants to forget. She is afraid to watch the programmes about the Breakthrough.

Now, she is sitting on the roof of the biker house, sharing a couple of cans of beer with Danny. He is polishing a gun, lovingly inspecting all the parts, dismantling and reconstructing. There hasn't been a riot for over a week, which Danny suggests, in an oblique way, might be something to do with what happened at the Carnival.

"Coincidence," Sallyann says.

"Could be," Danny replies. "But don't you feel something different?"

"Something different where?"

He shrugs. "Dunno. In the air maybe."

Sallyann pauses with her can halfway to her mouth, sniffs. "Nah."

"How's your ma?" Danny asks.

Sallyann looks at him sharply. She hasn't told him everything. "Fine. Why?"

He grins. "Just wondered. She did business with Ziggy a few weeks back."

Ziggy is the most terrifying of Danny's tribe. He usually deals in weapons. "What kind of business?" Sallyann asks, needlessly.

Danny gives her a look, but doesn't answer. "Reckon you'll stay here now?" he says.

"Of course! Nothing's changed. Where else can we go. We'll always be here. Mel likes it here."

Danny shakes his head. "Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but I reckon she'll send you out, Sal. She's always

planned that. She'll send you out."

"Fuck! I won't go!" Sallyann yells. "Why would she do that? How can you know? I won't go."

"Don't be an asshole, Sal. Take it when it comes." He leans over to kiss her cheek. "There are always sacrifices. It doesn't matter whether the gods are tripping out in skirts and thunderbolts somewhere in someone's heaven, or getting you to buy a can of beer on t.v. There are gods, and they need blood to keep them sweet. We lost the way for a while, maybe. Don't you see? It's been a long time coming, but the show was well organized, down to the last detail."

"This is just another of your stupid theories!" Sallyann says, but suddenly she feels cold and exposed sitting there on the roof. "You're making it up!"

Danny shrugs, lovingly wipes a piece of gun with a piece of lint. "The King of Carnival is dead," he says, "but there'll be another one soon, you see. There'll always be a king now. The people need it. We've got our New Age whether we like it or not, but, you know, it's not that new, not that new at all."

Sallyann's heart has begun to beat quickly in her chest. "I want to move in with you," she says urgently. "Let me live here."

Danny raises one eyebrow. He is silent for a few moments, then says, "Sleep on it," and squints up at the sky.

Sallyann follows his gaze. "Shooting star!" she cries, pointing.

"Falling satellite," Danny says, "but perhaps it's the same thing."

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**Storm Constantine** was born in the Midlands in 1956 and educated at Stafford Art College. Her first novel, *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit*, appeared in 1987 and has since been followed by half a dozen others. Latterly, she has contributed to numerous anthologies, and "Built on Blood" is her second short story for us; the first was "Priest of Hands" (IZ 58).

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# Unstoppable Fate

## Peter Garratt talks to Tanith Lee

“**T**o wake and not know where, or who, you are, not even to know what you are – whether a thing with legs and arms, or a beast, or a brain in the hull of a great fish – that is a strange awakening. But after a while, uncurling in the darkness, I began to discover myself, and I was a woman.”

So began *The Birthgrave* (1975), the first novel by Tanith Lee aimed at adults. (She had already published work for children.) I’ve always wanted to start with something as good as that, and since I’m writing about Tanith Lee, why not cut out the middleman and start with the words themselves?

The name “Tanith Lee” normally evokes one of two reactions in sf or fantasy readers. The first is of the “yes, well, don’t think I’ve read much by her” variety. The second seems to be unqualified enthusiasm.

Despite hearing occasional reports of a writer of unclassifiable wonders, exotic and erotic, I belonged to the first group until 1986, when quite by chance I attended a convention where Tanith Lee was Guest of Honour. As well as an introduction to her books, it featured a radio play and an episode she wrote for the TV series *Blake’s 7*. It was one I hadn’t seen, from a point fairly late in the sequence, by which time a lot of less fanatical “7” devotees were losing interest, and I approached it with low expectations.

Then came the transformation. Surely, the last series of *Blake’s 7* hadn’t been much good, let alone as good as this? I hurried off to buy books and find out what else I’d been missing.

**T**anith Lee is a writer who doesn’t like to be categorized: it happens, and, as she puts it, she doesn’t rebel against it, but she does keep on writing things that don’t fit previous categories. Therefore, the one group of readers one can’t recommend her work to are those who wish to be told of books which are very like ones they have already enjoyed, who become addicted to authors whose fame stems from the number of variations they can improvise on predictable themes. Her latest novel, *Dark Dance*, could perhaps be described as a kind of Slipstream Modern Gothic, because, as Jonathan Kellerman put it about a very different modern Gothic book, it’s about a girl and a house: but that’s only an easy description.

That first adult novel, *The Birthgrave*, is a case in point. Its setting has many of the conventional trappings of adventure fantasy: a wild planet, filled, in the words of Marion Zimmer Bradley, “with rich, alien names, half-sketched barbarian societies, ruined cities, decadence and wonder.” The tribes mostly survive at a low technological level, ignorant of vast areas of their own planet, creeping around the ruins of an ancient, inconceivably greater civilization. The heroine awakens, not knowing who or what she is, and travels through these strange lands, having numberless adventures, following the great road of the ancients, the “High-Lord’s Way,” never turning back. She believes herself the subject of a curse, and the focus of strange powers. Towards the end, however, other, more rational explanations come into play, deftly slipping the book into the stream between fantasy and harder sf, though the two sequels (originally written as one volume) *Vazkor, Son of Vazkor*, and *Quest for the White Witch* (both 1978), revert in form to a clearer type of fantasy.

As in most similar work, the books avoid some, though only some, of the squalor of primitive societies, while endowing them with a beauty, grandeur, and fascination most such possessed only in imagination. They skirt many themes familiar to fantasy readers, such as the love/hate relationship between a woman from a sophisticated, declining civilization and the relative savage who has ripped her bodice, but they avoid cliché. Perhaps this is because of the insistent theme that the central characters do not turn back: therefore their emotions cannot be recycled, their mistakes and forced bad choices effortlessly undone. There is something raw and harsh, but not unkind, about the series: it has an epic quality but does not lose the sense of identification with the characters and feel for their world-view in the way that sometimes happens in epics.

**T**anith Lee is not fond of the label Fantasy: “I think ‘fantasy’ is the term I find myself least able to accept, because I always feel that if I am writing fantasy I am writing a historical novel – not that it should be categorized as a historical novel.”

Indeed, many of her works depict societies which have their roots in the

past more than the future. On the “Birthgrave” planet, the echoes are of the age after the fall of Rome, with some cultures retaining more of the old civilization and decadence than others, while nomads with veiled women pick their way through the ruins, and a few tribes in odd corners retain a shard of innocence.

The series called “The Secret Books of Paradys” has a very different historicity. These are volumes of linked stories (*The Book of the Damned* and *The Book of the Beast*, both published in 1988, and *The Book of the Dead*, forthcoming) set in a city which clearly resembles Paris, at various epochs from the Roman to the nearly-modern. According to Tanith, it both is and isn’t Paris:

“Yes, it’s Paris with Alsatian influences – as though Germany and France had run together at the edges and it’s also a play on words because it’s Paradise and a parody...I’m fascinated by Paris, so it has a strong influence on me.”

Her work ranges across the genres and genre boundaries. I’m not in a position to give a comprehensive bibliography: I haven’t read all of Tanith Lee’s books, and one that I have in an American imprint lists several titles I’ve never even seen in this country. Perhaps that’s not surprising: Lee is very prolific, and generally reckoned to be more popular in the US than here. I sometimes think she can write faster than I can read: indeed I’ve sometimes heard her describe simply sitting down and letting a novel or story pour out of her – a piece that simply insists on being written.

As well as the “Birthgrave” series, she has created other purely fictitious worlds, such as that of *The Storm Lord* (1976), and her celebrated “Flat Earth” series (*Night’s Master*, 1978, *Death’s Master*, 1979, *Delusion’s Master*, 1981, *Delirium’s Mistress*, 1986, etc.). The last-named series is not set in an alien world as such, being introduced in this manner: “In those days the world was flat, and demons dwelt beneath.” Whereas the “Birthgrave” world is tinged with clear, brutal conflicts reminiscent of the Greeks, this world is more deeply fantastical. *Vazkor*, for instance, has an Oedipal attitude to his apparent parents, but reverses that when he discovers he is not in fact their son, idolizing his dead father and loathing the birth-mother who has

abandoned him. The "Flat Earth" series is closer to the Celtic weirdness of *The Mabinogion*: there is far more magic in the world beneath which demons dwell, many more strange transformations and uncanny bargains.

Lee's demons are not all creatures of total evil: nor indeed are they all male. She has a collection out from The Women's Press, appropriately entitled *Women as Demons* (1989), and subtitled "The Male Perception of Women through Space and Time." The periods range from late Roman and clannish Celtic, nod towards traditional mediaeval fantasy settings, include the early part of this century and then move on to both sophisticated and savage futures. Probably my favourite story is "The Unrequited Glove," in form a fairly traditional supernatural tale, where an unlovable golden-boy lover is driven to distraction by the eponymous accessory.

For Lee's work is often slyly humorous, but never totally escapist. It isn't unremittingly downbeat, and part of the attraction for me is that it often isn't possible to predict the outcome from the general tone, but there are no easy or improbable escapes. Gods may emerge from machines, but they can be even less helpful than those of Euripides. No one expresses more clearly the dilemma, for instance, of a woman inflicted with an unwanted pregnancy, perhaps as a result of rape or a forbidden seduction: "It seemed I had nothing left, only these trivial pieces of power...which came with hate, and grew in me day by day like a cancer. And that other cancer he had left in me, which grew also." And: "More than ever...the thing in my womb seemed an imposition, something nailed onto my own self, thrusting out, taking possession; a haunting" (*The Birthgrave*).

Evil is never far away, but not in the clichéd form fantasists still often get away with presenting, a simple external matter of something fanged and winged gibbering away somewhere dark and nearby. (Though with Lee, there might be one or two of those. You simply never know with her.)

A huge range of cultures influence the books. *Tamastara, or The Indian Nights* (1984) is a collection of stories with Indian themes (some set in the future.) *Sung in Shadow* (1983) is Lee's version of the Romeo and Juliet story, in a slightly different version of Renaissance Italy. *Sabella, or The Blood Stone* (1980) is about a highly erotic vampire: typically depicted with a good deal of sympathy. (And perhaps an influence on a modern generation of sympathetic vampires, such as Jack Yeovil's celebrated Genevieve Dieudonné in the "Warhammer" books.)

My own view is that in this wide range of work, the fantasies seldom fully recapture the intensity and brilliance of *The Birthgrave*. However, this does not mean that Lee's work as a whole has gone backward, but that much of the best of her later material would be better categorized as closer to science fiction. *Days of Grass* (1985) has humans in hiding from mysterious enemies who have taken over the Earth. "Crying in the Rain," the lead story in the first *Other Edens* anthology, was apparently written just after the Chernobyl disaster.

But my own favourite is *The Silver Metal Lover* (1982). This is a tale of near-future gilded youth, the rich who are always with us. Jane, the narrator, has been raised in an automated home to be the perfect child. She has six friends, but only one is at all reliable. Wary of people, she falls in love with SILVER (Silver Ionized Locomotive Versimulated Electronic Robot), created to be the ideal entertainer for the jaded wealthy. They go to live in a rundown area of the city, and make friends with a white cat. Perhaps it can be anticipated that the authorities will disapprove of this rebellion and try to run their blades into the eponymous android, but the ending is pure Tanith Lee, and I defy anyone to predict it. The novel is both moving and slyly humorous, as when Jane's beautiful but neurotic actress friend Egyptia, waiting for an audition, is herself mistaken for one of the new, perfect robots.

With *The Silver Metal Lover* being on my top ten of all-time favourite sf novels, it was with mixed feelings that I greeted the chance to interview Tanith Lee, and the arrival of her latest novel, *Dark Dance*, first of the "Blood Opera" sequence. I tend not to be enthusiastic about novels that come in sequences.

*Dark Dance* begins rather slowly. Unusually for Lee, it has a contemporary, real-world setting. We meet Rachaela, a young woman who lives a quiet life, working in a bookshop. Not much happens to her, until she rejects an invitation to stay with some mysterious apparent relatives, the Scarabae family. Things start to go wrong: Rachaela loses her flat, then her job. She decides she has nothing to lose by visiting the Scarabae, though even then, she suspects they may be behind her misfortunes.

Rachaela journeys to the remote Gothic home of the Scarabae. Naturally, it is in wild country, atop a cliff. There is no modern transport, and the nearest village is eight miles away. There is nothing indisputably fantastic in the book, save perhaps the existence of a house in this overcrowded island so far from any other dwelling! No holiday camp or caravan park intrudes on the inhabitants' solitude.

It's possible that the Scarabae are vampires: at times they behave as though they are, or imply they are, but it's never definite, and sometimes Rachaela wonders if they know themselves. What is certain is that they are different: mostly very old, eccentric, almost demented; never openly menacing, but not easy to lay one's head among. But the house is the real star of the book: vast and rambling, it is both colourful and claustrophobic. Every window is decorated, and therefore occluded, with beautiful stained glass. The scenes are Biblical in inspiration, but each is altered, disturbing, not quite holy: as in one where Abel appears to be killing Cain. It is a house only Tanith Lee could have created. Later, Rachaela, abused and incestuously pregnant, flees the place with a huge effort, and lives again for a while in the "real" world; a world almost as unwelcoming as that of the Scarabae: but eventually she is drawn back...

I liked the book. It has all of the important Lee elements: colour, strangeness, sensuousness, eroticism, disturbing things, but also compassion and even realism. Yet it is not very reminiscent of her earlier work: there are new departures.

It was therefore in a fairly confident mood that I set out to interview Tanith Lee, although I hadn't quite finished *Dark Dance*, reaching the last page as the tube pulled into her station. However, Tanith is a person around whom strange occurrences accumulate, and this was Friday the 13th. I had a lot of difficulty finding the Macdonald office, in the course of searching for which I tripped on a pot-hole in the road big enough to accommodate a colony of medium-sized demons, and fell flat on my face. I didn't think my tape-recorder was damaged, but somehow it failed to record part of the interview. (Though this may have been my fault, and anyway we managed to re-record.)

It's difficult to describe Tanith Lee. Her publicity photos could almost be of a character from a fantasy, rather than the author. For instance the pictures on the backs of the "Books of Paradys" present her in an exotic jewelled head-dress which she certainly doesn't wear in person to interviews. Though she has always seemed both outgoing and co-operative when I have met her, her personal appearances are rare, her attendances at conventions, book-signings, and the rest of the self-publicity circuit are few. I once heard her asked if "Tanith Lee" was her real name, and she replied enigmatically that "Tanith" was on her birth certificate.

She seems to write because she writes, not merely for a living or as a short-cut to getting attention. This started when she was at school: "When I was about six, they asked, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'"



and I said I wanted to be an actress. So that was what I wanted to be, but I didn't learn to read until I was nearly eight, and once I could read I started to write. I think now I'm very slightly dyslexic, because I tend to do the classic things dyslexic people do, like putting words the wrong way round in front of another one, and seeing words sometimes in the wrong position."

Nowadays, as I had supposed, she writes extremely fast: "I obviously have to revise sometimes, and occasionally I get blocked, but when it's coming, which most of the time, thank goodness, it is, it simply flows out of me and I write so fast that I can't read my own writing." She doesn't use a word processor.

Similarly, she seldom decides, as some people might, that a particular theme is worth pursuing, and therefore she ought to write a novel on it. "I sometimes sit down and say – now the idea that's coming too me, this spore that's in my brain is with this particular thing, let me begin and see what happens. I used simply to begin. I would have a few images, a few ideas, a few sensations, and I would work on those. Now I tend to discuss a lot of what I do beforehand with my partner John Kaiine, and he's my ideas man." He is also a writer: I asked if it was through ignorance that I hadn't heard of him.

"You probably haven't seen the relevant things yet, but he's excellent at coming up with ideas, and he will often... for example, in *Dark Dance*, all I had was a girl, a strange family, and stained-glass windows, but as I went through the book occasionally I would go to him and say, 'What do you feel would work here?' And he would come up with something which invariably I would be able to use."

Getting on to *Dark Dance* itself: "I see it as a contemporary sort of novel really, with a strong element of the peculiar. There are sequences which are in the central here-and-now, and sequences in the house which have elements of the past and uncivilizations and intense strangeness."

It's not likely that, like Ivana Trump, she will be accused of producing an autobiographical novel. Even so: "Who knows, it may be happening somewhere at this very minute. I have a terrible suspicion, and I hope they won't have me killed if I'm right, that there are Scarabae: very powerful, insidiously powerful, slightly spiritually bizarre people, families somewhere who have these powers and abilities and probably live in remote parts as hermits."

I learned a little about the forthcoming second book, *Personal Darkness*, which would be hard to discuss without giving away too much about the ending of this one. In fact, though, it's



Tanith Lee

not the next due out. Typically, she has two books in press. One is *The Book of the Dead*, the third of the "Secret Books of Paradys" (HarperCollins) – "a book of short stories set round a graveyard, discovering things about the people who are buried there: women who turn into vampire owls and so on."

The other is *Heart-Beast* (Headline), just hitting the shelves as I finish this article. "This is a werewolf book. I wrote a werewolf book some years ago called *Lycanthia*, and this is very different." Like *The Birthgrave*, this new book has a Greek feel. The central character kills his father, and is given a mysterious diamond which brings on

monster characteristics. "There is a definite feeling of Fate. Certain things happen in *Heart-Beast* which are not really explainable, and are in some ways non-sensible, and they are deliberately so, because I wanted there to be a feeling of unstoppable Fate."

This has not been an unbiased discussion of Tanith Lee. Like most of her regular readers, I now show unqualified enthusiasm. What I do hope I have achieved, is to guide *Interzone* readers towards works of hers they will enjoy. And of course there are other things, newer and perhaps even stranger, coming out as I write.

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# Ansible Link

## David Langford



Australians call it the Cultural Gringe, the barely conscious acceptance that one's home ground is somehow inferior. Presumably this is why, on first reading, I vaguely thought it natural that Frank Muir's monumental *Oxford Book of Humorous Prose* should omit all the favourite humorists of sf/fantasy. Token fantasies by Saki and Wells, but no Adams, Collier, Lafferty, Pratchett, Rankin, Shaw, Sheekley, Sladek... Then we reach page 970 and: "In the category of Second World War novels it is difficult to think of a book by an American, or any other author, which has been as widely read internationally and as much admired... as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*." Low-browed sf readers might have found it fairly easy to think of *Slaughterhouse 5*. But fear not, for Muir gives plenty of space to such almost legendarily unfunny humorists as Petroleum V. Nasby.

### The Lunatics of Terra

Edgar Rice Burroughs, having achieved immortality as Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc, is becoming litigious – suing *Vogue* magazine for wicked use of "trademark images" without authorization. According to *SFC*, this shocking crime consisted of a feature "showing lots of pictures of Tarzan and scantily clad Jane-clones." A million dollars in damages is being asked. I have this fantasy of some national newspaper running pictures of a major M4 pile-up, replete with tortured metal and spurting arterial blood, and shortly afterwards being sued for its blatant misappropriation of trademark images owned by J.G. Ballard Ltd.

Arthur C. Clarke is not best known as a poet, but indefatigable researcher Steve Sneyd has dug up Clarke's 1938 essay on sf poetry and 1939 poem "The Twilight of a Sun" (from contemporary fanzines) and published them as a chapbook: £1 to Hilltop Press, 4 Nowell Place, Almond-bury, Huddersfield, HD5 8PB. "The Intellect, pure, unalloyed, on courage eternally buoyed, Will span the vast gulfs of the void and... H'mm.

Gordon Dickson has surprised me. On seeing his fantasy *The Dragon Knight*, a (regrettably inferior) sequel to the 1976 *The Dragon and the George*, I speculated in print that Dickson would be slaying a few copy-editors – since the name of an important talking wolf, "Aragh" in the earlier book, had become "Aargh" throughout. But it's all deliberate:

Dickson writes in *SFC* that he consulted "Michigan's leading academic researcher and writer on the wolf" for correct snarl-phonetics, and made the change deliberately to indicate a wolf's own pronunciation. Unfortunately this pedantic research leads to an inescapably silly name... but I suppose Dickson was lucky the wolf expert didn't insist that it should be spelt and pronounced (say) "Woof."

Andy Porter, whose *SF Chronicle* is a nifty US news magazine occasionally ransacked for this page, wrote majestically in the June issue: "Let our votes for the Hugo Awards show our belief, unlike so many places I could name, in ballots, not bullets." Ever since, I've been trying to think of a way to fill in the Hugo voting form that could indicate a belief in bullets, not ballots... (*SFC* costs £25/year – to Algol Press c/o 69 Barry Rd, Carnoustie, Angus, DD7 7QQ.)

Jerry Pournelle was reckoned the bad sight of the BBC's generally excellent series about the impact of science, *Pandora's Box*. With Larry Niven as silent partner, he delivered the full Niven/Pournelle version of "how we licked the evil empire in Larry's living room," indicating that not only had the intrepid pair dreamed up SDI/Star Wars but written President Reagan's speech for him. "He made it sound as if Reagan's cabinet, the State Department, the whole of RAND and the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory had all spent the evening in Niven's living room, being set straight by these fast-lane thinkers," was one grumpy comment. While Pournelle (who according to many seemed a shade off-sober) got increasingly manic and was eventually pictured wagging his joystick and zapping incoming communist missiles at a computer-game display, Niven mysteriously failed to move or speak throughout the performance; some were led to conjecture that he was a life-sized photograph.

### Infinitely Improbable

*SF Encyclopaedia Update*: my mole within the heavily fortified editorial defences reports that publishers Little, Brown have decided the new edition will not contain any pictures. "The idea is to go for a sort of super-sophisticated Oxford University Press look." And, no doubt, to save a few bob.

Bestsellers were much talked about in June when *The Observer* ran a piece on

hardback chart-toppers that few people bought, mentioning that in the current week only the top-selling novel had actually cleared over 1,000 copies. This was Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods* (some 4,000 sales that week), which says much for the commercial impact of John Clute's reviews. Further down the charts, Robert Rankin's editor made a mordant point in *The Bookseller*: "When I told [Rankin] that the book at number 70 in last week's *Sunday Times/Bookwatch* bestseller list had a total sale of 0 copies, he wanted to know why his book (*They Came and Ate Us*) isn't in at number 70 as well, since it has sold 0 copies in a far more distinguished and entertaining manner."

*Far Point* magazine, recently plugged by that chap who writes the editorials, has been returning MSS unread – since editor Charlie Rigby's employers have sent him overseas. Masterful inactivity will prevail until around December.

More Awards: the Ditmar for best Australian sf novel went to Terry Dowling's *Wormwood*, and *Terminator II* received the SFFWA's new Bradbury award for best dramatic script. SFFWA awards are usually called Nebulas, but there has been strife about this one. Apparently the membership voted unequivocally against a Nebula for Dramatic Presentation, whereupon SFFWA President Ben Bova decided unilaterally to institute an award anyway (with the decision being made by a hand-picked committee to ensure that the irritated membership couldn't all vote for "No Award").

The *SF Foundation*, that excellent institution and research library which was being driven out into the snow by cruel Sir Jasper at the Polytechnic of East London (itself suffering from our government's aversion to spending money on education, research, science fiction, science or books), might now be moving north to the "interested" University of Liverpool.

Ten Years Ago... Tanith Lee explained in a convention speech how she'd caused several Israeli wars; Brian Aldiss was clobbered by nemesis when his *Daily Telegraph* "mini-sagas" (stories of exactly 50 words) competition brought in 33,000 entries for him to judge, his favourite being one from Princess Margaret which disclosed royalty's inability to count accurately to 50; and the fabled Lionel Fanthorpe scored a media first by arm-wrestling on Radio 4.

# Ladies Night at the OK Corral

Charles Sheffield

**N**o one was ready to admit it. That would be contrary to tradition. Yet the excitement sparked and snapped and jumped from man to man like an invisible electric discharge.

One more night. Then one more day. And then...

Tom Dainty could smell it in the dust and taste it in the lowland pollen. He could feel it in the shiver of the steers as they lifted their polled heads to stare east. He could hear it in Billy Overton's voice as the pair of them drove the last of the pick-up trucks to close the circle around the camp.

The younger man was staring to the sky, where a scattering of dark clouds formed crimson-edged lacunae on the glowing western horizon.

"Gonna be perfect tonight. Cold and clear. Just the way's s'posed to be. Gonna be starlight, gonna be moonlight." Billy muttered to himself, so that Tom could only just hear him over the lowing of the settling herd, and he slapped his grimy hands together. "Then hot water, gallons and gallons, enough to splash an' roll an' wallow. Ice an' gin an' a fancy glass."

Tom smiled to himself. Subject to subject, hopping from tonight to tomorrow night without a pause. Sublimation, was it called? You talked about one thing, to stop you talking about what was really on your mind?

On Billy's mind. On Tom's mind. On everyone's mind. But tradition ruled. There was a right time for such talk. It wasn't yet.

Tradition ruled, and it took precedence over convenience. Hot water and ice and drinks would come – eventually. At the moment it was only in Billy's imagination, and meanwhile Dirty Dave Jorgensen and Wilbur Jones were crouched at the centre of the camp, cussing and blowing and coughing and having a hard old time of it. The campfire was acting flirtatious, flaring up bright for a minute, then retreating to a dull sullen jumble of half-charred sticks.

Half a pint of gasoline, from any one of the trucks. That would fix it in a second...but not tonight. Tonight everything had to be done just so.

Tom checked the tyres of the truck, lingering after Billy had headed for the middle of camp. The tyres were fine. He'd known they would be. He remained on the perimeter, deliberately holding himself outside the action. He was as excited as Billy Overton, thinking about tomorrow (Billy was the youngest; no matter how long he aged, he'd always be the youngest).

But a dozen years of round-up had taught Tom pati-

ence. More than patience. Now he could savour the last day, push the thought of tomorrow to the back of his head and let its promise simmer there with the lid on.

He slowly straightened and turned around. The steers were quiet, settled for the night. Clear and cold. Billy was right about that. And he was going to be right about the stars, too. Tom couldn't see more than three or four, but give it ten minutes and the sky would be full. The mountains far to the west were snapping shut on the last of the sun. Soon all Tom could see were sky strata of red and black. They fused as he watched to a broad foreshortened sheet of greyish pink.

He turned farther, to gaze due east. *That way*, down the hill, less than a day's drive away. If he just opened a truck up to full throttle...

But it had to be twenty hours, not two. So stop thinking about what can't be.

Tom Dainty turned his eyes back to the camp. Wilbur and Dave, black moving shadows now, had finally got it right. The wood of the fire, carried seven hundred miles just for tonight, was throwing flames four feet high. Jackson would already be hovering by it, waiting for the moment when the wood turned from heart-red to orange and the beans and bacon and big pot of cold water could go on. For the past fifty-nine nights Jackson had been a fanatic about timing, you could set your watch by when he called chow-time. But tonight it would be ready when he said it was done. No promises.

Tom decided that he had half an hour, maybe more. Time to stroll right round the herd and check that the electrostatic pen was intact.

It would be. It always was. But he wanted that little bit of time for himself, to recall Cindy as he had seen her two months ago, the look and the feel and the smell of her. Then he'd be ready to share thoughts. He set off, ambling away on a lop-sided figure-eight through the sage and boot-snaring brush. In the moonless night he lost track of distance and direction. Only when a chaparral cock flew right up from under his foot, and Tom heard but didn't see the ground cuckoo as it flew inches from his face, did he realize that it was time to turn back.

There was no danger of getting lost. The trucks were dark crouch-backed monsters threatening the camp at their centre, flickering flame shadows pointing the way toward it. The smell of frying bacon would have been a good enough beacon, even without the fire.

As Tom approached he heard Jackson's whistle. He had timed his return just right. The cook was bending over the fire, to fling a double handful of ground coffee into the pot. Beans and corn and bacon were already off, steaming and smoking on the ground next to a black iron pot of molasses.

Tom saw the five others already around the fire. He was last man in, and the molasses was almost gone. That was fine with Tom. He hated the gooey sweet-tar taste of it, and his spoon's dip into the pot was no more than a required gesture. He took his plate four steps from the fire and sat cross-legged on the ground next to Griff.

The old man wasn't eating. He was staring bent-backed into the flames and fiddling with a scrap of flimsy paper held in a clump of gnarled fingers.

*Hand-rolling*, thought Tom. Showing off. Tradition or not, here was something none of the others on the round-up knew how to do. Griff claimed to have learned it back when it was *real*, something people did every day.

With everything ready, the old man was in no hurry. Tom had been through the experience a dozen times before, but even a first-timer like Billy Overton knew enough not to push on Griff. Sitting on the other side of Tom, young Billy seemed to be holding his breath, ready to burst with anticipation; but he did not make a sound.

