

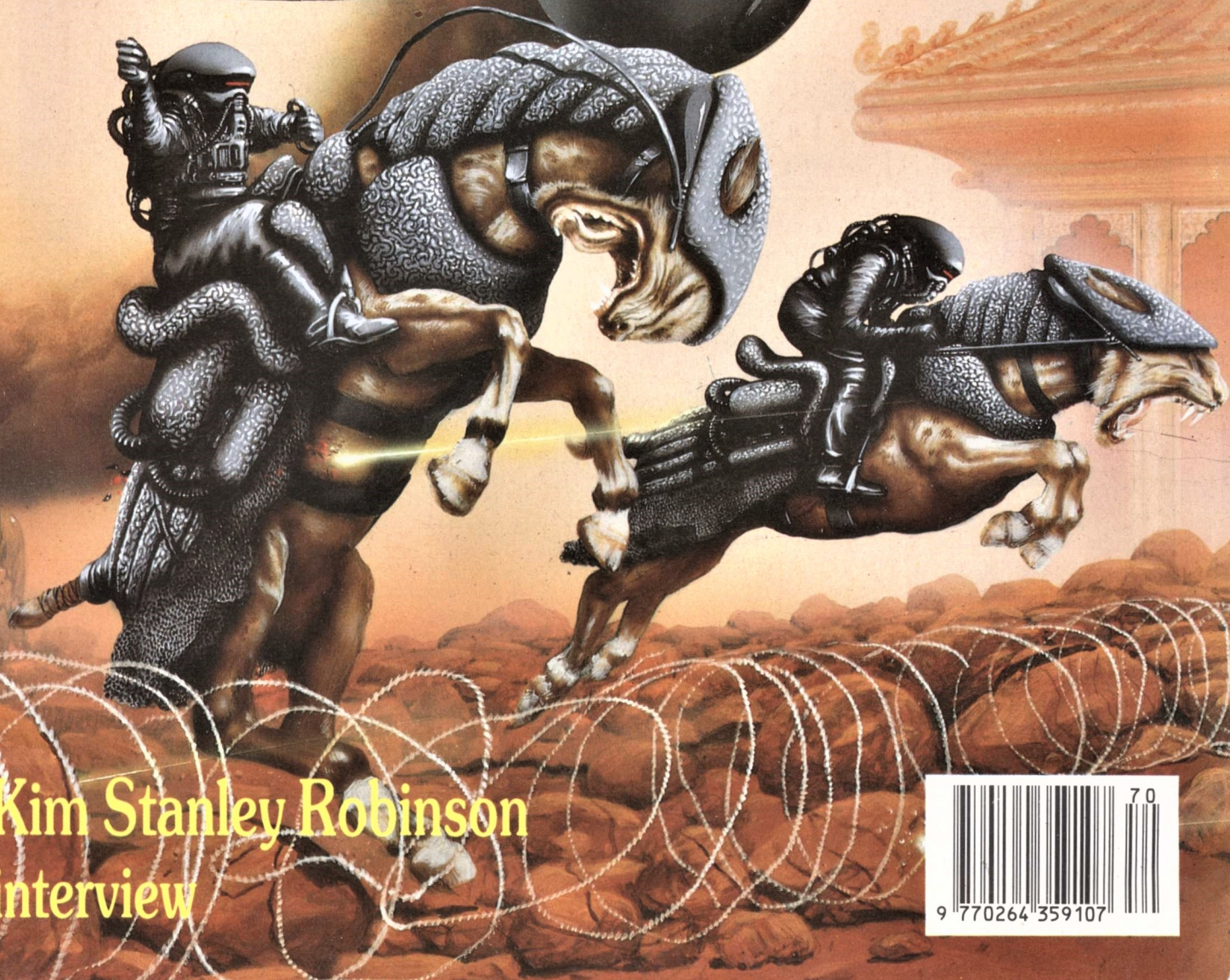
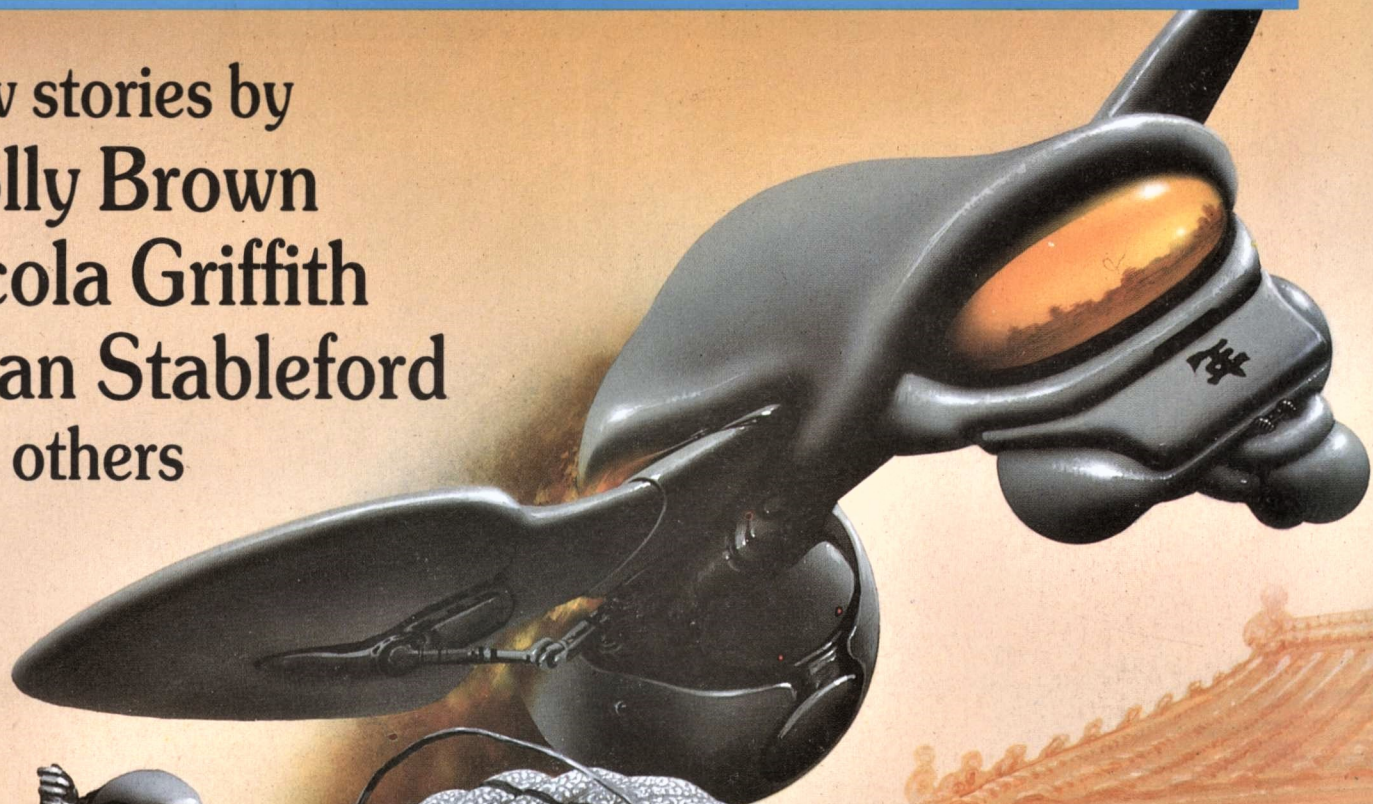
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

APRIL
1993

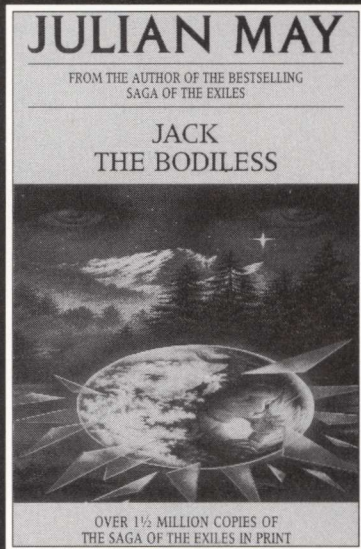
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Molly Brown
Nicola Griffith
Brian Stableford
and others



Kim Stanley Robinson
interview

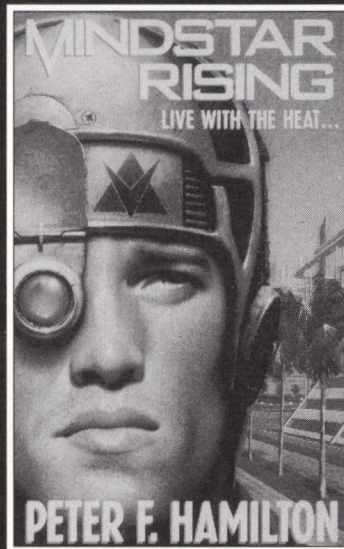


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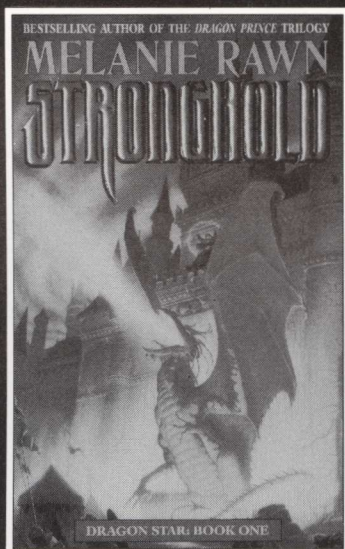
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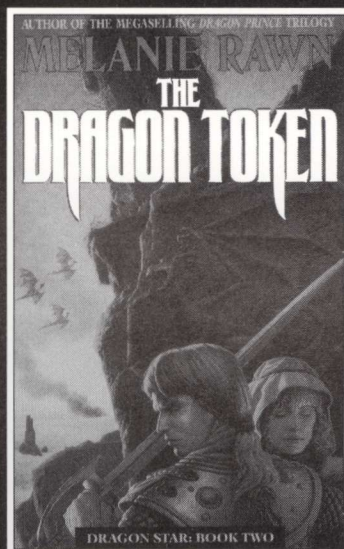
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accompanied by a stamped
self-addressed envelope of
adequate size. Persons overseas
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 70

April 1993

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Interaction

Dear Editors:

I must respond to the reply by Brian Aldiss (IZ 68) to the letters that you received on "Horse Meat." My reaction to the story had been that I did not like it, and wished I had not read it, but that perhaps others wanted that kind of thing. Now we are told that it had a deeper purpose. This seems to amount to an attempt to teach us about the world we live in, and to demonstrate that if people are treated like animals they behave like animals. If this is the intended message then the story needed a covering explanation – it did not come over. Nor is the behaviour described at all like that of animals – the story in fact contains good descriptions of extreme examples of regrettable types of human behaviour.

Brian Aldiss says that those who are unhappy with the theme should join Amnesty International. I am, as it happens, already a member and so, presumably, did not need to read the story. It is a pity that this was not explained in a prominent note after the title.

The most recent issue of the Amnesty International journal (for January/February 1993) mentions in its International News alleged atrocities in Iraq, Cuba, Tashkent, Malawi and Sudan. Other issues deal usually with other places, and very many countries feature in the course of a year. Descriptions of atrocities are given occasionally, and are covered in more detail in special reports, but not in the highly distasteful manner of "Horse Meat." Nor is it true that the atrocities described are far worse than those described by Brian Aldiss. Can anyone imagine atrocities that are far worse. If "Slasher Wilkins," one of those who wrote to you, does take Brian Aldiss's advice and join Amnesty International, he is likely to be disappointed.

If you actually want to further the work of Amnesty International, you might do better to publicize this directly, and feature extracts from its reports. This would also be a better way of teaching readers about the world we live in. Or perhaps you should continue to try to entertain us, perhaps with a more discriminating approach to stories submitted by eminent authors, and let us go elsewhere for atrocity reports.

Laurie Jones
Beckenham, Kent

Dear Editors:

You ask for comments about those stories that stood out over recent issues. I have to nominate Brian Aldiss' story "Horse Meat" (IZ 65) as

being one that stands out vividly. Vividly – as in opening the fridge and finding maggots crawling over the meat, or like finding a turd in the bath. I might have expected this from some slash-and-gore publication; I expected better from *Interzone*, and from Brian Aldiss. It leaves a bad taste. A very bad taste.

Aldiss defends this piece of gratuitous nastiness with appeals to the state of Eastern Europe, Rumania and other oppressive regimes. I am entirely unconvinced; he should go back and read Geoff Ryman's *The Undiscovered Country*, Ian McDonald's *Hearts, Hands and Voices* or even Dan Simmons' *Children of the Night* to see how an author can stir moral outrage at such atrocities without wallowing in them.

"Horse Meat" is a bleak nihilistic exercise in which no character has any redeeming features worth bothering with, and as such is hardly likely to engender sympathy and contributions for Amnesty International (are they content to have their name linked to this, or is this an *a posteriori* justification for this brutal and misogynistic piece, I wonder?).

If it is metaphor then the inescapable conclusion is that none of the people portrayed have any trace of human morality worth saving, and can all go to hell together. Moral outrage requires a victim, someone we could identify with, who might have been, in other circumstances, ourselves. There are none here. As a story, as sf, as a metaphor or moral point it fails. Completely.

And worse is the feeling that, before the hurried justification after the event by Aldiss, it is presented, by author and editor, in a science-fiction magazine, as (presumably) *entertainment!*?

Steve Jeffrey
Kidlington, Oxon.

Dear Editors:

I like the balance of the magazine and the quality and variety of the fiction you print. The illustrations enhance the printed word.

The Bob Shaw special issue was very, very good. The cover was stunning. The contents match the cover and I especially enjoyed reading Bob on writing, especially as I remember seeing his first efforts all those years ago.

I have just today received a letter from an American fanzine editor who writes "*Interzone* must be a good magazine if Buck Coulson says that, if he weren't being paid to reviewazines, he wouldn't buy all that many but he would buy *Interzone* if he could scrape up the money for the subscrip-

tion rate." I intend to send my correspondent some issues – he says he himself is considering subscribing so if you get a sub from him you'll know why.

Derek Pickles
Bradford

Dear Editors:

To begin specifically: I find Bob Shaw's attitude to stories involving robots or androids unacceptable. It is obvious by the examples he gives that he is referring to "yesterdays tomorrows," and that he has probably not read or watched any science fiction for some time. He attempts to ridicule such technology here, going on with a diatribe which is obviously based on his own, stated, aversion to complex machinery.

He tells us the design and manufacture of a man-like robot is just about "impossible." He calls himself a science-fiction writer yet he uses that word? The final straw comes when he asks what the *point* would be of an android robot's existence? I don't think there's much *point* in listing the reasons. The question to ask is; what use could the military, governments, religions, make of a machine that emulates a human being, and is not? The answers are as many as they are obvious. Other questions to ask are; what *point* is there to climbing Mount Everest, walking to the Pole, trying to create AI, existence? We might as well all give up and get pissed. Perhaps this is what Shaw is trying to tell us?

He also makes a mistake when he says "the vein has been mined pretty thoroughly." If an analogy has to be drawn with veins and mining, then the truth is that we are in a different mine now. A change of location which left Shaw behind.

Now, to the real reason for this letter: normally I would not complain, as until just recently I have found *Interzone* commendable, but this is the second time I have been profoundly pissed off by its contents, the last time when you published that piece of sick crap by Aldiss, which had obviously just been rejected by *Spanking Monthly* or some such. *Do you think the name of the author is more important than the story?*

Recently I wrote a letter to *BBR* bemoaning the fact that *IZ* always seems to get a lot of shit slung at it. It was published and no doubt I'm in for a spattering now. It does not please me that this shit-slinging may come to be justified.

Neil Asher
Mundon, Essex

David Pringle replies: Neal Asher is complaining about two very different things. Anyone may disagree with Bob Shaw's opinions on robots – but those

opinions should perhaps be taken in the spirit with which they were published, in an issue celebratory of Bob's many contributions to science fiction and sf fandom (in this sense, yes, most of the material in the Shaw issue was published because of "the name of the author"). Brian Aldiss's story, on the other hand, was published in no special context and has to stand or fall on its own merits. It has provoked a good deal of controversy, and the nature of its reception raises matters of importance to this magazine. We did not publish Aldiss's "Horse Meat" lightly (as we did Bob Shaw's non-fiction piece); for we too had found it upsetting. However, we were also impressed by the intense quality of the writing: it seemed a literary fever-dream which carried its own ghastly conviction. We pondered the story; several of us read it; one of our senior Advisory Editors was consulted. No one recommended rejection, and we decided to publish.

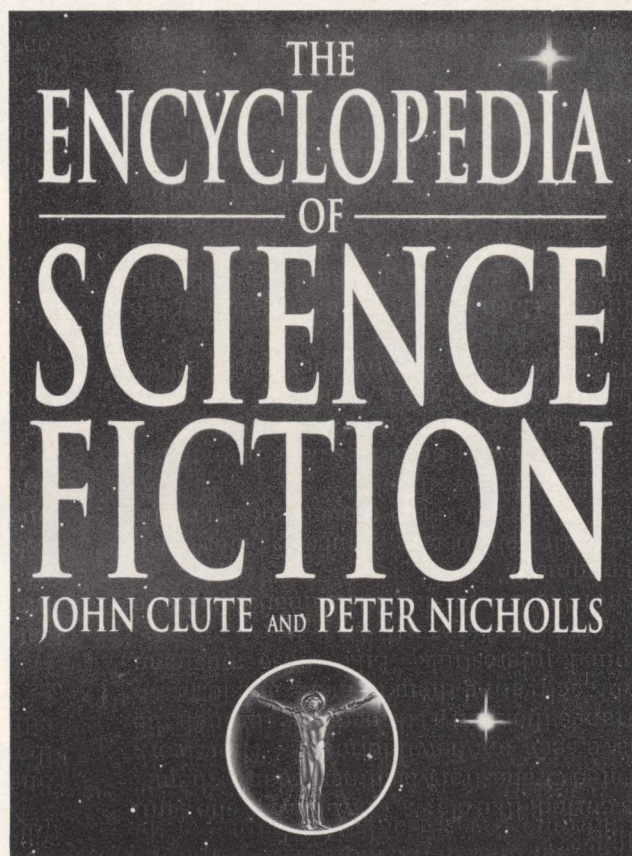
Some readers have praised the Aldiss story (and indeed voted for it in our readers' poll – see results in the next issue) but others, a vocal majority of the letter-writers, have complained bitterly. These people have had their say. Now, what we need to know from them (and from others) is just where the limits should be drawn with such "dangerous" material. Do readers not wish to be challenged, provoked, even upset or offended, by at least some of the stories we publish in these pages? Must everything we print be regarded first and foremost as entertainment? We have always considered sf to be something more than "mere entertainment," which is why we are producing a magazine devoted to the form. As I've said before, we hope to fill *Interzone* with a variety of stories covering the whole range of intelligent sf and fantasy – from light tales through stories of ideas, upbeat, downbeat, moving and thought-provoking fiction, to (occasionally) the profoundly disturbing. At this late stage, I'm not soliciting "defences" of the Aldiss story in particular, but do please write in and tell us if you think our overall policy is right or wrong. And tell us where you think the limits of decorum should lie.