"So here we are," said Griff at last. "Last night." He lit his hand-made cigarette with a glowing splinter snagged from the edge of the fire. "Last night of the round-up. This time tomorrow we'll be home. Back with our sweethearts."

"Mmm." It was more a collective sigh than an individual voice.

"But you know" – slow, luxurious draw, smoke to the bottom of the lungs – "it wasn't always this way. Was a time, before we had all that stuff" – the scornful jerk of the thumb into darkness, but every man knew it was directed at the circle of trucks – "was a time when we didn't leave our loved ones behind. They came right along with us. Our partners. Worked side by side with the men, hard as we worked. Faced danger when we did. Sweated if we sweated, went thirsty when we couldn't find water. Faced wolves and bears and rattlers, right alongside us. Partners."

The circle of heads nodded. Including Tom. Part of him said that this was just ritual, the Time of Privilege when the oldest man spoke. Because old as he was, and no one knew quite how old, Griff sure wasn't ancient enough to remember the time when the mothers and grandmothers of Cindy and Lucille and Mandy and Sue had come out on the round-up themselves. Another part of Tom's brain boggled at the very thought, the notion that such perfect perfumed bodies would be exposed to the dirt and wind and sun and harsh living of the round-up. And yet somehow he believed Griff. Wasn't that the whole point of ritual, of faith itself? That belief transcended logic?

"Tell us about it, Griff." Tom's voice was as loud as anyone's.

And Griff told, while the breeze came colder from the hills and the unsweetened coffee simmered blacker and smokier and stronger, and the fire sank down to a few raccoon eyes of glowing embers. As the tale wound to its end there was one interruption,

a far-off, delirious chortle of torment and madness. Griff paused with his head on one side, listening for an answering echo of derangement, long after the first sound had vanished.

"Chaco wolf." He flicked a half-inch cigarette stub into the dying fire. "Not supposed to come this far north, but I guess he don't know that. Hear one, has to be others. We'll set watch on the pens tonight. Makes you glad, don't it, that *they're* safe, back in town."

It made them glad, and in more than one way. Griff did not say it, but that menacing, distant howl in the darkness made the perfect ending for the last night of round-up.

By mid-afternoon perfection was long gone. Morning had brought in a sudden gusting wind from the west. Unexpected rain came with it, lashing at the herd and its guarding convoy of trucks. Visibility dropped to thirty or forty yards. The ground became sodden and slippery. It would be easy to lose a steer in the squalls and rain-fed arroyos, and blemish a perfect no-loss record.

No one wanted that. The pace slowed. Arrival in town was delayed, closer to sunset than midday.

But in a way, Tom thought, as they coaxed the last of the herd toward the corral, that final contrast added another touch of perfection. Sixty days on the trail, liquor-free and celibate, without a chance for a hot bath or a change of clothes, and with only a hard bedroll to sleep on. Then you arrive home in the middle of a freak storm, alert and skin-soaked and shivering...

...and know that the best time lies right ahead.

Griff had already gone in to report, and with his departure the mood of the group changed. The other five worked together to check the last steer and snag the section closed, then went right to the bath house. Jackson, first man there, threw the door open. Hot steamy air, fragrant with soap, hit them like a breath of heaven.

"Think this time I'm gonna try me a little *change*." Wilbur Jones stood in the fourth shower stall down from Tom, waiting for the rush of water to begin. The shower room was huge, big enough for forty men, so Wilbur raised his voice to make sure that Dirty Dave way down at the far end could hear him. "Think tonight I'll start by payin' me a little visit to *Lucille*."

"You stork-legged whorin' son of a chaco bitch." The voice came from someone invisible through the steam. "Whyn't you try'n do that, Will Jones? – if you think she'll let you. An' while you're at it I'll cut me a slice of Mandy. Show her what a real man is like."

"Do it." Wilbur's voice rose half an octave. "If you think you're tall enough to reach. After all you got to offer, Lucille an' Mandy'll *both* know I'm King Stud."

"Lucille wouldn't look at you if you was last man on earth."

"Which mebbe I'm gonna be, you sawn-off peanut. I'm youngern' you, someday they'll *all* be mine."

"Yeah. All yours – like the way they all belong to Griff? Nothin' but sniff an' memories. You sure you want *that*, King Stud?" And Jorgensen began to sing, in the smooth melodious baritone that no one ever heard out on the trail, "Ain't it a drag, *bein' old*."

It was the same old game, but of course young Billy

had never heard it before. He stood in the next stall to Tom, expectant face upturned, committing every line to memory. His grin was so wide that Tom felt he ought to reach over and turn the shower off, before Billy was hit and choked by a sudden torrent.

"Is Wilbur really King Stud?" Billy asked.

"If you believe him, he is. But it's none of my business. None of yours either." But Tom had his suspicions. He had seen Mandy after she had been with Wilbur, and her springy walk suggested someone with a good deal of zip left in her. Whereas Lucille, after a night with little Dave, walked rubber-legged and wobble-kneed.

Tom wasn't about to share those thoughts with Billy, because one thing was certain: it was no business of Billy's. Or of Tom's. He had no interest in Mandy, or Lucille, or any of the others. Except one.

A flood of water past his ears, hot as he could stand it, cut him off from Billy and the others. As the grime of sixty days on the trail was sluiced off him he went into his own private world. Would she have changed while he had been away on round-up? Sixty days was a long time. Hundreds of other men had been through town. Cindy would not have been *faithful* to him, that was a ridiculous idea. It wasn't allowed, and he didn't expect it. But would she remember him, and welcome him, the way that he was ready to welcome her?

He soaped and lathered and rubbed until every inch of skin was bright pink. He dried himself just as thoroughly. He shaved slowly and carefully, and took an unnatural interest in the way that Jackson trimmed the hair from over his ears and razor-cut the back to make a clean line at the nape of his neck. Clean pants, socks, and checkered shirt were waiting. High-heeled spurred boots of black leather, new-polished to a midnight glimmer. Best string-tie, with its turquoise and silver draw. He could see Billy watching, mimicking, taking his cues from Tom as a cool, experienced operator. If only Billy knew what Tom was like inside, as nervous as a beginner...

And finally there was nothing more to be done, no excuses left for delay. Tom took a deep breath, glanced at himself in the mirror one more time, and joined the line. There was a roaring in his ears, like a rain-fed creek after a downpour. The sound of rushing hormones. Two more minutes. Jackson and Billy were on his left, Wilbur and Dave to the right. Griff, a couple of paces in front, was resplendent in a loose shirt of maroon velvet and a white silk cravat. He inspected the others as they appeared. He nodded.

"You'll do." He reached for the handles, paused deliberately for a long few seconds, and swung open the double wooden doors. "So. Shall we join the ladies?"

**T**hey were standing together in a group at the other end of the room, next to a long table covered with bottles, glasses, and bowls of snacks. Tom heard his own boots resounding on the smooth planked floor. He knew vaguely that the other men walked with him, stride for stride. He didn't see them. He didn't see anything – except Cindy.

She looked wonderful, eyes bright and alert, brown hair brushed to a rich gloss. And she didn't give any of the other men a moment's glance. As Tom advanced into the room her eyes fixed on him and she came

straight to meet him. He put his arms around her. As he rested his head against her neck and shoulder he knew that he was home again.

He was stroking the back of her neck and admiring the yellow ribbons in her hair – brand-new ones, right out of the box – when she took hold of his sleeve and began to pull him gently towards the door.

"Hey!" He was laughing, allowing himself to be towed along into one of the private rooms. "Impatience. Don't I even get a drink first?"

Cindy gave him a knowing glance from the corner of her brown eyes.

"Oh, all right." Tom couldn't pretend he wasn't ready, as ready as she was. "I guess we got lots of time for drinking – later."

As he closed the door he turned on all the lights in the room. He didn't just want to *feel* Cindy, he wanted to see her and admire her. Because even now, even after twelve years, there was the strange *other* memory that had to be banished.

Cindy was waiting, motionless, as though she understood his problem exactly. He ran his hand along her silky, swelling flank, and leaned close to inhale the familiar, exciting perfume of her skin.

*This* was reality. The others were only a bad dream, slowly fading year after year. One day their very memory would vanish. Already he found it harder and harder to believe that he had done it with the others – had even claimed to have enjoyed it with them, back when it was safe, back before the Purge.

But the nightmare floated on, deep in his mind. It had been pushed under, day after day and year after year, yet it rose again and again like a long-drowned corpse.

*The pale, hairless bodies, thick with fat, plastic like dough under the pressure of his fingers. The taloned hands, spider-fingered, invading without hesitation or permission the most private parts of his body. Great legs, longer than the body itself, tightening around him, dragging him forward into that insatiable female maw, while other lips, smeared to a crimson gash with perfumed grease, slobbered against his face or grinned in triumph at his capture.*

Tom shivered and laid his head against Cindy's firm-muscled shoulder. *This* was what he needed. The touch of her was the only certain cure. After a few moments the tremble in his own body eased. He knew it was going to be all right.

He stroked her long, graceful neck and moved into position behind her, while she raised and swished her ribboned tail. He felt its rough caress across his cheek.

"All right," he whispered. "All right." He thrust forward, and sighed at the first release of tension.

Better than all right. Perfect. *Partners.*

As she turned around to nuzzle his neck, he groaned with pleasure and slipped a cube of sugar into her soft-lipped mouth.

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**Charles Sheffield** was born in Britain and gained a PhD in theoretical physics from Cambridge University. He has lived for many years in the USA, where he became president of the American Astronautical Society and published his first science-fiction novel, *Sight of Proteus*, in 1978. More than a dozen other books have appeared since, the most recent being *Cold as Ice* (reviewed by John Clute in IZ 61).

# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

It's hard to see why not everyone's left gibbering by Michael Tolkin's *The Rapture*, regardless of their personal take on the premise. If you're not persuadable that the last days actually are upon us, the opportunity to view the world through the eyes of those who believe gets scarier still – particularly with the accompanying awareness that what you're seeing is how reality genuinely looks to a vast number of people, and if God can tell them to shoot their firstborn He can just as persuasively tell them to shoot yours, or you, or twenty-two strangers in a mall in Evanstown. But the shivers run a lot deeper even than that. One, a significant number of the faithful have greeted this movie, ending and all, as a positive advertisement for their creed, which means they must feel pretty comfortable with the movie's modest argument that the old man's politics are maybe a bit BC. Two, the reason this material, so familiar inside the culture, seems so strange and shocking on the screen is that the interests of the believing community are too powerful to risk offending with anything more than this finely-tuned, irony-free, judge-as-you-will tiptoe through the eggshells. And three, and the principal thing that made me go AAKH when the lady behind tapped me on the shoulder to tell me I was leaning on her coat, is the horrifying discovery that you've been to these appalling places willingly, over and over, and that half the world has been there with you.

For the mistake, I think, is to see *The Rapture* as simply a film about religion. On those terms alone, it's at best a partial success. Theologically, it hasn't much more to say about the neoChristian God than that anyone who needs to be loved that much is a severely hungup guy and a deeply bad-news relationship. Psychologically, it does give a well-observed portrait of the believer and her community, and particularly of their patient interaction with the sneering faithless; but though the heroine's reality-starved life before conversion is evocatively sketched at work and play, the transformation itself occurs in a cut rather than live on the screen, and leaves the viewer no wiser about how what by LA stan-

dards is a largely rational person can mutate into a terrifyingly happy-eyed godbotherer. And politically, the movie has no choice but to cut a neat dotted line round the whole fundamentalist movement and detach it from any suggestion of a social and political context – accepting without challenge the assumption that there is no politics but divinely-ordained morality, and that that morality consists solely in engineering the truth of the Bible in a society reducible to a collection of individual souls.

But religion isn't really the film's bottom line, and it's certainly not its most thoughtful or unsettling theme. No less than *The Player*, though clearly less directly, (*The Rapture* is a film about Hollywood. Unlike *The Player*, however, it's a film that resists to the last the easy devices of irony; and the aspect of Hollywood it lays bare is not here the soft, unresisting target of the industry's own contemporary Babylon, or even the disconnected condition of LA person at large, but the far more disturbing subject of the dreams that lurk beneath the surface of popular cinema, and the psychological and spiritual needs of the audience that consumes them. You have to be blind in both eyes not to spot that *The Rapture* is a semi-conscious respray of *Close Encounters* (a film Tolkin's acknowledged as a personal landmark), and a *de facto* reflection on its long line of neofundamentalist derivatives from *Cocoon* to *Ghost*: all those movies where selected cynics experience the blinding irruption of transcendence into their lives, and spend the rest of the picture battling for faith against the superior forces of doubt and ridicule before their ultimate vindication at the end of things, rising bodily into the sky towards a light that purges away sin and leaves the feckless unbelievers behind to grub forever in the darkness. In all these movies, the cast is polarized with blazing simplicity into the saved and the damned, not in the more regular terms of straight good and evil, but on the subtler differential of whether they believe – with the sly implication for the audience, of course, that if they don't suspend their disbelief in this pile of cow's twos to the point of strangulation they'll be

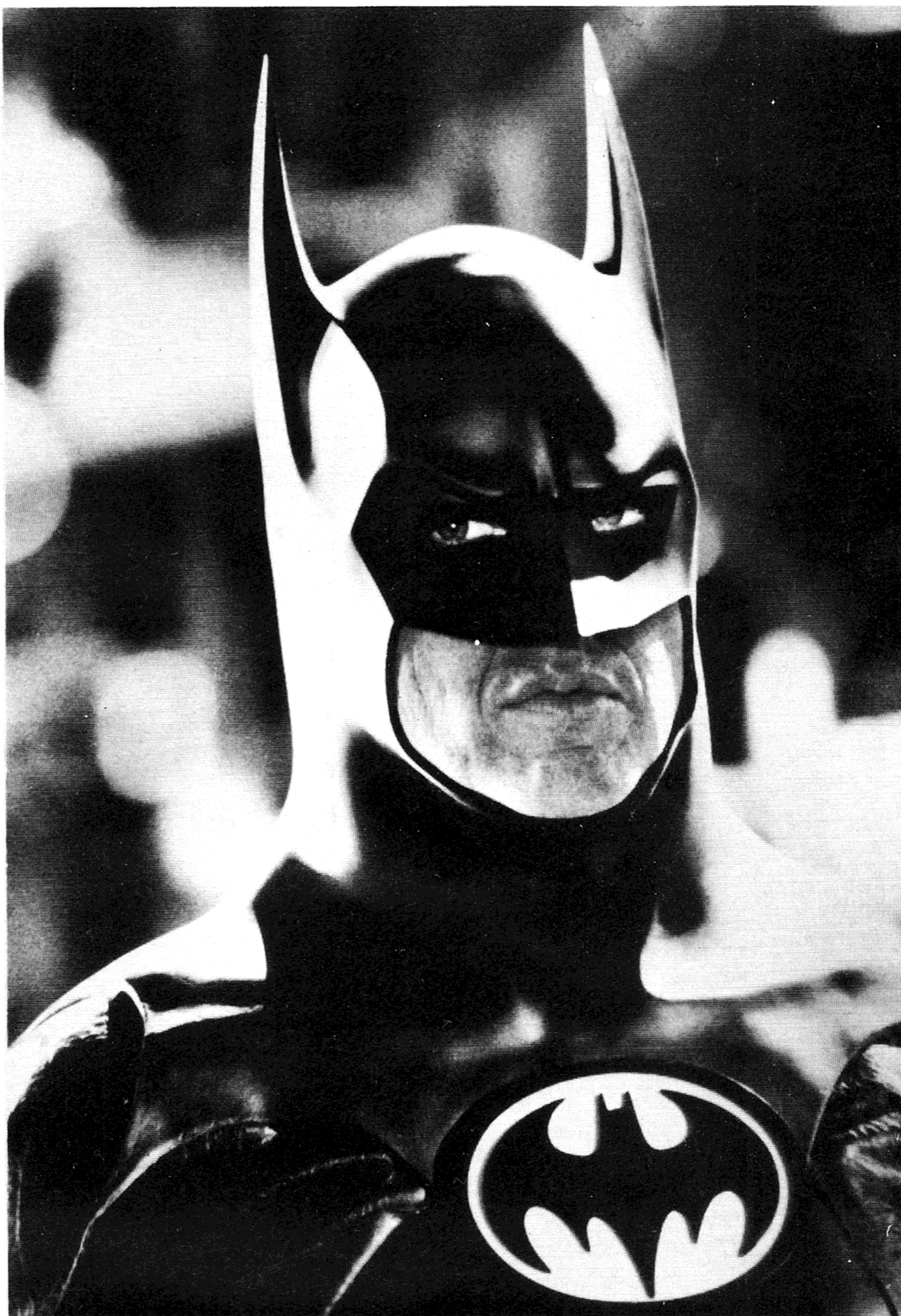
cast into the pit forever when Gabriel rolls the final credits and the really big lights come on.

And what *The Rapture* demonstrates, though with what degree of deliberateness is hard to assess, is that a huge chunk of the imagery, the philosophy, and the narrative structure of much of the key sf cinema over the last fifteen years is drawn much more closely than we'd like to admit from one of the scariest belief systems in global culture. When *Close Encounters* first came out, there was no shortage of jaw-dropping at what was then seen as its cheeky hijack of "religious" themes and images. But I don't remember anyone's probing exactly what brand of religious imagery was being peddled, perhaps because in antelapsarian 1978 the Oval Office hadn't yet been invaded by its first far-right fundamentalist whacko who believed the Bible said God wanted him to rain nukes on Yakutsk. The fact is, the movies' fascination with this particular pattern of faith, apocalypse, and judgment – the ascent in the body, the segregation of those saved by love from those damned by doubt – is impossible to detach from the peculiar form of spiritual survivalism that characterizes the Rapture myth in extreme versions of Christian mythology in the US. I hesitate to call it "fundamentalism", as the primary source of this very specific imagery doesn't seem to be any Biblical texts as such; at least, I'm not sure where the bit about rising through the roof of your car comes in Thessalonians, though it features prominently in Charles Anderson's widely-disseminated postcard painting for the Bible Believers' Assn of Sherman, Texas (showing a freeway running past a cemetery into an Oklahoma City-looking metropolis, with big stunt car smashes and planes ploughing into towers thanks to a spectacularly ill-drawn Saviour's serving abrupt notice on His eager flock, who Hoover up out of the earth and traffic to greet Him). But even if the roots go deep-deep down into the popular American unconscious, the sectarian colours seem pretty hard to deny.

So quite why this peculiarly goyische myth should hold such fascination for

a Spielberg or Tolkin is a matter between them and their maker, though in the case of *The Rapture* it at least should absolve the author of the suspicion of hidden proselytizing agendas. Indeed, this cultural detachment from his subject may part-explain the careful but troublesome gaps in the story presented: in particular, that glide over the process of conversion itself, both for the heroine and of her thitherto-sceptical lover. Oddly, but rather effectively, sf-movie ideas switch in to plug these gaps: the "dream of the pearl" shared, like Roy Neary's potato-mountain, by hosts of unrelated strangers across the nation; the doorstep evangelists as men in black, uneasy frontliners in a conspiracy of imminent cosmic revolution. If it comes out looking less like the genre piece it rootedly is, it's thanks in large part to the subatomic budget, which has forced the junking of most of Tolkin's planned big effectsy sequences, car-roof trick and all. On the film's terms, this is undoubtedly a plus: the visionary images end up hinted at rather than seen, with even the dissolution of all existence reduced to an unfortunately Gilliamesque pale horseman galloping round a couple of day-for-night locations, while the final interview between God and His handmaiden at the end of things in the mezzanine between heaven and hell is slashed to a standard red-lit Mojave nightshoot with God, heaven, and hell all discreetly offscreened. Even the dream of the pearl seems to have been cut, though it looks as though an attempt was made to film it.

And all this means that *The Rapture*, intended or not, comes out as a remake of *Close Encounters* with all the visual sweeteners and palatable metaphors stripped away. Its tale of rootless people in a derealized culture, conditioned to retreat from complexity and aspire to the unattainable, and escaping into a worldview of blinding simplicity and apocalyptic absolutes that turn out to demand their own more terrible price, is a lot more than just a scary thought-experiment in what-if-those-maniacs-were-right. As an analysis of what drives people to this version of God, it's too tunnel-focused on the individual to tell more than a corner of the story; but it says a lot about what makes people turn to *Ghost*, and to the vision of a world where good and evil are as simple and absolute as we've been taught, where believing counts for more than actually doing, and where faith is rewarded not by demonstrable results in this world (since, after all, it clearly isn't), but by the right to say told-you-so forever in the next. And whether or not we've been actively guilty of letting this stuff into our hearts, at a passive level it's a pearly dream anyone who's ever sat through one of these films has at some



Michael Keaton in 'Batman Returns'

time, however temporarily, been made to share. I don't think it'll ever again be possible to watch these pictures in innocence, unaware of the skeleton peeping from under the flesh.

As a test case, let's take a quick X-ray of a representative big summer movie, which this year would have to be **Batman Returns**. Now, here is a film with what, by genre standards, are some moderately advanced ideas about good and evil and the structure of the soul. Despite being set in a universe polarized by its own defining heroic code into the saved and the damned, ambiguities and complications are permitted to creep in at the seams. Good is personified in a double-sided remix of Charles Foster Kane who enforces morality through terror, and whose receipt of the batsignal quotes as much from Xanadu as from

images of the Annunciation. Evil wears a whole wardrobe of fetchingly various masks, from the familiar face of environmentally-naughty industrial despotism in Christopher Walken, to the nefarious bird revealed here to be simply a more drastic residue of the Scissorhands complex, to the nearly-innocuous working girl whose only offence in the actual film is some mild sexual display and a liberated vigilante response to patriarchy. But the mythological template is still glaringly visible. Even more literally than Mimi Rogers' character in *The Rapture*, the heroine is born again from her loveless mechanical existence, being here converted to radical postfeminism by that time-honoured comics device of character development, a blow on the head; and the subsequent battle for her divided soul is fought out between the people's chosen messiah and a flight-



Danny DeVito as the Penguin

less fallen lord of the darkness below. And come the trump, when our saviour comes to harrow the netherworld and she has to choose to love him and live with him in bliss forever in his kingdom or burn in sin with the already-damned – as it happens, the only open moral choice permitted anyone in the picture – she too opts for the politically cool choice over the spiritually correct.

All the same, it's precisely this exploration of complex people imprisoned in a world of simplicities that gives the *Batman* movies their edge of sophistication over the rest of the comics-pic genre. "Complex" may sound too kind, but against the background of new-Hollywood fundamentalism it's actually quite radical to suggest that people can have even as many as two different faces. It's arguable, of course, that *Returns* has actually been

unbalanced by this interest in complexity – that the movie is far too centred around its moral focus, the strongly-written but detachable figure of Catwoman, than around its rather seen-it plot focus of the hideous penguin man and his evil scheme to hold the city to ransom. But it would be shameful not to forgive such lapses from orthodoxy in a film so stuffed with them. As anyone will smugly point out, there are loads of things Burton still can't really do, including quite important aspects of the direction of action and actors. Key bits of plot like Walken's power plant flush quietly into the sewers, DeVito moves exactly like an underbuilt man fitted with a lightweight prosthetic stomach, grave-stones wobble, costume flippers fail to articulate, there's no chemistry whatever between the three leads, the final shot is a catastrophic misjudgment,

and probably nobody in the world could make a thousand penguins look menacing.

But it's amazing how much can be made up for by uncanny images, superb Daniel Waters dialogue, resolutely unreal character concepts, and an overall unrelenting strangeness that dares you to take your eye off the screen for a moment. Like the best Burton, it only just manages to pass for a commercial movie at all, and it's always refreshing to see that amount of studio money go on something so defiantly abnormal. As with *The Rapture*, the mere fact of such an unlikely film's existence is something of a miracle in itself. If the only God in movieland is money, at least He has some whimsical ideas about where to bestow the gift of life; and if these are, as so often prophesied, the last days of Hollywood, the *Batman* returns should probably be enough to stave off any idea of more drastic second comings for a year or two yet. All the same, it's been a summer of conspicuously big resurrections. It might be wisest to ride with the sunroof open.

(Nick Lowe)

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## Tube Corn

### TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

In his keynote speech at Channel Four's "Broadcasting Accountability Forum" in Birmingham on June 10th 1992, Anthony Smith had much to say about the "secondary discourse" which surrounds television. This secondary discourse consists basically of any way we the public can try to influence the broadcaster, from ringing the TV duty officer to making a formal complaint to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. There are the statutory mechanisms which regulate television output, pressure groups which try to influence the regulators, feedback programmes on television itself and of course journalism in other media commenting on what is produced. In his speech Smith suggested that there was something of a "legitimate hypocrisy" about this discourse, in that people tend to behave as though there is always someone else, someone we perceive as being vulnerable, who should be protected from television programmes we think might harm them – the child from portrayals of violence, the woman from portrayals of rape, the elderly from portrayals of crime, the psychopath from fantasy fodder – but of course we (whoever "we" are) are not members of a vulnerable group so of course it would be perfectly legitimate for us to watch what-



ever we wish. Nevertheless, Smith argued, we want broadcasters to behave as if they were responsible to us in what they produce.

Well, no, actually. What I want is for broadcasters to be responsible to us, the public, not just to behave as if they were.

Consider the regulatory mechanisms. The ITC (Independent Television Commission) awarded the Channel 3 franchises and was specifically designed to have a light regulatory touch, to have even less power to monitor the compliance of television companies with their franchise documents than its predecessor the IBA. The BCC (Broadcasting Complaints Commission) deals only with personal complaints and on a quasi-legal basis: if you happen to be in the background when cameras are rolling and end up unwittingly appearing in a pro- or anti-something broadcast when you are of the other persuasion, the BCC are your men. The BSC (Broadcasting Standards Council) was set up to monitor taste and decency issues and its membership is selected from amongst those of the Great and the Good whom the government I presume considers likely to have taste and decency: they are predominantly white, male, practising Christians and, I kid you not, have an average age of over sixty. The BBC Board of Governors are similarly drawn from the lists of the Great and the Good, and are similarly unrepresentative of the general population.

Well, we have been here before, with the 1990 Broadcasting Act, and nothing too bad seems to have happened so far, do I hear you say? Wait till next year, I reply, when the new franchise holders take over and the central scheduling on ITV either falls apart or doesn't, depending on all the desperate negotiations that are going on at the moment over who will be the scheduler. But does it really matter who gets to sit on these boards, who has the power, who chooses the people who have the power? This year – in fact this month – it is the BBC's turn as the government produces its green paper on the renewal of the BBC's Charter. Time has run out. If it matters who has the power then now is the time to take that power back from the Great and the Good and exercise it ourselves.

My own objection to regulating the broadcasters by making them accountable to panels of the Great and the Good is that the kind of people who make it onto these lists – busy, successful people with proven track records in some field of endeavour – are just exactly the kind of people who do not watch television. The Members of Parliament who select regulators from these Great and Good are themselves the worst offenders, working ludicrous hours that prevent them flopping onto



Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman

the sofa in front of *Eldorado* so that they get their information about television largely from the tabloids. Remember the story about how John Major wanted to join in with *Darling Buds of May* mania and was only prevented when his office's request for a set of tapes so he could learn the catchphrases was made public?

There are three possible solutions. One is parliamentary scrutiny of appointments to regulatory bodies. This is favoured by the Labour Party and would lead to inquisitorial sessions, like the confirmation hearings in the US system, in which appointees' dirty linen was brought out into the open. Amusing as this might be, I do not feel it would address the problem of the lack of representation of the working class, women, others outside the cosy Great-and-Good consensus. Another solution, so obvious in a democracy that it is astonishing it has scarcely been mentioned, would be to elect the members of the Boards that control our broadcasting. No-one appears to be advocating this as a solution, possibly because of the cost and also because it would be difficult to find, support and canvass for candidates other than via the existing party mechanisms, and a politicized Board of BBC Governors with a permanent majority for the government party is emphatically not what is wanted.

My own solution would be to choose BBC Governors by lot, like a jury. The mechanism works for the criminal justice system because what is wanted is a panel of people who have the same make-up as the general population and who can decide simple questions of yes or no, innocent or guilty, drawing on their own experience of the same society. Let the BBC be managed by professional broadcasters and managers but let their conduct be regulated by having their decisions referred to a "jury" – but a jury of our peers, the

people who watch television, not of theirs who make it.

Because I have been through the mechanisms of secondary discourse. I have written articles and appeared on a feedback programme and joined pressure groups and lobbied ministers and regulators – and, let me tell you, in the end it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. The discourse between broadcasting and its audience should not be "secondary" – secondary to its discourse with its real controllers, the BBC Board and the ITV shareholders. It should be the primary discourse, the first set of people to whom they are accountable.

My solution to the "problem" of BBC funding is equally simple. Forget the arguments we will, I predict, now hear trotted out about the BBC spending "public money" from the licence fee and whether they should try to do everything or concentrate only on distinctiveness (i.e. the expensive stuff the satellite companies can't be bothered with). It is not "public" money which the BBC has – it is our money, the licence fee. Simply make the failure to possess a TV licence a civil, rather than criminal, offence and free the BBC from the necessity of negotiating its licence fee with the government. Just as satellite television sets and collects its subscriptions, let the BBC set and collect its licence fee. Let it take non-payers to court and let non-payers have to prove to a magistrate that they have fixed their TV with an "I can't receive the BBC" gizmo as the only defence against paying the licence if they possess a set. And make the licence fee payable in monthly or weekly instalments without having to be a year ahead first.

Look out for the Green Paper when it is published. And make sure you write to your MP and make your views known or else the debate will go by default. How else are our voices going to be heard? (Wendy Bradley)

# Teatray in the Sky

## Barrington J. Bayley

I am a teapot. When in use, which is usually at least once every day, I rest on a cork mat on a polished lacquered table. I am carried from kitchen to living room on a silver-plated teatray. Otherwise I can continue to observe my owners' living room from an open sideboard, also in the living room.

One of the consolations of my new existence is that at least my family is still with me. We are all part of the same tea service. My wife is a milk jug, nicely glazed with a flower pattern and an elegant handle. My children are teacups. The saucers on which they rest I am not sure about; these are possibly not even alive. The same goes for the spoons, though in two of them I seem to sense our pet dog, Woof, and our cat Fluffy.

Also here with us is the children's Auntie Rita, more properly my wife's sister and hence my sister-in-law, who was staying with us at the time of the alien invasion. Rita is a sugar bowl, matching the design of the milk jug but with more of a splash of colour, including a band of gold painted around her rim.

It is rather odd to think of, but the immobility of our servitude is not as irksome as it was. One would consider that such a thing would drive any human being insane, but somehow – perhaps it is part of the conversion process – I have adapted to it. I can even feel a sense of pride in having maintained my place as head of my family, for I am, indisputably, a handsome and imposing teapot. I am able to enjoy the scalding sensation of hot aromatic tea which daily fills me, and more and more I experience a sense of pleasure in the act of being poured from. Exactly how and why we have retained our perceptions is, of course, a mystery. We have no eyes or ears, and yet we see, hear and smell everything around us. It is like a form of psychic perception where there is no particular viewpoint, or rather, the viewpoint shifts to give the best vantage. It is hard to explain.

But then it is hard to explain anything concerning the invasion. That the aliens should want to take over Earth is itself explicable. That they should then remake themselves as human beings and live in perfect imitation of Earthly society is, in a way, also comprehensible. Very likely to get inside alien cultures in this way is for them an interesting study, or, possibly, simply an amusing game. But that they should at the same time remake all of us former real human beings into the artefacts of that society is something one would never have thought of. Was it perhaps for

them simply the most convenient way of providing the necessary appurtenances of civilized Earthly life? After all, our brains would contain the templates, so to speak, of all our common utensils. Or is it more than that; is it part of a perverse enjoyment of their conquest to render us into our utterly passive role as articles of use? Much as a barbarian warlord might once have had the skull of his vanquished enemy fashioned into a drinking goblet?

Still, how could we understand, when the invasion happened so suddenly and quickly. We do not even have any idea of what the aliens look like when shed of their human disguises. We do not know, even, if their human forms are enormous while we retain an approximation of our real size and mass, or whether they are of normal human magnitude and we have been reduced to the size of Earthly tea things. At the onset of the occupation my family and "Auntie Rita" (as I prefer to think of her) had been sitting in the living room about to eat a tea of cucumber and tomato sandwiches; so in some way the domesticity of the scene is unchanged even though we are so reduced in status. Our alien "users" are a married couple. The one we see most is the female, a plump middle-aged housewife – not quite deserving the description "stout," though with a very big bottom – who carries herself with a fussy air, and likes to wear flowered dresses or else smart suits of skirt and top. In the afternoon some comparable suburban housewife friend often comes to visit, and this is our busiest and most eventful part of the day. Her husband returns home from his "work" – what it consists of we have never learned – at about six-thirty, and their evenings are almost ceremoniously dull. There appear to be no children.

I have been able to deduce that every single human person on Earth has been imprisoned in the form of a still-sentient inanimate artefact, though whether everything used by the aliens is human (or else a domestic animal) is another question. Many of the conveniences in the house appear to be human, as are various small items carried by visitors. With others, it is difficult to tell. What of buildings? Are houses men and women transformed and scaled up in size? Thinking about it, I have realized that the world we lived in before the invasion had more commodities than people in it. If the aliens have faithfully simulated our world, it follows that some things must be merely objects.

**Y**esterday something happened which shed light on just how completely the aliens have donned the human psyche. Lately our housewife owner has been receiving a different kind of visitor. A male acquaintance of herself and her husband – I tend to think it is a colleague of her husband whom she has chanced to meet somewhere – has taken to dropping in on her for a cup of tea while she is alone on the house. She pretends to herself not to look forward to these visits, and during them behaves with an exaggerated primness and properness. Yesterday he brought something to show her: a china pot, in which I instantly recognized my neighbour Tom Hogge. Indeed I could hardly have failed to recognize him, for the transformation process had intentionally been stopped short of completion. He reminded me of a toby jug. His head and grimacing face were metamorphosed into a clumsy-looking lid. His naked, beer-bellied body had become the bulbous bulk of the pot, legs drawn up in a squatting position and incorporated as embossed outlines in the glazed china, arms placed likewise against his chest. His penis, grossly enlarged, was raised and curved into the spout. It was a vulgar and pornographic product (rather like the original Tom Hogge, I could not help thinking), and our housewife reacted to it with amused disgust and feigned embarrassment, though she gave it numerous interested glances during the rest of the conversation. Her visitor daringly seated himself close to her on the sofa with the priapic Tom Hogge on the coffee table before them. For a short while she tolerated this small encroachment, then quickly rose, curtly announced that she had to make ready for her husband's return, and went into the kitchen.

I did not like to see this suggestive piece of play enacted in front of my family, and was glad when our housewife's man friend took his lewd piece of china-ware away. We have always raised our children in an atmosphere of propriety. Auntie Rita, a spinster with ingrained religious beliefs, must have been quite shocked. In fact I can clearly feel her embarrassment.

**Y**esterday evening there was an event. Our owners held a dinner party. There were just two guests: our housewife's occasional friend and his wife, who is a rather drab woman. I listened carefully to all that was said, but heard no mention made of the afternoon visits, or of the phallic Tom Hogge pot we had seen the week before. Ourselves we played no part in the occasion but sat throughout on our shelf on the sideboard. Instead the diners drank special Turkish coffee from tiny delicate cups taken down from two shelves above us. As with the fancy dinner plates on which the *filet mignon* was served, as with the frosted glassware for the mango sorbet, we sensed the humanness of the coffee set and tried to radiate a message of our own. These purely psychic sensibilities are vague, however. I am not sure if our fellow beings heard us.

The aliens talked much of current affairs. It seems a war has already begun. Our conquerors have lost no time in sampling that most traditional and extreme of human excitements. They spoke of the destruction by aerial bombardment of the city of Dresden, entailing the smashing of vast quantities of valuable porcelain.

No figures for loss of life among alien "humans" were quoted, and of course there would be none. Instead, they are using their commodities, the original human population, as casualties.

The "men" aliens also spoke of their work with much enthusiasm. They were involved in some sort of development project. I could barely understand it, and was more taken up with the emanations from my family. My children, the boys especially, felt more keenly than ever the despair and humiliation of their situation, at seeing the world they had once thought theirs usurped while they were reduced to immobile conveniences. I caught a stray thought from Lindy, my youngest one: "Did our cups and saucers feel like slaves?" My helplessness, as their father, was hard to bear.

**T**his afternoon it happened. Our respectable housewife, our "decent" middle-aged married woman, showed her squalid real nature. She allowed her clandestine visitor to have sexual intercourse with her on the living-room sofa.

That my children should witness such a scene! And that I should be so unable to prevent the defilement of their tender minds, to remove them, to cover their eyes at least, or raise protest! But no, I too was forced to rest motionless on my cork mat while the adultery took place. As before, he sat discourteously close to her. After a few minutes of idle chatter, he suddenly, without warning, began coarsely describing his lascivious intentions towards her. She blinked in mortification, went pale, and breathed heavily.

"I think you had better leave, Mr –"

Then her dress, with its pattern of violets and roses, was pushed up to reveal her pale plump thighs, running to fat. She fell back against the arm of the sofa in an exposition of shocked paralysis, while her quite enormous white drawers came down revealing a hairy gash, to the accompaniment of outraged, ecstatic exclamations – "Oh! Oh! Oh!" With our shifting viewpoints, we saw and hear everything. The obscene penetration, the heavings, the guilt-laden tremors, the growls of lust, until the ever-present aroma of tea was mingled with quite different odours.

It was, without doubt, the most degrading of our experiences so far.

**E**ver since that afternoon I have found myself dwelling in an erotic daydream. When the alien housewife's new-found lover departed she disappeared into the bathroom for a few minutes. Coming back downstairs, she evidently felt the need for another pot of calming tea, and put the kettle on. Feeling my handle in the same hand which had gripped the adulterous phallus, feeling hot tea spill from my willing spout, I was unexpectedly seized by the return of sexual desire. The object of my lustfulness was not, however, the wifely milk jug which habitually stood beside me. It was the more brightly coloured sugar bowl.

On every one of her yearly visits to us, it had been my weakness secretly to gloat over hot salacious thoughts of the children's Auntie Rita. Though unmarried and no longer young, she was not an unattractive woman by any means, and in clever hands could doubtless have been persuaded to indulge her-

self despite her religious inhibitions – and who knows, despite her family loyalties, and then to revel in the agony of private guilt which such a sin would entail. I had never, of course, risked unmasking my dishonourable cravings; but her fluttering eyelashes had long convinced me that she, in her turn, was more attracted to her brother-in-law than was her right.

Now a frenzy of wantonness overcame me. How far was this lecherous housewife prepared to go in deviant behaviour? Oh, if only she would surrender herself to a delirium of perversion, and pour my hot liquid into the sweetness of Auntie Rita's receptacle! Shamelessly staining her pure white sugar! I scarcely even cared any longer that my milk jug and teacups were there to see it!

Every other afternoon the trollop's paramour, her husband's trusted colleague, comes calling and they fornicate, sometimes on the sofa or on the floor, sometimes making their way upstairs. I think of little else but sexual gratification now. The sight of the pretty sugar bowl is a constant torment. In our passive condition, with only thoughts to occupy us, I suppose it was inevitable that I would become increasingly obsessed by such reveries. Sometimes it troubles me that my children might also have developed an unhealthy preoccupation. But there is nothing I can do about it. There is nothing I can do about anything.

**I**t is certain now. There is no doubt of it.

The occupation is coming to an end.

For some time I have suspected it. There has been an air of *desultoriness*, of carelessness, in the lives led by the aliens. Beyond the lace curtains there sometimes seem to have been shadowy shapes *whoomping* skywards. Once or twice, when the housewife drew the curtains back to increase the sunlight, I have seen people wandering about in the gardens, looking dazed and bewildered. I did not think they were aliens.

Last night it was confirmed by a conversation between the adulterous housewife and her husband. "A pleasant enough stay, dear. Quite amusing. But I won't say it wasn't beginning to bore me just a little. I'm not sorry Recall is here. We shall have to be ready to leave tomorrow night."

This morning he went to work as usual. And this afternoon his wife's lover failed to appear. The *whoomping* outside the windows has been increasing all day, and it is clear that as the aliens depart all their utensils and conveniences are resuming human form, for they could be seen wandering around the gardens in droves, until the housewife drew the curtains to screen them from view.

As the day wore on our mistress seemed to become unsettled, and glanced frequently in our direction. Finally she took us down and put us in our duty places on the coffee table: myself, my wife, the children, the spoons, and Auntie Rita. At first I thought she was going to boil a pot of tea, but no. She sat on the sofa and stared at us for a long time, her lips pursed in thought, a slight worry-frown creasing her brow. She fidgeted, once or twice crossing her legs and squeezing her thighs as though to gain pleasure from her genitals. Then she left the room, returning shortly with a box and a pile of newspapers which she crinkled up for packing. Carefully, she began packing us away.

We lie now in the dark, wrapped in newsprint, knowing that we are not after all to be released from our bondage of people-as-things. She has decided to take us with her.

Why? Is it fear of discovery? We were closest to her, inches from the sofa, almost personally involved in her sordid affair. Would our release somehow entail her husband's learning of it? If so, then her illicit liaison was obviously not part of the game, or holiday, or whatever it was.

Or is there a different, even more intimate reason? Do our memories of her lascivious behaviour enhance her own? Are we to be her mementoes, aids to her indecent thoughts?

Whatever the truth my present task, as head of the family, is to dispel the wave of dismay I feel from the others as the reality of our situation comes home. Take heart! This is not the worst! In many ways it is the best, for a great adventure awaits us, as we rest here waiting for the *whoomph* that will lift us to the aliens' world – or worlds – among the stars.

For one thing we shall be immortal, while those we leave behind will have turned to dust after only a few years. China lasts forever, and I am sure we can depend on our alien mistress to repair any cracks or breakages. And we shall always be together as a family. Always I shall have around me my delightful gold-rimmed teacups, my good-natured milk jug, and can continue to project my prurient thoughts at the flirtatious sugar bowl. I am sure she longs for my spout.

Wonders await us. We shall see the aliens as they really are, and dwell in their mansions. We shall contain heavenly brews. And above all, we shall be used, for all eternity. We are going to the great tea time in the sky.

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**Barry Bayley**, a frequent contributor to *Interzone*, was born in Birmingham in 1937. His sf novels include *The Star Virus* (1970), *Empire of Two Worlds* (1972), *Collision with Chronos* (1973), *The Soul of the Robot* (1974), *Star Winds* (1978), *The Pillars of Eternity* (1982), *The Zen Gun* (1983) and *The Rod of Light* (1984). His quirky short stories, which he has been producing since the late 1950s, have been collected in *The Knights of the Limits* (1978) and *The Seed of Evil* (1979).

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# Agents of Darkness

## Molly Brown

**O**n Martha Carson's first day at the John Winters Literary Agency, the second post brought a large parcel with no return address, which landed on Samantha Charlton's desk. Samantha sighed, tossed the unopened package to one side, and told Martha she was going out to lunch.

"Oh yeah, so where does everybody usually go?" Martha asked Samantha's back. She got no answer.

Martha reminded herself that her analyst back in New York had warned her about her tendency to paranoia, so she decided that Samantha just hadn't heard her. She'd speak a bit louder in future.

And all that shouting she'd heard through the wall a little while ago – when Samantha was in John's office yelling that she couldn't stand that awful American woman, and what was she doing in London anyway? – Samantha could have been talking about almost anybody. Maybe she was talking about Ruby Wax. Martha would just have to stop being so paranoid.

Though she wished she hadn't made such a fuss that morning when Samantha had tried to shake her hand. But she couldn't help screaming like she did, and she *did* try to explain, "I can't shake hands, not without gloves, anyway, and I forgot my gloves – just ran out without them. You see, I'm incredibly ticklish! Sometimes I can't stand to be touched – I get hysterical. My hands and arms are bad, but my neck is worse. Someone touches my neck, I go crazy. My analyst says this is an outward sign of hidden insecurities." Samantha had looked at her as if she was some kind of madwoman.

She put on her coat and hugged herself tightly. She could actually see her breath. Why didn't the English believe in central heating? Or any heating at all for that matter?

John had told her that Samantha would help her get into the swing of things, but all she'd done so far was suggest Martha take the bottom two drawers of the file cabinet. Martha felt very cold and very hungry. She wondered for a moment if it was genuine hunger or just a neurotic craving for affection disguised as a pain in her stomach. She'd read an article about that on the plane.

She didn't want to overfeed a neurotic craving for affection; she'd just get a carton of yoghurt. She was supposed to be on a diet anyway.

She found a deli right across the street. She bought a carton of yoghurt. She also bought a salt beef sandwich, a bag of crisps and three slices of chocolate cake. Then she found another shop where she could

buy real filter coffee, next door to a place that sold electrical goods.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee filled the air as Martha warmed her feet in the orange glow of a two-bar electric fire. Now she was ready to do some work. Her first task was to mount her collection of inspirational posters on the walls. The largest, a picture of a man tearing out his hair with the caption, "You don't have to be crazy to work here, but it helps," was given the place of honour: just above eye level, directly facing the door. She stood back and gazed around the room in satisfaction.

Samantha had been gone for almost two hours. Martha couldn't help noticing that the package on Samantha's desk was not addressed specifically to her; it was just addressed to the agency. She stared at it for at least two full minutes, and then she touched it, lightly running one finger around its edges. "Why not," she said out loud.

She ripped off the brown paper wrapping and looked at the title page: *Confessions of a Vampire* by Count Henry Vladimír. She sat down at Samantha's desk and started reading.

The first thing Samantha said upon her return was, "It's like an oven in here." The second was, "Kindly take your feet off my desk." And the third was something to do with the fact that Martha opened her mail.

Martha's reply to the first two was simply, "Sorry." But her reply to the third was that she could see Samantha was terribly busy, and she was just trying to be helpful.

Samantha raised one eyebrow. "I'm sure you have much more important things to do, like taking down those posters." She dabbed a delicate lace handkerchief over her face. "And opening a window."

**A** few weeks later, Samantha Charlton sat down in her living room with a stack of manuscripts and a pot of very strong coffee. She read the first five or six pages of each one before tossing it aside. Finally, she picked up the one that began: *I'd be the first to admit that being a vampire in the modern world is far from easy. It's not like you see in the movies, we're not all idle rich, we're not all devilishly handsome, though of course I wish we were. We don't live in big creepy mansions with hunchbacked servants to cater to our every whim. Some of us have jobs, though of course we work the night shift. A lot of us are on the dole. Some of us are homeless. A lot of what they say about us isn't true. A lot of it is. My name is Henry Vladimír, and this is my humble*

attempt to set the record straight.

There was a pale glow on the eastern horizon as Samantha composed a letter to the author, suggesting that they meet.

"Dear Count Vladimir," the agency receptionist typed one month later, "I am sorry to inform you that my colleague Samantha Charlton has been taken ill, so if you have no objections, I will be handling your novel, *Confessions of a Vampire*, which I have read and very much enjoyed. However, there are a few suggestions I would like to make and I think it would be useful if we were to arrange a meeting. Please contact my office to set up a convenient time. Yours, Martha Carson."

Martha re-read the letter before she signed it and told the receptionist to put it in the post. It was the middle of winter, but the office was lovely and warm since Samantha had gone away; Martha left the heat on all the time. And it was great not having to listen to all those sarcastic cracks about her being a "hot-house flower." And there was a marvellous satisfaction in tearing up the supposed "gift" Samantha had given her on her third day: a poster of a chimpanzee sitting on a toilet seat. "I do hope you like it. I saw it in *Athena* and I instantly thought of you." Martha had thanked her profusely and instantly mounted it on the wall directly facing Samantha's desk. Samantha's only response was a frozen and slightly sick-looking smile. She could never come out and say what she meant; stiff upper-lip and all that.

Everyone had been shocked when she had her breakdown. Everyone except for Martha. She'd seen it coming. Those stiff, repressed types always crack sooner or later. But even Martha was surprised at how thoroughly Samantha had cracked. Found wandering in a graveyard at three a.m., wearing nothing but a bloodstained nightdress and mumbling incoherently. The doctors said she was terribly anaemic; Martha wondered if that could have anything to do with Samantha's memory loss. She'd check her medical encyclopaedia when she got home.

It was pouring with rain by the time she left the office, and she'd forgotten her umbrella. She got thoroughly soaked and woke up with a sore throat the next morning.

Two days later, she was certain she was coming down with pneumonia. Henry Vladimir phoned just after sunset and said he could meet her any day she chose. "Oday," she said through her heavily stuffed-up nose. "Dow about eleben o'dlock Friday morning?"

"Sorry?"

"Dow about eleben o'dlock Friday morning?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't possibly make it that early. How about five-thirty? The sun will have been down for an hour by then."

Martha felt too ill to argue.

**O**n her way home that night, she bought two large bulbs of garlic. Her herbal specialist in New York used to swear by garlic, eaten raw, as a treatment for colds and flu.

Dinner that night was a garlic sandwich: three chopped raw cloves spread between two slices of bread. By morning she felt a little better. Breakfast was a garlic omelette.

The next two days, she had lunch at a little Italian place around the corner from the office and just asked the waiter to bring her a large glass of orange juice and whatever dish had the most garlic in it. By Friday afternoon, she was completely cured and didn't care if anyone ever came within three feet of her again or not.

At five-fifteen she prepared for her meeting by sucking on a large extra-strong mint pastille. At five-forty-five there was a knock on her office door.

She quickly slipped on a pair of gloves and stood up to greet her visitor. He was a small man, barely bigger than her. Like her, he wore large spectacles that almost covered his face. Unlike her, he was losing his hair. What was left of it formed a fine dark ring around his skull. He wore a black raincoat over a dark turtle-neck sweater, jeans, and jogging shoes. It was impossible to tell his age; he could have been anything from twenty to forty-five. Martha wondered if he'd been ill; he was awfully pale.

The man's lips brushed across her gloved hand; she wanted to giggle, but suppressed it. "Please have a seat, Mr Vladimir. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

He shook his head "no."

"I'm not sure what, if any, agreement you reached with my former colleague. I'm afraid no one's been able to get much out of her. I mean, she's been in hospital and I don't like to disturb her."

"She invited me to come here, as you have invited me. She expressed an interest in representing my book, but then I heard nothing more from her," he replied with a shrug.

"That's quite an accent you've got there. Where are you from?"

"That's quite an accent you've got. Let's just say I'm from Europe."

Martha began to feel uncomfortable; he wasn't just looking at her, he was staring. Intently. She had to suppress another giggle before getting down to business. "I personally think it's a nice touch, writing a work of fiction as if it were straight autobiography, but first-person is usually harder to sell. I was thinking that you might want to re-write it in the third person."

"Never."

"Huh?"

"Why should I write in the third person when I live in the first?"

"Well, we can come back to that later. There's another thing I want to discuss with you. There's a lot of violence in here." She tapped the manuscript with one finger. "Throats ripped open by razor-sharp fangs, the undead rising from their graves to rip innocent passers-by to pieces, lots of gore, lots of blood. That's all great, but what's missing is the heavy breathing."

"The heavy breathing?"

"Yeah, you know." Martha could see by the puzzled look on Henry Vladimir's face that he didn't know. "The sex," she explained. "Where's the sex? You haven't got a bit of sex in here, and let's face it, sex is the vampire's main selling point."

"Sex?" Henry said, raising both eyebrows.

"What else? Think of any vampire movie you've ever seen. Vampires are very seductive. Female vampires wear tight-fitting dresses, have long flowing hair and lure men to their doom. A male vampire is a

snazzy dresser who comes in through the bedroom window and heads straight for the bed where he rips his large-breasted victim's bodice. Then, as he sinks his teeth into her neck, we see a close-up of her eyes widening in an expression of pure ecstasy. The whole idea is a lot more's getting sunk into her than just his teeth, if you get my drift."

"I see," Henry Vladimir said. He was blushing. "But I say at the beginning, a vampire's life isn't like the movies. I wanted to reach people, to tell them the truth."

"Of course you want to reach people, Henry. We all do. But how many people do you want to reach? Two or three thousand? Or two or three hundred thousand? It wouldn't take much, just a scene or two ... tastefully handled, of course."

"I'll see what I can do."

"I knew you'd have a professional attitude. Now, if you'll excuse me, it's getting a bit late ..." She stood up and walked around to the front of her desk.

"I do apologize, Miss Carson." Henry stood and kissed her gloved hand once more. "I tend not to notice things like the lateness of the hour. It is only the sunrise I fear."

"No problem. I'll show you out." She pulled her hand away and headed towards the door. She could see both their shadows on the opposite wall. The way he was moving didn't look right; it was almost as though he was gliding instead of walking. His shadow grew impossibly large. And why was he raising his arms like that? She blinked and shook her head, silently scolding herself for having such an overactive imagination. Just because he'd written a book about vampires! She put her hand on the doorknob and turned to say goodnight.

Three days worth of garlic chose that moment to make a return appearance. Martha belched a cloud of it right into Henry Vladimir's face and he fell over backwards.

She knelt beside him on the floor. "Oh my God, I'm so sorry! Mr Vladimir, speak to me! Are you okay?"

"I'll be all right." His voice was barely a squeak. He struggled to get up, shielding his face with one hand. Martha helped pull him to his feet, then dusted off his clothes. He kept his face turned away from her the whole time.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am! You sure you're all right?" she asked him again.

"Fine," he said, still holding up one hand. "I'd better be going now."

"Okay, you write those sex scenes, and then I'm going to put the book up for auction. You're going to be a rich man, Henry Vladimir."

"Wonderful," he wheezed, hurrying out the door.

**T**wo weeks later, Martha opened her post and read a vivid description of an orgy in a desecrated church.

The book was duly sold to the highest bidder. Martha got a nice letter from someone at the *Guinness Book of Records*, asking for details of the author's advance.

A few days later, she asked John if there was any news about "poor dear Samantha." He frowned and told her that she'd been moved to a violent ward after biting one of the nurses. Martha shook her head and



Illustrations by Tony Roberts

frowned along with him. Then he told her about a strange recurring dream he'd been having: "I wake up and find Samantha hovering outside my window – and you know I live in a third-floor flat – then everything goes blank and the next thing I know, the alarm goes off and it's morning and I feel more exhausted than before I went to bed."

"You're under an awful lot of stress, John," Martha said. "Have you tried aromatherapy?" Then she left for an appointment at the hairdresser's.

It was a total disaster. Every time the stylist tried to trim the hair around her neck, she burst out laughing and hunched her shoulders all the way up to her ears.

"Will you please hold still? I can't possibly cut your hair if you won't stay still," the stylist told her repeatedly. "You're worse than a two-year-old child."

"I can't help it; my neck is extremely sensitive. My analyst says it's an outward manifestation of suppressed anxiety after a particularly traumatic divorce," Martha said between giggles. "Ouch!" she said a minute later.

The stylist dropped his scissors, wailing, "I told you to stay still, didn't I?"

The next day, she got a letter from Henry Vladimir asking if he could come to see her; he had some questions about his contract. She phoned him immediately, and as usual, she got his answering machine. He never answered the phone during the day. She left a message that she would be happy to meet him whenever he liked. He wrote back that it would have to be evening; the days were getting longer all the time now.

Martha sighed at her client's peculiarities and it was arranged that he would come to the office at eight o'clock Thursday evening. She ran out for a bite at six, and discovered a new deli she hadn't noticed before. The largest sausage she had ever seen was hanging in the window.

She went inside and was surrounded by the overwhelming aromas of meat and spice. The place was just like one around the corner from her apartment in New York. She suddenly felt an overwhelming surge of homesickness. Her eyes became misty as she bought herself a loaf of french bread and three-foot long salami. It was the next best thing to booking a flight.

The man behind the counter carefully wrapped the salami in cling film before placing it in an extra-large plastic bag. She took her prize back to the office and waited for Henry Vladimir to show up, which he did at ten past eight.

He had several worries. He couldn't possibly go to lunch with her and the publisher; it would have to be dinner, and a late one at that. Martha sighed and said she would fix everything. Then there was the problem of publicity photos.

"Why is that a problem?" Martha asked him with what she was certain was the patience of a saint.

"I can't be photographed," he told her.

"But why not? Believe me, they'll bring in an expert and you'll look wonderful."

"No, you don't understand. I can't be photographed." He looked at her imploringly, and saw that she still didn't get it. "I don't show up on film," he told her.

"Well, maybe with a bit of make-up."

"I'm telling you I don't show up on film. I don't reflect in a mirror, either."

"Ah," Martha said, enlightened. So he was one of those. That explained a lot. She knew there were people who actually believed they were vampires; like any true hypochondriac she owned enough medical books to fill a library, and she'd read about this particular condition in one of her many volumes on psychiatry. It was a recognized psychosis; it had a scientific name and everything. She frowned and tried to remember the name of the condition. Unfortunately, most of her psychiatry books were still in her apartment in New York. She could have kicked herself for leaving them behind, but she was certain she'd read somewhere that these people really do drink blood. *It would be great publicity.*

"So photographs are going to be a problem," she said sympathetically.

"I'm afraid so. And they can forget about that signing tour of America."

"How come?"

"Haven't you read the book? I can't cross water!"

"Not even first class?" Martha asked jokingly.

"Well, there is one way. I'd have to travel in a coffin filled with unhallowed earth."

The publicity! Martha tried to keep her voice calm as she told him that everything would be arranged; he shouldn't worry. That record-breaking advance was beginning to seem like peanuts. She had a great idea for the launch party: waiters in black capes and white make-up would serve Bloody Marys and little heart-shaped hors-d'oeuvres with stakes through them, then Henry would make his grand entrance in a coffin. She'd phone the publisher's PR people first thing in the morning.

"Anything else you worried about, Henry?" she asked him, casually pushing a bit of hair behind her ear.

"What's that? On your neck?"