Dear Editors:

In issue 67 Bob Shaw advises sf writers that the appropriate choice of names can go a long way towards suspending the reader's disbelief.

I was born on the planet Billinge, less than a parsec's distance from Golborne's muddy wastes. Could you ask Mr Shaw by what paranormal means he chose these two places – both far-flung outposts of the Galactic Empire of Wigan – to invest "Alien Porn" with such an incredible credibility?

Bill Lythgoe
Wigan



Win an SF Encyclopedia!

Competition time. We don't often run competitions in these pages, but the publishers Little, Brown have kindly offered us as enticement a copy of the massive new edition of **The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction** edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. They're offering just one prize copy, mark you, and if you want to win it you're going to have to work hard. Read on.

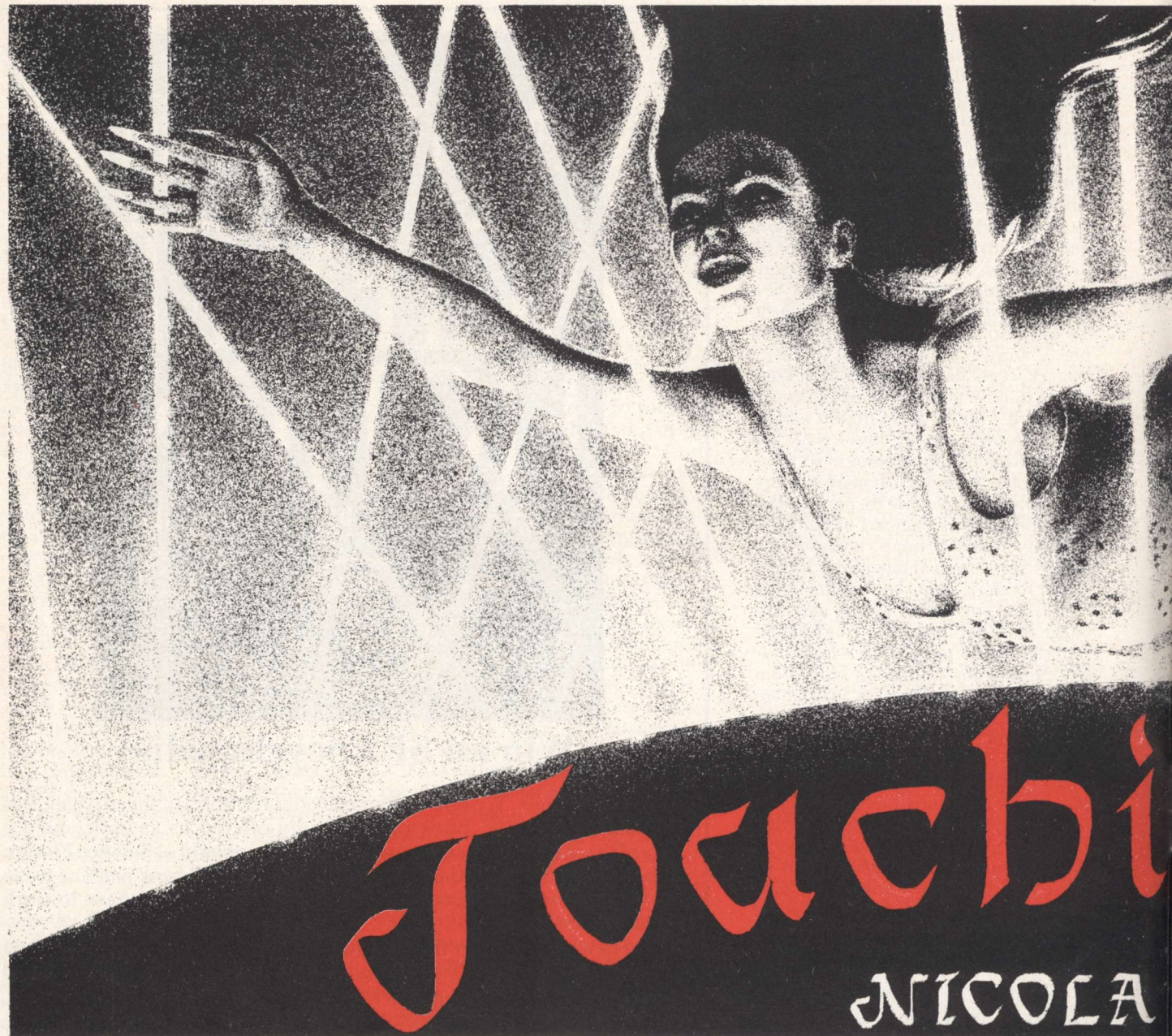
This new Clute/Nicholls tome, out in late April 1993, is a vast rewrite and expansion of the first edition (1979) and is well over a million words long – the essential one-volume reference book for the science-fiction field. I've had little involvement with its preparation myself, other than to revise and expand my entry therein on **J.G. Ballard**. Which set me to thinking...

Back in the late 1970s, Jim Ballard was offered the job of novelizing Ridley Scott's forthcoming sf movie *Alien*. In a letter to me (dated 26th February 1984) confirming the truth of this unlikely rumour, he stated: "They offered me \$20,000 but it was surprisingly easy to turn down." He added: "I wouldn't mind doing the novelization of *Alphaville*, or even Huston's *Moby Dick* or Hawks's *Big Sleep* (Welles's *Macbeth* would pose some problems)." Revelatory stuff! As we all know, the *Alien* assignment went to Alan Dean Foster instead. So what I propose for a readers' competition is this:

Let us pretend that this is an alternative time line in which J.G. Ballard did accept the commission to write the novelization of *Alien*. Please send us your best two or three paragraphs of *Alien*-as-written-by-Ballard. The most convincing entry will be published here in *Interzone* and its author will receive a free copy of the Clute/Nicholls *Encyclopedia of SF*. Deadline: 1st May 1993. Happy writing!

(Ideas for future competitions: *The Sheik* as novelized by James Joyce; *Citizen Kane* as by Virginia Woolf; *Casablanca* as by Ernest Hemingway; *It's a Wonderful Life* as by Henry Miller; *Barbarella* as by Angela Carter; *RoboCop* as by Salman Rushdie; hmm... the brain bubbles.)

(David Pringle)



Touchi

NICOLA

That summer I was working nights at Talulah's to pay the rent until school opened again in the fall. It was Wednesday night, getting on time to close, and there was one woman left, nursing a beer over in the corner under the bass speaker. She was small, Asian-dark, her dusty black hair cut in spikes and not an ounce of fat on her, but not frail, definitely not frail.

I had to ask her to move her feet so I could get the mop under the table.

"My name's Nadia," she said, "and I'm a National Treasure."

National Treasure. That was a new one on me. "Right," I said, because the customer always is.

She moved her legs, anyhow. And finished off her beer. Then she looked around as if she hadn't seen the place before. It was hard to tell what she thought of it. Talulah's is better than some places, worse than others. I've seen plenty of women's bars, though, and I like this one. On nights when I'm here as a paying customer and the women are high-stepping, flashing lean muscle and white teeth, and the floor almost

moves with the weight of the music, it's a fine place, a place of possibility and excitement. But now, with the music down low, and the people paired off and gone, the harsh overhead light showed puddles of spilled beer on the floor and stains on the wall.

"Thursdays are the best," I offered, leaning on my mop. "And of course, I'll be here then." I gave her my best smile.

That's when she pushed back her chair and looked at me. Her eyes were very dark brown. Black maybe. "How do you do that?"

"What?"

"Trust a stranger. You shouldn't."

"It's never done me any harm."

Her smile was strange, twisty and self-mocking. "I do believe you mean that. You trust me." She said it slowly, as though she was tasting it. Then she nodded once, sharply. "Trust for trust then. But when the time comes, just make sure my guards don't see you talking to me."

Drugs, I thought, but she didn't look like she used. Too healthy. "Guards?"



Big Fite

GRIFFITH

"Privacy isn't one of the privileges of a National Treasure."

Then she slid out of her chair as if she was made of oiled snake, not woman, and left.

That night I lay awake in my efficiency, thinking of the way she moved, of her black eyes, of her voice skating through several different layers at once, like ocean currents.

Thursday, she was back. She was wearing black, the same dusty charcoal black as her hair. It made her skin look warm and rich, like cello wood. I slipped out from behind the bar and took a couple of beers to her table.

"You didn't get my name last time," I said, and put a beer in front of her. "I'm Kate." I held out my hand. She turned away, pretending she hadn't seen it.

"Go," she said, not looking at me. "My guards are here."

"Oh?" I glanced round, casually. "Where?" Sometimes if you humour people, they quit.

Not Nadia.

"Over by the pool table. Two of them. Earrings, short hair. One has beer, the other a shot glass." She'd just described the entire clientele. But she wasn't finished. "They're both wearing loose jackets. They have guns."

If she didn't want me at her table she just had to say so. But the thing was, I think she did want me there. I stayed.

She watched the dance floor for a minute. "Meet me in the bathroom in five minutes," then she got up to play the pinball machine.

I served a couple of people, and kept watch on the two women by the pool table. Their faces were in shadow, but one had an outwardly bent little finger, as though it had been broken and badly set. They didn't even glance at Nadia.

In the bathroom, Nadia was by the mirror, standing with feet wide and balanced, hands relaxed, but I could tell she was humming with tension. Even in the harsh neon, she was beautiful.

"I don't know why I'm doing this," she said.

I didn't, either.

She spread lean hands, as though offering something. "My name is Nadia Amin. I'm a National Treasure because I'm a LAOM dancer. The only one. I'm here in Atlanta because I'm helping Kyoto-TEC with their latest ad campaign. And when I'm not filming the commercials I'm working with a research team to figure out why I'm the only one who can do it."

"Do what?"

"The dance." She was impatient, but I didn't understand a word.

"Look," I said, "I'm a communication systems major. I don't know anything about laser dancing. Is that like ballet?"

Her hands curled, like claws. "L.A.O.M.," she said, "Light Activated Orchestral Machines. I dance them." She must have seen my bewilderment. "They work by laser. I arrange them on a stage, dance through the beams of light, activating them to make music."

That sounded interesting. "Like those musician robot computers from Taiwan?"

"No. These are actual musical instruments. They're not pre-programmed."

I'd worked with light before, semester before last. It's tricky stuff. Every flicker of movement alters the parameters. "That's impossible."

Her smile was a slow slide of lips back from teeth. "Not for me. But as I said, I'm the only one."

That smile made me nervous. "You said you were a National Treasure. I didn't know they could apply that to people."

"They couldn't. Until now. I was a, ah, guest of the state, but Kyoto-TEC got wind of what I could do and hired some very good lawyers. They argued I was unique, and valuable, a national resource to whom normal rules should not apply." Again, that slow slide of lips. "Maybe they bribed the judge. Anyway, she agreed to bind me over to Kyoto-TEC. So here I am."

"Yes," I said, cautiously, not knowing where that was, exactly.

"They've got a lot of money invested in me. And I'm unique. They do everything for me, give me anything I ask for."

She had no responsibilities. Like a child. I couldn't really imagine how it might be to live like that. "Is that what the guards are for, then? To make sure you stay safe?"

Her laugh clattered around the cold shiny spaces of the bathroom like a thrown knife, and I remembered she was a dancer, and dancers are very strong. She took hold of my arm, "You really shouldn't trust me," she said softly, then walked out into the dark and slam of the bar.

I stayed to wash my face and try understand what the hell was going on.

When I got back out, she was gone. So were the two women by the pool table.

My apartment is five flights up. At night, when I'm tired, they're hell to climb, and I swear I'll look for a first-floor apartment in the morning. But in the mornings I always relent: I'd taken the room because of the view. There's nothing like watching dawn come up over Piedmont Park, turning the trees to peach and orange and gold. Not that I'm often awake at that time in the morning.

Monday morning I was: Nadia was sitting at the

end of my bed. She held out a laserdisk, between two fingers.

"I thought you might like to watch me dance."

"Christ..." I levered myself onto my elbow. She was still there; it was still dawn.

She smiled. "You look very soft when you're asleep. Very vulnerable."

She was wearing midnight blue, and her lips looked like plums. I waited, fascinated by those lips, too confused to ask questions. She leaned forward, slowly. I couldn't take my eyes off her mouth. She laid the disk on my chest. I clutched it to me, still stupid with sleep. "I don't have a player."

Nadia turned, looked around the bare white walls. She'd probably spent more money getting her hair cut than I had furnishing the whole efficiency. "No TV either."

"Where are your bodyguards, anyway?"

"Everywhere." She stood up, sleepy-lidded, like a cat, rocking my bed, sending my hormone count sky-high. She leaned over me again, and tapped the disk I was still clutching to my chest. "I'll leave that for you."

She slung me a smile over her shoulder as she opened the door and stepped through. The locks clicked shut behind her.

It was only then that I wondered how she'd known where to find me, and how the hell she'd gotten in. *You really shouldn't trust me...*

Two and a half hours later the super banged on my door. "Package for you downstairs."

"I'll get it later."

"Came by special delivery. You gotta sign for it. Guys are waiting."

He sounded like one of those phone sex ads: Call Now, Guys Are Waiting. How could I resist? "I'm coming."

It was an HDTV, with laserdisk player and home entertainment system.

"I can't pay for this!" I said to the three men in overalls.

"Shipping bill says 'pre-paid,' lady. You want it or not?"

It was a Kyoto-TEC shipping bill. Nadia. But how had she done it so fast? And why? I thought about her crazy laugh, and bodyguards with guns.

"Lady..." They were getting impatient.

I nodded. "Follow me."

The screen went from black to white letterbox: an unmoving shot of a white-walled room with bare boards polished by age and countless generations of dancing feet. What looked like seven unfinished metal barrels, each a different girth and height, squatted on the floor in a huge irregular circle. Thick cables ran back from each and disappeared off screen. Nadia was tinkering with the insides of the leftmost barrel; she straightened abruptly, flicked a switch. A red eye glowed on the closed panel. She moved to the next one. The camera remained fixed on the centre of the circle. The red light glowed on the second barrel. She went to the third.

A neat line of print appeared in the lower right corner of the screen: *Day two: initial assessment performance with Kyoto-TEC prototype LAOM's.*

I could tell by the way she walked that her muscles would feel tight under her skin, coiled, ready. Pre-performance nerves.

By now, red glowed on six of the seven barrels. Nadia leaned, flicked the switch on the last one and stepped to the middle of the circle. Her feet were bare. She wore the same dusty black as the second time she'd come to Talulah's, and no jewellery. Her hair was longer than I was used to seeing it, and she looked tired and tense: maybe it was she who was being assessed, not the machines.

She raised her arms. The light in the studio dimmed, and each of the seven barrels suddenly splayed dozens, hundreds of ribbons of light up and out, like straight-line fountain water. At first it looked like white light, but it wasn't, not quite. One barrel poured with ivory, another with sepia, a third shimmered like a heat haze over sand.

Nadia stayed immobile, in the exact centre of the ring, black clothes untouched by light. She was smiling faintly, her skin sheened with sweat, breathing even; not nervous now, just ready.

I'd never seen anyone move like Nadia did. One moment she was standing there as if she'd been carved from wood a hundred years dead, the next she leapt away in a twirling half turn, slashing her arms down through several beams of different coloured light, flick flick flick, faster than I could follow, making music. Every time her hair, or a fingertip or a crease of her clothes, the heel of her left foot or the thrust of a knee or hip went through light, there was a sound. Nadia kept moving, and the music poured from the barrels: tubular bells and violas, french horns and African drums: sampled music, like a light-operated Fairlight Series IV. Only instead of taking sampled and digitally stored music that had already been programmed into coherent sequences and then manipulating the waveform using a light pen, she was doing it all simultaneously, with her body, using dance to make music. It was like watching a shuttle liftoff: impossible, but happening right before your eyes.

It was fast music, sun-on-dragonfly music; music like the thousand and one nodding flowers in a field and the flyers and burrowers that played above and below ground. Light-hearted music, but complex, with the rhythms of life and death: computer-aided Grieg, or Camel with violins; marvellous music, intoxicating. And creating it, spinning in it, sweat flying from her skin and making its own little music, was Nadia: charcoal tunic and trousers stained black in patches, hair slicked down to her scalp and half-smile gone, replaced by utter concentration. I could see and hear the work going into the music: muscles bunched and stretched, her bare feet thumped on the boards, breath whistled. For a few seconds, half a minute maybe, she hit her groove, and the dancing and music came together in a perfect, symbiotic pattern. Her sheened arms slid and swam through the light like fish, faster, faster, and the bass and treble, the horns and strings and woodwind all fitted together in an intricate jigsaw making me laugh out loud at the wonder of it. But then she put a foot too far forward and the cello sound faltered, and the synergy of movement and sound was lost; once again, it was just a woman dancing beautifully, making marvellous music.

The screen blanked, cutting off picture and sound mid-bar.

I blinked, took a shaky breath. So that was LAOM dancing. I picked up the remote, wanting to watch it all again, in slow motion, but the screen flicked white again. More?

This time the lettering came up first: *Day 163, Performance, Mark III Kyoto-TEC LAOM's*. Five or six months later, then. And this time they had a real camera operator on the job: a pan shot of the LAOM's first, eight of them now, seven arranged in a squashed-looking circle, the eighth off-centre. They weren't the crude things of the *Day 2*, either: these were beautifully finished machines, wooden cases gleaming with soft polish, plates made of burnished high-tensile alloys.

Nadia stood, ready: not the tired, tense woman-under-trial of *Day 2*, but a different Nadia.

She was wearing arterial red; there were long feathers hanging from one ear, and the fingers of both hands were tipped with razorblade extensions of dull grey metal. Around her right ankle was a thick ring with a spike on the outside. The quality of her waiting was different, too: not an absence, but a presence. She brooded, like a caged animal, like a storm building on the horizon; a creature of brass and blood. I expected her to slide back her lips from red teeth and hiss.

The LAOM's suddenly spread their fingers of light – jungle colours this time, purples and golds and turquoise – like exotic pineapples sprouting spikes of virulent greenery. Nadia moved her head, letting the feather in her left ear swing out and touch a turquoise ribbon: a parrot cawed. She moved her head again; the parrot screamed over the thumping start of a deep heartbeat. The camera pulled back its focus: Nadia's foot was tapping deliberately, the spike cutting back and forth through a low gold stream of light. Then she turned, fast as a panther stalking, and the music came pouring forth.

It was murder music, heat-and-sex music, and Nadia was leaping, whirling, sliding and tricking her way through those thousands of frozen Roman-candle lights. She never once missed the heartbeat. Wherever she was, at whatever speed, that footspike came down dead on the beat, every time, over and over.

I could hardly breathe.

She reached and sliced through hot ruby and hummingbird blue with her metal-tipped fingers, and the ribbons of light from two LAOM's began to rotate. She moved faster and faster, but, paradoxically, everything seemed to slow down, become perfectly defined. Each note, each layer of music was absolutely separate from the rest; each beat seemed to have all the time in the world to swell and crest and ebb, then swell and sound again. My heart was thumping and I wanted to shout, or scream, or die. I felt on the edge of something profound.

And the sound and the dance built, and Nadia's ankle spike never missed a beat, only now she was using her fingertips and her feathers and the flick and swirl of her diaphanous trousers to create counter beats, and rhythm upon rhythm upon rhythm.

It was only when the screen blanked again, releasing me, that I found I was crushing the remote control in my hands, bruising my palms; that I was able to

cry. I sat on the couch for fifteen or twenty minutes, coughing up sobs from deep places I never even knew I had. Nadia had ripped something away, torn aside the veil we normally wear every day to survive in the city. She made me smell life, feel it, touch it, taste it. She made me want... something. Something more, much more than I had now. She had made me see that there was more to life than just existing the best I could day by day. Life was to be lived; to be taken and shaken and sucked dry, used up. Every moment was precious. I wanted to reach out and touch her fire, bathe in it, be clothed with it.

Life. Nadia made me ache for it, fiercely, from my bones out. But inside I was scared, as well as excited: there was never adventure without risk.

Monday and Tuesday nights Talulah's stays closed, so they're my lazy days, my weekend. I spent the rest of Monday doing errands: stocking up on food, doing my laundry, the usual stuff. Every so often, vacuum cleaner going, or plate halfway to the sink, I'd pause and look over at the huge entertainment centre that took up more space than my kitchenette, and wonder: Why? And that, of course, was closely followed by: How? How had Nadia found out where I lived? She didn't even know my last name – at least, I hadn't told her. And how had she managed to get everything here so fast? And that all led back to why. Why was she doing this?

You really shouldn't trust me.

And then, of course, I'd have to put the plate down or turn off the vacuum cleaner, and play the disk again, just to reassure myself that I'd seen what I'd seen.

I slept badly that night, and my sleep was full of erotic dreams of a feral and primordial Nadia, a Nadia without inhibition.

I woke up Tuesday almost as tired as when I'd gone to sleep, and with my body giving me unmistakable signals that now it knew exactly what it yearned after. I sighed. I had to do something about this.

My laptop was ancient, a hand-me-down from Mom, with dysfunctional battery backup and zero compatibility with any known modem. So I stuck a diskette in my pocket and took the MARTA train downtown to the main Fulton County reference library.

I read first about research trends in computer-assisted composition. Nothing unexpected there: lots of gabble about Fairlights and courtcases pertaining to digital sampling and copyright, and one tiny article in an obscure journal about the possibilities of adapting computers so that physically challenged people could use light to compose music. There was a counter-article detailing why such light-parametered composition computers would, in practice, be impossible to use. I checked the author of the first article and found he worked at Columbia, in the music and computer labs sponsored by Kyoto-TEC. Ah hah. The article was dated two years ago. Nothing since then. Just as Nadia said: new stuff, and the prevailing opinion was that it simply couldn't be done. But Kyoto-TEC had watched the work done in their laboratory and decided differently.

Next, I looked up National Treasure provisions and

precedent-setting court cases. There it was, under *Decisions: Kyoto-TEC v. US Govt.*, and the date was about right, seven months ago. Jackpot. I hadn't brought enough disks for the whole thing, so I just downloaded the abstract.

I set up a search for Nadia and Amin in the out-of-town media files, and found two articles that were relevant. The first was nothing much, just a paragraph in the *Seattle Times* about three students graduating with double honours at the University of Washington. Nadia was one of them, graduating in dance and music theory. The second was more interesting.

It was dated eight months after the first – and ten after the piece I'd read earlier on the Kyoto-TEC lab researcher's theories. According to the paper, Nadia Amin, a promising young student enrolled at the Seattle Academy of Performing Arts, had blown the entire electrical system of the Gardner Annex while trying to perform something she called "Zeus and Semele: An Exercise in Light Composition."

I looked at the colour image of the gutted annex for a long time. Now I knew that it was at least possible for Nadia to be who she said she was. I was looking forward to getting home and reading the abstract of the court case, to finding out just what it took to be declared a National Treasure as opposed to a National Menace.

When I got home there was a message on my machine from my mother, reminding me that today was my father's birthday and I was supposed to be going over for dinner with the rest of the family. I'd forgotten of course. I dropped the disks on my couch and sprinted for the shower. The court case abstract would have to wait for tomorrow.

On Wednesday I woke up well after midday to the hot, still air of a coming storm. My skin felt tight and I had a headache; the room was stifling. I decided to risk overloading the ancient electrical circuits and turned on my window air conditioner to cool the room.

I always find it hard to concentrate before a storm. After I'd spent an unnecessary hour puttering about with breakfast and watching local news on my HDTV, I finally got dressed and settled down with my laptop and the abstract of the court case.

I couldn't understand the first couple of pages at all, gobbledygook, all of it: lists of obscure statutes and indictment codes, and lots of wherases and hereinafters. The air conditioner was labouring, making my head thump. I frowned and concentrated, and around page five the words began to make sense.

The judge, one Honorable Harriet Thurman, agreed to admit the testimony of expert witness Dr Schubert Macillvaney, psychiatrist. Macillvaney assured the court that Nadia Amin was not usually dangerous, except in certain, already described circumstances, and that in his opinion there would be no danger to the public should she be released into the custody of Kyoto-TEC, as long as stringent prec –

The AC coughed once, horribly, and the current in my apartment died. The words on my screen blipped out.

I sat in the suddenly dark room and stared at my blank screen. *Released into the custody...* What had Nadia done? Blown up another academy?

You really shouldn't trust me. I thought of her hard shiny laughter that night at Talulah's; her talk of bodyguards and guns; how she had found me, found my apartment, bypassed the locks, sat on my bed. But I also remembered the way she had leaned forward, so close; the way she moved, oh god the way she moved...

Finally, the level of darkness in the apartment got through to me: it wasn't just the gathering storm, it was getting late. I scribbled a note for the Super about my burned out fuses, and left for work.

Talulah gave me some hard looks; I rang up the wrong money several times, and twice kept customers waiting while I stared off into space, thinking of Nadia with her ankle spike and metal fingernails, the way she curved and arched, her blood-red lips...

The women were restless tonight, and Jenny the DJ played strange, hard music with a driving slow beat. The air shimmered with tension and heat. We sold more shots of tequila and vodka that night than any other Wednesday since the fourth of July three years ago. I got bought a few, too, and drank them down eagerly, as though the clear liquid might give me some answers.

Nadia came in a little after midnight. I'd been waiting for her of course. She was wearing diaphanous dark-red pants and shirt through which showed her dancer's shadowed curves. I could almost feel those strong muscles under my hands, and wondered whether if I ran my fingers down her silky calves I'd find a metal spike around her ankle. I turned away as she found a table near the dance floor, and served two women who had just come in. They ordered beer. When the taller one reached out to pay, I noticed her little finger was bent. They both wore jackets, even though it was hot. I swallowed, gave them change. They nodded and took stools at the bar. Where they could watch Nadia.

"Think I'll go round up the empties, see if I can scare up some more orders," I said casually to Talulah. She gave me another of those hard looks, but nodded.

I hit four tables before Nadia's, trotted back and forth with more shot glasses of vodka and tequila. When I thought the bodyguards weren't looking, I cruised up behind Nadia.

"A drink, ma'am?"

She looked up with those sleepy-lidded eyes, those dangerous, gorgeous eyes. She smiled, and I knew she knew I'd watched her dance. She could probably smell it on me. "A drink, yes." Her eyes flickered to the jacketed women at the bar and back. I nodded that I'd noticed them. "Bring me a surprise," she said, and turned away.

I took her a shot glass of Prairie Fire: tequila with seven drops of tabasco sauce. She swallowed it down without looking at me. "Bring me another." I brought her another. She watched the women on the dance floor moving belly to back, and drank it down as fast as the first. "Now you can watch me dance."

She stood up, still without looking at me, and walked onto the floor, moving through the heaving crowd with an easy reach-the-rhythm step that wasn't either syncopated or bang on the beat like a march. Then she danced.

At first she seemed to be more or less standing still,



but her hips were moving, slowly, and she began to run her hands up and down the air before her. Now and again she moved a leg slightly, bending out at the knee, easily, to the music. Then her hands moved, one down, one stroking the air between throat and belly level, up and down. She looked at me then, and smiled, and I blushed a hot, deep red.

Here, she was saying, *this is what I'll do to you when I take you to bed.*

I couldn't bear it, I wanted her so much, but I couldn't turn away: I stood there, trembling, helpless.

The music changed, and a woman with long hair started dancing at Nadia, who laughed and danced back, ignoring me. I wanted to kill that woman with long hair. I pushed my way through the crowds and out an emergency side-door exit into the parking lot.

The night tasted of cars driven too fast and braked too hard, of beer and fragile laughter, of one o'clock in the morning. The sky was dark and thick with thunderclouds. There was a flash in the west, and a low rumble. Sultry, restless weather.

Music blared loud and was cut off again as someone stepped out into the night. I didn't turn, but tilted my head back to watch the stormcloud bunching and heaving like overheated muscle.

A hand touched the back of my neck. Nadia. The hand slid around to stroke my throat. "Let's go," she said in my ear, and, god help me, I went, just like that, without telling Talulah, without even *thinking* of telling Talulah, without thinking of the court case or Nadia's admonitions not to trust her. I walked to my car, her hand still on my neck, without saying a word, without thinking at all.

The rain started on the way back to my apartment, fat ripe drops. I wanted to drive fast, but Nadia laid a hand on my thigh and I kept the speedometer exactly at thirty. No dark sedan followed us. My blood felt like molten metal.

At the apartment building, we still didn't speak. Our breathing matched, heavy and rhythmic, as we climbed the five flights of stairs. When we reached the top, Nadia stroked the back of my neck with one hand and tapped in my lock code with the other. We went in.

The power was still off, but the bed sheets shone sodium yellow in the glow of streetlights reflected from rain-wet streets. Nadia watched, unspeaking, her face in shadow, as I undressed. I felt as though I was stripping off my history, my inhibitions, my safety. This was right here, right now, like playing with fulminate of mercury. I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that I wanted her to run a fingertip through the sweat in the small of my back, I wanted her to hold me with those strong arms and iron legs, I wanted her breath hot on my face as her lips came closer. I wanted her, wanted her, wanted her.

Hours later, Nadia stood naked by the open window, watching the night. I lay across the bed, fascinated by her, drunk with her, surfeited, stuffed tight as a drum with sweat and sex and the memory of skin between gentle teeth, of strong fingers, and her belly on my back and arm around my hips.

When the storm had been over the roof over Nadia over me over the bed, the rain had been so heavy it had leaked through the old roof tiles, seeping down inside the walls, mixing with the plaster made of red Georgia clay, making the whitewashed walls weep blood.

That had been hours ago. The storm was gone now, and all that remained of the rain were dripping gutters and the glisten on the treetops in Piedmont Park. The streets were quiet; it was not long before dawn.

"At this time of night," she said, "I can almost believe it would be possible to fall out of a high window and be buoyed up by the darkness itself, that we could fly." She turned back to look at me, and the breath caught in my throat. "Do you believe in flying?"

Yes. But I couldn't speak. She had made me fly for hours; I had soared. I couldn't see her face, but I knew she smiled. She moved a step towards the bed, and though the streetlights reflected from below turned her eye the mad marigold of a hawk's, and I was scared, my blood roared hot under my skin, and the tendons running inside my thighs tightened in anticipation. She laughed, a low double-cream laugh. "Perhaps you would like me to come a little closer?"

I woke up the next day, alone. The window was closed. I sat up. Had I dreamed it? But the walls were streaked with plaster blood, the sheets were torn, and the room smelled of her, my hands and my hair and belly smelled of her. I laughed out loud: pleased with myself; a little ashamed; exhausted.

There was a yellow sticky note on the TV screen: *Three o'clock, in the park.*

A typically Nadia note. No *Please* or *Thank you* or *Can you make it?*

The power was still off and I was showering in the dark when someone knocked on the door. I didn't much feel like getting out all wet, so I ignored the tapping and turned the spray up to full force. If they knocked again, I wouldn't hear it.

I soaped myself absently, shivering as I remembered Nadia's hands, the way she had touched the back of my neck and said, "Let's go."

How was I going to persuade Talulah to let me keep my job? I couldn't believe I'd just walked out like that, without telling her.

I sighed and rinsed off, pulled a towel off the rack. I needed that job. Perhaps Talulah would believe a sudden case of ptomaine poisoning, a night in the emergency room... I padded through into the main room, towelling myself dry.

There was a woman staring at the stained wall.

Obviously she had just let herself in: the door was still swinging closed. She spun around when she heard me. Crooked Finger.

"Oh," she said, looking at me, then the wall. "Then it's not..." She shut up, but not before I heard the relief in her voice.

I stood there, naked and confused. "What's not what?"

She sidled toward the door.

"Wait," I said. Some of my shock was wearing off, but not the confusion. "What are you doing here?" She opened the door. I noticed the gloves. "Wait just a goddamned minute —"

She bolted through the door, slammed it shut behind her.

I stared at it blankly, then leaped after her. "You stop right there!" But she was disappearing down the third flight of stairs. I swore, and started after her. Old Mr Hinklemeier popped his head out of his door, and his eyes bugged. I was still naked.

Damn everything to hell and back.

Nadia was by the lake, feeding the ducks. I watched her for a while from the trees. She threw bread as she did everything else: with utter concentration, a kind of ferocity that did not allow for interruption. The ducks didn't care. They swam around and around, performing for their supper.

I stepped out of the trees, enjoyed the way her pupils blazed big for a moment when she saw me. Mine, I thought with that absurd proprietorship of the day after, and smiled.

She smiled back, and the day suddenly seemed brighter, cleaner. "Watch this," she said, and threw a single big piece of bread into the centre of the swimming ducks. One of the smaller ones, a mallard with a green head and flashing eye, thrust its way through the squabbling covey and snatched the bread. "He does that every time." She sounded admiring.

"Why not just throw smaller pieces, so they can all have some?"

"I like to watch them fight."

She gave me some bread, and we threw it in companionable silence for a few minutes. I did my best to make sure all the ducks got some.

We walked slowly around the water. Two men followed us at a discreet distance. "Are they watching us?"

Nadia did not even look over to see who I meant. "Someone's always watching me."

"They weren't at Talulah's, that first time." Or last night, in my apartment.

"That was special. It was my birthday," and she stooped to pick up a stone which she tossed into the water.

She had been all alone that night, just her and five empty beer glasses and the end of an evening. Her birthday. I wanted to gather her up in my arms, but she was standing so straight and staring out over the water with such concentration that I didn't.

"There was one in my apartment, earlier. One of the women that came into Talulah's last night." She didn't turn, but a shift in her shoulders told me she was very interested. "She must have thought there was no one home. I'd just come out of the shower, stark naked, and we stared at each other. I don't know who was more surprised, her or me."

Now Nadia was looking at me. I could see the pleats in her brown-black eyes, pleats I had noticed for the first time last night when she had been moving over me, running her...

"Did she say anything?"

"Um? Oh, no, not really. Just looked at me, looked at the wall, and bolted."

I hadn't realized Nadia had been tense until her muscles relaxed and she turned back to look over the water, relieved.

"Nadia, what's going on? I don't understand any of

this. First of all, you tell me not to trust you. Then guards with guns follow us about the place." I took her hand, trying to get rid of the awful fear that was suddenly hauling itself up my spine, one vertebra at a time. "They should know by now that you're safe with me, that I'm not some corporate assassin. I mean, what are these guards afraid of? And what are you afraid of? I really don't get this." Crooked Finger hadn't seemed upset to see me. If anything, she'd been relieved. "I don't like it. I'm not used to people letting themselves into my apartment as and when they feel like it. Even you."

Nadia didn't say anything. I sighed, and tugged her over to a bench. We sat down.

"Talk to me about this." Silence. "At least tell me how you did it, how you knew where to find me in the first place. How you managed to get through my locks."