"Huh?" Then she realized that he must be talking about the plaster just below her ear. It was only a little cut, and it had been her own fault. "You mean this?" she asked, pointing at it.

Henry nodded, licking his lips.

"It's nothing. Just a little accident while I was getting my hair trimmed."

"Was there any blood? Let me have a look at it." Henry rose from his seat and moved towards her.

Martha looked into Henry's eyes and felt as if a huge weight was pressing down upon her. All her strength and her energy seemed to drain away. She sat perfectly still, unable to move or speak. Henry removed the plaster and leaned forward with his mouth open wide. Martha's eyes glazed over. Somewhere, faraway, voices called her name, inviting her to join in an eternal dance.

But the spell was broken the instant a wisp of Henry's thinning hair brushed against the bare skin at the base of her neck. She shrieked and brought her shoulder straight up to her ear, laughing hysterically. "Don't do that! I'm ticklish!"

Henry jumped back a little, holding his nose. Martha's shoulder had snapped up and hit it hard. The way it was swelling, it was probably broken.

Martha's giggling stopped immediately. She had



seen Henry's face. His skin had turned a horrible shade of greenish-grey, and chunks of it were hanging loose, revealing the bones underneath. His eyes had taken on a yellow glow. His lips were a deep shade of purple, and somehow, in less than thirty seconds, the man had managed to grow a set of fangs.

Henry's breath was deep and noisy. There was a horrible smell in the office. Martha knew what it was, and it was the knowledge, even more than the smell itself, that made her gag. It was the smell of a rotting corpse.

"Henry, let's be reasonable," she said, rising carefully from her chair and edging around behind it.

Henry shrieked and lunged towards her. She raised the chair and swung it across his face. Once again, he stopped to hold his nose.

Martha's mind raced desperately. What did she know about vampires? There were three things that would repel them: a cross (fat chance of finding one in the office), holy water (ditto), and garlic. Garlic!

Count Vladimir glided menacingly towards her, shielding his nose. He looked angry. Extremely angry.

Martha dived for the bag she'd stored beneath her desk. The Count dived after her. Then he shrieked in horror.

Martha was brandishing a three-foot long salami that must have contained at least a dozen cloves of garlic. "Back off," she said. "I'm not afraid to use this." She tore at the cling-film wrapping.

Henry backed off.

"Siddown!" she barked, waving him towards a chair with the salami.

Henry sat down.

"I think it's time we laid down some ground rules," she said, stroking the salami. "First: don't you EVER, and I mean EVER, try that with me again or you'll have a stake through your heart before you can say 'American paperback rights'! And then I'll cremate you! Got it?"

Henry Vladimir, whose appearance was beginning to return to normal, nodded contritely.

"Second: from now on you do exactly what I tell you. With worldwide distribution, magazine serializations and a TV mini-series in the offing, I'm not gonna let you blow this deal. You are going to be on perfect behaviour at all times. That means no attacking your editor, either."

Though Henry sighed and nodded, Martha resolved to send Henry's editor a garlic necklace by motorcycle courier.

"Third: from now on you are on time for appointments. That's twice you've been late!" She paused for a moment, and then she added in her most menacing tone, "Don't you even think of crossing me. Whatever you do, you don't wanna make me mad. 'Cause when I get mad, I get ugly. You may think you're a tough guy, stalking little villages in Transylvania. But let me tell you something, buddy, you don't even know the meaning of tough 'til you've lived in New York City."

**T**he fact that there were no photographs of the author only added to the aura of excitement that surrounded the book.

As the release date drew near, bookshops across Britain agreed to open at midnight for special late-night autographing sessions.



Martha accompanied Henry to every interview and distributed home-made garlic bread to everyone present, insisting that they try some. Those who refused were given a cross to hold. Everyone said it was a marvellous publicity stunt.

The Guinness Book of Records got in touch with Henry's publisher to enquire about the number of advance orders.

The publisher arranged for Henry to appear on a live television programme three days before the book's release.

"I can't do it!" Henry moaned, pacing circles around Martha's office.

She yawned and glanced at her watch. Eleven-thirty p.m. Henry was so difficult in the summer; too little darkness made him cranky.

"I can't go on television!" he said again.

"It ought to be all right, Henry," Martha told him.

"I don't show up on film. I can't be photographed."

"But it's not going to be on film. It's a live broadcast."

"You think that makes a difference?"

"Yeah. It should do, anyway."

"What about the make-up?"

"What about it?" Martha asked tiredly. She was exhausted. She had other clients as well, especially since John had gone away on holiday and left her to run the agency single-handed. Henry didn't seem to realize this, and lately he'd been keeping her up until an hour before dawn almost every night.

"They'll sit me in front of a mirror, won't they?"

She'd forgotten about him and mirrors. "Er, I'll think of something." She yawned loudly. "I know, I'll tell them you have extremely sensitive skin and can't have any make-up or you break out in a rash. Okay?"

"Okay," he said, sounding doubtful. "Are you sure this is going to be okay? Martha?"

She was snoring.

**T**he Chatter Box was a late-night live interview and variety show that specialized in the strange and tacky. The guests appearing the same evening as Henry included a sculptor who worked with dead rodents and a rock band called "Sick Pay." The host, Tony Hitchens, was young, sarcastic and known for his amusing taste in clothing.

The studio audience, which had been suitably warmed up in advance and had practised applauding when the floor manager clapped his hands above his head and cheering when he spread his arms wide, did exactly what they were supposed to, and cheered loudly when Tony Hitchens appeared in a huge black cape. He waved and smiled, revealing a false set of fangs, which he then removed.

"Sorry ladies and gentlemen, I can't talk with those things in."

"Then put 'em back in!" someone yelled from the audience.

"I can see we're off to a great start tonight. That's my producer, ladies and gentlemen," Tony said, vaguely waving in the heckler's direction. "It's going to be one of those nights," he said with an exaggerated sigh. The audience loved it.

After exactly one minute and forty-five seconds of monologue, the floor manager cued Tony to introduce his first guest of the evening. "I don't suppose there's

anybody in Britain, or even the world today who hasn't heard about what's got to be the most publicized book ever written: *Confessions of a Vampire*. Everybody but everybody is talking about this book, and it isn't even in the shops yet! Up 'til now, the author has been a little bit of a mystery man. Nobody even knows what he looks like. But I know what he looks like, ladies and gentlemen, and in a moment, so will you. Let's have a really warm welcome for my first guest this evening: Count Henry Vladimir!"

The studio audience went wild as Henry Vladimir poked his head through the curtain, blinking uncertainly. Tony Hitchens rolled his eyes and made a big deal of walking over to the curtain and saying, "You can come out now, Count."

"Good evening." Henry stepped out from behind the curtain.

"Just over here, Count," Tony said, indicating the desk and sofa at one end of the stage. "Walk this way." He pushed his knees together and waddled over to his desk. The audience howled in appreciation.

Henry bowed to the studio audience and walked over to the sofa in a dignified manner.

"Sit down, Count. Make yourself comfortable."

Up in the control room, the director was tearing out his hair. According to the image on the monitors, Tony Hitchens was talking to himself.

"So Count, let's get right down to brass tacks, shall we? I understand from your publicity people that you claim that you are a genuine vampire and that your book is one-hundred-per-cent true."

"Well, not one-hundred-per-cent," Henry admitted.

"AHA! So the truth comes out! Now look, just between us, since we're such good friends and everything, what part isn't true?"

"Well, I've never actually been to an orgy. Though I've been to some pretty good parties."

The studio audience shrieked with delight. The station switchboard lit up with calls from viewers demanding to know what was going on. The technicians in the control room pushed every button they could find. Still no Henry Vladimir.

"But you're not really a vampire, are you?" Tony winked and nudged the Count with his elbow.

"Yes I am."

"Come on, Count."

"But I am."

"Okay, if you're really a vampire, then why don't you bite me?"

"What?" Henry asked breathlessly.

"If you're really a vampire, I want you to bite me. I'm sure we'd all love to see how it's done. Wouldn't we, ladies and gentlemen?"

The studio audience cheered.

"What a bunch of ghouls!" Tony rolled his eyes at the camera before turning back to Henry. "Really, we'd all love to see a real vampire at work." He took off his cape. Then he undid his tie and the top button of his shirt. "Go on," he said, pointing at his neck. "I don't mind. Really." He ignored the insistent shouting in his earpiece. Something about the Count is invisible, cut to commercial. It sounded as if his director had gone stark raving mad. "Bite me," he said.

"No, thank you," Henry replied.

"I knew you were a fake. All that business with your

manager handing out garlic bread and crosses backstage. I wouldn't have any of that stuff. Garlic is strictly for the French."

"You didn't have any garlic then?"

"Of course not."

"And you are carrying no cross?"

"Now what do you think? Well, Count baby, I'll tell you what I think. I don't think you're going to bite me, are you?" He turned to the audience. "Well, he's a fake, ladies and gentlemen. I knew it all along. This vampire business is nothing but a load of media hype. And if anybody should know about media hype, it's me!"

"Well, if you insist," Henry interrupted.

"So you're going to bite me after all?" Tony said mockingly.

"With pleasure," Henry answered, swooping down over his host.

The studio audience laughed hysterically as Henry, deprived of human blood for so long, greedily drank his fill. They laughed even louder when a woman ran onto the stage waving something that looked like a giant sausage and screamed, "Stop it, Henry! Stop it!"

Viewers around Britain wondered why they couldn't see Tony Hitchens any more, either. He was there a few seconds ago. The station announced they were having technical difficulties and cut to a commercial for cat food.

The sated vampire swung around, faced the studio audience, placed his hands across his stomach, and belched. His fangs were dripping blood. The audience and crew watched open-mouthed as Count Vladimir changed into a bat and flew away, leaving the woman angrily shaking her fist and Tony Hitchens sprawled across the floor with his throat torn open. Then they burst into a spontaneous round of applause.

**T**wo weeks later, Martha's office door opened. She looked up from the pile of manuscripts on her desk. "Henry! I've been trying to get hold of you for weeks! You were such a hit on the Tony Hitchens show, everybody, but everybody, wants you as a guest. Jonathan Ross, Clive Anderson – they're phoning five times a day. Even Wogan's talking about a comeback; he wants you to co-host a special midnight broadcast. And do you know the entire first print run of your book sold out within forty-eight hours and the second printing looks like it's gonna sell out before it even hits the shops! Coppola and Spielberg are fighting over the film rights, and Jack Nicholson's telling everyone in Hollywood that he's desperate to play you."

"That's very nice, Martha. But I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

"Bad news? What do you mean?"

"I'm afraid you won't be representing me any more. Of course, you've been very helpful, but I believe there are other agents better equipped to deal with my – how can I put this? – special needs."

Samantha and John walked into the office, wearing matching black capes. They both had yellow, glowing eyes and purple lips. Samantha smiled at Martha, revealing a perfect set of fangs.

"You can't do this, Henry. We have a contract."

"I think you'll find my contract is with the agency and not with you personally. And these two," he

indicated John and Samantha with a sweep of his hand, "are the agency. Not you."

"But I'm the one who got you the biggest advance for a first novel in history! I'm the one who contacted Hollywood! I'm the one who's been negotiating the contract for your second book..."

"I know all this, Martha," Henry said. "And I'm very grateful. Really, I am. But it's just that these two... well, we have more in common. They understand me. If you know what I mean."

"Oh," Martha said. "You mean..." she pointed at her neck.

Henry shrugged and nodded.

"Damn it, Henry! You're going to be one of the biggest authors of all times, and with your immortality... there's just no end in sight. For one thing, you'll never go out of copyright. And if you think I'm giving up my ten per cent, you're crazy. I'll do whatever it takes to keep you."

"You mean?"

"If that's what it takes." She dropped her head back, exposing her jugular vein. "But just be careful, okay? You know how ticklish I am."

---

**Molly Brown** comes from the United States, but has been living in London for a few years. Among other things, she claims to have worked as an armed guard, a cabaret performer and a professional obituarist. She has contributed several short stories to crime anthologies edited by Maxim Jakubowski, as well as two earlier sf/fantasy pieces to *Interzone* – "Bad Timing" (issue 54) and "The Vengeance of Grandmother Wu" (issue 61).

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Kim Stanley Robinson's

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# R.A. Lafferty

## An Annotated Bibliography

### Andrew Tidmarsh

**R**(aphael) A(loysius) Lafferty was born on 11th November 1914. His first story, "The Wagons," appeared in 1959; his first three novels – *Past Master*, *Reefs of Earth* and *Space Chantey* – appeared in 1968. He has to date published about 250 short stories and 20 novels. During the 1960s and 1970s he was a popular and prolific writer: three novels – *Past Master* (1968), *Fourth Mansions* (1969) and *The Devil is Dead* (1970) – were Nebula Award nominees and his short story "Eurema's Dam" (1973) was a Hugo Award winner. Since his 70th birthday he has written nothing apart from the story "Le Hot Sport" (1988). But, in 1990, he was the winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award at the World Fantasy Convention.

Lafferty's major work falls into three groups, *The Argo Mythos* (including the trilogy of novels *Archipelago*, *The Devil is Dead* and *More Than Melchisedech*, the associated stories "Dotty," "How Many Miles to Babylon," "Promontory Goats," "Episodes of the Argo" and "The Three Armageddons of Enniscorthy Sweeney," and – in the author's opinion – his most important work); *The Dana Coscuin Cycle* (including the novels *The Flame is Green* and *Half a Sky* and the unpublished novels *Sardinian Summer* and *First and Last Island*), and the (autobiographical) cycle *In a Green Tree* (including the novels *My Heart Leaps Up*, *Grass Hoppers* and *Wild Honey*, *Deep Scars of the Thunder* and *Incidents of Travel in Flatland*).

Lafferty's work is not to everyone's taste. There is not a bit of science in his science fiction. His prose style is rough and clumsy, his novels – in his own words – are "just short stories strung together." Yet his characters are giants among men whose histories may be read, layer by layer through geological time, as though hewn from the face of a cliff. For R.A. Lafferty, science fiction is mythology.

Since 1984, his work has been kept in print by a number of enthusiastic small presses. The following list includes all of his published novels (irrespective of apparent genre) and the contents of all the collections of his short stories. Two appendices include a list of novels that he has written which have not, as yet, been published and the names and addresses of those small presses from which his work is presently available.

I have been helped in the preparation of this list by Chris Drumm, by Dan Knight (in particular, whose *R.A. Lafferty Checklist* is available from Drumm Books), and by Les Escott.

#### **Past Master** (1968)

A novel. Nebula Award nominee 1968, Hugo Award nominee 1969. Lafferty's first and most accessible novel. Sir Thomas More is returned to life by the rulers of the planet Astrobe – which, according to Lafferty, is present-day Earth – to solve their apparently intractable problems. Highly recommended.

#### **Reefs of Earth** (1968)

A novel. The children of the Dulanty family look like "normal Earth children" but the truth is that they are "aliens from a strange planet" who "delight in destroying their neighbours."

#### **Space Chantey** (1968)

A novel. "The Lay of Road-Strum from the ancient Chronicles." Lafferty's re-working of *The Odyssey*.

#### **Fourth Mansions** (1969)

A novel. Nebula Award nominee 1970. Roger Zelazny compares this novel to "a psychedelic morality play where the Virtues and the Vices keep sneaking off the stage and changing masks." A dense, symbolic fantasy with a contemporary American setting. Recommended.

#### **Nine Hundred Grandmothers** (1970)

A collection containing "Nine Hundred Grandmothers," "Land of the Great Horses," "Ginny Wrapped in the Sun," "The Six Fingers of Time," "Frog on the Mountain," "All the People," "Primary Education of the Camiroi," "Slow Tuesday Night," "Snuffles," "Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne," "Name of the Snake," "Narrow Valley," "Polity and Custom of the Camiroi," "In Our Block," "Hog-Belly Honey," "Seven Day Terror," "The Hole on the Corner," "What's the Name of that Town," "One at a Time" and "Guesting Time." Highly recommended.

#### **The Devil is Dead** (1971)

A novel. Nebula Award nominee 1971. A series of somewhat confused adventures featuring the Devil.

**Arrive at Easterwine** (1971), subtitled "The Autobiography of a Ktistec Machine as conveyed to R.A. Lafferty."

A novel. The "exuberant, hilarious and wise testimony of an obsessively creative (ktistec) machine."

**The Fall of Rome (1971)**

An "historical novel" in which Lafferty "followed history where the history could be found" but, otherwise, "invented" it. Recommended.

**The Flame is Green (1971)**

A novel. Vol 1 of the Dana Coscuin Cycle, to be followed by *Half a Sky*, *Sardinian Summer* and *First and Last Island*.

**Strange Doings (1972)**

A collection containing "Rainbird," "Camels and Dromedaries, Clem," "Continued on Next Rock," "Once on Aranea," "Sodom and Gomorrah, Texas," "The Man with the Speckled Eyes," "All But the Words," "The Transcendent Tigers," "World Abounding," "Dream," "Ride a Tin Can," "Aloys," "Entire and Perfect Chrysolite," "Incased in Ancient Rind," "The Ugly Sea" and "Cliffs that Laughed." Recommended.

**Okla Hannali (1972)**

An "historical novel." An "epic of the Choctaw Indians" that Terry Bisson calls the "great undiscovered American novel." Highly recommended.

**Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add? (1974)**, subtitled "Stories about Secret Places and Mean Men"

A collection containing "About a Secret Crocodile," "Mad Man," "Nor Limestone Isles," "The Man Underneath," "Boomer Flats," "This Grand Carcass Yet," "In the Garden," "Groaning Hinges of the World," "Golden Trabant," "How They Gave It Back," "Maybe Jones and the City," "Seven Story Dream," "Adam Had Three Brothers," "Pig in a Pokey," "The Weirdest World" and "The Ultimate Creature." Recommended.

**Funny Fingers and Cabrito (1976)**

A chapbook containing "Funny Fingers" and "Cabrito." Incorporated into *Iron Tears* (1992).

**Not to Mention Camels (1976)**

A novel. A "strange and curious novel, laced with superb similes, mind-blowing metaphors," and "cascading prose."

**Apocalypses (1977)**

A volume containing the novels "Where Have You Been, Sandalotis?" ("a very old name for something either in legend or in geography – are Sardinia and Sandalotis the same place?") and "Three Armageddons of Enniscorthy Sweeney" (an "introductory sketch of the life and attributes of Enniscorthy Sweeney"; part of the Argo Mythos). Recommended.

**Archipelago (1979)** (Manuscript Press)

A novel. Vol 1 of the Argos Mythos trilogy, to be followed by *The Devil is Dead* and *More Than Melchisedech*. Inspired by the legend of the Argonauts. In Lafferty's opinion, his best novel.

**Aurelia (1982)**

A novel. The story of the space girl who taught that "sin was an offence against happiness."



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**Golden Gate and Other Stories (1983)** (Corroboree Press)

A collection containing "Golden Gate," "Mr Hamdryad," "This Boding Itch," "Condillac's Statue of Wrens in his Head," "The Cliff Climbers," "McGruder's Marvels," "Tongues of the Matagorda," "Ishmael into the Barrens," "Eurema's Dam" (Hugo Award winner, 1973), "Days of Grass, Days of Straw," "Make Sure the Eyes are Good Enough," "Bequest of Wings," "Fall of Pebble Stones," "Marsilia V," "One Eyed Mockingbird" and "Sky."

**Through Elegant Eyes (1983)**, subtitled "Stories of Austro and the Men Who Knew Everything" (Corroboree Press)

A collection containing "The All-At-Once Man," "Mud Violets," "Barnaby's Clock," "The Ungodly Mice of Doctor Drakos," "The Two Headed Lion of Chris Benedetti," "The Hellaceous Rocket of Harry O'Donovan," "The Woolly World of Barnaby Sheen," "Rivers of Damascus," "Animal Fair," "And Read the Flesh Between the Lines," "Old Halloweens on the Guna Slopes," "Brain Fever Season," "St Poleander's Eve," "And All the Skies are Full of Fish" and "What Big Tears the Dinosaur's." Recommended.

**Annals of Klepsis (1983)**

A novel. "The third focus of the humanly inhabited universe has been determined to be a point and a

person on the Planet Klepsis..." The last of Lafferty's novels to appear from a major publisher (in this case, Ace Books in the USA).

**Four Stories** (1983) (Drumm Books)

A 40-page booklet containing "The Last Astronaut," "In the Turpentine Trees," "Faith Sufficient" and "Bird Master."

**Heart of Stone Dear and Other Stories** (1983) (Drumm Books)

A 44-page booklet containing "And You Did Not Wail," "Company in the Wings," "The End of Outward," "Heart of Stone, Dear" and "Haruspex."

**Snake in His Bosom and Other Stories** (1983) (Drumm Books)

A 44-page booklet containing "Jack Bang's Eyes," "Pleasures and Palaces," "Posterior Analytics," "Snake in His Bosom" and "Unique Adventure Gone."

**Ringin' Changes** (1984)

A collection containing "Parthen," "Old Foot Forgot," "Dorg," "Days of Grass, Days of Straw," "Brain Fever Season," "And Read the Flesh Between the Lines," "Old Halloweens on the Guna Slopes," "The Ungodly Mice of Doctor Drakos," "The Woolly World of Barnaby Sheen," "Rivers of Damascus," "Among the Hairy Earthmen," "In Outraged Stone," "And Name My Name," "Sky," "For All Poor Folk at Picketwire," "Oh Whatta You Do When the Well Runs Dry?" "And Some in Velvet Gowns," "The Doggone Highly Scientific Door," "Interurban Queen" and "Been a Long Long Time." Recommended. The last of Lafferty's collections to appear from a major publisher (Ace).

**The Man Who Made Models and Other Stories** (1984) (Drumm Books)

A 52-page booklet containing "The Man Who Made Models," "I'll See It Done and Then I'll Die," "The Effigy Histories," "Of Laughter and the Love of Friends" and "Two for Four Ninety-Nine."

**Half a Sky** (1984) (Corroboree Press)

A novel. Vol 2 of the Dana Coscuin Cycle.

**Slippery and Other Stories** (1985) (Drumm Books)

A 40-page booklet containing "Slippery," "All Hollow Though You Be," "Ewe Lamb" and "John Salt."

**My Heart Leaps Up** (1986) (Drumm Books)

A novel, published in five instalments. Vol 1 of the four-novel series "In A Green Tree," to be followed by *Grass Hoppers and Wild Honey*, *Deep Scars of the Thunder* and *Incidents of Travel in Flatland*.

**Serpent's Egg** (1987) (Morrigan)

A novel. Published in a limited edition of 1010, 260 copies of which include the story "Grey Ghost: A Reminiscence." "The Lynn-Randal Experiment raised three children together almost from infancy. When these three were just short of ten years old, they were merged with children of three other experiments. Was the experiment too successful?"

**The Early Lafferty Vol 1** (1988) (United Mythologies)  
A 40-page chapbook containing "The Wagons," "Saturday You Die," "The Other Side of the Moon," "Long Teeth," "Rain Mountain" and "Task Force Fifty-Eight and One Half."

**Promontory Goats** (1988) (United Mythologies)

A 24-page chapbook containing "Promontory Goats." Part of the Argos Mythos.

**The Back Door of History** (1988) (United Mythologies)

A 36-page chapbook containing "Rogue Raft," "Assault on Fat Mountain," "Rainy Day in Halicarnasses," "Phoenic," "Calamities of Last Pauper" and "Six Leagues From Lop."

**East of Laughter** (1988) (Morrigan)

A novel. Published in a limited edition of 1010, 260 copies of which include "The Story of Little Briar Rose." "This is the story of how the World, at the uneven changing of its supporting pillars, staggered and reeled."

**How Many Miles to Babylon** (1989) (United Mythologies)

A 36-page chapbook containing "How Many Miles to Babylon." Part of the Argo Mythos.

**The Elliptical Grave** (1989) (United Mythologies)

A novel. Published in a limited edition of 375 copies, 75 copies of which include the story "The Man Who Lost His Magic."

**Sinbad: The 13th Voyage** (1989) (Broken Mirrors)

A novel.

**The Early Lafferty Vol II** (1990) (United Mythologies)

A 36-page chapbook containing "Day of the Glacier," "Beautiful Dreamer," "McGonical's Worm," "Ghost in the Corn Crib," "Almost Perfect" and "Maleficent Morning."

**Episodes of the Argo** (1990) (United Mythologies)

A collection containing "Episodes of the Argo," "The Casey Machine" and "Apocryphal Passage of the Last Night of Count Finnegan on Galveston Island" (intended to be the ending of *The Devil is Dead*). Part of the Argo Mythos.

**Dotty** (1990) (United Mythologies)

A novel. Published in a limited edition of 330 copies, 80 copies of which include the story "Holy Woman." Part of the Argo Mythos. Recommended.

**Mischief Malicious** (1991) (United Mythologies)

A collection containing "Tom O'Shanty's Aura," "The 99th Cubicle," "Fog in My Throat," "Oh, Those Trepidatious Eyes!," "Buckets Full of Brains," "Pine Castle," "Junkyard Thoughts," "Enfant Terrible," "The Polite People of Pudibundia," "Rang Dang Kaloof" and "Puddle on the Floor."

**Lafferty In Orbit** (1991) (Broken Mirrors)

A collection containing "The Hole on the Corner," "One At a Time," "Configuration of the North Shore," "Entire and Perfect Chrysolite," "Continued

On Next Rock," "Old Foot Forgot," "All Pieces of a River Shore," "Interurban Queen," "When All the Lands Pour Out Again," "Dorg," "And Name My Name," "Royal Licorice," "Flaming Ducks and Giant Bread," "The Skinny People of Leptophlebo Street," "Great Day in the Morning," "The Hand With One Hundred Fingers," "Fall of Pebble Stones," "Bright Coins in Never-Ending Stream" and "The Only Tune That He Could Play." A collection of stories from Damon Knight's *Orbit* anthologies. Highly recommended.

**Tales of Chicago** (1992) (United Mythologies)

A novel. The first third of *More Than Melchisedech*. To be followed by *Tales of Midnight* and *Argo*. Part of the *Argo Mythos* trilogy. Recommended.

**Iron Tears** (1992) (Edgewood Press)

A collection containing "The World As Will And Wallpaper," "By The Sea Shore," "Or Little Ducks Each Day," "Funny Fingers," "Cabrito," "Horns on Their Heads," "Berryhill," "Selenium Ghosts of the Eighteen Seventies," "Lord Torpedo, Lordy Gyroscope," "You Can't Go Back," "Ifrit," "Thieving Bear Planet," "Magazine Section," "Grey Ghost: A Reminiscence" and "Le Hot Sport."