She tilted her head back, stretched. The sunshine turned her throat to gold. "I told you: they give me everything I want; I have access to more than you can possibly imagine. As for finding you, that was easy. Kyoto-TEC have unofficial tendrils in every pie. I accessed the local IRS database and found there was only one employee at Talulah's whose first initial was K. So getting your last name was simple. Then I scanned the phone company's information for your address. Easy."

Just accessed the IRS database. Easy. Right. "What about the lock?"

"It's made by Kyoto-TEC. I found out what model it was, then asked one of the designers to show me how to compromise it."

Just like that. I wondered if she had any moral scruples at all. Like a child, she could have something, so she took it, right or wrong. And like a child she refused responsibility for what she did.

Children are notoriously fickle.

"I'd like a number where I can get in touch with you."

"I can reach you easily enough."

"I know. But I'd like a number. Just in case."

Nadia looked at me. "You don't understand," she said finally. Damn right I didn't. "I'm at everyone's beck and call, all the time. They whistle and I have to jump. I wanted, want, to have someone who won't do that to me, where I'm in charge."

"It doesn't have to be either or," I said, and took her hand again. "And you have rights. You could make them give you time for yourself, privacy, like you did on your birthday."

"That was different. They gave me the time because they were desperate: I wasn't able to work any more." She took her hand away. "Have you ever seen a swan with a lead fishing weight around its neck, choking? That was me. I couldn't dance, I couldn't fly with them wrapped around my neck like that. So they let me have a night, one night."

"Two nights," I said, and kissed her hand. She said nothing. "No?"

"Depends how long it took them to find out who you are, where you live. What time they managed to track us down."

I imagined Crooked Finger and her colleague crouching by the door, listening to my abandonment, and felt naked and furious. I wanted to march over

to the two men standing by the lake and bang their heads together. But underneath my anger was the nagging feeling that I was missing something, something important.

"So," she said, "I'd like you to trust me. It's important that someone does. Trust me enough not to ask for my number."

I understood the need for privacy. The thought of never having it was appalling. If it was that important to her...I nodded. She smiled at me, then blinked that lazy-lidded blink that sent desire curling through my belly. "Let's go back to your apartment," she said.

"I'll see you tonight or tomorrow night," she said as she left, three hours later.

It took me thirty minutes to summon up the energy to climb off the bed, but then I hurried: I still had to persuade Talulah to let me keep my job, and it wouldn't do to be late.

Talulah didn't believe my story, but forgave me anyway. The evening passed slowly. Nadia didn't come.

I climbed my five flights slowly, half expecting to find her in my apartment when I got there. Hope springs eternal.

For the first time since I'd rented it a year ago, the apartment seemed bleak and empty. At least the power was back on. The laptop blinked at me. I hesitated, then turned it off. Nadia deserved her privacy.

I was tired, and hungry, but all the food in the refrigerator had spoiled. Tomorrow. I'd deal with everything tomorrow.

I touched the stain on the wall and climbed into bed. The sheets smelled of her.

The reporter turned away from the rain-streaked window. "Zeus and Semele," he said, "and she'll burn you. At least with two women it won't be a case of Leda and the Swan." Then he turned into Nadia. "Trust me." She laughed and the laughter took shape, dark, with wings, and flew out of the window. "You see," she said earnestly, walking towards me, "it's not a question of whether you trust me, but whether or not I can trust myself." She came closer and closer and I began to panic, then suddenly she was choking: a rope with weights was wrapping around her neck, snakelike. "No!" she screamed, "not this time!" and then the one strangling was me, and Crooked Finger was coming through the door with a mop and bucket and a big plastic bag.

I had other dreams, but that was the one I remembered when I woke up at midday.

Zeus and Semele. Some Greek myth or other. Uneasy dream logic.

Last night, if anyone had asked me, I would have told them I trusted Nadia completely, believed everything she said. I'd even thought that I no longer needed to read the court abstract, that I didn't wish to absorb others' comments on a woman I was beginning to care for. But sometime during my dreams, little inconsistencies had floated up from my subconscious and now sat in a clump, demanding to be heard.

It's not a question of whether you trust me, but

whether or not I can trust myself... What did I know about Nadia, really?

When I climbed out of bed I ignored the laptop and went straight back to the library.

All the way back on the train, hours later, I stared at the smeared window, not seeing the city or reflections of the hot, bad-tempered commuters homeward bound; seeing nothing but a mind's-eye picture of the library screen, with those damning, damning words.

After hearing assurances that Kyoto-TEC were well placed to foster and develop Nadia Amin's natural talents, to the eventual benefit of all Americans, Judge Thurman indicated her willingness to transmute sentence and accord Amin status as National Treasure. The judge expressed some reservations about Kyoto-TEC's precautions. K-T again called expert witness Macillvaney, psychiatrist, who reiterated that Amin was unlikely to prove dangerous to the general public. Despite this, he assured the court, K-T would – under his personal supervision – undertake to keep Amin under observation at all times, and to physically restrain her at those times of greatest risk – during solar and atmospheric storms.

K-T's counsel reminded Judge Thurman that the Secretary of Labour had asked for special consideration of this case, given the number of jobs likely to be at risk should K-T go into receivership, which it assuredly would if their investment in Amin was not realized.

Judge Thurman expressed further reservations but admitted that given the recent directives from the Supreme Court she had little choice. She reminded Kyoto-TEC that the untimely death of a young man at Amin's hands was a good reason, a very good reason, for the original sentence of life in a secure mental institution, and she reiterated her promise that if K-T ever forgot that, if they ever deviated by one iota from their proposed security arrangements, she would send them all to jail, Supreme Court or no Supreme Court.

Whereupon Justice Thurman formally declared Nadia Amin to be a National Treasure, thereby superceding state jurisdiction and overturning any earlier sentences handed down in the United States of America, and remanded Amin into the protective custody of Kyoto-TEC, incorporated, under the conditions set forth in Document 157-3B, until such time as a higher court declared said ruling null and void.

And then, because I hadn't wanted to think about what I'd just read, I'd looked up the story of Zeus and Semele.

I got to the bar early. I didn't know what else to do. I must have been in a daze, because even now I don't remember what Talulah said, or what I said, or anything about the first couple of hours. I moved through the evening on auto-pilot, saying hi to the customers, laughing at their jokes, making the right change.

When Nadia walked in the evening did not so much come into sharp focus as ripple and reform around her, like a cloak. Even knowing what I knew, understanding the risks she had taken, I couldn't set aside the flood of memory images that overlay her appear-

ance as she walked to a table: Nadia dancing at me; her hand on my thigh as we drove; turning with that mad marigold eye and asking from the rainshadow, "Do you believe in flying?"

I had then.

Her keepers came in right on her heels. No more discreet distances; I guess that stain on the wall had really scared Crooked Finger. I walked around the bar, straight to Nadia's table.

She smiled. "I'll have another of those Prairie Fires."

I remembered the taste of tequila on her mouth. "Outside," I said. "Not the parking lot. The patio."

She raised her eyebrows, but got up and walked in front of me, outside. The air smelled of the honey-suckle Talulah had trained over the trellis.

She reached for me. My blood leaped like a wild thing and there was nothing more I wanted than to put myself under those hands, feel her cool dry palms whispering over my skin, but I moved away.

She tilted her head, considered me. "Not tonight, Josephine?"

I almost changed my mind; she seemed so utterly normal, standing there with that puzzled look on her face. "I trusted you," I said.

She understood immediately: I knew. Her eyes were hooded. "The first time we met, I told you: never trust a stranger."

"You can't absolve yourself of responsibility like that, with words. I did trust you. And what of your words in the park? 'Trust me,' you said, 'trust me enough not to ask for my number.' Trust you! What about trusting me? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you wouldn't have loved me."

"You can't know that! You lied to me. You said the guards were there to protect you." *Is that why you have the guards?* I had asked. *To make sure you stay safe?* And she had laughed. At me. At my naïveté, my eagerness to believe what she told me. "But they weren't, were they? You have guards to protect people like me from you. That woman who came into my apartment was relieved because I was still alive: she thought the plaster stain on the wall was my blood. After all, you've already killed one person, they were going to put you away forever for it, so why not kill me too?"

"I would never kill you," she said quietly.

"I don't know that! How can I trust you when you've already lied to me so many times?"

"I never lied. You believed what you wanted."

"And you think that's not lying? That's a solipsism worthy of a child, not a grown woman! You knew what I believed, you knew it was untrue, that's pure deception."

"I would never hurt you," Nadia said again, and she sounded alone and vulnerable and my heart almost broke.

"But you... I..." I just didn't know what to say. This woman had killed a man, and I still loved her. "Please, tell me what happened."

"I have a psychiatric condition that manifests itself in a confusion between sex and death. An active confusion. It's complicated by the fact that I also have a physiological condition, a brain imbalance that's affected by electrical storms."

"Don't. Don't quote at me. Tell me..." What? What



was it I really wanted to know? That she wouldn't do it to me. That it was all a mistake. That she wasn't crazy. "Tell me what happened, and why."

"I threw him out of a window. In a storm. He didn't believe in flying." I couldn't tell what she was thinking. She seemed utterly alien. "You did."

"And if I hadn't?"

"You were in no danger. The guards were listening outside."

"No." I groped for words. "You gave them the slip. It was some sort of test. You were testing yourself. To see." She had deliberately put me in danger, had taken me to bed in a storm, when her poor mad brain could have made her do anything, when she knew she could not trust herself. Or... maybe she did. *Trust for trust*, then, she had said, that first night. I had trusted her; perhaps that had given her the ability to trust herself.

"You've made me feel so much." I couldn't describe it to her. She would never understand: she was different, elemental, a being clothed in fire.

...and, with child, the princess Semele asked her mysterious lover to reveal himself in his true nature and form. When Zeus refused, Semele denied him further access to her bed and body. In wrath, Zeus assumed the form of thunder and lightning, and Semele was consumed.

But I wasn't some idiot peasant, six months pregnant, and Nadia was mortal. She bled, as I did, and felt, and needed. This wasn't impossible.

"Nadia —"

We looked at one another. She was lovely, lovely like a snake, like a twenty-one-foot crocodile, like the edge of the world.

Music burst over us as Crooked Finger pushed open the door. We ignored her. Satisfied that we weren't feeling murderous, she withdrew.

I loved this woman. There had to be a way. "I think you should try therapy," I said, very fast, because I knew she wouldn't like the idea. "And there are drugs you could take, if you thought... when you maybe couldn't really trust yourself. Your trial was more than a year ago. There might be new treatments. Psychiatry is always changing, always moving on." She was shaking her head. "No. Don't make up your mind yet. Do you love me? No, forget I asked that. Don't say anything. I'm going to go back inside now, and serve more beer to more customers. I want you to leave. I want you to think about what I've said, and when you have an answer... when you have an answer..." My throat was closing up. "When you have an answer, let me know." I left her standing there, and stepped back into the smoke and heat of the bar.

When I got home, she was sitting in my bed. Streetlight turned her skin to gold and copper, and the shadows between her ribs were dark and mysterious as ancient bronze.

"Do you love me?" I asked from the doorway, without turning on the lights.

"I want you."

"That's not good enough," I said, but I was pulling off my clothes.

"Come here." She held me by the hips. "How shall I answer you? I'm crazy, not legally responsible for my actions." Her voice was hot and dark and rough as a cat's tongue. My nipples pebbled. "I'm the only

one who can LAOM dance, because I'm crazy, crazy enough to believe I can fly, that I can do it." She kissed the place three inches above my navel, where all the nerves in the torso come together. "Everyone else knows it can't be done, so they don't do it." She kissed lower. "I'm mad enough to believe in myself, to believe that it can be done. Lie down." I did. "So I do it. Like an idiot savant. No one knows how I do it, but I do."

She lay down beside me and began rocking her palm on my belly. She spoke into my open mouth. "And you want me to go to some shrink and be cured of what it is that makes me believe I can fly, that makes me free. Open your legs." She started inside my knees and stroked my thighs gently, all the way up, cradled my buttocks in one hand. Her eyes were like holes. "I won't," she said.

Then she wrapped herself around me like a python.

I woke early, not long after dawn. She was sleeping on her stomach, head turned to the right, one leg bent at the knee, arms above her head, lips parted: perfect, right down to her eyelashes and fingernails and the downy hairs in the small of her back.

I won't, she had said. And she wouldn't.

With her eyes closed, I could forget that she'd killed someone, once. I was willing to take the chance. I wanted to rub her feet when they ached and listen while she complained about the weather; I wanted to see her laugh when I presented her with seventeen brightly-wrapped presents for her next birthday; I wanted to stand in line with her at K-Mart to buy cheap shirts, and work out who owed what on the phone bill.

She sighed and turned her head to the left. Where she had been lying on it, her hair was flat and dark. I wanted to run my fingers through it. Instead, I slid quietly from the bed, pulled on some clothes and wrote a note to stick on the TV screen: *Gone shopping to make you a breakfast that'll put the nectar of the gods to shame.*

I took my time at the market. For the first time, I enjoyed sifting oatbran through my fingers, fascinated by its cream and gold flow, its smell of dust and biscuit. The rice flour was more gritty, and reminded me of almonds. While I waited for the orange honey to fold, heavy and slow, into my container, I imagined sitting outside in some Florida orchard with Nadia, listening to bees hum through the blossom.

I plumped each loaf of bread to find the freshest; picked up each piece of fruit individually, checking for that perfect, unblemished, ripe-to-bursting skin before I put it carefully in my basket. I even chose the eggs one by one.

I walked back through the early morning sunshine, then up the five flights of steps full of the marvel of the breakfast I would conjure from my paper sack: fruit salad, bran and banana muffins, eggs, toast...

The apartment door was open. The sticky note was gone. Nadia was gone. A strange woman was wiping down the light switches and door handles, and Crooked Finger was sitting on the edge of the bed, tapping something against her thigh. The laserdisk.

I put my sack down carefully on the kitchenette table. It needed a good scrub, I thought. I didn't ask what Crooked Finger and her colleague were doing, or where Nadia was.

"We'll have to take this, too," Crooked Finger said to me, meaning the disk. "I'm sorry."

"Are you?" I wasn't hostile, just tired. Very, very tired. She had the sense not to answer. I wondered how many times she had cleaned up after Nadia, and whether she'd ever had to use a body bag.

The woman wiping things down gave a doorknob one last polish, nodded at us both, and left.

"She asked me to give you a message," Crooked Finger said.

I started taking out the eggs, one by one, and breaking them in a bowl. I rummaged for a fork, concentrated very hard on breaking the perfect golden hemispheres into stringy liquid.

"Here." She put a piece of paper by the bowl. A yellow sticky note. "I'm sorry," she said again. I just kept beating those eggs until the door clicked shut behind her.

I picked up the note.

Love can be a lead weight too, and I need to fly.
She had loved me, after all.

I'll never see her again; images don't count. And I somehow don't think there'll be many of those, despite Kyoto-TEC's high hopes. It's just a matter of time before, somewhere, with someone, Nadia loses control, and another body tumbles through the air on a rainy night; Crooked Finger and her fellow moppers-up won't always be able to fix the evidence. Then Nadia will go back to jail, or maybe she'll throw herself out of a window, try flying for real: she wouldn't be able to bear being shut up, never allowed to dance again.

I sold the entertainment centre, painted out the stain on my wall; I bought new sheets and tucked the egg-stained sticky note in a drawer. But sometimes when I'm sweeping up at Talulah's, I imagine her sitting at that table, alone, as she was the first time, when I asked her to move her legs so I could mop the floor, and whenever the sky rumbles, or I'm driving through heavy rain, I feel a ghostly hand on my thigh, and smell tequila. I still burn for her fire.

Nicola Griffith's first novel, *Ammonite*, came out recently from Del Rey (USA) and Grafton (UK) and has been gathering good reviews. Her last stories in *Interzone* were "Song of Bullfrogs, Cry of Geese" (issue 48) and "Wearing My Skin" (issue 50). She has recently sold a novella, "Yaguara," to Ellen Datlow's forthcoming original anthology provisionally entitled *Blood and Roses*. Though born and raised in Yorkshire, Nicola now lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her partner, fellow sf/fantasy writer Kelley Eskridge (who also has a story in the Datlow anthology).

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 **HEADLINE**

Witness

Keith Brooke

Boy flew from the little clearing and, buffeted by a sudden updraft, was hurled up above the first of the trees. He twisted his supple body and turned, coming back so that the rising air would take him up into the blue and all he had to do was spread his wings and soar.

Ruig looked on wistfully. Boy was a part of him, his own child, yet Ruig's own feet were fixed to the ground, not tucked up under his belly like those of a bird.

Boy was a speck and then he was gone.

Ruig sat back, resting his elbows on the rising ground. He listened to the screeches and pipings of birds and animals from the surrounding undergrowth; somewhere in the distance, he thought he could hear the hum of agricultural machinery. He looked up at the blue sky, drifted over with wisps of white. He would give the boy a few minutes more – he knew how he liked to soar when the day was such as this.

But when he came down he would work him hard: Boy knew he must pay for his moments of pleasure. If he wasn't pushed to his limits then his muscle condition would deteriorate and he would become fat and lazy and the flying edge would be lost.

Ruig took a long pull of perry from the flask he carried on his diagonal chest belt. Two days ago, he had been Witness at Charlbur, a village on the banks of the River Ewenlode, and they had sent him on his way well provisioned, as the river peoples usually did.

He stood and stretched. Boy had been away longer than Ruig had intended. Often, his child would spend much of the day aloft, while Ruig walked or rode, but now was the time for his training and Ruig didn't want him to have gone too far away.

He was about to call his hawker's call when he spotted the mote up above. He squinted and waited, smiled when he saw the distinctive profile of his child's stoop: chin out, wings and legs dragged back at full stretch by the wind. He didn't have the grace of a true falcon, but his bulk and sheer, physical power were impressive, nonetheless. Boy's eyes were slitted against the rush of the air, his lips peeled back in a toothy grimace, his hair flying out behind him.