**Appendix A: The Unpublished Novels**

*Esteban* (1968)

*Mantis* (1970)

*Iron Tongue of Midnight* (1975)

*When All the World Was Young* (1975)

*Dark Shine* (1977)

*Fair Hills of Ocean, Oh!* (1979)

**Appendix B: The Small Presses**

**BROKEN MIRRORS PRESS**

Box 473, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02238, USA

**CORROBOREE PRESS**

1309 4th Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414, USA (Greg Ketter)

**DRUMM BOOKS**

Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226, USA (Chris Drumm)

**EDGEWOOD PRESS**

Box 264, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02238, USA

**MANUSCRIPT PRESS**

Box 336, Mountain Home, Tennessee 37684, USA (Rick Norwood)

**MORRIGAN PUBLICATIONS**

84 Ivy Avenue, Southdown, Bath, Avon BA2 1AN, UK (Les Escott)

**UNITED MYTHOLOGIES PRESS**

Box 390, Station A, Weston, Ontario, Canada M9N-3N1 (Dan Knight)

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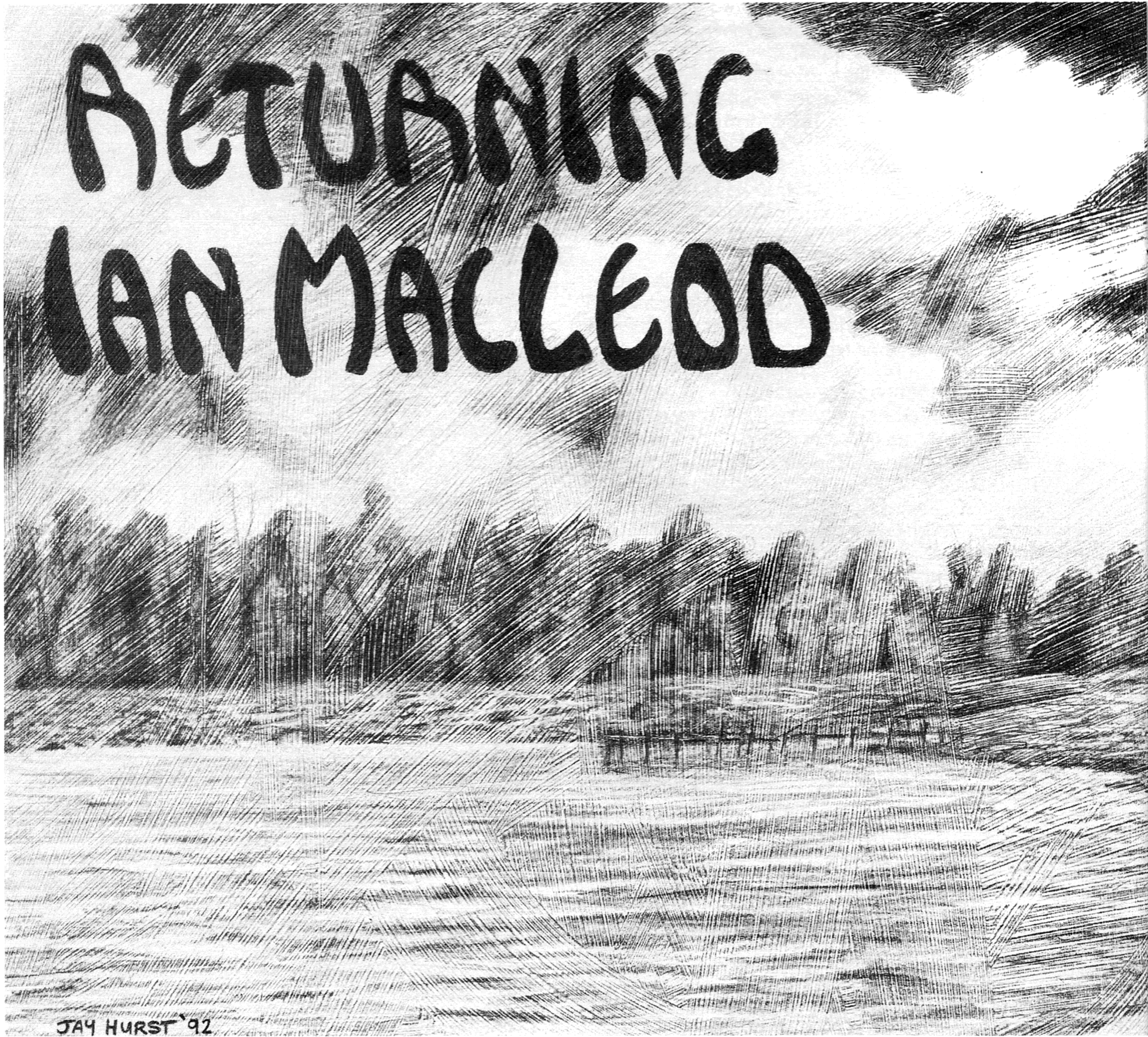
## JGB NEWS

### A newsletter for readers of J.G. Ballard

Yes, the Ballard newsletter has been revived, after several years away. Full of specialist bibliographical information and minutiae, it is for keen readers of JGB only.

Issue 18 is out now, accompanied by the never-circulated issue 17. If you wish to receive them, please send £2 (inland) or £3 (overseas; \$4 USA – dollar bills accepted). Make cheques or postal orders payable to "David Pringle" and send them to *Interzone's* main address, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK.

I am willing to trade the newsletter for cuttings, photocopies, etc., of reviews, interviews and articles concerning JGB (especially overseas material). Please enquire if you have a genuine interest.



**A**n old man exercising his dog found me wandering the shore of the lake outside town. It seemed as though nothing had changed. The uneven pier I'd fished off as a kid still stretched out across the water and the same upturned keels still mouldered on the strand. It must have been the memories of other summers – other Earths – that pulled me here. The salt pickings off grazed knees. Times when every greening rope and smoketube butt was treasure.

Recognizing the badge on my spacesuit, the old man rang the local police from the callbox beside the road. On standing instructions, the police in turn contacted Mission Control. I stood waiting on the shingle, remembering the water's soft odour, the pull of a fishing line, cries of gulls and of laughter, the slap of the waves. By the time the people from Mission Control arrived a small crowd had gathered; nudging, whispering, pointing. The door of a floater hissed open. Everyone stood well back. Alone, I climbed inside.

**“W**here have you been?” they asked, leaning across the debriefing table at Mission Control. “Tell us, what do you remember?”

“I remember *The Hollander* falling towards Belia. Earth and the stars and the Moon smearing blue. Being afraid and alone.”

“And after that?”

“Nothing.”

Nods and glances were exchanged. With a corporate shrug of their corporate shoulders, the Mission Control people led me down the corridor to another room, leaving me to clean up. I was puzzled – and, I admit, offended – by their lack of interest. Here was I, one of the famous twelve astronauts, back from trying to reach beyond. Weren't we all heroes? But when I'd got through the difficult ritual of washing and changing, it was explained to me that this was the fourth time I'd returned to this particular Earth, and that every other return had been much the same.





"I can't remember," I said. "It feels like the first time."

"That's quite natural," they said, smiling. "And we're pleased you're here."

"And no one has got beyond Earth?" I asked.

The Mission Control people shook their heads. Then they lead me out through the swing doors into the sunlit car park.

"Is that all?" I asked.

My old ground-control contact produced a car key from his suit pocket. His name, I now remembered, was Tony Tsui. We'd been close colleagues, but never friends. Careful to avoid touching, he dangled the glowing key towards me.

"Take a rest," he said. "Go home."

My car was low and sleek, of a newer design than any I had seen before. But it was still recognizably a development of the earlier models that I had driven before leaving, and it only took me a moment to understand the controls. It whispered into power at the

touch of my fingers. I instructed it to take me home.

The drive home was much like the car itself, like meeting the close relative of someone you have known, a twin or a brother. Scanning stations on the radio, I heard distant music like the sigh of waves, the threads of news stories that, for me, lay mostly unravelled at both ends. The only item that made any sense was Mission Control's announcement that another of the twelve astronauts – this time the one from the craft called *The Hollander* – had returned.

The old streets, the old houses. It was past rush hour. The kids were out playing. The men were in shirtsleeves supervising the lawnmower whilst their wives saw to the herbaceous borders, or sat on the porches in shorts and tie-up blouses to catch the warmth of the setting sun. A few shaded their eyes to watch me pass, as though they somehow associated this car passing under the shadowed elms of their street with the news that had heard late on in the tea-time bulletins.

Each turn became more familiar. Elaine and I had chosen a house far out in the suburbs where you could smell the woods and the corn when you opened the windows, where every other plot was still a field. Somehow, a secret part of me had always seen it as a place where, eventually, Elaine would end up living happily and alone – without me. I'd had these thoughts even before we were married, when we first climbed over the gate and dug the For Sale sign out of the ivy, when I was still on a low rung of the ladder at Mission Control, when wandering Belia hadn't been discovered and *The Hollander* wasn't even a dream.

Past the local school, the local shops, the big old bridge spanning the river. The car slowed behind a farmward-bound tractor, clod-heavy claws folded on its bonnet, the engine muttering to itself at the end of a long day. I found the command to lower the car windows and let in the sweet county dust, the smell of straw, the evening-cobwebbed air. The tractor turned up the farm drive. Soon after, I too was home.

Long shadows of a climbing frame and scattered outdoor toys stretched over the front lawn. The house was redbrick, with lights beginning to show at the windows. Climbing out of the car, I found myself feeling for the house keys in my pockets. Of course, they weren't there.

I stood on my own doorstep and rang my own doorbell. It sounded odd, a summons coming from somewhere deep inside. But Elaine would be expecting me – and tomorrow there would probably be a party with the neighbours, out on the back lawn if the weather stayed good. How many times had Mission Control said I'd been back before? Was this the fourth or fifth? Someone was coming down the hall, but I found myself looking back over the treetops and hedges. The first stars were already beginning to show. And with them, Belia. Red as Sauron's eye, near as the Moon.

**T**he door opened. The unchanged smell of the house came out to greet me.

"You've arrived," Elaine said. For a moment, I thought she might reach out to touch. But, clumsily, we stepped back from each other.

"I suppose you heard the news," I said.

"I heard it on the radio."

"I'm afraid," I said, trying a joke, "that I haven't brought any starmen back with me."

Out of habit, I shrugged off my coat and tried to hang it on the hall stand. But it passed through the hook and drifted down to settle on the carpet. We both stared at it; just another shadow.

"You haven't got yourself a job?" I asked.

"Oh no," she smiled with greengreen eyes. "After all, there's my widow's pension."

"And how's little Danny?"

"Danny's fine. He's upstairs in bed."

"How old is he now?"

"Nearly eight. And Jenny's fine too."

"Jenny?"

"Our eldest kid."

I nodded, and went through the door on the right to sit down in the lounge, realizing as I did so that this was where we had always taken guests in the house.

Elaine turned on a lamp and sat down on the chair

across from the fireplace, her hands pressed tightly down on her lap. She asked, "Have you eaten? I suppose you'd like a drink?"

I stared at her.

"I mean," she said, "you can eat and drink, can't you? They always say at Mission Control that you're virtual matter, that –"

"– it's just a matter of concentration. Yes, I can eat and drink as easily as I can touch the arm of this chair." I smiled, brushing the soft fabric with my fingertips to prove my point, wondering if it was really her perception or mine that made the waveform collapse. "I haven't eaten, but I'm not really hungry. A drink would be nice."

She stood up again, "I'll get some water."

When she had left the room, closing the door behind her, I stood in front of the mirror hanging over the mantelpiece. I wanted to see what I looked like, whether it was possible for me to age. But peering from the familiar scenery of my own lounge, I saw the face of a stranger.

"It must be hard for you," Elaine said, making me start as she came back into the room, "all this air, all this gravity."

Remembering the right measures, she poured me a whisky and water. I sat down and she drew up a low table and placed it near to me. "Thanks..." I said.

"Do you remember the times you came back before?" she asked, sitting down again.

"No. Were they all like this?"

She nodded. "You always try to hang your coat, and you walk in here and choose that chair. And then you say you haven't eaten but you're not hungry. The weather's always the same too. Sometimes, when I look out in the morning and I see clouds and sunshine, the bluebells in the field opposite, I know you'll be coming even before I hear the news. That's funny, isn't it?"

"And what do I say now?"

"What you just said."

I sipped the whisky without thinking. It tasted of nothing – a good malt, wasted. I forced myself to tighten up, to believe that I was here, knowing that in a worst case, if I really let go, the expensive fluid would simply fall through me onto the chair. I sipped again, concentrating, observing, tasting peat, alcohol, sweet amber darkness.

"It's Laphroaig," Elaine said. "Your favourite. I always keep some in."

I nodded, glancing over at the half-empty bottle on the side.

Then I turned when I heard the front door opening, footsteps outside in the hall.

Elaine shouted, "We're in here, darling, Daddy's come home."

Jenny had long blonde hair and looked a little like Lewis Carroll's Alice, with a face that was too shinningly perfect to survive the change to adult beauty. I stared at her, taking her in, all the changes. My own daughter. I just stared.

"It's good to see you again, Daddy."

"It's good to see you."

"I heard on the news. Daddy, I'm sorry you didn't get beyond."

A ticking silence filled the room. "I think," I said, "that I'm starting to feel hungry after all."

"I've put something by in the stove," Elaine said, her hands still tight, still smoothing her dress. "Come on into the kitchen."

Elaine and Jenny sat watching me eat. Even in my own kitchen, with glimpses through the dark window of the garden I had spent so many happy hours tending, I felt like some creature in a zoo. I was absurdly conscious of my every swallow and word and gesture. I concentrated hard on the food, on the familiar taste of Elaine's cooking, on asking my daughter Jenny questions that would show the right kind of parental curiosity.

Jenny was a sweet, polite kid. But somehow I had lost any sense of love for her. Still, I was proud of her, proud even of the way she did her best to disguise her confusion at finding her essentially dead Father – her famous Dad – somehow back at home, sitting at the kitchen table eating food that her Mum had kept over in the oven from tea. But then I reminded myself that none of this was new to her, that I'd been back – what was it? – four times before.

"Little Miss, I think you'd better be getting up to bed," Elaine said after I'd finished eating.

Jenny got up quickly from the table. "Goodnight Mum," she said. She was almost at the door before she remembered and turned. "Goodnight Dad."

"Well," Elaine said after she'd put the dishes in the unit and poured herself a big glass of wine, holding it firmly and with both hands in the hope that I wouldn't notice she was trembling, "...what do you want to do now?"

I shrugged. "What do I usually do?"

She frowned, and covered the frown with the rim of her glass to drink.

"...I'm sorry," I said, "I didn't mean..."

"Oh, no, it's all right. This can't be easy for you, I realize that."

We went outside into the garden, sharing the unspoken knowledge of a ritual repeated. She was standing closer to me now, and I sensed that she was more comfortable in the darkness.

"Up there," she said, looking up at the glittering stars. "It must be wonderful...and lonely."

"Not wonderful," I said, "not lonely," wondering why she had to pretend that my journey had anything to do with this particular Universe, these particular stars. Knowing too that we'd spoken this way many times before. And red Belia shone brighter than most of the stars, anyway. Belia the drifter, Belia the wanderer, captured now in a distant Earth orbit, tamed and encircled by the monitors and satellites.

"It isn't like ordinary spaceflight," I said, wondering why I kept telling Elaine these things. "Man could never cross this Universe. Without Belia, we would never stand any chance of reaching the stars."

"You still dream about that, don't you? The stars, the starmen. Making contact."

"I'll always have that dream."

The lights of the nearby houses were shining through the trees, gently flickering as the night wind stirred the leaves and branches. On and off. Bright, then dark. Like beacons, drawing the moths, the bats, the insects – weary travellers all. The lights called

out to me with the promise of warm, welcoming arms, sweet forgetfulness and the remembrance of all things.

She said, "I'm sorry I didn't come down to meet you at Mission Control."

"There was no need – we're here together now."

"I kept telling myself that I should go when I heard on the news that you'd come back again. But I suppose I get scared. It's always the same."

"Really, I don't mind. It's lovely to come home and find you here, Elaine. Just waiting. You, Danny... Jenny."

Elaine shivered, pulling her arms tight around her waist.

I asked, "Are you cold?"

"Just tired. Shall we go to bed?"

She had put my pyjamas out on the pillow, pressed and smelling of the laundry. It was a kind thought, a gesture towards lost normality, and I made the necessary effort of concentration to put them on, and then to use the razor and soap on the shelf by the bedroom sink. She sat on the bed, half-dressed, watching as I shaved. I don't think she realized how difficult the act of shaving was, but even to the strange and critical eyes that stared back at me from the mirror, the effect was convincing. Carefully, I slopped the dark-flecked foam down into the enamel basin where she couldn't see, running the hot tap for effect. And, unobserved, the waveform ceased to collapse. It had all dissolved into transparency long before the vortex descended down the plughole.

Lying together with the lights off, the curtains drawn, the room shimmering, Elaine asked. "Do you want to touch me?"

"If you'll let me...if you're not afraid."

But of course she was afraid – I could feel it even though she had drunk enough wine to stop herself trembling.

"It's easy with inanimate objects," I said, rolling over onto my side, gentle pulling back the sheets from the curve of her breasts. "They have no will, nothing to accept or reject. And part of the problem is me...I fell the same repulsion."

"You don't repulse me."

"Uncertainty, then. Fear."

"Just touch me. I'd like to feel you. Really, I would."

My fingers touched the skin of her neck, tracing down. I could feel her warmth, the tremor of her breath. How long had I dreamed of this moment? How long? Eventually, she let me hold her for a while, lying close with the sheets rucked around us like two eternal lovers, real and true. For me, it was sweet oblivion – for her, an act of bravery or love or some kind of surrender. I could feel the house around me, my two children sleeping, the occasional car passing along the road, the trees whispering as their branches snagged starlight and streetlight. The moment lasted for longer than was possible, until the forgetfulness of sleep began to come over me, and Elaine pulled back across the pillow with a stifled cry at the sight of my hand lying inside the curve of her belly.

"What will the starmen be like when you meet them?"

This was Danny, my own little Danny, bigger now with his bright red hair faded to

brown and the crescent of freckles wrinkled up around his eyes and nose as he squinted in the bright sun. Morning, and we were walking together along country paths near home. And he was asking the one question that the kid inside me would always want a kid of my own to ask.

"The starmen..." I paused to snatch a seedhead of dandelion from the hedgerow. Showing off, I blew at it. Twice, three times, watching the little parachutes scatter. "...life in another Universe could be a million times older than we are. They might look like us, but most probably they won't. If you think of the most exotic animal here on Earth, and then try to think of something else...something impossible."

"What will they say?"

"Everything we can't imagine."

"And why haven't they come here already?"

"Because...because they're probably afraid. Afraid the way we are."

"But you're not afraid, are you Daddy?"

"No," I said, "not any longer."

We reached a little park, a kind of play area, with old wooden swings and a rusted slide and the tilted ruins of a roundabout rising out of the long grass. The kids on Earth had better toys to play with these days. They could step right through doorways into amazing games, talk and battle with digitized aliens that were probably far stranger and more convincing than anything I could convey.

Danny sat on a swing. The old wood and the metal chains moaned and creaked, but I pushed him high towards the sky. Now that his back was to me, now that he probably wasn't listening, I found it even easier to talk. My pet subject. All the dreams of space I'd had when I was a kid. Oh yes, the starmen would be strange and special, and the stars would taste of salt and the emptiness between would be blackcurrant. Of course, it was all quite impossible – as impossible as the dream of travelling faster than light. But I still had that picture in my mind. I knew what the starmen would be like when we finally met them. Silver eyes flecked with the gold of wisdom set in long faces that always smiled. Reaching out many-fingered hands to touch, to hug and hold and laugh at the plight of us poor humans, all the dead and all the living.

And then Belia had been found, drifting through the Solar System. Possessed of an enormously deep gravity well, yet too small to be a star. And bright, too – her light redshifted to blood and rubies. Shuttles were sent out, and Belia was tamed, analyzed, brought home. Starbright – but no star – Belia was a wanderer from the start of this Universe, from the moment when spacetime began. A small black hole. Oh, how the men of science had struggled to explain that a black hole would actually glow with a fizz of quantum matter if it happened to be small enough. At first, the people of Earth were disappointed – they wanted black holes to be pits of darkness, plugholes for dreams – until it was explained that Belia would virtually solve the world's energy problems. And that somewhere within her ruby brilliance, she hid her ultimate jewel. An event horizon shrouding a singularity. A pathway out of this Universe.

The swing shuddered and the frame sagged in the middle. I almost found myself reaching out to grab

Danny and save him. But he leapt back onto the ground in a moment, landing easily on his own two feet.

Jenny was there at the table for lunch, although earlier on in the house I felt that she'd been avoiding me: as though she sensed that I wanted to talk to her alone.

"Why don't you drive down to the shops?" Elaine asked me. "We need to get stuff to fill up the larder. Everyone's coming this evening."

"You shouldn't have bothered," I said. "I don't need a party."

Elaine shrugged. She was wearing an apron, holding tight to the sink. Briefly, her eyes met mine, and I saw the darkness of a betrayal I could scarcely remember.

"Okay," I said, looking towards Jenny. "Will you come and help me at the shops?"

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Daddy. I've arranged to meet some friends."

"And me too," said Danny from across the table, before I had a chance to ask.

So I went to the shops alone, with the list that Elaine had given me, and in the car that Mission Control had provided. I told myself that this was good, part of the necessary acclimatization process. After all, I hadn't had any real time on my own since returning. And in the shops, I found that people recognized me from the news. They were all happy to ask the right questions and act with the right mix of commiseration and admiration due to someone who has undertaken a hazardous journey and returned without reaching their goal. They were even happy to help me control the loader-trolleys and decipher Elaine's spidery handwriting, happy to do anything as long as they could keep their distance. Beyond this respectful glow, I could sense another layer of attitude. Kids sniggering and pointing, adolescents stepping away as they tried to look cool, mothers catching the hands of their children and drawing them back along the bright displays. He's just a dead astronaut, I could hear them whispering. You know, my darling, one of the men and women who wander from universe to universe. They're all the same.

So I took my time. The stares and the nagging thoughts kept me busy. It was nearly evening again – the end of the first full day of my return – when I got back home, slowed down by the same tractor, searching my pockets again for the house keys that I realized Elaine hadn't given me, feeling almost the same sense of isolation and unease as I rang the doorbell and waited for someone to come.

"Where have you been?" Elaine asked. "Look, the neighbours have already arrived."

"So what?" I snapped despite myself. "Don't I do this every time anyway?"

"Do you think that makes it any easier?"

People had gone out onto the lawn, and there were more arriving. Friends, neighbours, relatives, old colleagues from Mission Control – looking happier and sleeker and more at ease than I remembered. And they all had the advantage over me. They'd been to a party like this one before, with *Welcome Home* strung up in red and white over the elm tree. They all knew just what to say.

"It's wonderful that you're back."

"You must have a thousand stories. Look, come round soon for dinner. You can eat, can't you?"

"I'm proud of you. I never believed you'd do it."

"Do you think you'll try to get beyond Earth again?"

No, I said, and yes, and maybe. Through the drifts of barbecue smoke and smiling faces, I could see that the ivy I'd planted years before along the back wall was now close up to the gables. Soon – by this autumn anyway – someone would need to get up on a ladder and drag it out of the gutters. But I was pleased with the way it softened the lines of the house, pleased with how well the rosebushes were doing, pleased with the smell of charred and sizzling meat and the coloured lights that made the garden hang back in a warm glow from the onset of night.

I saw Tony Tsui, my ground-contact at Mission Control. Hoping that he might be worth more than a quick ready-made phrase, I went over to talk to him.

I asked, "Do they all come back this often?"

"You mean the other astronauts?" He shrugged, gazing over my shoulder to where the children were playing, teasing the tin garden weeder and lawnmower with impossible commands. "Some come more often, some less."

"Doesn't that bother you people?"

Briefly, a sense of anger and disappointment crossed his face. After all, he'd been the one who'd had to face the politicians, the press.

"It isn't what we'd planned," he said, managing to smile again.

"But it can't go on forever, can it?"

"Who knows? You're quite outside the laws of this Universe. You're virtual matter – a kind of ghost." He sipped his wine and swallowed, getting into his publicity spiel. "Sure, you're a lot clearer and sharper than all those headless lords and the white ladies..."

I looked down at the ground, at the impressive way my feet were resting on it without drifting down into the turf. Part of the problem with us twelve astronauts was that we hadn't been chosen with any need to fit the usual mission profiles. Mission Control normally looked for calmness under pressure, a strong will to live. But not for this project. They needed dreamers, dreamers who were prepared to die for their dreams. When the twelve of us were still together in initial training, it had been easier to ignore that fact. We'd laughed and joked, and gone along with everything that was suggested, looked forward to fame and the hope of discovery, a special kind of immortality.

I said, "Nothing here has changed – but everything feels different."

"I suppose that's likely anyway, isn't it? Think of Odysseus. Think of all the explorers in history. They never really settled down – they always wanted to get away."

"And we just keep returning. I'm sorry."

"Jesus, don't apologize. You people were the bravest I ever knew...know. We've just got to keep hoping that one of you will finally break into some different kind of universe."

I asked, "Is anyone else back here at the moment?"

Tony hesitated. I could almost see the wheels of corporate policy spinning inside his head. "As a matter of fact, yes. Anne Harrison returned just two days ago. We found her wandering around her old



office at Mission Control. Bumping into things. Walking through them.”

“You should have said before. We’d have invited her here tonight, to this party.”

“I think she’s had enough of parties. I know how it is for you people – meeting all the old faces must be a strain.”

“Don’t ever,” I said, “try to tell me that you know how it is.”

I found my daughter Jenny standing a little apart from the other kids, too old to join in their games, too young to want to talk to the adults.

I smiled at her with fellow feeling. “How’s it going?”

Her perfect face contorted. She said, “You’ve forgotten everything, haven’t you? Nothing has changed. I remember you leaving home, I remember seeing that terrible coffin on TV. Watching you, smiling and waving as you climbed into it. You, falling towards Belia.”

I nodded. Did she know that, in this particular universe, I was still falling? But it was all so hard to explain. Nobody but the physicists believed in singularities, waveform collapse and virtual matter; perhaps it was easier for her to think of me as just a ghost.

“And you left me and you left Mum and you left Danny. You went to die because you thought you’d get on better with some creature from beyond. Well, I’m glad you haven’t found any starmen. I hope you never do.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, looking around at all these happy people, knowing that – although I would probably come back again – I would never belong.

**N**o one seemed to notice when I left. The car that Mission Control had given me started silently, and somehow managed to back its way out between all the others parked in the drive.

Houses glowed through the clear dark night along the roads into town. I turned on the news, listening to the slow unravelling of words that no longer made any sense.

The car parked outside Harry’s Bar. At least that hadn’t changed. The same neon sign buzzing and winking, the bottom half of the H dead and dark. We used to come here a lot, us twelve astronauts when we were still in training. Inside, the same music was playing, the same greasy light was shining over the same empty tables. We’d jokingly renamed it the Space Bar, in honorary recognition of all those other bars – the ones in the old films that had never stopped playing on the secret screens of our own minds. Places where five-armed Venusians served bubbling methane cocktails to red Arcturian warriors.

Anne Harrison was sitting alone, sheltered from view behind the last cheap wooden screen. I pulled up a chair and sat down beside her.

“Is that you?” she asked.

“It’s me.”

“You’ve changed. I thought I looked bad.”

“I’ve just come from a party at my home,” I said.

“Mine was yesterday. But I simply chickened out. I came straight here and got drunk, just the way I’m going to do tonight. It’s quite possible, you know – I mean getting drunk. All it takes is some imagination. If I really tried hard, I suppose I could do it without even having to pretend to swallow this muck.”

I nodded.

“Still, it’s good to see you,” she said without smiling, hardly looking up through the greasy drifts of her greying hair.

“I suppose you know I didn’t get anywhere.”

“I heard it on the news. Soon they’ll stop reporting us altogether. First you, then me. Coming out of nowhere in a couple of days. No different kind of universe, no starmen, no news. We’re just earthbound ghosts, going through the same endless rituals. We must be boring them – it sure bores me, and I can’t even remember.”

“But everyone seems so happy here, don’t they? This isn’t really the place that we left.”

“You know what they said. Every universe is unique. Somewhere, something has to be different, otherwise it wouldn’t arise out of the meta-universe. When I looked at my music collection at home, I thought I’d found what it was. A cube was missing – a favourite recording. Then I remembered I’d lent it to someone, that I’d never got it back.”

It was a joke, but Anne wasn’t smiling. The thing that distinguished this Universe from every other would be nothing more than the faintest quiver of one electron in some distant galaxy. This was a different Earth from the one we’d left – a different Universe, a different Harry’s Bar – but everything else, including the fact of our departure and return, was exactly and endlessly the same.

She finished her drink. I found myself watching it sink down into her mouth with much the same curiosity that the living must feel as they watched me.

She said, “I suppose it’s possible that we made everything better just by leaving. Does that sound like paranoia?”

“It sounds like the drink.”

I watched as she walked over to the bar. What was that song we used to sing? But I’d lost it; it had gone forever.

“So,” she said, “what are you going to do?”

I stared at the whisky she’d placed in front of me, wondering if I had the energy to drink. “Try to go beyond again, I suppose. Like my namesake, *Der fliegende Hollander*, The Flying Dutchman.” But at least he’d had a proper ship: my *Hollander* had been little more than a man-carrying bullet. Just as Jenny had said. A coffin.

“You know,” Anne said, “I asked them what would happen if we just stayed here. I asked that Tony Tsui guy. He didn’t exactly say, but I’ve worked it out anyway. We’d slowly dissolve, disappear. That’s why they have the parties at home and all the rest of the crap. To convince us that we’re here, to keep the waveform in collapse.”

“Is that what you’re going to do? Just hang around?”

“I might,” she said.

“I’ll try to take *The Hollander* out again,” I said. “If they’ll let me.”

“Oh, they’ll let you all right. Do you think that they want us here? Mucking up their lives.”

“The starmen must be out there somewhere,” I said. “And they’ll be wise, they’ll know the answer. They’ll be able to bring us back to life.”

“That,” Anne Harrison said, “is just a dream. You’re falling beyond an event horizon, you can never return.”

She reached for her drink, managing at the third try

to stop her trembling fingers from passing through the glass.

She asked, "And aren't you afraid?"

"Yes," I said. "Of course I'm afraid."

I got back home deliberately late. The guests had all left. Elaine was in bed and asleep, tossing and muttering. I wanted to touch her, to brush the damp hair from her forehead and soothe away whatever lay inside. But I knew that Anne Harrison was right. I was fading, weakening.

I drifted around the darkened house, blown on currents of memory, passing thoughtlessly through walls and unopened doors. Hovering over Danny's bed, I watched him smiling and half-covered in pillows. I floated through the wardrobe towards my beautiful daughter Jenny, finding the scent of life and sheets and the white furniture in her room. I finally ascended the stairways of dust in the attic and settled on the dewy tiles of the roof. I sat looking up at red Belia and at the stars, waiting for dawn.