Ruig snatched the lure from his belt and swung it low. Boy twisted, spread his wings, switched from falling rock to sudden, low swoop and in an instant was past him, rising, the lure pulled away just beyond

his grasp. Boy's wing-tips had cut past Ruig's face, a leaf's width from cutting his skin. A cynic might claim that it was only Ruig's Ward that had prevented such injury, but Ruig knew it was his own, and his child's, practised skill – empathy, not gadgetry, allowed man and son to work so closely, like one person in two bodies.

He had been holding his breath, overcome, as always, by the thrill of nature. As a child he had flown finches and bats; as an adolescent, he had flown owls and falcons and an insane, augmented raven. As a young man he had worked with a sympathetic Caster to create all kinds of chimeras and augmentations, but none had ever come close to the man-child rapport he had with his son. He often dreamed of joining him in the air, of having his own body recast. But such a radical transformation did not fit with his professional life and, in any case, he had been in his own body far too long to change now.

Boy was a speck again, circling in the updraft from the gentle slope where Ruig waited.

"Boy!" he yelled, into the wind, swinging the lure in a slow, tempting circle. "Hup! Hup! Hup-hup-hup!" Still, the boy-hawk soared, although Ruig could see that he was watching the circling lure, and he knew that his child's blood would be screaming out to him to dive, stoop, catch the lure and drink of its pale fluid. Boy was his dependant in more ways than one.

There was a disturbance at the edge of the clearing, the chatter of an agitated magpie. A figure appeared at the mouth of the path Ruig had arrived by some time before. A man, tall and dark-skinned like Ruig, although this newcomer's frame was leaner, the musculature more precisely defined beneath anonymous grey trousers and dark leather cape.

Eyes met and the man glanced away to the ground. It is a rare individual who is not uncertain when meeting a Witness. Then he looked up, nodded, climbed the slope towards Ruig.

Boy was circling lower now, and Ruig snatched up the lure from where it had been lying in the sun-dry grass. Boy would take any such opportunity to steal the lure and cut his exercise short. He was no fool.

Rather than stop below Ruig on the faint track that bisected the clearing, the man circled and stopped at the same level. "Ruig," he said, and nodded in greeting.

"Yes?" Ruig replied, wondering what the man might want. Some communities still sent out messengers like this, when seeking a Witness. Ruig preferred them to log a message with his signaller: that way there was no one to break his peace as he travelled with Boy. Ruig would have to refuse, in any case, as he already had an engagement at a settlement in the Windrush valley, to Witness a dispute between that village and its neighbour.

The man seemed confused, as if he did not know what to say. "Yes?" said Ruig again, letting his irritation show. He hated company, when he had the trees, and the hills, and Boy.

"Ruig," repeated the man, grasping for words. "My name: Ruig."

"No," said Ruig. It was his turn to falter, the sensation unfamiliar. "No, I am Ruig. You have come to find me, to seek my help, perhaps?" He felt sorry for the poor man, obviously confused, perhaps simple, although one was only simple through choice or design these days.

"No," argued the man. "My name is Alcaj Ruig Tre. I am a traveller. I saw you here, alone. I sought companionship."

Alcaj for his father. Tre for his mother. Ruig for the Caster who had tuned his genes in the hours after conception. The newcomer shared not only his public name, but also the private fore- and aft-names of his family. Alcaj Ruig Tre.

"A strange coincidence," said Ruig, father of Boy. "We share all three names." He tried to put his discomfort aside. The man was merely a traveller who shared his three not-uncommon names.

"Strange indeed," said Ruig, the traveller, who was not a Witness, and not father of Boy. "And here, on the same road." He nodded again, in greeting, and made as if to move away. "A Mentor once told me that coincidence is the work of the Devil," he said, "so if I may excuse myself..." He started to walk on, up the slope.

"Boy!" called Ruig, the Witness. "Hup! Hup!" The traveller glanced up, but continued on his way.

Boy grew from speck to silhouette to stooping, naked boy-hawk-bullet, cutting down through the mild air. Ruig raised his hand, but the Boy had mistimed his dive, would need to return for another pass.

But instead Boy headed for Ruig, the traveller, still walking up the slope. Wings and tail spread, braking against the air. Ruig, the traveller, looked up again as the turbulence ruffled his hair; then, instinctively, he raised his hand, and Boy landed gently, scrambling up his arm to chuckle softly into the man's ear as, in the early days, he had done to Ruig, his father.

The man continued to walk and Ruig started to panic. He felt, irrationally, that he should let them go, Boy and father, walking up the slope. He shook himself, gathered up his bag from the ground. "Hey!" he called, and began to scramble up the slope, as man and child disappeared into the mouth of the forest.

Trees closed in above them, around them, so that the light, filtered through countless layers of leaves and tendrils, was as green as the vegetation itself. Green flowers grew from the litter of leaves and sticks on the forest floor. Green birds flew, tiny emeralds flickering in and out of the fringes of

Ruig's perception. As a boy he had spent hours, days, just sitting quietly, motionless, waiting for the woodland fauna to emerge; a travelling Witness only ever saw a tiny fraction of this wildlife, as he moved and disturbed.

They had been walking for some time, now, and Boy was still on the Traveller's shoulder, both frustratingly uncommunicative, both green, in the dappled woodland light.

Ruig had shared his journeys, on foot, on hang-car, on public train, with many unwanted companions before. They were drawn to him like ants to sugar. As a Witness, people fed him, housed him, clothed him, and these unwanted companions followed in the hope of living on his leftovers, dwelling within his sphere of goodwill. Most of all, they sought the protection of his Ward, a device which shielded him from bullet and spear and knife. The Ward was rarely employed, though, as everyone knew that he, a Witness, had its protection; but if, somehow, its defensive field was breached, they all knew that punishment would not be far away. He was, in a very small way, something of a god to the people he watched over. He was the arbiter of their lives.

But if this man, this Alcaj Ruig Tre, the Traveller, was merely another parasite, then why had Boy flown to him, as if to his own father? Why did Boy ride on this interloper's shoulder, sparing barely a glance in Ruig's, his true father's, direction?

Perhaps the man carried some means of enchantment to which Ruig was immune. Some device, some gadget, some new augmentation about which Ruig had not heard. But then, Ruig thought, as he struggled to keep up with the fit man's pace through the trees, over the protruding roots, up the steepening slope... but then, perhaps he was not immune after all? Perhaps he was in this strange man's thrall just as much as Boy. Why else would he struggle so, to keep up? He could always have another Boy cast from his tissues – all it would take would be a visit to the city, and the price of the Caster's time. Money had little meaning to a man who spent all his days travelling and living off the kindness of strangers. There were even Casters who worked for free, for the love of their craft, if he was not prepared to pay. It was such a Caster who had worked with him when Ruig, himself, was a boy, with his first owls and hawks, grafting into them a bonding, a mental affinity, an understanding of the way Ruig thought.

They had reached the lip of the hill, now, and before them the wooded country spread out as far as Ruig could see. The forest here was chequered with machine-tended fields, and great glass growths where the more tender crops were raised. Below them, at the foot of the scarp-face, was the village that was Ruig's destination.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Ruig, as they rested before their descent. "Why have you come?" He was unaccustomed to feelings of defensiveness, invasion. He was a Witness: no one had ever intruded on his life to quite this extent before.

"I am a traveller," said the other Ruig. "What are you doing here?"

"You've been sent to trap me," said Ruig, the real Ruig. He looked at Boy, and said, "Why do you travel on this man's shoulder? You should be up there" –

he gestured at the sky – “flying with the birds. Go on!”

He waved his hands and Boy shook his feathers, spread his wings and heaved himself into the air. Ruig watched as his child dropped out over the edge of the hill, caught the updraft, and rose majestically in a slow spiral, wings stretched, slight adjustments of his tail correcting his course. Again, Ruig was taken with the ease of his son’s flight. He breathed out gently, and saw his own expression of wonder on the stranger’s face. “What do you want with me?” he said softly, to the man, but there was no reply.

They followed a rough track down the limestone face of the scarp and rested again, halfway down. They sat on a rocky ledge, with the tops of the trees reaching up to almost their level. Ruig thought of eagles, imagined he was perched in an eyrie, surveying his domain.

“Have you considered the possibility that you are the impostor?” said the man, the impostor. His tone was that of a normal conversation, yet his words had the edge of a blade no Ward could deflect. “Have you considered the possibility that I am Alcaj Ruig Tre and that someone has sent you to test me?”

If this man had come to trap him, then he was doing an admirable job. For a moment Ruig was tumbling through space and time and he believed this other Ruig, but then he gathered himself and he saw the playful smile on the man’s face and he realized he was being taunted as no ordinary man taunts a Witness. It made him feel, in that instant, as if he was just a normal man again, privy to all the little social exchanges and challenges he had left behind when he had accepted the Ward.

He shouldered his pack and led the way down the rough track and all the time he was reminded – by the scuffed footfalls, the little cascades of dislodged stones – that this man was behind him, watching him.

They passed in silence through the trees, the slope of the land gently leading them down towards the village of Scawltter. The woodland was not as thick here and occasionally Ruig glimpsed Boy soaring, gliding, being mobbed on one occasion by a cloud of chattering finches. Boy somersaulted and lashed out his taloned feet at the birds, to no avail; they only harried him more eagerly. The hostility was a sign of his age, Ruig thought. When he was newly cast, eighteen, nineteen years before, he would never have responded in such a manner. Perhaps he would benefit from recasting – an eagle? a vulture? Maybe all he needed was an adjustment to the aggression and impetuosity of his age. They would discuss it tonight, perhaps.

They came upon a mud road, at the edge of the wood. It took the form of a ridge, dropping away to swampy paddies on either side. Along the rows of rice and tilapia enclosures, little automata floated, tending their crops, their shoals.

“Boy! Hup-hup-hup!”

Signalling his continued strange mood, Boy came at him directly out of the sinking, golden sun. Ruig squinted, held his arm up before him, gasped when suddenly Boy resolved himself as a great haloed silhouette and struck his arm harder than necessary. “Shoulder,” he muttered angrily, and Boy walked along his arm, up to rest against the side of his head

and face. His grip was tight on Ruig’s shoulder, but his talons were blunted by the protective influence of the Ward.

His call had attracted the attention of the villagers and as the children came running, the Traveller retreated until he was following Ruig and Boy at a respectful distance.

“What’s his name?”

“Can I hold him?”

“What is he?”

Ruig smiled at the familiar questions. “My son,” he said. “Only he can decide who holds him.” He nodded at the adults of the village, as they caught up with their children and admonished them for their forwardness.

For the last third of its distance, the road was barely wide enough to contain the throng around Ruig and Boy. The children still chattered and their elders spoke to Ruig in the standard formalities of greeting. Augmented animals looked intelligently on, perhaps wondering if Boy was one of their own.

Where the paddies ended the road opened out and its surface changed from dry mud to a plasticized matting. The dwellings were of a design typical of this region. Single storeys, one or two with an extra level built onto the flat roofs; walls were off-white, of a similar material to the road surface; windows were glazed and tinted, doorways open and wide. The village had a single telecom mast attached to the machines’ warehouse, set a little distance away from the main part of the settlement.

Two houses on the fringe were warped and twisted, the result of a recent fire. Ruig looked at them. He could still see the black scorch marks, the charred remains of their less durable contents. The dwellings were beginning to heal themselves, but it would be several days before they were habitable again.

“The glade has been ours for generations,” said one man, from the village of Scawltter. “My parents took me there as a boy. I know where every fruit bush is, I know all the places that the birds nest, the flowers bloom. The glade is ours.”

They had been arguing since first dark. They were seated on the ground in a woodland glade a short distance from Scawltter, Ruig dressed in his Witness’s cloak and hat, trying to cultivate an expression of interest and attentiveness.

Why did they call him for such trivialities, he wondered? But to these people, the villagers of Scawltter and the Paul’s Acolytes of Riss, he conceded that ownership of the glade had some deep significance. The Paulian Ecclesiarch wanted it as the site of his new Lodge, but for the Scawltterans it was a challenge to their traditions and heritage, and to their pride. But what did it really matter?

He realized they were looking at him, waiting. “What does the historical record say?” he asked, hoping that they had not already told him. His role was more guide than judge, it was merely to sit, and prompt, and encourage. This dispute was one of long-standing – generations, rather than months, he suspected – but recently it had escalated so that any tragedy, such as the fire at Scawltter, or a recent drowning at Riss, was blamed on the other side. The Witness

brought the two sides of a dispute together and provided the framework for them to work out some form of settlement. He diffused hostility, allowed confrontation without violence. He had no doubt that Scawler and the Paulians would be in dispute again before long, but in a world where there was little physical hardship, and crime was usually cast out before birth, the Witnesses were normally enough to maintain an informal peace.

He was drifting again. He could sense that the villagers and the Paul's Acolytes were displeased with his vagueness, that they sought more direction from him, but there was little he could do. Tonight, he was distracted and weary. He did his best to keep the debate going, but by midnight there seemed little point in continuing.

A house with four rooms had been set aside for Ruig that night. He stood in the main living area, watching as the Traveller settled himself on a heap of cushions and Boy swung up to sit in a conveniently placed niche in one wall. He hadn't invited the Traveller in, but now that he was here there seemed little point in having him removed.

One of the men of the village stood in the doorway, smiling obsequiously. "Of course," he said to Ruig, "all the usual hospitalities have been provided. We are grateful, indeed, that you could come so quickly, and that you were such a help. They had not spoken to us in over four months, before tonight."

Ruig waved in dismissal. He hated the type, the unctuous official for whom communication was a series of coded, rehearsed formalities. The man backed out of the doorway.

Ruig turned to the Traveller, but decided not to speak. Instead he stepped through a beaded doorway into one of the sleeping rooms. The air was scented, here, and he felt his spirits lifting. He shrugged the diagonal belt over his head, untied his cloak, his trousers. He had sensed her presence as soon as he entered the room. A hard cotton mattress covered one half of the floor and she lay on it, waiting. In the dim light from the walls he could see her slim shape, her hair splayed on the pillow, the dark triangle at her crotch. He wondered how the adults of the village had known of his preferences – it was not uncommon for less informed settlements to offer him men, children, animals, automata, as well as the women he favoured. Perhaps his reputation had gone before him; perhaps they had enquired.

He lay down beside her and in that instant wondered what she would be like. He reached out and put a hand on her belly, felt its nervous tremor at his touch. He pressed himself against her, found her mouth, her cheek, her neck. He was surprised that he felt so eager, after such a long day.

"I am honoured," she said, stroking him, the first words spoken between them. He did not care that it was the Witness she wanted, not Ruig, the man. He did not mind being a symbol at a time like this.

In the other room Ruig, the Traveller, activated a wall-screen and a surge of music washed over, into Ruig's, the Witness's, bed-chamber. He groaned, felt himself soften. He had forgotten about the other. Boy, he did not mind; Boy could be ignored, as he sat on his perch, cleaning his feathers or licking his downy crotch. But the other, the interloper...

The woman was disappointed, naturally. She tugged at his limp penis, urging him, beseeching him. All her pleas simply made it worse.

Angry, he turned away. "Go," he said. "I want to sleep." She cried as she pulled a cloak around herself and stepped clumsily into her shoes. He hated her sounds. He felt angry, frustrated. He hoped they wouldn't send him an alternative now – man, child, automaton. He hoped they would all just leave him in peace.

Sleep didn't come easily that night. His emotions were too fraught to allow him to settle and then, as he lay on his mattress alone, he heard the sounds from the next room – the woman's voice, her moans, and the deep, murmuring tones of the other Ruig – and he knew that the village's hospitality was being enjoyed by the man who shared his name.

In the morning he left the house, stepping past their tangled, naked bodies, under the gaze of his child perched in his niche as before. "You have an Oracle?" he said, to the first woman he saw. She looked at him strangely, as if a Witness should have no need of technological assistance, but she pointed him towards the right building nonetheless.

The room was entered directly from the street, a screen drawing down automatically behind Ruig as he passed within. The Oracle took the traditional form of an old man, sitting against one wall with legs crossed. "Please," it said, arranging its veils. "Sit, if it puts you at ease." It gestured at the floor before it, and Ruig sank to his knees and then sat before the Oracle. "Please," it said, again. "What is the nature of your enquiry?"

Ruig stared into the machine's impassive features, its facade of human flesh spun over a metal framework. It seemed, as they always did, like a real man, a man of wisdom and hard-won experience, yet he knew that it was only a front, that the real processing of data and actions took place in the fabric of the building, or back in the city to which it was linked via the village's telecom mast. He knew that it was no more than an automaton, with a multi-cored cable plugged into its anus as it sat cross-legged, solemn-faced, before him.

"Who am I?" said Ruig, simply. He was accustomed to asking questions, but never about himself.

The Oracle raised one eyebrow and smiled a little. "A trick question?" it asked. But it was obliged to answer. "Somewhere on your torso you carry the Ward of a Witness. Its code identifies its registered carrier as Alcaj Ruig Tre. Alcaj Ruig Tre is fifty-six years old, was born in the town of Theoc, Province of the Sevens, educated –"

"But is that me?" interrupted Ruig. He did not know what he expected to gain from this meeting. When he had entered the room he had not even known that he would ask these questions. He had not understood quite how intensely this other Ruig had disturbed him.

The Oracle shrugged. Somehow the gesture seemed even more human to Ruig for the fact that it had been executed by an automaton. "You ask unusual questions," it said, after a long pause. "Facilities are available for you to provide tissue samples for analysis, if that is your wish." It stopped and watched him and

when it was clear that he did not intend to respond, it continued, "But I fear that even then you would be unsatisfied."

"You can't help me?" said Ruig. "Is that what you mean?" He had not considered the possibility that this, an Oracle, would be unable to solve his problem. An Oracle always had the answer.

"I can offer help," it said, and Ruig relaxed a little. "But my analysis indicates that whatever is offered by a mere machine will be inadequate to your demands. There are times when the old ways are best. Interpersonal contact and the progress of time are two solutions that cannot be provided by an Oracle."

Ruig thought for a few minutes. "My parents," he said. "You have records, information?" He had not seen them in over a decade.

"Of course," said the Oracle. "Tre died three years ago by self-inflicted wounds, a ritual death supervised by officials from the Sheolat religious cult. Alcaj is alive..."

The Oracle gave Ruig details of where his surviving parent lived in the city of Oxfer and Ruig decided to go there immediately.

"If you are me and I am the impostor," Ruig said to the Traveller, before leaving him with the boy in the room donated to them by a sycophantic Oxfer hotelier, "then why are you prepared to follow where I lead? Why did you sit back when I put on the robes of the Witness to mediate at Scawltler?"

Ruig, the other, smiled, and said, "Because that is my nature, where yours is to dictate and dominate. Is that sufficient answer?" The ease with which the traveller deflected all Ruig's questions only served to undermine what confidence he had retained. Even the Oracle had been unable to tell him if he was the real Alcaj Ruig Tre or an impostor.

He left the hotel and strode through the crowded streets of the city in a fit of anger. Seeing his Witness's outfit, people parted like water flowing around a post, yet that merely deepened his gloom. If only they would close around him, let him join the mass, the jostle and bustle, he felt that he could at least be reassured of his own humanity.

He found the district by relying on memory, and then his signaller guided him to the address the Oracle had given. It was a shabby building, built of brick, with crumbling white rendering; the door stood open and screaming children ran in and out, chasing a small dog that had been augmented with the head of a wolf and the eyes of a cat. He brushed past their small hurrying bodies, smiling at their touch, the implication that they had not yet marked him as different to any other. A woman glared at him from along the corridor. Perhaps she had seen his pleasure at the children's touch and she feared for them, knowing that a Witness usually got what he wanted.

He climbed the steep stairs, shallowly breathing the air that smelt of urine and old cabbages.

The door hung crookedly, partly open. "Hello," he called, hoping that there would be no reply and that he could go quickly from this place.

The door creaked back and a small, hunched woman stared out. Her face was wrinkled and sagging,

her eyes that horribly familiar, piercing blue. Her hair was sandy grey, tied back with strands loose across her brow, her cheeks.

"Father," said Ruig, uncertainly. "It's me: Ruig."

His father stepped back into the room, pulling the door wider open and indicating that Ruig should enter. "It's a mess," she said, her tone as unapologetic as it had been when its pitch was lower.

"It always was," said Ruig, entering the room, looking about at the books, the tangled bed linen, the small wall-screen blabbering silently out at him. He looked at his father. "You've changed," was all he could think to say.

Alcaj chuckled, and somehow the sound made Ruig relax. It sounded right. "Let's drink," she said, heading for a half-empty bottle on a table, wiping glasses with fingers and then the hem of her long shirt.

Ruig couldn't take his eyes off his father. The two sat and drank, catching up on the lost years. In the past his father had been uncommunicative, a morose man whose longest sentence was two grunts instead of one. Now, Ruig was amazed that it was all so easy; he was discovering a relationship he had never known before, he had thought there was little left to surprise him in the world, but he had been wrong. Finally, Ruig asked, "How long have you been a woman, father?"

"Six years."

"I wish I'd been here at the time." But he knew that he would have done the wrong thing, at the time: it had to be presented to him whole, like this.

"No," said his father. "I needed space of my own. Tre had left, you had left... I had time to think. It's troubled me all my adult life, I realized. I went to a Caster, before my mind was made, and he questioned me until my head was ringing and whatever progress I had made was shattered by his casting of doubts. It took me another year before I decided." Alcaj looked at Ruig, now, and then looked out of the window as if he could see back across the years. "There's a time when you stop asking questions, Ruig," she concluded. "A time when suddenly it doesn't matter any more, because you just know who you are."

And as the old woman looked out of her tenement window, and Ruig gazed into her faraway eyes, he suddenly started to see, to understand.

When he returned to the room given to them by the hotelier he had half-expected Boy and Ruig, the other, to have gone, but they were still there. The other smiled at him, but this time it did not have the usual unsettling effect.

Boy was perched at the open window, looking down over the street. Ruig squatted before him and waited until his child had turned to meet his gaze. "How long?" asked Ruig. "How long have you resented me like this?" And he saw from the expression on that small, warped face that he was right.

He turned before Boy could respond. He pulled his Witness's cloak from his bag and tied it at his throat. He placed the cap on his head. And then he turned to face his son and the impostor. "Now," he said. "How long?"

His son started to chuckle in his half-human language, restricted by the changes to his vocal cords and his thorax. Then Ruig, the impostor, raised a hand

Green Light for Red Planet Blues

Stan Nicholls talks to Kim Stanley Robinson

Trying to identify trends in science fiction can be foolhardy, because perceived fads have a habit of vanishing like Scotch mist. But one strand does seem currently fashionable – novels about Mars. Allen Steele, Ben Bova, Colin Greenland, Jack Williamson, Robert Forward, Mick Farren and Paul McAuley are among authors who have recently set books there.

Kim Stanley Robinson has gone one better and written a trilogy. Volume one, *Red Mars* (HarperCollins), covers the first forty years of Earth's attempt to colonize the red planet. Volumes two and three, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*, will take the story several centuries further.

Can Robinson account for this stream of Mars stories? "It's amazing, and I don't quite understand it. But I have the feeling we are just beginning to fully digest the impact of the Mariner and Viking missions. Now we know what Mars' surface really looks like, and it's an utterly astonishing, awesome, beautiful landscape. Okay, those missions were in 1976, so it seems like a slow reaction time, but I wonder if it doesn't take that long to absorb the impact of such information.

"When I started researching the trilogy, and saw the books of photos put out by the US government from the Viking mission, something just snapped. I thought, 'Wow!' I mean, I'm very attracted to polar regions, mountains and deserts, and here was an entire planet of them."

The trilogy, which Arthur C. Clarke told Robinson should be compulsory reading for future colonists, had a forerunner in the form of a novella, also called "Green Mars."

"I wrote that when I knew I was going to do the trilogy," Robinson explains, "and my intention was to write a short story simply to claim the title 'Green Mars.' It seemed to me it was a great title, and an obvious one, and with five hundred writers actively pumping out science fiction somebody was bound to use it. I wasn't going to get onto this project for another five years or so and I got paranoid about that.

"The funny thing is that when Clarke wrote to me he said, 'I would be calling

my current book *Green Mars* if you hadn't already taken the title.' So it wasn't pure paranoia; it had some basis in fact."

What lay behind his decision to tell the story over three volumes?

"I'd worked out the sort of macro-scale plot in my head and thought of it as a single novel, and I knew it was going to be a big one. I wanted it to be a big one. But the moment I got into working on it I realized it was going to be really hard to get the entire thing in one volume. I was worried whether I could afford to do things like spend seventy-five pages on the trip there, and that was cramping me. I discussed it with friends, my wife and my agent, and everybody more or less said, 'What's wrong with a trilogy?'"

"To tell you the truth I'd had a prejudice against the whole concept of the trilogy as a too commonly used device to stretch out a tale way beyond what it needs to be. But as soon as I got over that prejudice I was immediately relieved. I think of it now as a sort of Victorian three-decker; as one novel too long to fit into the covers of a single book."

Robinson was helped in his research by a group called The Mars Underground. "It's an informal association of American scientists, engineers and technical people who are fascinated by the Mars Project. They are principally interested in going there, and colonizing it in the very near future, and secondarily with the notion of terraforming it later on. They have a conference every year in Boulder, Colorado called The Case for Mars Conference, and a big conference book is published every year by the American Astronomical Society.

"They present papers to each other and discuss various technical problems, like the best Mars glove, or the best Mars helmet-to-body link-up. They get very arcane and technical because a lot of them are aerospace engineers and this is almost their work. If the US government was to put money into a Mars Project it might very well become their work.

"You call these people and say, 'I'm writing a science-fiction novel about

Mars and I'd really like to get it right, can you tell me about this and that?' And they just talk your ears off. They are fascinated about this notion of getting it right, because a lot of them have expressed dissatisfaction about science fiction not paying enough attention to the factual working-out of detailed astronomy and engineering."

The main point of conflict in *Red Mars* occurs between those colonists who want to terraform the planet and those who feel it is best left alone. The author himself is torn over the topic. "I feel an almost perfectly balanced ambivalence about this issue," Robinson says, "and it's one of the things that drew me to the project so strongly in the first place, and why I'm devoting five or six years of my life to it.

"There's a part of me that says terraforming Mars is a beautiful idea, almost a religious act; in that if we were ever able to walk on the surface and breathe the air of a complete biosphere it will be a wonderful human moment. It would have to be one of our greatest achievements. On the other hand, the planet that's already there is a sublime, stunning place already, with its own dignity and its own integrity, and presumably its own standing in some kind of spiritual sense. If we change it we're going to ruin a lot of its features. Most of the cliffs will fall if the planet gets hydrated, for example. In essence we'll turn it into a giant park and it will not be Mars anymore. It will be something other than that. We won't have that sense of the otherness and the sheer harsh beauty of Mars as it exists right now. So I feel the red view strongly, but I also think the terraforming project is a very great one."

But there is no doubt in his mind that one day Mars will be colonized. "In fact, if you and I live our full span, I believe we could be around to see it."

I have to say it doesn't look a very likely prospect at the moment. "It sure doesn't, I agree. But the reason I think it's a good possibility is kind of a *real-politik* thing. Russia and America have two enormous aerospace programmes, and with the Cold War over, there's not a good purpose for either of them.

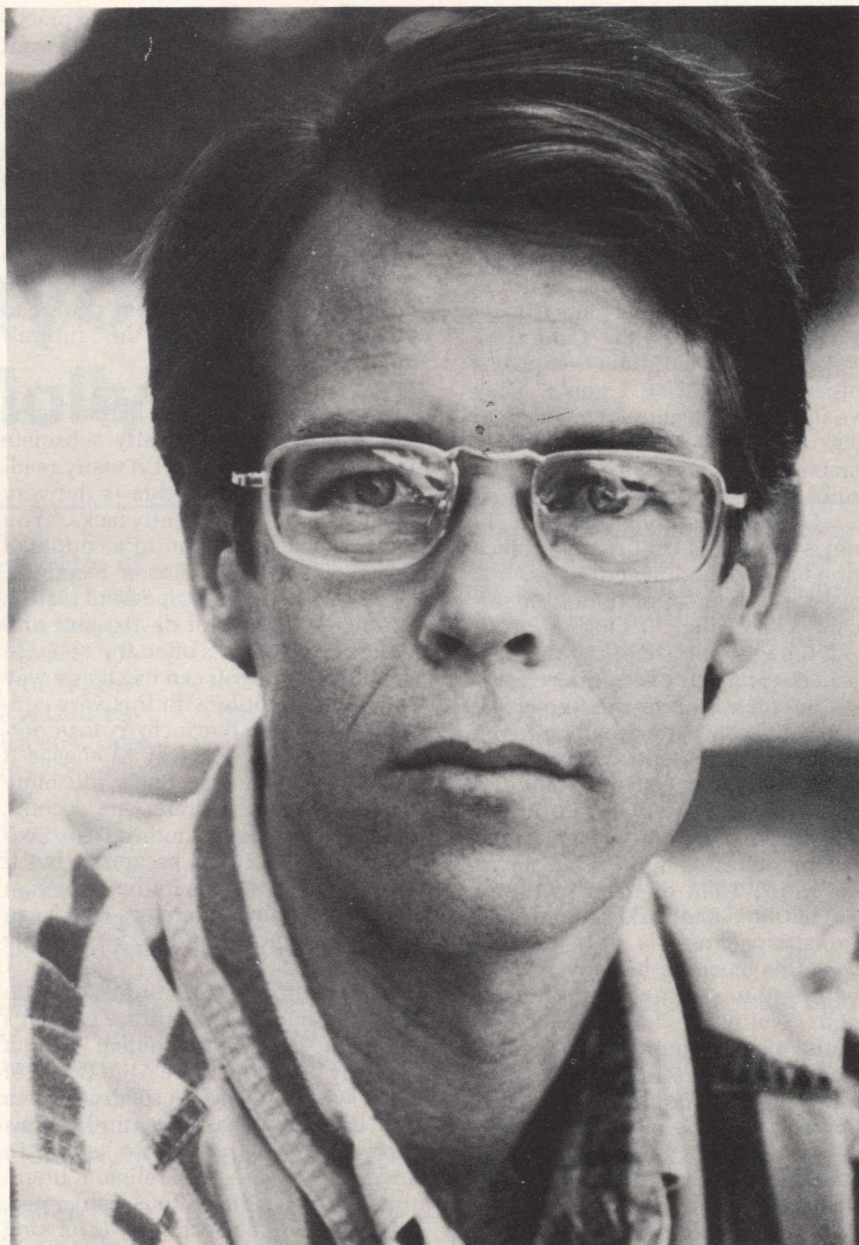
There are these two massive military-industrial complexes, specifically aerospace complexes, without a clear project any more. A lot of that ought to be turned to needed things on Earth, such as rapid public transport systems to replace cars, which the industry could be re-tooled for without throwing out everything they know.

"But a reward for the best work done by these firms in Earthly matters, the plum to be fought over by them, could be the Mars Project. It would also be a way of keeping that industry from crashing. We're talking about budgets of six hundred billion dollars a year between the two countries, and if we suddenly sucked that out and put it elsewhere it's not just those industries and those employers which will crash, but everybody else the money filters down through. We could have a post-Cold War depression of quite an amazing magnitude.

"So it would be a reasonable idea to sic these people on by sending a manned mission to Mars, and setting up stations there and on the moon. You might get a pay-off some day in terms of mining. You would certainly increase their *esprit de corps* in that they would have a project which was not only within their competence but also beautiful in its way. Going to Mars and setting up a colony, never mind the terraforming part of things, is a magnificent act that would be encouraging to everyone."

Of course there are many people who argue that we have enough problems here on Earth which the money could be better spent on. "I have a lot of sympathy for the point of view that says we really ought to get our house in order here first. But my argument would be that it is not an either/or choice. If we were fully engaged in trying to solve the Earth's problems, which we certainly aren't, the trip to Mars would be an expression of hope. It's not simply a matter of throwing billions of dollars at our problems here on Earth in order to solve them, because they have to do with the way society is organized in its most basic form. They are two separate issues."

Robinson says his trilogy is firmly in science fiction's utopian tradition. "Yes, very much so, although that isn't at all clear at the end of the first volume. Certainly the end of the first volume is a low point in the fortunes of the utopian movement on Mars. And there are characters in the book with utopian visions that are contradictory or in competition to other utopians on the planet. I don't want to give away too much about what happens, but I have utopian desires for this project, and I feel that eventually that's how it will be perceived. All science-fiction readers, in some part of their souls, are utopians. They read sf because they're



Kim Stanley Robinson

interested in the future. I would presume that makes them want to be better rather than worse. That to me is a utopian impulse."

When he was a child, was he enchanted by the idea of Mars? "No, I can't say I was. I never read the Edgar Rice Burroughs books, for example. I wasn't much of a science-fiction person at all, really, except for the occasional Jules Verne novel. But when I did get interested in science fiction I began to write stories set in the solar system, and I found I always seemed to have an understanding of some vague Martian history in the background that I didn't have to work on too hard. It felt as if it was already there.

"I first became seriously involved with sf when I was an undergraduate and more or less by accident stumbled across a Clifford Simak novel. I had read some Asimovs and sort of felt that he was unique, but this Simak book

made me realize that if I could randomly pick out a science-fiction novel and enjoy it so much then probably Asimov was not unique. There would be more. So I dived into it. That severely inconvenienced my college work because I was reading tons of science fiction when I should have been studying."

Growing up in Orange County, he says, made him receptive to science fiction's attractions. "It sounds strange, but I think being brought up there was an important factor. Orange County was transformed from an agricultural place full of orchards into an apartment-block and freeway landscape right before my eyes. It happened in a few years when I was a teenager. It was a devastating experience, and I suppose it's the classic example of future shock.

"Science fiction was the first literature I encountered that expressed the way it felt to see that transformation,

that kind of smashing into a future. I took to sf because it was the poetry of my experience. It was the metaphor that spoke best to me – more than any other literature ever had – as to how it felt like to be a southern Californian.”

Robinson has gone on record as saying there are those who don't regard him as a science-fiction writer. Who are these people? “Critics in the field mostly. Up until the Mars trilogy, my books, particularly the ‘California’ novels, have had a different emphasis compared to most sf, I guess. They have less on the technological side of things and more on social relations, characterization and other themes that remind people of mainstream literature. I cannot tell you how many reviews say, ‘This isn't really science fiction but it's good nevertheless.’”

A bizarre reversal of the old mainstream critics' line, “It's a good novel even though it's science fiction.” “Yeah, but I hope it's becoming clearer that I'm committed to this project of writing about the future, which to me makes it science fiction. People can have all kinds of different interests about various aspects of the future and still be science-fiction writers. Some are more interested in the science part of it, which I am often myself, and some in the historical, sociological, personal aspect of it.”

Does this mean he has any interest in getting into writing other kinds of fiction? “Not *per se*. I feel I'm already right there in the genre that's the most powerful way of describing our current culture. I'm committed to science fiction as being the most vibrant and alive genre going. I'm really very fond of it in literary terms. Sometimes the exclusionary aspect of it, which reinforces the prejudices of those people who won't read books labelled science fiction, is frustrating. But in pure literary terms I feel like I've found the place I'm most comfortable in, and I think it's a powerful field these days.”

Red Mars contains ecological, political and social concerns, bearing out Robinson's contention that sf is capable of carrying an agenda, and by implication the belief that the genre can influence people. “That's my working assumption. The reason I have a hunger for more readers is not simply the selfish motive of more books sold equals a more secure living – although that's an important consideration – it also increases the chance to influence people.

“I think science fiction is one of the great subversive forms around today. It's very hard to shock or subvert post-modern society because anything can be eaten by the current commodity-culture machine. It's almost impossible to shock anyone but elements of the population who believe in religious values from a previous time.

Generally speaking you can do practically anything and it's just the event of the week.