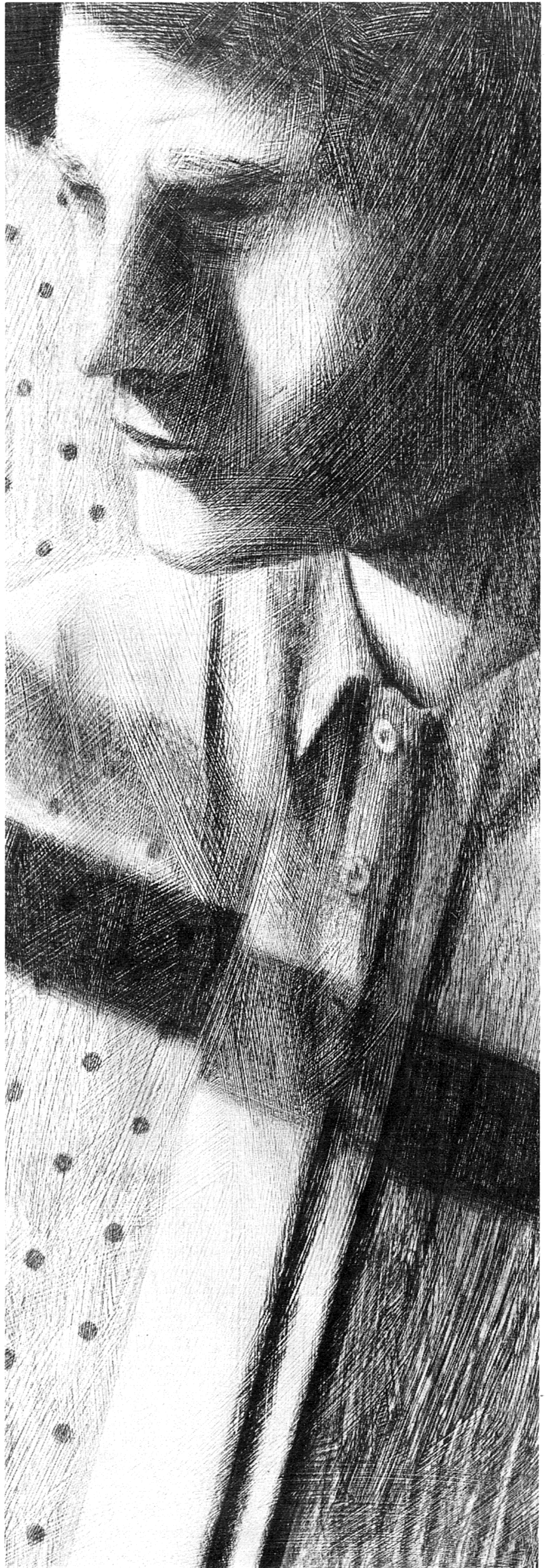
Hard to remember now, what weird sense of purpose had made me climb into that tiny snub-nosed craft aboard a satellite orbiting Belia. Me, I was never a true astronaut anyway. Calling my coffin *The Hollander* – giving it any kind of name at all – was just a concession to vanity.

And then the launch, and me the third of the twelve. Nudging *The Hollander* down through space towards Belia. I only had enough oxygen to last a few hours, but Mission Control had explained that that was all I needed. It was, after all, a few hours of my time, not theirs. And if the cameras and the sensors aboard the satellite had been able to penetrate Belia's glow and watch me until the end of time, they would still have seen me falling. From their viewpoint, I would never reach Belia's event horizon. But for me, for all of us astronauts, the falling would be quick and easy. And, crossing the event horizon, looking back, the whole history of this Universe would flash by in one moment. Every fleck of starlight that would ever fall would reach me in that instant, and the flash of energy would crush me beyond matter. I would become a singularity as I crossed out of spacetime. As some wag at Mission Control had put it, we astronauts would disappear up our own assholes.

Of course, our bodies, even our matter, could never survive this push beyond. But then quantum physics determines that matter isn't real, anyway. For an atomic particle to exist as an objective lump rather than an indeterminate fluctuation, an observer is required to bring about the collapse of its waveform. To give it substance, a particle has to be measured; it needs to be stopped and asked the time. Thus a tree, unseen, will never fall in a forest. Thus an astronaut, even one who has fallen through his own singularity, will, unnoticed, cease to exist.

But me, I was never really an astronaut anyway. And what kind of husband? What kind of father? Why had I done it? Sure, before Belia was found, times of my youth when science still rang from the collisions of physics and cosmology, there were a thousand scientists who said they'd merrily give their lives for a chance to fall into a black hole. But somehow it was different when the opportunity actually came.

Belia arrived, a singularity from the start of space-



time, echoing the huge energies of the Big Bang. And she beckoned; not with the promise of death, but a kind of immortality, a place where the cold equations of science finally stopped and this Universe ended, where every other universe began. The joke was that, out of all the infinite and unimaginable possibilities, out of all the universes filled with beckoning starmen, salt ocean space, cetacean suns and cockleshell worlds, we astronauts were consistently drawn to a series of Earths that were quite indistinguishable from those we had left behind. Quantum physics had shown a century before that virtual matter arose naturally out of nothing, but that it could exist for bare nanoseconds, and stray only a minute distance from the electromagnetic field that gave it birth. What no one had imagined was that by overcoming this and all the other laws of nature, we astronauts would also manage to confirm them. I was long-lasting virtual matter – a supra-quantum disturbance in spacetime – but I still couldn't stray far from home.

I remembered the last holiday I'd taken with Elaine and Jenny and Danny. Standing on a hill, looking out across lakes scattered in the rolling green like the eyes of heaven. My family beside me. The soft wind and tears in my eyes. My instructions had finally come through from Mission Control. The twelve astronauts had been selected. I hadn't believed it. The psychological profiles, the flashing lights, probing the traumas of the past – all of it had meant nothing. But then they told me that I was still a kid at heart, still alone, still dreaming of starmen. The lakes shimmered in the breeze, and I hugged Elaine and kissed the soft down of her cheek. And I wondered how close you had to get before you made contact.

“Where have you been?” Elaine asked as I walked in through the doorway of her bedroom. She was sitting up in bed. Yawning, stretching, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. “People missed you at the party.”

I smiled and said nothing. I drew the stool out from beneath the dressing table, and sat watching her as she dressed.

The four of us took breakfast together. The sound of birdsong came in with the scents of the woods and the corn through an open window.

“Daddy,” Jenny said, “would you take me down to ballet class?”

She couldn't bring herself to smile or even look at me across the table, but I knew that she was trying to undo a little of what had been said at the party.

“I think,” I said, “that I'll probably go straight into town. Go see the people at Mission Control. I'm sure your Mum will take you.”

“Does that mean,” Danny asked in his sweet and innocent way, “that you'll soon be leaving us again?”

Elaine and Jenny tutted and shushed him, but I could see it in all their faces. The hope that things would soon be back to normal again, that I'd be just a proud and bitter memory.

“Yes,” I said. “I think that's the best way, don't you? And this time, Danny, I'll do my best to bring back a starman. I promise.”

“That'd be great,” Danny said. Before I had time to change my mind, or he could duck away, I reached out and touched him softly on the shoulder.

“But you will stay a while longer, won't you?” Elaine asked. Reaching to clear away the plates, the coffee I hadn't drunk, the food I hadn't eaten.

But already I was standing up, walking out of the kitchen and down the hall, doing my best to carry the sense of life and the nearness of my family with me as I left the house and closed the door, as I started the car.

“Wait!” Elaine called, running out onto the lawn.

Pretending not to hear, I turned the car quickly down the drive, along the country roads that led towards town.

Everything in town seemed cleaner and neater. I saw tramcars and floaters and open markets, lovers holding hands across the tables of street cafés. But the Mission Control buildings never changed. They had always been graceful, long and low and white. Through the glass doors, I felt the soft bustle and algebraic hum of computers and conditioned air. Yes, it was all coming back to me now, the ambitions, the failures, the secrets and the laughs we had all shared. As Tony Tsui greeted me without surprise and led me along the smooth corridors, I paused to chat and smile and wave at faces I knew. At last, I felt more at ease – there was no need here for me to act the hero. There was old Colbert, looking thin and trim and young again. Stan Redway, his toupée replaced by a head of real hair. Nye the project librarian almost touched me with his delicate hands as he told me proudly how he'd managed to give up smoking at last after years of trying. And there were Bob and Barbara Bolton, back together again and sharing the same office.

Tony took me outside. Mostly, this place was a museum now. The shuttles were launched far outside town, using Belia's own energy.

Tony asked, “Are you ready to go?”

“Yes,” I said. “I'm ready.”

Gazing across the weedgrown concrete, I saw the clean tailfins of a rocket. Already, it climbed halfway up to the sky. I began to walk towards it. Glancing back at Tony, I saw his eyes track a flock of gulls as they wheeled low around the gantries, passing through the rocket. Through me. I knew then that I was fading, and that this rocket was too beautiful to be real. But still, I was grateful that it was there.

My rocket – *The Hollander* – was waiting, humming. An arrow, aimed at the sky. My feet clanged the iron rungs. The cockpit was welcoming and new. It smelled like home, the very first time you arrive.

Soon, I was ready for takeoff.

An old man found me wandering the shore twenty miles from town. Recognizing the badge on my spacesuit, he rang the local police. On standing instructions, the police in turn contacted my people at Mission Control.

Back at Mission Control, they only asked me one question. When I'd answered it, they showed me to a car that was waiting in the afternoon sun. It was new, but still recognizable; like meeting the close relative of someone you have known, a twin or a brother. It took me along the familiar roads towards home, and I felt the tug of familiar memories. If only, I thought, standing at the doorstep of my own house with evening



shadows settling across the lawn, if only... And how many times, I wondered, how many times have I done this before...?

The door opened. The scents of the house greeted me.

"You've arrived," Elaine said. For a moment, I thought she might reach out to touch.

"I suppose you heard the news," I said.

"Yes, the news."

"I'm afraid," I said, trying a joke, "that I haven't brought any star-men back with me."

She paused, and looked up at me strangely.

Out of habit, I shrugged off my coat and tried to hang it on the hall stand. But it passed through the hook and drifted down to settle on the carpet.

"You haven't got yourself a job?" I asked.

"Oh no," she smiled. "After all, I don't need to. There's my widow's pension."

"You look really well."

"Danny's upstairs in bed."

"How old is Danny now?"

"Nearly nine. Jenny's fine too."

"Jenny?"

"Our eldest kid. Our daughter."

I nodded, and went through the door on the right to sit down in the lounge.

Elaine turned on a lamp and sat down on the chair across from the fireplace, her hands pressed tightly in her lap. She asked, "Have you eaten? I suppose you'd like a drink?"

I stared at her.

She stood up again, "I'll get some water."

When she had left the room, I went over to the mirror hanging above the mantelpiece. I wanted to see how the stranger who stood alone in this room had changed.

What I saw brought a different kind of understanding. The face that stared back at me from the mirror was long and narrow, with golden eyes flecked silver. The face of a starman, an alien.

When I reached out towards the reflection in the glass, my fingers passed straight through.

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**Ian R. MacLeod** lives in Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham. He last appeared in *Interzone* with "The Family Football" (issue 53). Since then, his reputation has been growing by leaps and bounds, especially in the United States where *Asimov's* editor and best-of-the-year anthologist Gardner Dozois describes him as "rivalling Greg Egan for the title of Hottest New Writer of the Nineties to date." He has just completed his first novel.

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Back issues of *Interzone* are available at £2.50 each (£2.80 overseas) from the address shown on page 3.

## Author Interviews in *Interzone*

(Issues 13-63 inclusive; we ran no interviews before issue 13. Interviewers' names are given in brackets after interviewee.)

Acker, Kathy (Stan Nicholls) #27, Jan/Feb 1989  
Aldiss, Brian (Colin Greenland) #38, Aug 1990  
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Ballard, J.G. (R. Kadrey & D. Pringle) #51, Sept 1991  
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Barker, Clive (Kim Newman) #14, Winter 85/86  
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Constantine, Storm (Stan Nicholls) #58 Apr 1992  
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Disch, Thomas M. (Gregory Feeley) #24, Summer 1988  
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Goldstein, Lisa (Pat Murphy) #42, Dec 1990  
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# Beaks and Saws

## John Clute

There are times, after reading a story by Lisa Tuttle, that you feel such a fool. Sometimes, if you are male, it is because you are a man: and she has, with an air of reasoning calm, once again enfiladed the patchwork shell of self that you (as a male) wrap yourself in like some sinner out of Hieronymous Bosch, naked as an egg within, awaiting the great beak of day. Sometimes, if you are an incautious and trusting reader looking for a genre dawdle in the shallows of Romance, it is because she has opened something beneath you that simultaneously numbs and awakens. And sometimes, if you are either of these (or someone else), it is because you wonder how she managed to trick you, once again, into believing her heart was in the job. Standing behind all these ways of being fooled is a single conclusion: Lisa Tuttle, who has published widely and competently and for a long time, and who always keeps her diction and her pacing and her choice of subject under a seemingly unflappable housekeeperly control, is in fact a most dizzyingly uneven writer.

The worst of Tuttle is in neither book on review – *Lost Futures* (Grafton, £4.99) and *Memories of the Body: Tales of Desire and Transformation* (Severn House, £12.99) – and a couple of the tales assembled in the second volume are as ravaging as anything she's written; but at the same time the chance to see so much of her work at once begins to work in strange ways on the reader. *En masse*, her stories (and the current novel, which is told in the same voice, and deals with the same patterns of obsession and oppressive self-avowal) force the reader into a kind of confrontation with the persona that so implacably does the telling. No (says the reader) that story isn't good enough for you to tell it, and if I want to read about Love and Loneliness and Stuff I'd just as soon gobble up a proper Romance that ends in his (her) arms, thank you very much. Yes (says the reader) this story is better than one could have believed you were about to let on, in that unwavering voice of yours, in that competent quietude of diction you hide within, naked as an egg. Yes or No, the voice is the same.

*Lost Futures* (it reads in some ways as a kaleidoscopic reshuffle and blow-up of "Riding the Nightmare" [1986] from the new volume of stories) evokes both responses: No to the placebo abstractions of romance diction; Yes to the engrossing hook of the basic premise, and to the unflagging energy with which it is worked out. No to the ending, in which the derangedness at the heart of the tale takes, as it were, a break for tea. Yes to the ferocity of attention to the extremities of the psyche, a ferocity which only slackens in those final pages.

The story is not simple. Clare Beckett is 33, unmarried, an accountant in a small city in the state of New York, a muffled survivor of various relationships. Her life has been shadowed – indeed it may have been terminally shaped – by a traumatic event in her adolescence, which has fastened itself upon her (or which she has fastened onto). Left as a teenager by her parents to take care of her ill brother, she loses her virginity to a friend just as her brother is dying of sugar loss. Whether or not his death can be understood as genuinely her fault is not entirely clear; but as far as she is concerned, the action of her life stopped short at that moment, and she has subsequently been unable consciously to make any further decisions which might constitute yet another dreadful turn. Moreover, as a mathematician she is convinced that the universe itself is constantly splitting into a growing near-infinity of parallel worlds: that each quantum "turn" of a particle, or a life, generates two worlds; and so on towards infinity. So when she suffers a mental breakdown, and begins to experience, in the form of dreams, prolonged flashes of immersion in parallel versions of her own life, she recognizes that she may in fact be making leaps to worlds which represent alternate life choices.

It is all very carefully done. Tuttle knows sf and fantasy very thoroughly indeed, and establishes with surgically nicety an ongoing ambivalence as to whether or not Clare is psychotic or in fact experiencing a variety of worlds: one where she has made a proper career choice and become a professional mathematician; another where she has married and divorced; a third where she is a psychotic invalid whose refusal to pay heed to anything but her own state Tuttle superbly conveys (the invalid serves as an exaggerated version of Clare's own ruthlessly self-involved psyche: for the excesses of guilt Clare expresses about her brother contrive to retain him as her chattel); and finally a reality where cross-world turns by "oneironauts" like her are widely accepted and are of intense interest to professional investigators.

As the novel progresses, the psychotic invalid psyche begins to invade the "prime" narrative world, entraps Clare in a dystopian hell of psychosis, moves the tale towards its diminishingly neat climax. Everything is paced to a nicety;

the voice of the author adheres unwaveringly to its canny tessitura. But there is no spasm, no sense – as in Joanna Russ's similarly constructed *The Female Man* (1975) – of a tale just barely holding itself together against the deranging stresses of its every meaning. *The Female Man* is a sum greater than the derangement of its parts; *Lost Futures*, for all its unblinking meritoriousness as a portrait of the maw of the human psyche, does no more than add up.

And when, as sometimes happens in *Memories of the Body*, there is not much to add up to, one does find oneself thinking in terms of underachievement, unevenness. "A Mother's Heart: a True Bear Story" (1978), "Jamie's Grave" (1987), the Aickmanesque "Skin Deep" (1989): all share a neatness which is, in the end, too snug a fit. The trouble is, they sound just like the great stories in the book. They fool you. They trick you into raising them in your mind's eye to the level of their diction, which is too high for them; more seriously, they act to persuade you, after the fact, to reduce the three or four superb tales in the volume downwards to the "normalcy" of Tuttle's narrative voice. Which allows one to forget – or never to notice – the great gap between the worst and the best of Tuttle's work. "The Wound" (1987), "Memories of the Body" (1987, from *Interzone*; though it closes with a series of dulling sententiae), "Riding the Nightmare," "Husbands" (1990) and "Lizard Lust" (1990, also from *Interzone*) are among the very best short stories published in the last decade. Once freed from the gossip of context, they are as polished as habitats in space: machines to pack lives into. The portraits of the male psyche they present are stinging but fascinated. The women in the stories tend to wear placid guises, but are in fact ravenous for self, sex, role, being. The men are masks that beg for stripping; the women are aborning. The stories work as ideograms, couched in harsh-lit fantasy terms, of the jigsaw of the sexes at this time. They are savage, regret-filled, funny (as in "Lizard Lust"), and as shaped as *lieder*. They are what it should always mean to write like Lisa Tuttle.

There are two strikes against *Aestival Tide* (Bantam Spectra, \$5.50) by Elizabeth Hand. It is a second novel, and it is the second volume of a

sequence. *Winterlong* (1990) was a huge, intense, verbose and murmurous harlequinade of a tale set in an America deluged by holocausts, and suffered mainly from inattentiveness to narrative flow, so that the reader tended to shoal every few pages, gasping for the oxygen of a sentence which said And then, O Dearly Beloved.

*Aestival Tide* is set in the same America, a land so densely irradiated by the consequences of various cataclysms that nothing is left but excavation and topsyturvy suture. There is nothing new in the world, nothing to build with but bones and recirculated grue, nothing to do that has not proved wanting, again and again. It sounds like inanition and shoals; it sounds like the old Dying Earth entropy saw. It is not. Though there are things unjelled about the book, *Aestival Tide* is in fact – unlike its predecessor – an effective story, a dovetailing narrative crescendo, each page just slightly faster than the previous, with every character moving, more and more quickly, to the moment of climax at the eponymous festival, where all the plotlines (the effect just barely avoids an effect of seemingly unintentional vaudeville) knit valorously together as various protagonists sign in by air, elevator, sea and tunnel at the great gate which opens ritually once a decade to expose the citizens of the ziggurat city of Araboth to the outdoor world, and they do good orgy on the beach, and abhor the consequences, and go inside again. But this time there is no city to return to, as a great tsunami engulfs the wicked burg in the final pages, and the evil protagonists kick the bucket (except for those who don't), and the good slingshot out of the last sentence into the sequel.

It is not entirely unsilly. The contortuplicated nine-level city – each level called after one of the degrees of the heavenly host, and each containing a designated class of citizen – is in fact risible. But *Aestival Tide* is not intended to work as a commentary on arcology design, or on the psychology of the pocket universe; Araboth is far more like a Theatre of Memory than a blueprint of post-holocaust urban life, and the interbreeding gouaches of knowledge it encodes relate almost exclusively to genre. Like its predecessor, the book is a multifaceted homage to, and mutation from, the energized lore of sf. Particular names and titles come to mind – T.J. Bass's *The God-whale* (1974) for the cetacean; John Crowley's *Engine Summer* (1979) for the memorious crystalline figure which tells itself and others whenever activated; *Flash Gordon* (the movie) for post-Nazi halls of assemblage; Richard Grant (who lives with Hand) for the Villiers de L'Isle Adam/Mervyn Peake athenic architect; Paul Park's *Sugar Rain* (1989) for city-ending

weather in a welter of smells; Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* (1980-83) for the vocabulary which evokes time's aisles and for other things, too – but this is only a beginning, because the book is a constant fractal unfolding of itself and its germinations. *Aestival Tide* is a hive; and should breed more.

John Kessel, too, engages in the saw trade, and the stories assembled in **Meeting in Infinity: Allegories & Extrapolations** (Arkham House, \$20.95) come at times close enough, through an analogous overloading of text, to the risible. (We exclude "Faustfeathers," whose humour is entirely deliberate, and which may be the funniest Marx Brothers story ever written.) But Kessel knows exactly what he's doing, and that allegories generally bite the hands that feed them. He knows very well that stories constructed so that they are amenable to allegorical readings – so that it is possible to translate them "upwards" from a radical of presentation in which what they are is what they mean, to one in which what they mean is what they are – always risk a compensating descent into bathos. For there seems to be an inherent solemnity to the acting out of allegorical heightening, and a story like "The Lecturer," which might be intended as hilarious, struggles in vain against the essential piety of the uplift dynamic, so that the accreted meanings which stack themselves onto our reading of the implications of the talking statue of a lecturer ends in what does seem an involuntary image out of, perhaps, Dr Seuss: hat upon hat: too many hats upon the head. All crooked. All tame.

But most of the stories escape the problem of the piling on of hats. "Not Responsible! Park and Lock It!" is more complex than can be described, which may in the end be a sign of the successful allegory (unsuccessful examples being, perhaps, those whose complexities can in fact be counted, like Seuss hats). It embodies metaphors of the highway as life, and of a kind of post-holocaust America as Hell, in the tale of the rite of passage into adulthood of one "realistically" conceived boy. Nothing is pointed out; everything wells up. "Judgment Call," too, though heavily freighted with equations, rests within itself. "The Big Dream" is an unfeignedly savage assault on Raymond Chandler; "Another Orphan," the best-known story in the book, seems rather underpowered compared to Kessel's best work, and its use of *Moby Dick* to focus questions of human destiny seems etiolated, balsa. "Hearts Do Not in Eyes Shine" is, again, superb. "Man" again, is not. And "Invaders" killed sleep: so grippingly told that one could not avert one's reading gaze from the genocide

inflicted by Spain upon the Aztecs; so ornately but precisely savage (Kessel is an astonishingly savage writer) about the exculpatory routines of sf. *Meeting in Infinity* is an uneven book, but one which – like good allegory – amounts to far more than the sum of its sometimes damagingly un-deranged parts. In the end, it is a book which grows the reader around it. I think I will be wearing it inside, from now on.

(John Clute)

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## Paradise Redeveloped Mary Gentle

With Tim Powers' *Last Call* (Morrow, \$23) we are in Fisher-King territory, mediated by T.S. Eliot. What better Wasteland, you might ask, than Las Vegas? What better new approach to Tarot cards (over-used in fantasy as they are) than to make your protagonist a professional gambler? This is a powerful and satisfyingly surprising novel.

*Last Call* opens with a father playing poker with his little son, with Tarot cards. It is the cumulation of twenty years' planning for Georges Leon. The fact that he has come to love his young son Scotty is not relevant; he can, by doing what he does, make Scotty into what he has made his elder son Richard – a pair of robot eyes through which Leon can keep watch on the world. And on his gambling enemies. When his wife Donna stops the game at gunpoint, he holds the boy up as a shield. Which doesn't prevent her firing. Minutes later, Georges Leon has received the wound of the Fisher-King, his genitals destroyed; and Scotty has one of the Tarot cards embedded in his right eye. Powers is, as we have come to expect, still expertly hurting his protagonists.

Years later the adult Scotty, now Scott Crane, travels with his adoptive father Ozzie Crane as a professional gambler. He is the son of a "bad King," Ozzie tells him, found in the same way as they find Scott's adoptive sister, the abandoned baby Diana – by using silver coins: Venus's metal. Ozzie has taken him outside the game, so that Scott can grow up and decide what he wants to do about it. What Scott decides is mostly that the old man has some truly weird superstitions...

For those readers who, like me, wouldn't know a poker game from a hole in the ground, there is no need to panic: the novel is self-glossing in that respect. Cards in *Last Call* are not only the pasteboards that win and lose fortunes, they are also the Tarot cards that control (or seduce or induce) those powers that inhabit the Collective Unconscious but are not shy about

affecting the material world. Where Scott Crane makes his first major mistake is to play in the game on the houseboat on Lake Mead in 1969. As a young man he ignores his stand-in father's advice, ignores the warning signs – "If the drink in your glass starts to sit at an angle that ain't quite level, or if the cigarette smoke starts to crowd in over the cards and fall there... fold out. You don't know what you might be buying or selling come the showdown." What Scott sells in winning becomes a matter of acute concern twenty years later, when another man hosts a session of the strange game Assumption.

Assumption is a game to determine who becomes King. What that means in the real world is brutal control. Buggy Seigel, who created Las Vegas, was a King. Now Scott Crane, the one-eyed jack who quit poker, is haunted by a dead wife, and on the run from manifestations of malevolence. Because the debts are due on the last game, when all the winners become the eyes of the present King, their own identities destroyed. And the next game is due.

With his "father," a dying friend who wants to harness randomness and chance to cure his own cancer, and his not-sister with whom he is empathically linked, Scott travels to Vegas to play... but that's only the beginning of what's really going on. This is a Tim Powers novel, after all.

And, this being the present day and the Tarot pack being what it is, there have to be some powerful female characters. Granted Diana makes heavy weather of an unconvincing declaration about wanting to be a proper wife, mother, and sister – but Tarot cards weren't set up to be politically correct. You chooses your archetypes and you follows them. I guess. You cannot move in *Last Call* for bouncing off cultural references, whether it be Jung or Eliot or Country & Western, or Dante or Prospero or Mandelbrot or Oz. But that's cool.

**P**eter Conrad's *Underworld* (Chatto & Windus, £14.99) is archetypal, too, but has fairly few consolations of story. Read it for the feel, uncannily accurate in reproducing those moments when one dreams, or is a child, or is not certain what reality might be.

Stripping the names from places and the times from history, it takes place where the gleaming apartment blocks and skyscrapers of a city tower over the grubby, makeshift valley that opened, some time ago, when a limestone formation collapsed. Composed now of huts, footpaths, fields, ant's nests, and a short-cut road that the city dwellers use, the valley is a refuge for those who reject the technological, or who find this dangerous wasteland a useful hideout.

This could have been simplistic. But

Ern, the old man who rejects the city, does so out of a mixture of human stubbornness and mistrust, not any ideology. The visionary or mad woman Mona who watches the gasworks' flames where they sear the night at the valley's end, is looking for the end of the world, but realizes she may have got it wrong. As it says, towards the end, "... there was really no story, only a series of accidents, as unpredictable as weather."

What story there is, is of a head. Someone strayed, in their shiny new car, down through the tunnel that Ern does traffic duty on with his grandson Wilf, into the hands of car thieves. Later, a head wrapped in plastic turns up in the streets adjacent to the valley – boys are playing football with it. The narrative meanders around the experience of the victim, the murderer, the witnesses; aiming at some dramatic future event, but never losing the intimation that this is not the important part of what happens. Paul the architect identifies with the lost head. Kate the artist draws Wilf, takes him to her apartment. Wilf, when persuaded, draws a map of the valley that shows no footpaths or buildings, but sacred sites where the guardian Dogs are staked out, and where a satyr-faced fountain leers.

What is important is felt reality (ants building their tower anchored to a thistle), that becomes metaphor (for the thoughts inside heads), that becomes an Orphic mystery when separated from the dictates of time and language. "A myth was a story which compulsively went on telling itself, and came out differently every time."

In the post-modern *Underworld* Clem, the murderer, has tried all the obscene acts imaginable, remaining essentially untouched because he refuses the compact of society. Wilf, a boy with a stick and no father, is a hero in a wilderness. The murder victim wanders, in midlife, into a dark wood. We are here, it seems, in a Comedy. Is there a murder, or a sacrifice? Who is the outer narrator?

Fittingly, *Underworld* is, underneath, mostly concerned with death. What does it do, how does it happen, what does it mean? Pat answers only come in stories. Myths tell you: you can never know, but it is much stranger than you think.

**D**an Simmons' latest novel *The Hollow Man* (Headline, £15.99) feels oddly disappointing, but this may be because it is an altered and lengthened version of his story "Eyes I Dare Not Meet In Dreams." It is rarely helpful to have two versions of something in one's head and be forever comparing them.

We are again in the territory of T.S. Eliot and Dante. Jeremy Bremen hears people's thoughts. He had developed

a mindshield to keep the neurobabble down to bearable proportions, but this has dissolved with the death of his wife Gail, the only other telepath he has ever met. Gail dies of cancer and Bremen launches himself off across America in torment, a perfect inside-the-skull witness to the seven circles of damnation of modern society. Small-time gangsters pursue him – one charmingly named Vanni Fucci, another Comedic refugee. But no malevolence directed at him is quite as chilling as people just doing whatever it is they do, to themselves or to each other.