“If you really want to influence people, make them think or take them aback, sf is one of the best tools. It's constantly shoving history and the future right in the face of our culture. It says things aren't always going to be like this. It says, ‘You may want to be an ostrich but it's not going to do you any good. The environment's going to change anyway, and the future's coming.’”

The idea of science fiction being radical is practically obsolete these days, I suggest, with many readers complaining that this is the very element the field currently lacks. “You can use science fiction in a couple of different ways,” Robinson responds. “You can use it to escape from reality, simply as a series of daydreams, and unfortunately that's often the case. On the other hand you can use it as a way to try and grapple with this very confusing world we live in, to try to understand it better, in a way to engage it more fully and give one's life more meaning. I much prefer the second, obviously. There's nothing intrinsically bad about it as escapism, but if you go to an extreme in that direction you're mis-using a literature which can be the most powerful tool for creating values.

“One of the biggest hurdles you run across in our present culture is what's called the ‘fact/value problem.’ Which is a way of saying there's the world of facts, which science is so absorbed in and basically represents, and there's the world of the values we believe in and that we learn from religion, literature and psychology. In a secular age, an age in which psychology is looking like a bull in a china shop, literature becomes one of the main repositories of our values. The fact/value problem encapsulates the notion that it isn't at all clear how you can attach values to facts, or how values might arise out of the facts.

“Well, if you've got a literature called science fiction, in a way you've got a genre that's calling itself fact values. There is an attempt in many science-fiction stories to jam together these two basically disjointed parts of our cultural lives, and it's one of the great powers of the form. Just the name of the genre itself is saying to people, ‘We can make this linkage, we can connect values to facts.’ That's one of the reasons I'm so attracted to it.

“When people ask me what I do, I'm not ashamed of saying, ‘I'm a science-fiction writer.’ Over and over again you see a jerk-back of surprise at that. First of all, it's an odd profession; not many people do it. Second, people's conception of science fiction is clearly unsettling. A lot of them say, ‘Oh my gosh,

you do comicbooks or something?’ They have the feeling they know what science fiction is.”

Robinson has found that even the environmental movement has a jaundiced view. “They don't understand science fiction at all. Their notion of sf is that it's technophilic, military-industrial complex stuff, a kind of Pournelle and Niven thing. As if all science fiction is nothing but *Star Wars*. I've encountered some impersonal hostility at environmental conferences because when I'm identified as a science-fiction writer they immediately think of me as the enemy. This shocked me so much I eventually began to collect together a reprint anthology, *Future Primitive*, which contains a number of science-fiction green futures. Anyone familiar with sf knows there's a full ideological spread in the field; there are some luddites, but also people who are very interested in techno-wilderness combinations, ecotopias and so on.

“My view of the field is probably skewed a bit, since I'm inside the picture myself. I have trouble seeing it objectively, and I don't know where the heart of science fiction is any more. But I feel quite strongly that there's some really good stuff being done these days. In fact I would go so far as to say that the golden age of science fiction is probably now. There's a cornucopia of great work being done.”

If only the mainstream critics, the disdainful ones, could be convinced of that. “Yeah, that's the ostrich response again. There are people who, if they were to admit that science fiction includes stuff worthy of their attention, would have to admit also that they've been wrong now for ten, fifteen or twenty years. They would have to admit their ignorance, and that the world is a lot bigger than they thought. Also that the future is real and can be discussed and simulated.

“And that it's scary.”

CORRECTION

On page 3 of *Interzone* 69 (“Can You Tell Them Apart?”) I referred to **Robert Holdstock's** forthcoming novel, announced in his publisher's catalogue as *The Cathedral*.

Rob informs me that the book has now been put back, from April to August 1993, and the title has been changed. A new novel in his “Mythago” sequence, it will be called *The Hollowing*. HarperCollins are the publishers. A much more intriguing title. Watch out for it.

(DP)

No Better Than Anyone Else

Molly Brown

It was a Friday night and I was part of a team working the booth joints in the West sector of Area 4. Another team was working the East. There'd been seven booth-related murders in the last four months; all dark-skinned women in their twenties, with shoulder length black hair, all known prostitutes, all mutilated. Two were black, one was oriental. The rest were Latino: three Puerto Ricans, one Mexican. I'd never done plain clothes before; I'd only been out of the academy three weeks. But I was twenty-two years old, and despite my blue-eyed Irish mother, I looked more like my Puerto Rican father. So I was assigned to Bruce Woods' team as a decoy.

My partner was Castilla Mae Jones, a six-foot-tall black chick with a red and green dragon tattooed on her right thigh. She wore a leopard-print leotard and ballet shoes; I wore a red rubber strapless dress. It was a bad choice, so tight I could hardly move and hot as hell. We each wore a single silver earring, which was actually a microphone. And of course we wore rubber gloves — Area 4 was a disease zone. Nobody went to Area 4 unless they were already infected, crazy, suicidal... or a cop.

I'd heard some of the uniform guys back at the station, saying why risk good cop lives over a bunch of broads who'd probably have been dead in a year or two anyway. But murder's still murder, isn't it? And you can't just ignore it, no matter who the victim was or how long she might have lived anyway. Doesn't matter if she wouldn't have lasted another year or even a week, she still had the right to that week. And I told them it was our job to get the bastard who'd stolen that week, or that day, or even that hour she might have had left. And they just said you're a fucking idealist, Gonzales, and nobody stays an idealist long on this job.

Bruce decided we'd hit this joint called *Ricky's Dating Game Lounge* first. It was eleven o'clock. There were maybe half-a-dozen people in the whole place, counting us and the bartender. We were the only women. All the booth joints were dumps, but this was a worse dump than most. It was just a long narrow room with a couple of tables and a bar, dark and smelling of stale beer and smoke. The mirror behind the bar was cracked. There was a black imitation-velvet curtain drawn across one corner at the back, next to the ladies' room. That's where the booth was. In the other back corner there was a jukebox and a tiny stage where the bartender told us they were supposed to

have a dancer. It didn't look like the dancer was going to show. Frankie O'Hara, our back-up, had gone in a few minutes ahead of us. He was sitting at the bar ignoring us, just like he'd ignored me back at the station. I didn't like the guy; on the way over, he'd rolled his eyes every time I opened my mouth. He was wired, too. A little microphone next to his chest.

Bruce stayed outside in an unmarked car, watching the front entrance and monitoring all three of us; he was supposed to come in if he heard anything suspicious, like gunshots or screaming, as if he really thought screaming would be something unusual in a place like *Ricky's*. O'Hara said the reason Bruce stayed in the car was he was scared of infection — if he got out of the car at all, he'd be wearing a surgical mask. Looking around *Ricky's*, I wished I'd worn a mask myself, even though they said you couldn't get infected through the air.

Castilla had been a bit stand-offish back at the station. Bruce told me she'd told him no way was she gonna get stuck looking after some goddammed rookie who didn't know her ass from a hole in the ground. She wanted to work with Chrissie Lopez, but Chrissie got assigned to the other team. Castilla was stuck with me, and anyone could see she wasn't happy about it. But once we were hanging around *Ricky's* with nothing happening and nothing to do but talk, she started to get a bit friendlier. Especially after I told her I'd been with *Dilation and Curettage*.

It wasn't like I was bragging, it just slipped out. We'd given our glasses to the bartender to be filled and sterilized. He'd placed them back on the bar, using a pair of metal tongs, and handed us each an individually wrapped straw. Ordinarily, that should have been precautions enough, but I didn't like the look of the bartender — even in the dim light of *Ricky's*, I could see the guy had a pasty face and huge dark circles beneath his eyes. Of course, he might have just been tired, but I wasn't taking any chances; there was no way I was drinking anything poured by that guy, even through a sterile straw. We took our drinks and went to stand at the back of the room. I noticed Castilla wasn't drinking hers either.

She was leaning against the jukebox, smoking a cigar, when I noticed the box had one of the old *Dilation* tunes: "Cut Me, Baby." You know it. It's the one with the chorus that goes: Cut me, squeeze my veins dry, let me die in your arms, let me

die real slow cause I love love love you. And then there's this instrumental part that's done with synthesizers and there's a woman's voice and it sounds like she's moaning. Well, that's me. I'm the one moaning, plus I sing back-up on the chorus. I was nineteen when we recorded that. I just couldn't help pointing the song out to Castilla. She was really impressed. "Quick," she said, "hand me some money so I can play the sucker!" She played the song and I sang along with the chorus. "That really is you!" she said. Suddenly her whole attitude towards me went through this complete transformation; it was like the old days, when Dilation were tops in the virtual charts and people used to recognize me everywhere I went.

She got all excited and said she knew she'd seen me somewhere before, I looked so familiar. She started going on about all the virtuals, like the one for *Cut Me*, where Derek slashes me with a razor and then I rise headless out of a grave, wearing a blood-spattered gown. And of course, *Satan's Child*, which is most people's favourite. Everyone knows that one, it's where Dilation ride their Harleys into a derelict church and I'm strapped to the altar and suddenly the guitars turn into chainsaws and you get to choose whether they slice me up or have sex with me.

"Girl," she kept telling me, "anybody'd who'd leave a band like Dilation for this shit is crazy! You're fucked up in the head, you know that?"

"They can't sing, Castilla. I was the only one of them who had any kinda voice, but they just kept me in the background most of the time, like some kinda decoration. And in every single virtual, they killed me off! Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, I did twenty virtuals with them, and I got murdered twenty different ways. They hung me, they shot me, they electrocuted me, they cut off my head. You name it, they did it to me. That shit can get annoying."

"You can't take that stuff personally. Every virtual's gotta have somebody die. That's what sells the song. You should know that!"

I tried to tell her how Dilation's guitars were just fashion accessories 'cause none of them could even play an instrument, the computer did it all, and how they couldn't even work the computer themselves, there was this guy who did it for them. And she just said, "Who cares about music? They're such pretty little boys."

And then I tried to tell her how they're not little boys, they're in their forties and you wouldn't look twice at them if you saw them in the street, the computer pretties them up for the virtuals. And she said but you don't look any different in person, and I said of course not, I didn't need twenty years taken off of me. Then I told her that Derek Dilation's real name is Stan Bukowski and Clive Curettage is Sidney Hars-tein, and that Stan's got boils and Sidney's got bad breath. But she just said she'd slip old Sidney a peppermint anytime. I gave up.

Castilla nearly took a sip of her grapefruit juice, then realized what she was doing and put it down on top of the jukebox. She looked around the room, winked and tilted her head towards the front door. I turned slightly, trying not to be too obvious, and saw a man standing near the door, staring at Castilla. I could have sworn the guy was drooling.

"I still think you're crazy," she said, watching the

man watching her. "What's it matter what anyone's like in real life anyway? Who cares if they're Derek or Stanley or Sidney or whatever, those guys are stars! I've got them on virtual and that's good enough for me. That's good enough for most people. Why'd you ever wanna leave them and come on the job?" I told her my Irish grandfather'd been a Captain. "Oh, God," she said. "So it's the family business. That explains a lot."

The man she'd been watching started walking towards us. She took a small gold compact from her bag, and started dabbing powder on her nose and chin. "What do you think, Rosie?" She called me Rosie. Fifteen minutes earlier, I'd been Gonzales.

"I think he likes you," I said. "That doesn't mean he's a slasher, does it?"

"We'll find out, won't we?" Castilla leaned back against the wall, striking a perfect pose. I glanced over at the bar and I saw the look on Frankie's face. Now I knew why the guy seemed like such a sullen bastard he was in love. "He's getting closer, Rosie. This is where I get to be an actress, just like you in the virtuals. Lights, camera, action!" Castilla placed one hand on her bare dark thigh, long red nails drumming her tattooed dragon. I got out of the way.

Castilla and the guy talked for a few minutes; Castilla was laughing. Then they headed towards the black curtain. She wasn't supposed to do that. I looked over at Frankie O'Hara. His face had gone green.

We both lit cigarettes and waited.

They came out less than five minutes later. The man looked angry; Castilla looked ill. I rushed over to her. "You okay? Is that our guy?"

She mumbled something about leaving her alone, and stumbled into the ladies' room. I followed her in and found her kneeling in one of the stalls, heaving into the bowl. "You all right?" I said. "What happened?"

She staggered to her feet. "Shit," she said. She took a wad of toilet paper, sprayed it with disinfectant, and stuffed it under her leotard, between her legs. "I'm still bleeding."

"Bleeding? What'd he do to you? Oh my God, he's getting away!"

She waddled over to the sink. "Shut the fuck up, Rosie! He's not the slasher."

"Then what's going on? Why are you sick? Why are you bleeding?"

"Will you shut up?" she hissed, pointing at my earring. I finally understood; she didn't want Bruce to hear. She took off her earring and indicated that I do the same. Then she unstrapped the bag from around my waist, opened it up, and dropped both our earring mikes inside it. She placed my bag in the sink, and turned on the tap. "What are you doing?" I said. "My badge and my gun are in there!"

"Shut the fuck up, will you? Your bag's waterproof, I've got one just like it at home."

"You gonna tell me what's going on?"

Castilla nodded wearily and slumped to the floor, leaning her head against the pipes beneath the sink. "Lock the door," she told me. "I don't want any assholes walking in." There was a metal bolt; I slid it across.

She closed her eyes. "It wasn't like I expected. It

wasn't what I thought it would be; it was nothing like the virtuals."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Before I went in that booth, I... you don't tell anybody about this, you hear? You don't tell anybody or you die. Got that?"

I nodded.

"Before I went in the booth, I was a virgin."

I almost choked; it was an involuntary reaction.

"Don't you laugh at me, bitch! Whatever you do, don't you laugh at me or I swear I'll knock your head upside the wall!"

"I'm not laughing at you, Castilla. I swear I'm not. But why the hell did you go inside the booth?"

"Why do you think? Because every woman who was murdered was murdered inside a booth! I'm a decoy; it's my job to go into the booth!"

"But why'd you take this assignment? You could have turned it down."

"Turn it down? Oh yeah? I've been on the force three years. You know what I've been doing all that time? I spent my first year searching the body cavities of women prisoners. The last two I've been touring schools, lecturing children about road safety."

This time I did laugh. "You mean you were an 'Officer Friendly'?"

"That's what the kids called us, yes. Will you stop laughing, damn you! This assignment was my chance to be a cop, a real cop. I couldn't turn this shit down."

Frankie O'Hara was pounding on the door. "Castilla, are you all right?"

"Go away!" Castilla shouted.

"Look, Castilla," I said, "if it's any consolation, I think technically you're still a virgin. I mean, what happens in the booth technically isn't... well, you know... because there's something between you the whole time."

"Will you shut your stupid face?" Castilla growled at me. "I don't need you to tell me about it, okay?" I didn't need her to tell me about it, either. My own first time had been in a booth, but at least I'd been with someone I knew, someone I even thought I was in love with. And it was terrible, with that dim red light and piped-in music and vibrating walls, each in your separate padded compartment with a lubricated, disinfected - supposedly "infinitely stretchable, guaranteed never to tear" - latex wall between you the whole time so there was no contact and no chance of infection. The booths had been brought in after the epidemic of 2019, and now there were booth joints in every major city, except for Charlestown, South Carolina, where even virtuals were banned. Frankie was still pounding on the door, threatening to break it down. "Tell that boy to get out of my life."

I pulled the bolt aside and opened the door. "Castilla wants you to go away." He shoved past me and got down on the floor beside her. "Oh baby, baby," he said. "Talk to me."

"What? What do you want me to say to you, O'Hara?"

"Anything, baby. Anything."

He moved in closer to her. I saw her reach inside his shirt and pull out his little microphone. "Get outta here, Gonzales," O'Hara said.



Illustrations by Jim Burns

My drink was on top of the jukebox where I'd left it. I picked it up and sat down at a table. My dress was digging into my stomach so bad I could hardly breathe. I was shifting around in my chair, trying to get comfortable, when the worst thing that could possibly happen to a rookie cop working undercover happened. Someone recognized me.

"Rosemary Gonzales!" he shouted for the whole bar to hear.

Every head turned. Great, I thought. Everybody's having a good look at me, everybody in the bar knows my name.

A guy about my age, dressed in black leather jeans and a tee-shirt, was walking straight towards me. "Rosemary Gonzales," he was saying, "Rosemary Gonzales. I can't believe it."

"I think you've got me confused with someone else." I looked at the ladies' room door in desperation. When were those two coming out?

He was standing over me, breathing on me. "Come on, you can't fool me! I'm your biggest fan. I've got every virtual Dilation ever made - I've zoomed in on your face, close up, a thousand times. I know every inch of you, intimately."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but you've got me mixed up with someone else. My name is Sandra, and I've never been in a virtual; I don't even like them."

"Don't tell me that. It's me. Victor. You remember me, don't you?"

"Victor?" I took a good look at the guy, and then I remembered. Orange-haired, pimply nutcase who used to send me flowers every day. And he used to write me letters, telling me how the two of us met and made love in his dreams every night, which he considered proof that we were lovers on the astral plane. I recognized him from the photos he used to send me, at least a dozen of them, all of him sitting alone in a room papered with pictures of me: close-up stills from every virtual I ever made. Even his ceiling was covered with them. I remembered he had a job somewhere, making dentures or something. A nutty, obsessive fan, but harmless. Dilation had loads of fans just like him, always writing weird letters and sending gifts. I figured it was better to admit who I was than to keep arguing with the guy - he probably just wanted my autograph; then he'd go away.

"Victor," I said, "of course I remember you. You used to call yourself Dilation's number-one fan, didn't you?"

"Not Dilation, only you. I saw their latest virtual and it was crap - you weren't even in it. What happened? Did you quit or what?"

I shrugged. "Something like that."

"So what are you doing now, Rosie?"

"Not a lot. Look, Victor, I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell anybody you saw me here, okay?"

"Don't want people to know how you've come down in the world, huh?"

I stared into my drink, willing him to go away, willing Castilla and O'Hara to come out of the john, willing Bruce to get out of his goddamn car and come into the bar and tell us we were leaving this dump and moving on to the next one. It didn't work. Victor leaned even closer.