The modern spin is physics; in this case, the version of it that says that human consciousness is a wavefront which collapses probabilities, maintaining and in a sense creating the "real world." Or rather, real worlds, since this is also the version in which alternate universes are created continuously, although with no hope of communication between them. The two ideas do not necessarily sit easily together.

Together with these is a third plot strand, the unnamed first-person narrator who follows Bremen and comments on his actions. Although unnamed, it is clear from early on that this is actually the retarded boy who is dying in hospital, whose mind Bremen enters. It is he whom Bremen will meet at the end, to resolve matters about Gail and the secrets he (despite telepathy) kept from her; and where he will receive self-knowledge, and a hi-physics apotheosis.

The thing about the Divine Comedy is that the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* are each about the same length as the *Inferno*. It takes that much space to set up penance and reconciliation and salvation. The end of *The Hollow Man* feels cramped and hurried and, unfortunately, trite.

**P**hilippa Gregory's *The Wise Woman* (Viking, £14.99), on the other hand, is not myth-based, it just feels that powerful. This is my candidate for a book that will knock your socks off. It is a historical novel.

It is also different.

Where *The Wise Woman* scores so strongly is in its uncompromising statement of blunt truths. The lord's heir who chases women is, in what seems an everyday phrase of conversation there, "cunt-struck." It is not a phrase one associates with historical fiction, which tends to the disguised lecture or soft-porn costume drama. Sex here is as everyday as stock-breeding, especially since most of the plot centres around the barrenness of the heir's wife. *The Wise Woman* focuses on unblinking portrayals of what people really do when they are cornered.

Face it, this could have been a

Georgette Heyer romance. Alys, the child of the local witch Morach, is adopted into a nunnery by the kind Mother Hildebrande, but flees when Hugo, the son of Lord Hugh, burns the nunnery down, since it's the early 16th century and Henry VIII has just got nasty with Rome. Her herb-skills enable her to get a place in the castle nursing the old lord...

Except that Alys, aka Sister Ann, smells smoke as she wakes in her cell – and legs it, without pausing to give one word of warning to the other nuns. They burn to death. She went to the nunnery in the first place (dropping her sweetheart without a backward look) only through a desire for clean linen, warmth, wax candles, and food on the table. Anyone who has any experience of living in huts will instantly appreciate why this is a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

Alys is simultaneously fascinating, reprehensible, and a dupe. Taken from the hut to tend to the old Lord Hugh, she establishes herself a place in the castle as one of his daughter-in-law Catherine's waiting women, and fixes her eye on his son. The story of how a genuine love on both their parts is perverted by her fear of what might happen if she doesn't make Hugo love her is convoluted and tragic. *The Wise Woman* is Alys's story of being utterly determined to stay in the castle, and rise as high as she can, regardless of anyone or any means. It will be particularly useful if she can bear a bastard (but male) child to the heir. It is taken as read that women are laughably unimportant and have no other use except as breeders.

Related in the same down-to-earth style of pragmatic practicality as the problems of having retainers hanging around your castle eating your food, the desire to go rip off the New World and make a fortune, the need to keep London happy and at a distance, and marry off your waiting women to your captain of soldiers, and organize deer hunts and witch hunts – is magic. Magic in *The Wise Woman* is ugly, and petty, and it works. One can make wax dolls and witch a woman into falling into the moat. One can make "love potions" that chemically delude a man into believing he has slept with a goddess (but not to make him like the woman afterwards). One can curse cattle and wombs.

It is never overtly stated where Alys' magic comes from, although she believes it is divided into two: that herbal part that as a nun she is entitled to use, and those dark powers for which she prays to somewhere else. *The Wise Woman* is neither New Age nor Christian in its ideology, resembling more the groundrock of superstition that remains in agricultural communities. Because there are no genre expectations to enable us to second-guess the

author, Gregory can pull off some set pieces which are surprises and truly horrible.

The whole tone is wonderfully – or if you prefer, diabolically – undramatic. No need to make a fuss. If Alys wants something, she lies to get it. If Hugo wants a woman, he fucks her on the castle stairs. If Catherine can't have Hugo in her bed, she'll take Alys. There is nothing sensational in how any of this is portrayed.

And, finally, there are two sections in italics in *The Wise Woman*, at the beginning and the end, both from Alys' point of view. Together with the third-person narrative they make a triptych. Reading them, one concludes that other extremes of emotion besides the selfish can be pragmatic too, described with the same unblinking eye.

(Mary Gentle)

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## Growing Pains Wendy Bradley

You are an ordinary person living a humdrum, ordinary existence, vaguely nagged by the feeling that there ought to be more to life than this. However a situation develops where you – and only you – are in the right place (with the skill/hereditary right/magic ring) that can save the world. You feel inadequate to the task but the task is more important than your inadequacies. The world must be saved so you do the best you can. You grow in stature as the situation develops and in the end you overcome: but in the achievement you have changed and so has the world. You can't go home again.

I'm not claiming to have codified the entire genre but if you have ever read a fantasy novel you must find my first paragraph vaguely familiar. The person called by fate to undertake a task for which they aren't equipped comes into almost every fantasy novel; certainly into all of the ones I was sent this month, although a couple of them handle the plot less than elegantly.

With **Blood Trillium** by Julian May (Bantam, \$20; HarperCollins, £14.99) the weakness is in the "growth in stature as the task develops" section of the story. The novel is the sequel to *Black Trillium* which was co-written by May, Andre Norton and Marion Zimmer Bradley. In her solo follow-up, May puts each of the triplet of identikit heroines into a situation in which she ought to grow but then signally fails to let any of them show any growth or even any recognition that growth and change might be necessary. First of all, the magic worker hasn't the skills she needs to counter her enemy and is taught some by a *deus ex machina*. She does not, however, seem to alter her

perceptions as a result of her training, the training itself is very unconvincing and there is another *deus ex machina* all ready to do the same for her adversary in the next volume. Then the maternal sister has to cope with her husband and children being kidnapped but again the separation and restoration make no impact on her character: all she does is wring her hands and wait for them to escape under their own steam. Finally the third, virgin-warrior, heroine tries to rally her people to go to war and they won't because she hasn't thought the situation through and they're not prepared to pander to her Joan of Arc complex at the risk of their own necks. All in all this is just a display of heroines who wally about waiting for a sequel. Depressingly dim.

**The Winds of the Wastelands** (*The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse Book Three*; Fontana, £8.99) by Antony Swithin is again a sequel, third in a continuing series, but like its closest predecessor is curiously boring. Tolkien claimed to have written *LoR* to develop and give a setting to his elven languages but no one reads it for the elvish; Swithin seems, however, to have written his Lyonesse books purely to explore his imaginary Roc-kall, the lost continent off the European shore to which his hero flees 15th-century Yorkshire in the first book.

In this novel all the hero, Simon, does is wander with his old and some new companions in search of the elusive Lyonesse which he believes to be somewhere on the continent. But he does not grow, he does not learn, he is not changed by his experiences. They happen to him like beads on a rosary, click, click, click. He is captured by bandits – but escapes before they can do anything to him. He is injured to the point of death by a blow to the head – but cured with nary a twinge after a long (offstage) struggle by a wizard healer. Happening on a city of demons, the travellers find a statue which suddenly cocks its head and looks at them, a truly scary moment – and they promptly and sensibly run away but neither look back nor even trouble to wonder what happened. I suspect the whole series may end with Simon in the shower back in Hallamshire turning to his wife to reveal that the last three seasons have been a dream.

**The Door into Sunset** (Volume Three of "Tale of the Five"; Corgi, £3.99) by Diane Duane is a hard one to get into, finding ourselves as we do at the closing stages of a war with most of the participants metamorphosing into demi-gods all over the place. The plot, though, has a satisfying shape to it from pleasing use of stereotypes and archetypes, and there is at least an attempt to deal with how it might feel

to metamorphose into a demi-god or a king (will your lover still like you when you can fry him?). There is also a whiz-bang ending that finishes up with a group-marriage ceremony between all the characters left standing, so that everyone gets to live happily ever after. Goodness only knows what Duane is going to find to do in the next volume.

**“D**o you always let animals do your fighting, Ivan Tsarevich?” ... “Birds, beasts, men, women. Those who think well enough of me will always defend me. How many will defend you?” Sigh. I have to confess to committing that great crime for an objective reviewer, falling in love with the hero of Peter Morwood’s *Firebird* (Legend, £8.99). This is the sequel to his *Prince Ivan* and describes the period in which the Teutonic knights tried to invade Russia in 1236 and were defeated by Aleksandr Nevskiy. Only they weren’t: it was Prince Ivan and his wife the sorceress, not to mention a grey wolf, a firebird and a substantial army of people prepared to die heroically, graphically and messily if necessary. Nevskiy turns out to be one of those creeps with great PR who was just along for the ride but happened to bring his own chronicler.

The plot mixes magic, history and folklore, and the tone hits Russian fairy tale (all right, the ones I remember reading when I was a kid) spot on. The main strength of the book, though, is in the characterization of Ivan, an engaging lummock of a hero with a great line in dialogue – “Blood will out” ... “I’d much rather it stayed where it is, thanks.” Everyone else is smarter, fiercer, better at magic than he is, but he does what he can without stopping to worry about his machismo and is real enough to be changed by his experiences of murder and magic and mayhem. More please.

**F**inally, I picked up Barbara Hambly’s *Magicians of the Night* (HarperCollins, £8.99), smiling in anticipation when I saw the name of the author and that it was the sequel to *The Rainbow Abyss* which I had enjoyed. Then my heart sank when I saw that it was about, gulp, Nazis. Trust me on this one, you can’t hope to write a credible fantasy novel that has Nazis in it. OK, Hambly is good, she nearly carries it off: up until page 208 my palms were sweating and I was in superfast-read mode desperate to find whether Rhion would sus that the Nazis weren’t the good guys and what they would do to him if he did. Bradley’s Rule holds good, though, as after the plot break on page 208 the whole thing falls apart because Hambly gives you time to get your breath back and go “but...” However, Rhion survives his encounter with the more disgusting aspects of our

own dear universe with his credibility as a character more or less intact and I shall be surprised if he does not reappear, grown in stature as a result of his rather weird experiences, in an eventual volume three.

(Wendy Bradley)

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## Simmons Marking Time? Chris Gilmore

**A** reviewer should never be guided by prejudice, and the surest way of succumbing to that is to deny it exists. Very well, then; I picked up *Prayers to Broken Stones* by Dan Simmons (Headline, £15.99) with a strong positive prejudice. I knew and admired the *Hyperion* books and *Song of Kali*. I had read *Phases of Gravity* and *Summer of Night* with less pleasure only because they are written in modes which I find less appealing. Then I opened it. The first item is an introduction of excruciating vanity and vulgarity by Harlan Ellison, describing in what I’m very much afraid is true and accurate detail how he read Simmons for the first time, went apeshit (I’m sorry – no other expression will do), and proceeded to patronize him grossly under cover of a secular laying on of hands, by which he presumed to welcome him into the fellowship of writers. I believe freemasons do something similar, but at least they do it in private and don’t boast about it in print. I gritted my teeth, reminding myself that while Ellison’s writing and behaviour may be vulgar and vain, the opposite has often been true of his perceptions.

Having got over that I read the story the fuss was all about. “Suppose,” the story posits, “it were possible to raise zombies from the newly dead. You could have your deceased friends and relations around for the rest of your own life, looking alive but mute and without sentience or volition. Wouldn’t it be frightful?” Well, yes, I suppose it would. But since no one of remotely normal psychology would want to, and since anything on such lines would be banned as an affront to human dignity, a writer needs to explain a bit about how society came to such a pass if his projection is to have any bite. Many years ago Richard Matheson did just that, in a story called “Dance of the Dead.” It wasn’t all that good, but a lot better than this.

Having got into a bad mood with the writer, I found it deepened by “Eyes I Dare not Meet in My Dreams,” a mawkish and pious treatment of a theme Roger Zelazny handled much better, and two jokes against televangelists (now there’s a controversial target!)

both very crude, even though the first is quite effective. By this time I’d have dropped the book had it not been by Simmons (such is prejudice). As it was I persevered, and things got better. “Remembering Siri” reads like a very fine stand-alone extract from *Hyperion*, though Simmons describes it as the germ from which the whole book grew. The same goes for “Carrion Comfort,” which is a bit like Eric Frank Russell’s *Sinister Barrier* written from the viewpoint of a reluctant Viton. “Iverson’s Pits” is a vengeful dead story, “Shave and a Haircut, Two Bites” is a new approach to the vampire myth, “Two Minutes Forty-five Seconds” is an exploration of compromise and guilt, as in a very different way is “Death of the Centaur.” All are exceptionally well done, but there’s too much dead weight.

Two other stories are neither very good nor very bad. “Metastasis” could only work if you combined absolute ignorance of oncology with a superstitious dread of cancer. Maybe some people do. “E-Ticket to Namland” is yet another expression of the American group neurosis over Vietnam. It may work over there, but travels badly. I presume the book, which covers ten years, represents Simmons’s entire output of short fiction to date. He should really have waited until he had enough to sustain its best quality, and left the rest for someone’s PhD after his death – traditionally a sure way of disarming prejudice.

**O**n to Simmons’s new novel, *Children of the Night* (Headline, £15.99). Nicolae and Elena Ceaucescu, having come to believe their own propaganda, fell into the hands of their own people. They received a trial of sorts, and were executed after lunch on Christmas Day, 1989. It was an unusually full firing squad, since the soldiers who had guarded them during their last days threatened to mutiny if they were left out. The contribution of the British government was to strip Nicolae of his honorary membership in the Order of the Bath, a day or two ahead of the bullets; a particularly lucid diplomatic signal.

Only then did the true horror of life in Romania seep out. It was already known to contain the ingredients of paranoia, megalomania and squalor essential to a socialist paradise, but Dan Simmons, who went there shortly after the revolution, found elements of wantonness far beyond the run-of-the-mill folly, mendacity and waste endemic in Albania or the DDR. They put him in mind of tales of Vlad the Impaler, the original Dracula. Romania had been nationally affected by algalagnia.

Could it be that Vlad’s spirit was still at large, working mischief? If his spirit, why not his body, vampires being what

they are? Of course, there are many ways of defining a vampire's nature. Simmons adopts a hard-sf approach, based on a combination of recessive mutation and a benign retro-virus. His vampires (called *strigoi*, a word cognate with *Strega*?) are possessed of unlimited longevity, almost unlimited recuperative powers, and the need for whole blood, but they have no antipathy to sunlight, crucifixes or garlic, nor can they metamorphose into bats. This notion, which constitutes the book's sole claim to be regarded as science fiction, involves Simmons in some heavy data-dumps in the early chapters, but really what we have is a well-researched, pacy thriller in the tradition of Dennis Wheatley or Frederick Forsyth.

Dr Kate Neuman, hematologist, goes to Romania in the wake of the Revolution. There she finds and adopts a very sick child whose anomalous condition may possibly hold the key to all manner of ills including AIDS and cancer, but who proves to hold a high but undefined position in *strigoi* society – the vampire equivalent of Prince of Wales, perhaps. The *strigoi* make strenuous and ultimately murderous attempts to recover him; Kate, aflame with maternal no less than scientific fervour, pursues them to Romania; there are betrayals, bloodshed, car-chases, moments of tenderness with a priest who has lost his faith, excellent touches of local colour etc., and a fine climax which should bring plenty of gainful employment to stuntmen and special effects people when the film gets made.

In interlude passages, we become privy to the dreams and recollections of Vlad himself. It's very well done, if you like this sort of thing; those who prefer thrillers to science fiction will call it his best yet. Even I, preferring sf, have to allow that some of the descriptive writing is first rate. But, for all its merits, *Children of the Night* hasn't the least claim to psychological depth, irony or original thought. Simmons has proved himself capable of all these things, and I wish he'd do it again. (Chris Gilmore)

## Other Folks' Cultures

### Ken Brown

Well, this has been a turn-up for the books. Five, count them, five good solid readable sf books in one issue's worth of review copies. Perhaps the best, certainly the weirdest is from the great R.A. Lafferty. **Tales of Chicago** (United Mythologies Press, \$19.95; you won't find this one in your local bookshop – write to PO

Box 390, Station A, Weston, Ontario, Canada) is the first part of a proposed trilogy with the overall title *More than Melchisedech*. According to the publisher's covering letter, it is also part of a cycle including *Episodes of the Argo*, *The Devil is Dead* and *How Many Miles to Babylon*.

There isn't much point in describing the plot in any detail. It's an account of the childhoods (there are at least three) and educations of a modern magus. The flavour of the writing is more prominent than the events described. Lafferty's strange (perhaps unique) style of writing is not to every taste. It is sentimental, repetitive, somewhat pompous in feel, with lots of explanation and lots of religion. I know that a small minority of my friends and colleagues consider Lafferty a major genius. Another, perhaps, equally small group in which I place myself, find him continually enjoyable, humorous and – and this is important – an easy read. I can pick up almost anything by him and quickly get in to the flow of the thing. I also know that the majority of readers seem to find him obscure, repetitive and grating.

Lafferty may not be James Joyce, but if we are limiting ourselves to sf, he's perhaps the nearest we've got. I doubt if either man would like the comparison. I know I like the book.

Sticking with post-modernism, the latest slab of Terry Dowling's future Australia is published as **Blue Tyson** (Aphelion, A\$12.95), sequel to *Rynosseros*, and like that book reminiscent of Jack Vance (I know, I'm always saying that, but this time it's true – there's a preface by Vance to prove it).

Australia (and most of the solar system) is dominated by a diverse group of Ab'os (Dowling spells it that way) tribes, genetically engineered, practising strange religions, and employing mental technologies almost incomprehensible to the "National" (i.e. non-Aboriginal) Australians who are restricted by law to the cities of the coast.

We are never given any overview of this society: it is revealed piecemeal, in a series of colourful sketches, as seen by the hero, a National sand-ship captain who for some unclear religious reason has won the right to travel freely in Ab'os territory. Ab'os dominance is never explained, nor are we told whether that apparent hegemony is economic, technological, military, or simply a matter of fashion. There are hints that the Ab'os are a kind of style show for the real powers of the world, a Hollywood or Disneyland of the future.

This lack of background seems to be deliberate, intended to communicate to a white and English-speaking

readership some of the incomprehension that one assumes the native inhabitants of Australia felt (or perhaps still feel) at the behaviour, technology, and laws of their European conquerors.

This does not make for an easy read. *Blue Tyson* expects an informed, sf-literate reading – you have to recognize a sand-ship or a Cody manlifting kite when you see one, and assume some pact or treaty or Prime Directive that bans powered transport and modern weaponry in the tribal areas. Although each story is individually fascinating and some of them are tragically poignant, I found them collectively unsatisfying. I wanted an explanation, an overall direction, a glossary, a map.

In Emily Devenport's **Shade** (Women's Press, £5.99) a young Earthwoman fetches up on the shores of an alien planet, living by her wits. The place is about as unpleasant, corrupt and decadent as you can get, swarming with beggars, criminals and street people, the sentient wreckage of a recent bloody war, very various alien species and street people of at least four species living (or dying) off child prostitution, gambling, drugs and just about everything else unpleasant. She is conveniently provided with exactly the supranormal talent you need for this lifestyle, a sort of empathy which enables her to tell whether someone thinks they are going to win any game or contest. This means she can gamble on fights and almost always win and is a great help playing poker. (OK, how come she's still poor?)

The different alien races all turn out to indulge in exploitative sex with humans, of the worst sorts: there are child abusers, rapists, sadists. It all only makes sense if these different alien races stand in for men (i.e. literal men, adult human males) with their strange and violent habits.

Then, somehow, the whole thing reconstructs itself as a totally unreconstructed space opera, and a TRIUMPHALIST space opera at that. Our heroine marries one of the alien warlords and goes off to join the Space Navy, with every intention of restarting the war and apparently about to enjoy it. It's as if inside our socially-aware feminist cyberpunk author there is a Doc Smith Lensman fan waiting to get out. There's even a good press for the divine right of kings. There is a hero-king (really, descended from local versions of the gods) living in the gutter and he looks like Babar the Elephant. (About halfway through the book someone asks why he looks like an elephant when they don't even have elephants on his planet. He doesn't give an answer. I wonder if the author has one).

Despite all this I liked *Shade*. I read it through with interest and enjoyment;



but the stylistic, social and political messages are, at the very least, mixed.

**M**ike Resnick's *Will the Last Person to Leave the Planet Please Shut Off the Sun?* (Tor, \$18.95) is a collection of his short stories. And they are short, three or five pages is typical. There is little ground-breaking here, this is the sort of stuff that was the staple of 1950s and early '60s sf magazines: brief, clever, humorous, taking some idea to extremes with a twist at the end. Resnick has a distinctive voice (I can't help thinking that he writes in a Cincinnati, Ohio, accent) and his work is easy to read, to pick up and put down again.

The stand-out stories are the award-winning "Kirinyaga" and "For I Have Touched the Sky," both set amongst a group of Kikuyus from East Africa living on a terraformed (or more strictly, Kenyaformed) planet and attempting to rebuild the way of life of their pre-colonial ancestors. "Kirinyaga" is a rendition of what must be a near-universal folk motif, in which a wise old man triumphs over apparently great odds without seeming to fight. In "For I have Touched the Sky" the traditional ways do not actually suffice, and insisting on them leads to tragedy.

Now these are good stories. They are well-written and the very idea is refreshing in that it represents recognition of the diversity and mutual alienness of Earthly cultures. But I have a personal grouch with the Kirinyaga stories: if anything, the distinctiveness of the Kikuyu is played down – they don't, to me, seem distinctively Kikuyu, more like a stock African tribe. For example there is no mention (in these stories) of their traditional political and military arrangements: the cycles of initiations, age sets and regiments, cutting across kinship, ridge and clan; the councils of elders, the meetings and discussions that formed the nearest thing they had to what we would call a "government." The traditional set-up would be much more alien to the presumed white, English-speaking reader than Resnick's, although it would be quite standard to many other East African cultures, or the classical Greeks. The "Kirinyagans" live in villages and have chiefs, two things that were anathema to the traditional Kikuyu. The language didn't even have a word for "chief."

More gallingly, the really distinctive thing about the Kikuyu in modern times has been their dynamism and readiness to accept change, to be American about it, their pioneering spirit. In little more than one human lifetime (I have myself met an old man who remembered the first white men coming to his area) they have adapted to a completely alien way of life. I expect to see the Kikuyu of the next millennium running the cultural herit-

age worlds, not hiding in them.

And I'm not sure Resnick gets the origin story right. When God gave Gikuyu a digging stick and the ancestor of the Akamba a bow, he surely gave the ancestor of the Maasai a staff, not a spear. The spear went to the ancestor of the Athi. It's actually important – the Maasai were meant to be herders, not warriors. Despite my personal beeves, these are good stories worth reading, vastly preferable to cowboys in space or yet more serial killers.

**I** didn't quite manage to escape serial killers this time. *Mantis* by Richard La Plante (Little Brown, £8.99) is both a police novel and a martial-arts novel, with a little bit of mysticism thrown in. People are being killed in distinctive and horrible ways, and a rough and ready Philadelphia detective enlists a Japanese martial-arts expert to track down the murderer. The killings are very unpleasant and dominate the book. I suppose the martial-arts stuff was meant to be important but I'm afraid I missed it. I tended to skip the fight scenes, finding them too boring to register in my mind. I do not like reading a book which is obviously meant to appeal to people who want to read about violent and sadistic rapes.

That said, I preferred it to Michael Crichton's *Rising Sun*. This has been out in the USA for a while now (the copy I read was not an IZ review copy). A woman is murdered in the LA office of a Japanese multinational, and the detective assigned to the case needs to enlist an expert on Japanese culture and martial arts for the investigation. (Sounds familiar – see above). There is a complex cover-up involving bribery, threats, obfuscation and the digital manipulation of video recordings (it has more right to be considered science fiction than a lot of what is reviewed in IZ; the plot turns on a genuine bit of technology).

As a whodunnit, I like the book. But the plotting is not the reason for the notoriety *Rising Sun* has achieved in the last few months. Yes, reader, everything you heard about this book is true. It is a barely rational attack on everything Japanese. Almost every encounter in the book, every piece of dialogue, comes up with some way the Japanese have wormed their way into US society, in which "they" are plotting to subvert "our" political economy. And yes, the villain is Japanese, and surprise, surprise he does kill himself at the end.

**I**n *Crygender* by Thomas T. Thomas (Baen, \$4.99) "the Japanese" have taken over the island of Alcatraz and leased it to a secretive clique fronted by an anonymous surgically created hermaphrodite ("cryptic gender," hence the title) for use as a brothel.

Another detective and sidekick team turn up – this time an elderly French policeman and a US lawyer in search of the missing daughter of a German politician. Lots of interesting ideas, if none too original (organlegging meets virtual reality – while we're at it, who invented virtual reality? Philip Dick?) set amongst lots of violence and some sexual fantasy (presumably the reason the action is set in a brothel). There is a subplot concerning the identity of *Crygender*, but s/he turns out to be the person you thought all the time. Better than *Mantis* or *Rising Sun* but, to me, not a lot to write home about.

It was a relief to turn to *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen F. McHugh (Tor, \$19.95). The world of the 21st century is ruled by Chinese communists. Rafael Zhang is a Chinese-American engineer, working on a building site in order to get a chance at an education. He falls out with his boss, goes to work in the Canadian Arctic and gets enough credit to take an engineering course in China. He has one or two not very successful gay love affairs, gets qualified (as a Daoist engineer) returns to New York, takes up part time teaching, throws up the chance of a highly paid job with a multinational corporation, and starts his own design business.

And that's it. Zhang doesn't save the world. He doesn't join the space navy, get involved with a serial killer, rebel against the government (except in his own heart), design, build, find or steal a superweapon, or do any of the other things that usually happen in sf. McHugh's Chinese are real people, utterly unlike the Japanese ciphers in *Rising Sun* or *Mantis*. She knows how her future world fits together: the politics, the sports, the slightly incongruous Martian colony, the wonderful Daoist architecture. Yes, dear reader, *China Mountain Zhang* is a novel. An intelligent, satisfying, readable novel. At last. **(Ken Brown)**

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## British Magazine Reviews

### John Duffield

**F**ar Point is a magazine you'll have seen advertised in these pages. It's a classy-looking A4 glossy with full-colour cover and selected interior artwork. The latest is issue 4, dated May/June '92 with a snazzy dragons-plus-floating-city exterior to presage the pro production within. Oh, and there's lots of ads. The biz.

There's no less than nine stories in all, all a bit on the short side, but with a definite zing and a good satisfaction rating. There was a traditional science-

fiction story called "A Break In the Ring" by John Brunner, about a mega-intelligence from orbital Saturn puppeteering long-lost corpsicles in spacesuits. I liked it. Even better was "The Hard Man" by Andy (*Paperback Inferno*) Sawyer. This one was about a magicked fellow living in a kind of Cromwellian witch-hunter England, so solidly impermeable he deflects musket balls, swords, et cetera. The tale had atmosphere, and really caught me. Indeed 'twas verily excellent. Also enjoyable was a Jazz-band story featuring a semisupernatural transvestite supersinger, called "Miss Ain't Behaving" by Jack Wainer (regular contributor to *Peeping Tom* magazine, aka David Bell publisher of the same, har har). Then there was the droll "The Price of a Head" by Roger Pyle, about a dwarf with a big sword and a horse and a copious saddlebag full of ulp, heads. The evil little bugger gets his comeuppance at the hands of our hero, and the story is humph, nod, well satisfying. Plus there was the snappy "The Character Who Was" by Peter Reveley, about a psychopath literary character who accidentally gets into a Mills & Boon romance with best-seller results. Short, but sweet.

That's five out of nine. The rest weren't bad, though "Duallists" by David Wade was a tad familiar what with the fighting cyborgs operated by ringside remote control. "Ninufar's Kiss" by Sarah Ash was OK, but the water-nympho emotion was rather flat. "Metal Picnic" by Mike O'Driscoll was pidgin experimental - I liked it... NOT! Last and least, "A Substitute for Love" (part 3) by Del B. Normanton had grown tiresome. I just couldn't read it. A couple of duds, but still there was plenty to enjoy for the £1.95 I paid at my local Menzies, not counting the convention news, book reviews, letters and editorial, and a good science-fiction article on terraforming. In general *Far Point* isn't so *duh*, cerebral as *Interzone*. It's less literary and goes in more for entertainment. Thus I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending it, but unfortunately it's now suspended until at least December 1992 because editor Charlie Rigby has been posted to New York on business. Sigh. But look on the bright side, if it does appear as scheduled, the next issue will still be out before issue two of mags like *The Lyre* and *R.E.M.*

*Far Point*: 64 A4 glossy pages with colour, £1.95 per issue or a six-issue sub for £11 with a freebie book such as *Another Round at the Spaceport Bar* thrown in. Available from Victoria Publications, PO Box 47, Grantham, Lincs. NG31 8RJ.

Here's a new one called **Orion**, well laid out with regular typesetting and nice illustrations, kind of a cross between *BBR* and *Works*. The paper

feels good, and so did I when I saw it came from Stockport. But I groaned at the first story, a sub-1000-worder by Andy Ferguson, giving a conversational infodump on Hendrix and Monroe. The final line was "Science Fiction. Who reads that stuff?" Grrr, me for one.

However the next story, called "The Exorcist" by Mark Haw, was good. It was a slow-paced account of a man haunted by the unexorcised ghost of love. The ghost is literal - love being something that has clucking mothers sending for the big old stiff in the black hat. I found myself thinking about this one, and feeling for the main man. Yup, liked it.



Which is more than can be said for "The Isabella-contoured Syncline" by Todd Mecklem and Jonathan Falk. What is this? It's got neither rhyme nor rhythm. It's sprinkled with Latin, German, and French, and it doesn't make sense. Jesus, it's down as fiction, and it's a mere 113 words long. For Christ's sake John Clute writes longer sentences than that. Todd Mecklem and Jonathan Falk, on your bike.

Onwards... "The Man with Multiple Injuries" by Enda Scott was along the lines of Terry Brooks's *Magic Kingdom For Sale, Sold*. Dude sees wacky ad, goes to back street with mega dosh, and steps through indicated door to "travel to new dimensions, explore new worlds." I enjoyed it up to a point, but felt that it kind of lost its bisto factor towards the end. Skipping over another squibbette by the tandem twins Todd Mecklem and Jonathan Falk, there's "The Green Zoo" by Laura Jacobsen. Now this was a story I really found myself rooting for, about a couple whose bills and final demands take animate form... ranging from an electricity board tarantula to a fully-

comp motor-insurance crocodile. Them's bills ya gotta pay! Aaaaah! bisto! Lovely story. Yup. Ding. Hit.

There's a couple more: "The Room" by Terry Marsden concerned a pensioner couple down on their luck, prey to unscrupulous landlords, whilst "The Hourglass" by Robert Frost was a telecog piece with an experimental feel to it. Both were forgettable little downers. The fiction was supported by a reviews feature by Adrian Hodges, who has an enthusiastic turn of phrase that made me want to buy the books he talked about. Plus an ace little cartoon strip called "Culture Shock" by Stephen Walker. Cracker. All in all I had mixed feelings about *Orion*. It was patchy with high points, but wasn't bad for a first issue.

*Orion*: 44 A5 pages, £1.75 per issue or a three-issue sub for £4.50. Available from (and cheques payable to) Alan Garside, 3 Bower Street, Reddish, Stockport, SK5 6NW. Issue 2 should be out as you read this.

Another new one is **Strange Attractor**, edited by Rick "Slaphead" Cadger, winner of the *Fear* prize for best newcomer fiction. A5 typeset with a full colour cover, *Strange Attractor* is a cross-genre slipstream magazine tending towards horror. The first story is "The Last Barnsley Werewolf" by Simon Clark, and contains some convincing hot lust, plus some good ol' Blood 'n Guts: *His feet slithered on a mash of blood, tattered spleens, and a thick, steaming rug of intestine*. Yum. I liked the lively 5-page comic strip called "Future Perfect" by Noel Hannan and Lon Roberts. Example: "I told you to put it down! POW! Aarg!" There was a dinky little story about Satan being a beat-up old wino, written by somebody called *Damien*. Plus there was a damn fine yarn by Allen Ashley called "My Wild Love," featuring this ordinary geezer and his mermaid girlfriend who sings tra-la-laa in the bath and goes shopping in a wheelchair. Good one. OK, for me there were also some missable stories: Mark Haw's "Spirit of a Drowned Maiden" was well crafted, but I didn't know what the hell it was on about. Semi ditto for "Cobb" by D.F. Lewis, and double ditto for "Levelheading" by Andy Cox. But what the hell, this here *Strange Attractor* is meant to be a bit weird, so suck it yourself and see.

*Strange Attractor*: 40 A5 pages, £2 per issue or a four-issue sub for £7.75. Available from R. Cadger, 111 Sundon Road, Houghton Regis, Beds, LU5 5NL.

Ah, now here's a magazine that is absolutely utterly A1 Ace. Hoggety dawg, I can think of nothing nicer than a Saturday afternoon on the sofa with **The Fortean Times**. Now, I don't know whether it's fiction or not, but who cares, I just love this dad-dad-dah-

dah dad-dad-dah-dah twilight zone stuff.

Issue 63 starts off with a bunch of odd little true-life storyettes, like how this owl going splatt into a plate glass window left a perfect image in feather dust. You could even see the astonishment on its face. The remains were found down on the ground half eaten by a fox. Another example was the one about the Scottish fisherman who dredged up a body in his nets and yeuch, it was his long lost brother! There's a picture of this Brazilian petty crook who turned his little finger into a vacuum-cleaner hose to suck up gems from a jeweller's tray, and a piece on the *Armillaria bulbosa* fungus which spreads across acres of forest soil and is now reckoned to be the biggest organism going. There was an interesting article about "Rat Kings," which are bundles of rats with their tails all knotted together – apparently they can grow up like that if the nest is cramped or something. And ugh! Over the page there's two-faced calves, kittens and goats. Not two-headed, but all with one head that bifurcates into two faces. The pictures are there to prove it. Absolutely gross. Didn't I say this mag was brill?!

It goes on and on. There's snake stories, tomatoes from outer space, ominously big cats being spotted in the Peak District, spontaneous human

combustion with a full-page cartoon strip, lake monsters, crop circles (including mandlebrotts!), UFOs, book reviews, letters...ahhh, bisto. And what's really good is that they dish it all up with a sarky cynicism mixed in with good old sensawunda wow! Treat yourself to a *Fortean Times*. If you don't like it I'll give you your money back.

*Fortean Times*: A4, glossy professional full-colour cover, 68 dense pages, bimonthly. £2 from your local newsagents or £12 for a 6-issue subscription from John Brown Publishing Ltd, *Fortean Times*, 20 Paul Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DX. Call 0373 51777 for credit card payment. Also available in America via Eastern News Distributors Inc, 2020 Superior St, Sandusky, OH 44870, USA.

(John Duffield)

*Note: John Duffield is a name that's fairly familiar in the UK small-press magazine scene. He's served as an assistant editor with New Moon magazine, though the latter is currently suspended due to publisher Trevor Jones being unwell. John is also a prolific writer of short stories. He kicks around with the small-press crowd at pub evenings and conventions, where he has the temerity to wear a blazer.*

## UK Books Received

June 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.

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Fantastic Science Fiction: Short Novels of the 1970s**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-112-9, 535pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA [?], 1992; contains long tales by Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Donald Kingsbury, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Norman Spinrad and others.) June 1992?

Asprin, Robert. **Phule's Paradise**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-992450-1, 255pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; second in the series which began with *Phule's Company*.) 2nd July 1992.

Baxter, Stephen. **Raft**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21091-1, 251pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 51.) 25th June 1992.

Benchley, Peter. **Beast**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-910161-0, 350pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; it's another "aquatic menace" novel in much the same vein as *Jaws*, except that in this case the monster seems to be some kind of mutant creature; did you know that Peter

Cursed and alone, he is a vessel for the thoughts of others – their dreams, their fears, their nightmares and their pain

# THE HOLLOW MAN

A journey to the dark heart of mortality from the award-winning author of *Carrion Comfort* and *Hyperion*

## DAN SIMMONS

'Writes like a hot-rodding angel...I am in awe of Dan Simmons' *Stephen King*

Out now in hardback

 HEADLINE

Publisher of the Year



Benchley's father was novelist Nathaniel Benchley and his grandfather was humorist and movie actor Robert Benchley?) 2nd July 1992.

Bisson, Terry. **Voyage to the Red Planet.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32104-8, 236pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 63.) 10th July 1992.

Bond, Larry. **Vortex.** Warner, no ISBN shown, 670pp, paperback, £5.99. (Near-future techno-thriller, first published in the USA, 1991; this one is about war in South Africa; Tom Clancy commends it on the cover: "The techno-thriller has a new ace, and his name is Larry Bond!"; trade paperback received, plus cover of mass-market edition.) 24th September 1992.

Bova, Ben. **Sam Gunn, Unlimited.** Methuen, ISBN 0-413-65730-2, 342pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1992; it consists of linked stories about the adventures of the eponymous spaceman.) Late entry: 26th May 1992 publication, received in June.

Brooks, Terry. **The Elf Queen of Shannara.** "Book Three of The Heritage of Shannara." Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-5555-7, 403pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; the first two volumes of this trilogy were published in the UK by Macdonald [now Little, Brown].) 9th July 1992.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Claw.** Warner, ISBN 0-7088-5258-0, 380pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published under the pseudonym "Jay Ramsay" in 1983; it has also been published in the USA as *Night of the Claw*; this edition contains a new afterword by the author.) 23rd July 1992.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Waking Nightmares.** "Tales of Horror and the Supernatural." Little, Brown, ISBN 0-356-20341-7, 273pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Andy Robertson in *Interzone* 62.) 23rd July 1992.

Carroll, Lewis. **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, and Through the Looking Glass.** Illustrated by John Tenniel. David Campbell/Everyman's Library, ISBN 1-85715-904-7, 327pp, hardcover, £6.99. (Juvenile fantasy novels, first published in 1865 and 1871; first included in Everyman's Library as a combined volume, 1929; this is a very handsome new edition, on "cream-wove, acid-free paper," and reasonably priced, to inaugurate the new "Everyman's Library Children's Classics" series.) October 1992.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Against the Fall of Night,** and Benford, Gregory, **Beyond the Fall of Night.** Orbit, ISBN 1-8572-3026-4, 326pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novellas; Clarke's was first published in the USA, 1953; Benford's was first published in the USA, 1990; the latter is of course a sequel-by-another-hand to the former; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 50.) 25th June 1992.

Clarke, Arthur C. **How the World Was One: Beyond the Global Village.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05226-0, 289pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Popular-science text by a leading sf author; first published in the USA, 1992; it's a rewrite and considerable expansion of his earlier book *Voice Across the Sea* [1958; revised 1974].) 25th June 1992.

Coyle, Harold. **Trial By Fire.** Viking, ISBN 0-670-84693-7, 446pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Near-future militaristic thriller, first published in the USA, 1992; it concerns a revolution in Mexico, and the subsequent war.) 30th July 1992.

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Dragon and the George.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21326-0,

279pp, paperback, £4.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1976.) 25th June 1992.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Alien 3.** Based on a screenplay by David Giler, Walter Hill and Larry Ferguson. Warner, ISBN 0-7088-5240-8, 218pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novelization, first published in the USA, 1992; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 25th June 1992.

Gabaldon, Diana. **Cross Stitch.** Arrow/Rowan, ISBN 0-09-991170-1, 864pp, paperback, £5.99. (Timeslip romance, first published in the USA, 1991; first in a trilogy.) 16th July 1992.

Gaiman, Neil, and Dave McKean. **Signal to Noise.** Introduction by Jonathan Carroll. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05284-8, unpaginated, trade paperback, £9.99. (Graphic novel, first edition; originally serialized in *The Face* magazine, 1989; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 9th July 1992.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Bad Day for Ali Baba.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3720-4, 372pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991.) June 1992?

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **Scheherazade's Night Out.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0451-9, 250pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1992.) June 1992?

Gentle, Mary. **The Architecture of Desire.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13628-X, 252pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Matthew Dickens in *Interzone* 53.) 16th July 1992.

Gentle, Mary. **Grunts!** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01956-3, 429pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous military fantasy novel, first edition; on the cover, it's subtitled "A Fantasy with Attitude"; looks like fun.) 16th July 1992.

Grant, John. **Albion.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3593-7, 439pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 54; "John Grant" is a pseudonym for Paul Barnett.) June 1992?

Green, Simon. **Blood and Honour.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05240-6, 316pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; sequel to *Blue Moon Rising*.) 25th June 1992.

Green, Simon. **Blue Moon Rising.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05289-9, 448pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 55.) 25th June 1992.

Green, Simon R. **Guard Against Dishonour.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3794-8, 188pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; fifth in the "Hawk and Fisher" fantasy/mystery series which began with *No Haven for the Guilty*; we think this is the same author as Gollancz's Simon Green; despite this series having been published first in the USA, he is British.) June 1992?

Gross, Martin L. **The Red Swastika.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3751-4, 374pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future thriller, first published in the USA [?], 1992.) June 1992?

Hambly, Barbara. **Magicians of the Night.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-002-23915-9, 349pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; sequel to *The Rainbow Abyss*.) 23rd July 1992.

Holt, Tom. **Flying Dutch.** Orbit, ISBN 1-8572-3017-5, 252pp, paperback, £4.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in

1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 54.) 25th June 1992.

Holt, Tom. **Ye Gods!** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-016-7, 296pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 25th June 1992.

Hunt, Andrew. **Cat's Cradle: Witch Mark.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20368-2, 256pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition.) 18th June 1992.

Jennings, Philip. **Dome.** Unicorn Productions [PO Box 6, 6680 AA Bommel, Netherlands], ISBN 90-5413-054-7, paperback, £4.95. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a fairly well known short-story writer who lives in London.) No publication date shown, received in June 1992.

Jones, Jenny. **Lies and Flames: Volume Three of Flight Over Fire.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0456-X, 339pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 9th July 1992.

Jones, Stephen, and Kim Newman, eds. **Horror: 100 Best Books.** Revised and updated edition. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56639-0, 368pp, paperback, £5.99. (Collection of critical essays about horror fiction; the first edition appeared from Xanadu Publications [UK] in 1988; winner of a Horror Writers of America Bram Stoker Award; recommended.) 2nd July 1992.

Jordan, Robert. **The Dragon Reborn.** "Book Three of The Wheel of Time." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-028-0, 595pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 53.) 25th June 1992.

Jordan, Robert. **The Great Hunt: Book Two of The Wheel of Time.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-027-2, 707pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 44.) 25th June 1992.

Kay, Guy Gavriel. **A Song for Arbonne.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-002-24062-9, xvi+494pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Canada [?], 1992; proof copy received.) October 1992.

Kennealy, Patricia. **The Throne of Scone: A Book of The Keltiad.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06832-5, 479pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; second Grafton printing; reviewed by Peter Garratt in *Interzone* 23.) 23rd July 1992.

King, Stephen. **Gerald's Game.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-57493-3, 348pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA [?], 1992; proof copy received; the accompanying publicity describes King as "the most popular novelist in the history of American fiction with world sales now computed to be over 100,000,000"; just to put this in perspective, another press release received from the same publishing house on the same day tells us that Harold Robbins, whose first novel was published in 1947, has "achieved sales of 685 million, making him the international bestselling novelist of all time"; despite Hodder's claims, however, both King and Robbins still have some way to go to beat Britain's own Agatha Christie, whose cumulative sales have been estimated at 2,000 million copies by *The Guinness Book of Records* 1992.) 16th July 1992.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Eyes of Darkness.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3769-7, 468pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel; first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols," 1981; third Headline printing.) June 1992?

Lackey, Mercedes. **Magic's Promise: Book Two of The Last Herald-Mage.** Penguin/

Roc, ISBN 0-14-016752-8, 320pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 25th June 1992.

Laymon, Richard. **Dark Mountain**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3921-5, 372pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as *Tread Softly* under the pseudonym "Richard Kelly," 1987.) June 1992?

Lindsey, David L. **Body of Truth**. Warner, ISBN 0-356-20798-6, 417pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 9th July 1992.

Louvish, Simon. **Resurrections from the Dustbin of History: A Political Fantasy**. Bloomsbury, ISBN 0-7475-1191-8, 215pp, paperback, £6.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition; according to the blurb: "the year is 1968; Leon Trotsky has just died in Moscow, after leading the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for 44 years; in Italy, the geriatric dictator Benito Mussolini is on his last legs; in the United States, the naturalized American citizen Joseph Gable, alias Goebbels, has not given up his ambitions for a political victory under the aegis of the ex-Senator for Illinois, the ageing German emigre Adolf Hitler"; and so on...) Late entry: 28th May 1992 publication, received in June.

Lumley, Brian. **Blood Brothers: Vampire World 1**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016993-8, 741pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 25th June 1992.

McCammon, Robert R. **Mine**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21226-4, 560pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 25th June 1992.

Moorcock, Michael. **Byzantium Endures**. Cape, ISBN 0-224-03542-8, 404pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Historical novel by a leading fantasy author; first published in 1981; first in the "Colonel Pyat" or "Between the Wars" quartet.) 16th July 1992.

Moorcock, Michael. **Jerusalem Commands**. Cape, ISBN 0-224-03074-4, 577pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Historical novel by a leading fantasy author; first edition; this is the long-awaited third novel in his "Colonel Pyat" or "Between the Wars" quartet; the action takes place in America and North Africa during the 1920s and 30s; the fourth novel will be called *The Vengeance of Rome*.) 16th July 1992.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Laughter of Carthage**. Cape, ISBN 0-224-03532-0, 602pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Historical novel by a leading fantasy author; first published in 1984; second in the "Colonel Pyat" or "Between the Wars" quartet.) 16th July 1992.

Morris, David. **The Masks of Lucifer: Technology and the Occult in Twentieth-Century Popular Literature**. Batsford, ISBN 0-7134-6706-1, 223pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Study of pseudoscientific literature, first edition; an interesting book, if somewhat academic in style, covering theosophy, Velikovsky, flying saucers, Von Daniken, etc., and treating them as a form of popular "fiction"; however, the author makes one silly claim: in his introduction he states, "remarkably, at the time of writing, the type of text being studied had been totally neglected"; really? – sure enough, in Morris's index, notes and bibliography, there is no mention at all of the three basic works in this field, namely Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* [1957], Christopher Evans's *Cults of Unreason* [1973] and John Sladek's *The New Apocrypha* [1974]; it's odd that this man set out to write a book on pseudoscience and was apparently not aware of these three excellent ventures into the same territory.) No publication date shown: June 1992?

Preiss, Byron, ed. **The Ultimate Frankenstein**. Introduction by Isaac Asimov. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3831-6, 373pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; contains original stories on the Frankenstein theme by Brian Aldiss, Michael Bishop, Charles de Lint, George Alec Effinger, Philip José Farmer, Esther M. Friesner, Mike Resnick, F. Paul Wilson and others; it's a companion volume to the recent *The Ultimate Dracula* [see "Books Received," issue 60], and contains a similar, rather skimpy, filmography.) June 1992?

Rohan, Michael Scott. **The Gates of Noon**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05202-3, 318pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Chase the Morning*; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) September 1992.

Ruggero, Ed. **38 North Yankee**. Penguin/Signet, ISBN 0-45-117150-0, 534pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future war novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it's about a renewed war in Korea; "fast-paced military adventure," according to Stephen Coonts; "dazzling," according to Tom Clancy.) 25th June 1992.

Russo, Richard Paul. **Destroying Angel**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3885-5, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1992; it has a cover commendation from Ursula Le Guin; this is Russo's third novel; the first two, *Inner Eclipse* and *Subterranean Gallery*, were published fairly invisibly in this country by Grafton.) June 1992?

Stasheff, Christopher. **A Company of Stars: Starship Troupers, Book One**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32043-2, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 10th July 1992.

Van Arman, Derek. **Just Killing Time**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-57114-9, 508pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £8.99; it comes with a bookmark that bears the slogan "Which novel will silence *The Lambs* forever?") 25th June 1992.

Vinge, Vernor. **A Fire Upon the Deep**. "The first great space epic for the nineties." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-002-6, 391pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; reviewed from the American edition by John Clute in *Interzone* 58 [which review is quoted copiously on the back cover of this proof]; this book is a likely contender for all next year's sf awards.) 17th September 1992.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Fire Sea: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 3**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40375-3, 414pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 59.) 16th July 1992.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Days of Atonement**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21386-4, 437pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 46.) 23rd July 1992.

Wilson, F. Paul. **The Keep**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-05455-1, 379pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1981; sixth NEL paperback printing; it seems that in the relatively young genre of modern mass-market horror *The Keep* is already a hoary classic.) 2nd July 1992.

Wilson, F. Paul. **Reprisal**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56253-0, 323pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the

USA, 1991; "the second in the three volume sequel to F. Paul Wilson's horror bestseller *The Keep*." ) 2nd July 1992.

Wolfe, Gene. **Castleview**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56254-9, 279pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 46.) 2nd July 1992.

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## Overseas Books Received

Anthony, Piers. **Alien Plot**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85394-7, 255pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received.) October 1992.

Barnes, John. **A Million Doors Open**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85210-X, 315pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) October 1992.

Bova, Ben, and A.J. Austin. **To Save the Sun**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85177-4, 379pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; an accompanying letter informs us that it's an expansion of Bova's 1978 story "The Last Decision," and that it's "a wonderfully entertaining exercise in Asimovian SF.") September 1992.

Clifton, Mark, and Frank Riley. **The Forever Machine**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-842-5, 351pp, paperback, \$4.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1957; this was the book which won a 1955 Hugo Award under its magazine serialization title of "They'd Rather Be Right"; the text here follows a 1981 edition which restored the full text [the 1957 first edition had been cut savagely]; one could say it's an sf novel which is famous for not being famous.) June 1992?

Engstrom, Elizabeth. **Nightmare Flower**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85404-8, 304pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror collection, first edition; proof copy received; most of the stories are reprinted from *F&SF* and various small-press magazines; the novella "Project Stone" is original to the book.) September 1992.

Hand, Elizabeth. **Aestival Tide**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29542-X, 399pp, paperback, \$5.50. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second novel by the author of *Winterlong*.) September 1992.

Kerr, Katharine. **Resurrection**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29834-8, 114pp, paperback, \$3.50. (Sf novella, first published in the USA by Pulphouse Publishing, June 1992; proof copy received.) September 1992.

Kessel, John. **Meeting in Infinity: Allegories & Extrapolations**. Illustrated by J.K. Potter. Arkham House, ISBN 0-87054-164-1, 309pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 15 stories reprinted from Asimov's, *F&SF* and elsewhere.) 12th August 1992.

Knight, Damon. **Why Do Birds**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85174-X, 268pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a new work from an old master, to mark his 70th birthday; it's described by him as "a comic novel of the destruction of the human race.") December 1992.

Leinster, Murray. **Quarantine World**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-844-1, 266pp, paperback, \$4.50. (Sf omnibus, first published in the USA, 1983; it contains the linked novellas "The Mutant Weapon," "Plague on Kryder II," "Ribbon in the Sky" and "Quarantine World," originally published in two slim volumes as *The Mutant Weapon*, 1959, and *S.O.S. from Three Worlds*, 1966; "Murray Leinster" was a pseudonym of the late Will F. Jenkins.) July 1992.

McDonald, Ian. **The Broken Land**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-08983-8, 322pp, hardcover, \$22. (Sf novel, first published in the UK as *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, 1992; proof copy received; the British edition was reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 59.) 15th September 1992.

McDonald, Ian. **Speaking in Tongues**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29239-0, 310pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; it contains 11 stories from Asimov's, *Interzone*, *New Worlds*, *Other Edens*, *Zenith* and elsewhere; this is the second time that McDonald, a British author, has had a short-story collection published in America simultaneously with a new novel; and neither collection has been published in the UK as yet; why can't British publishers summon the nerve to try the same experiment some time?) October 1992.

Menick, Jim. **Lingo**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-812-3, 334pp, trade paperback, \$10.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 53.) June 1992?

Moffett, Judith. **Time, Like an Ever-Rolling Stream**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-08323-8, 318pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a sequel to *The Ragged World*.) 24th September 1992.

Pollack, Rachel. **Unquenchable Fire**. Overlook Press [Lewis Hollow Rd., Woodstock, NY 12498, USA], ISBN 0-87951-447-7, 390pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1988; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, and achieving an American edition at last; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 26.) Late entry: May 1992?

Sterling, Bruce. **The Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-08058-X, 313pp, hardcover, \$22.50. (Non-fiction study of computer hacking in America; first edition; proof copy received; see Sterling's column on "The Cyberpunk Bust" [*Interzone* 44] for a taste of what this book is like.) 15th October 1992.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Aristoi**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85172-3, 447pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1992.

Yolen, Jane. **Briar Rose**. "The Fairy Tale Series, created by Terri Windling." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85135-9, 185pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1992.

## FOR SALE

**The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction** by David Pringle (with assistance from Ken Brown). Hard-cover edition, Grafton, 1990. A guide to some 3,000 sf titles, described by the *Oxford Times* as "among the four or five most useful books published in this field in the last two decades." It sold quite well and there are just a few copies left. We are selling these to *IZ* readers at less than half the original price of £16.95 – £8 inc. p & p (£10 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

**Interzone: The 2nd Anthology**. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stabelford, Ian Watson and others – fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to *IZ* readers at just over half the original cover price – £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

**Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare**. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. Covers all Ballard's work from "The Violent Noon" in 1951 up to the eve of publication of *The Unlimited Dream Company* in 1979. Still in print in the USA but long hard to obtain in Britain. Now copies are available from *Interzone* at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

For any or all of these items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. You may also pay by Access (MasterCard) or Visa card: please send us your card-holder's name, address, card expiry date and signature.

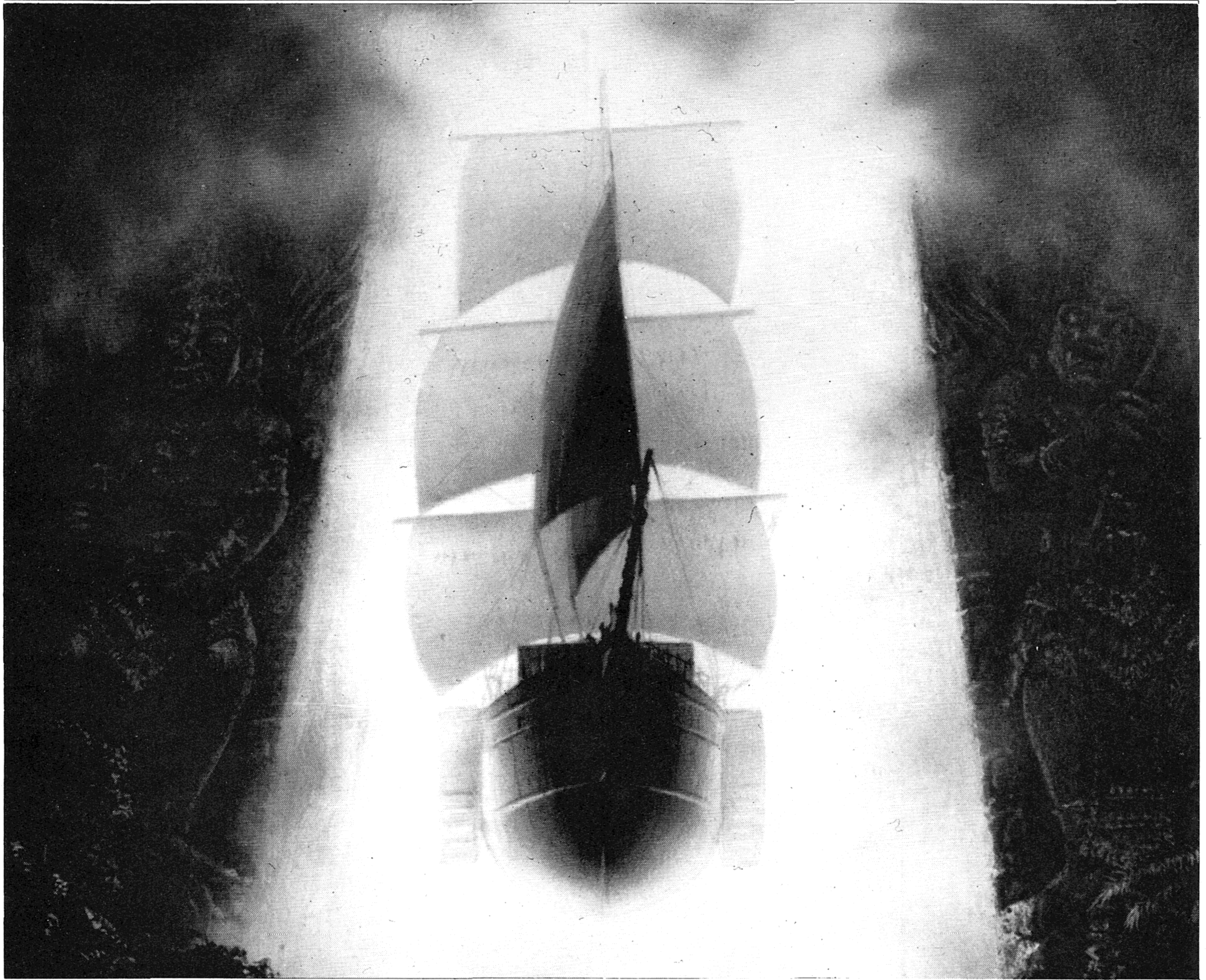
Note: this issue's 'Small Ads' are on page 22

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