"You knew how I felt."

I shrugged and glanced at my watch. Barely two

minutes had gone by since I'd left Castilla and O'Hara in the john. It seemed like a lifetime. "I don't know what anybody feels about anything," I said.

"You knew, but you didn't care, did you, Rosie? Didn't you get the flowers? I sent you flowers every day, remember?"

"That was years ago, Victor." I looked at my watch again. Another ten seconds went by; I know because I counted them, one by one. That rubber dress was killing me. I was sweating like crazy, and my skin itched all over.

"So how about it, Rosie?"

"How about what?"

"There's only one reason for coming to a place like this. You must want it bad."

I couldn't believe it; he actually expected me to go in the booth with him. He actually expected it. "No way, asshole," I said, "Fuck off."

Victor's eyes went narrow and hard. I felt a knife in my ribs. "That's not nice, Rosie. That's not nice, at all. Now stand up, real slow."

"Bruce," I said.

"What?"

"Bruce, come in right now!"

"Stop playing games, Rosie, before I get mad. Now get up real slow, like I told you, or I'll cut you right here."

Oh shit, I thought, Bruce couldn't hear me - my goddamn earring was in my bag, which I'd left in the ladies' room with Castilla. And so was my gun. I stood up slowly, like he said. He pressed himself hard against my side left side, pinning down my left arm, and put one arm around my waist, pinning down my other arm. Positioning himself so that the knife was hidden from view, he pulled me to my feet and away from the table. I could feel the tip of the knife through my dress. If he was planning to take me outside, Bruce would see. But he didn't take me outside, he led me towards the imitation velvet curtain at the back.

Once we were behind the curtain, he manoeuvred himself around behind me and raised the blade to my throat. "Don't make a sound," he said, "don't even whisper." He fed a one hundred dollar bill into a slot beside the booth door. It slid open, and he pushed me inside. He came in behind me, squeezing us both into the same compartment. "You can scream now," he said as the door slid closed behind us. "The walls are soundproof."

Victor pushed me back against the wall, his blade digging into my throat, my right shoulder bending the latex wall at my side. Behind him, I saw the exit button glowing faintly, just out of reach.

"Hey, Victor," I said, quietly, "what's this all about, huh?" The wall behind my back was vibrating. Then the piped-in music started, a slow thumping beat with lots of synthesized groans and heavy breathing.

"I was so wrong about you, Rosie. I used to think you were something really special. Everything I ever did I did thinking of you. I dreamed of the day we would be together. You were beautiful, but you were arrogant. You thought you were too good for me, didn't you Miss Rockstar? But look at you now, in a booth joint in the middle of a fuckin' disease zone! No better than anyone else. Not even half as good."

"Who said I was a star? I was a back-up singer."

“Shut up!”

With that blade pressing into my throat, I didn't try to struggle, I just tried to keep him talking, until somebody noticed I was missing. “Come on, Victor,” I said. “We're old friends, aren't we?” He spat in my face; I didn't dare raise a hand to wipe it off. I grimaced and fought back a wave of nausea as I felt the spit oozing down my cheek.

“Friends?” he said. “After what you did to me?”

“What do you mean? I never did anything to you.”

“What about Atlanta?”

“Atlanta? What are you talking about? We never even played Atlanta!”

“You recorded a virtual there. Monarch Studios, Atlanta. I remember the date: April 23rd, sixteen months exactly tomorrow. I was outside the studio, waiting for you with a bouquet of roses. I always used to send you roses, remember? Roses for Rosie? And these five guys came up to me... I remember there were five of them. Five of them! And they grabbed the roses from me and they threw me up against the wall, and they told me, ‘This is from Rosie,’ and they took turns punching me in the stomach and they knocked me to the ground and they kicked me and they told me if I ever came near you again, they'd kill me. I had four broken ribs; I spent a week in the hospital. I gave you my devotion, you gave me two black eyes and four broken ribs.”

“I had nothing to do with it, I swear. I never even knew about it until now. I wouldn't have done that to you or anyone. Honest.”

“You didn't know about it, huh? I looked up and saw Derek watching from a window. You think I don't know about you and Derek?”

I remembered now. Victor wrote me this crazy letter, he said he'd been to a ceremony just like the one in *Satan's Child*, the devil had promised me to him for eternity, and he'd be coming to get me. I showed the letter to Derek and he said not to worry, he'd make sure the guy never got near me. I didn't get any more letters, so I forgot about it. It was a case of out of sight, out of mind. How was I supposed to know what had happened to him? Derek and I split up, I left the band, and I'd never given Victor a second thought. It was like he'd never existed. “I'm sorry, Victor. But it was nothing to do with me. I didn't know about it.”

He didn't hear what I said, he didn't seem to be listening. His eyes moved to the blade at my throat. “Things would have been different if I'd had this. I'd shown 'em not to mess with me. Nobody messes with me.”

“In your first ever virtual, you looked straight into my eyes and told me you loved me. I played it over and over, and each time you promised to be mine forever. I laid there in the hospital for seven days and seven nights and you never came to see me once. You never even sent me a card. Why'd you say you loved me if you didn't mean it?”

“Victor, those were only the words to a pop song! Words someone else wrote for me to say. And I didn't know you were in the hospital. I honestly never knew. Now please put the knife away.”

“That's when I started to hate you, Rosie. That's when I really started to hate you. I wanted to kill you.”

Victor was the booth slasher. The reason all the victims looked like me was because in Victor's mind,



I was the victim. I was the one he wanted to kill and so far he'd killed me seven times. I wasn't going to let him kill me again. I pulled my head away, into the latex, and brought my knee up, hard.

He doubled over. The music speeded up, as it was programmed to do after the booth had been in use for ninety seconds. The groans got louder and the red light in the ceiling started to strobe. Victor screamed and struck out wildly, knocking me off balance.

I fell against the opposite wall. I tried to pull myself up, but the more I tugged at the latex, the further down it stretched. I managed to stand up just as Victor recovered enough to lunge at me with the knife. I brought my knee up again, knocking it from his hand, and reached for the door. He grabbed my arm and pressed my face down into the latex, so I couldn't breathe. He tried to twist me around, wrapping me up like a fly in a web, but the latex sprang back into position, twirling me around so fast I was dizzy. Victor got hold of the knife again.

"Police!" I shouted. "You're under arrest!" He brought the blade down in a sweeping movement; I raised my left arm to block him and punched him in the stomach with my right. "I'm not joking, asshole. I'm a cop." I grabbed his right wrist with both hands, ramming the knife against the wall. It wasn't very effective, the blade just sank into the padding. Victor knocked me back with his left arm. I landed next to the exit button. As I reached over to press it, I heard the sound of something ripping, and then my head was encased in transparent rubber. Victor pulled it tighter and tighter; I couldn't breathe. I kicked and flailed my arms, slamming my hand desperately against the wall where I knew the button was still glowing. The piped-in music faded out, and I heard the whoosh of a sliding door. Then everything went black.

I didn't even hear the first shot, but I heard the second, or maybe it was the third. All I know is, there was something sticky and wet all over me. Then there was something heavy. The heavy thing was pulled away, and I didn't feel anything. But I heard voices. Maybe I couldn't open my eyes, but I could hear.

Castilla was screaming that she'd never shot anybody before. O'Hara was saying he couldn't believe how stupid that fucking rookie had been, going into the booth without her gun.

There was a siren, then there were more voices. "This one's dead," a voice said. "What about the girl?"

"Still breathing," said another voice. "But only just. Oh shit!" There was a sudden shower of water and disinfectant; the automatic cleaning system had come on, and whoever was talking must have got drenched. I know I did.

I was moving; I heard more sounds, more voices. "We're gonna have a lot of explaining to do," O'Hara was saying. "That goddamn rookie's really dropped us in the shit."

The air felt cooler, I was outside. "Hey, guess what?" Bruce was saying. "I just heard it over the radio. They got the slasher!"

I wanted to scream of course they got the slasher, I'm the one who got him, but I couldn't even open my mouth.

"Yeah," Bruce said, "they got him about an hour ago, in the eastern sector. Chrissie Lopez got the collar. He pulled a blade, she cuffed him, he confessed to all seven killings. That Chrissie Lopez, she's quite a cop, isn't she?"

"She's one of the best," O'Hara agreed.

I heard the ambulance doors slam, and I was driven away.

Molly Brown is becoming a familiar name to our readers ("Bad Timing," issue 54; "The Vengeance of Grandmother Wu," issue 61; "Angels of Darkness," issue 64; etc). From Chicago but now resident in London, she has been a cabaret comedienne, a gun-toting security guard, and all the usual dull things. What more do we have to say about her? Shall we embarrass her by reminding the world of the ecstatic way in which Maxim Jakubowski described her in his most recent *New Crimes* anthology? Perhaps not.

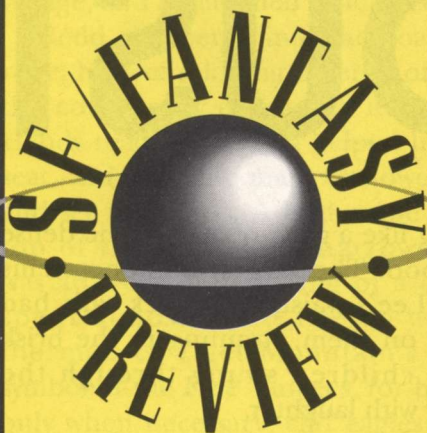
FOR SALE

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 Stableford, 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 either or both of these items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, 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.

PREMIER ISSUE



SPRING 1993

GOLLANCZ

Victor Gollancz has been a leader in sf and fantasy publishing for 40 years – many readers first discovered the sf genre by way of the celebrated yellow-jackets. Now the yellow-jackets have gone, but the imprint that published Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Frank Herbert, Ursula Le Guin, Ian Watson, William Gibson, Bob Shaw, Greg Bear and Terry Pratchett is as committed as ever to publishing the very best sf and fantasy from new writers as well as from the big names.

Interzone, as the leading journal of sf and fantasy, has the most sophisticated readers in those genres – and a similar publishing commitment. So it seemed right to us to give *Interzone* readers a sneak preview of some new Gollancz titles.

Three times a year, you'll find in the *Preview* excerpts from some of our most exciting up-and-coming writers as well as glimpses of the new work of well-established authors. We're eager to hear your comments on these excerpts and to see if they are a helpful tool in choosing your reading material.

I hope you will enjoy this first *Preview* and that you agree the authors included are some of the most exciting contemporary writers working. And if you turn to the last page in our insert, you'll find a reader survey and a chance to receive a free book simply by supplying us with your thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Evans
Publishing Director

THIS PREMIER OF THE
GOLLANCZ *SF/FANTASY PREVIEW* FEATURES THE WORK OF:

PAUL MCAULEY

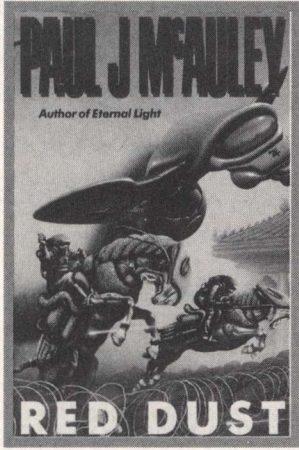


IAN MACDONALD



PAUL VOERMANS





RED DUST

Mountain and rose to the surface, bringing moisture from the underlying permafrost. Dust rays, slow monsters with rippling wings fifty metres across, moved through shoals of plankton with their bristly palps swinging to and fro, leaving wide wakes of darker dust.

A dust-ray trail was sighted the day after the Free Yankees captured Redd and Lee and Chen Yao. Soon after, a lookout tied to the top of the tallest tree of the shoal spotted the feeding plumes of the ray itself, and the entire population poured out of the nest and clambered trees and bamboo stands to try and catch a glimpse of the beast for themselves. They regarded it as a propitious sign: Redd would be given the ritual chance to kill it, and so gain tenure.

It was the middle of the afternoon. The clear pink sky glowed like neon and both moons were aloft: Fear a tipped crescent just above the western horizon; Panic a chip of light falling eastward. A kind of haze hung over the dust sea, and its heavy surface was the colour of molten copper. Sluggish waves rolled towards Tiger Mountain. Its lower flanks were hazed, but its flat peak was sharp and clear and seeming to rear higher than the two moons. The cliffs of its vast lava shield, six kilometres high, were so close that Lee could see house-sized boulders that piled up along their base, and the weathered folds and convolutions that vertically fretted their heights, but they might as well have been on another world.

Lee wanted, needed, yearned, to escape, to reach Tiger Mountain and climb to its top. Part of it came from the viruses, and from Miriam's partial personality, but at least half of it came from himself. He had made the promise to himself back in Ichun. But he wouldn't kill to keep that promise; too many people had died already.

Most of the Free Yankees were forward of

The shoal was skirting the edge of a plankton bloom that grew where deep currents hit the edge of the shield of Tiger

the nest, crowding like a gang of apes in the dense thickets of bamboo. The largest bamboo stems were as thick as Lee's waist, and black sails had been raised high on them, straining in the brisk breeze. Masked children swung through the ratlines, shrieking with laughter.

Lee had to step around and duck under a web of guy ropes and lines. Blown dust sifted over his torn shirt and jeans; dust accumulated in the finest creases of his skin and worked into the seals of his filter mask. Hanging on a leaning bamboo stem, he peered around a dense tangle of wireweed at the prow of the shoal. A dark lane ran across the red dust, wider than the shoal. It was the track of the dust ray.

One of the Free Yankees, a tall thin man in crinkling semi-opaque coveralls made from dust-ray intestine lining, came up to Lee, clapped him on the shoulder. A tattooed eagle spread its wings around the back of his skull, under the straps of his mask. He said, 'You'll help your master. Put this on and come with me!'

A group of men and women were hauling something like the upturned shell of a giant tortoise. Redd was amongst them. A young woman, with muscular arms and a V-shaped torso that made her intestine suit tight across her small flat breasts, grabbed a rope and heaved. The shell shot forward and most of the others fell on their behinds.

By the time they had scrambled up, the boat – that was what the shell was – was riding high on the dust, under the tangle of tough polished roots which fringed the shoal. The muscular woman grabbed a sheaf of harpoons and jumped down. The others followed, and the tall man made to shove Lee forward.

Lee dodged the man's advance, and jumped. For a clean instant he thought he'd made a mistake; the small round boat was crowded with a dozen people (who had lines attaching them to the boat's rail), and if he landed in the wrong place he'd tip it over. But his virus reflexes took over. He felt as if he was fluttering down as slow as a leaf and landed with one foot in the well of the boat, the other on the raised bow. He turned and raised a hand in salute to the man who'd tried to push

him. It occurred to him that he must look like a captain making his farewells before a difficult voyage, and he laughed inside his mask.

Redd clambered into the boat down a knotted rope, his feet skidding on ends of roots polished to the consistency of smooth iron by blowing dust. Hands reached up and helped him teeter into his seat, and then the mast was lowered into the boat and set in its step. A bird shape was nailed to the top of the mast, wide narrow wings spread. It was an ironwood carving of a cliff eagle, which spent almost all its life on wing, sailing the thermals of Tiger Mountain's cliffs. It was the symbol of the Free Yankees, for both touched land only when necessary; cliff eagles to incubate their eggs and raise their young, the Free Yankees to render dust rays.

A big triangular sail was hauled up. It filled with wind and in an instant the little boat leaped forward, its flat frictionless hull hissing and banging as it skimmed the crests of the dust waves. The shoal dwindled from a ragged island to a speck, was lost in the vastness of the red sea. Lee paid attention to the business of handling the boat. A scoop like the V-shaped plough of a bulldozer acted as rudder, its long tiller hauled by two people. The boat was tacking into the wind, following the broad dark wake of the dust ray. At every other leg of each tack, abrasive dust fumed across the boat. Despite his coveralls, Lee's whole body was soon alive with incendiary itches as the fine stuff worked through seals and into every crease and fold of his skin. He had to keep wiping away powder that clung to his goggles.

He was given the task of pumping up silvery floats with a set of foot-operated bellows. Around him, the others were measuring out lengths of cable into neat loops. The harpoonist was checking out her weapons and showing Redd what to do.

Each long harpoon was tipped with a hollow, triangular barbed head; a cap that screwed into the hollow head held an explosive charge. Redd handed one to Lee, who hefted it, found a grip at its point of balance. Redd shouted to the harpoonist that it didn't seem possible to throw it any distance, and she shrugged and wagged her hands either side of her masked head: body laughter. Then she clamped something to the shaft of the harpoon, just behind the grip. It was a cluster of powder rockets. The harpoon was a low-tech rocket-assisted missile.

By now, the shoal had vanished. Lee found he kept looking to starboard, at the shield-wall cliffs rearing up from the shadows at the tumbled bases. So it was that he missed the first sighting, but, alerted by the muffled shouts of the Free

Yankees, he saw the plume of the dust ray when it rose again: a sudden double sheet of darker dust which shot high into the air and ruffled out in long billows on the breeze.

The plume was dust, taken in as the ray sieved the sea for plankton, that had been ejected from the ray's fine barbed combs by a kind of convulsive cough.

Redd, his masked face next to Lee, said that it was a big son of a bitch. Lee had to agree. Up in the prow, the muscular harpoonist was arming her weapons, banging the explosive charges into sockets at their points with cheerful gusto. Everyone else ducked as the boat heeled to starboard and the sail swung across. The harpoonist handed Redd a harpoon, and at the same time Lee saw the ray.

Its wide carbon whisker wings stretched a hundred metres either side of its long flat armour-plated body. The wings were as black as a vacuum shadow. (Miriam was suddenly with Lee, standing just behind him, it seemed, and it was difficult for him not to turn to her.) They ceaselessly rippled over the bronze surface of the dust as the ray moved forward with dreamy slowness amidst a fine haze. Its combs rose like signal arms against the pink sky, fantastic fringed sculptures a dozen metres across, swept down and out across the dust, collapsed into its mouth. A double sheet of dust shot up, and the filter combs swept out again.

The little round sailboat tacked away from the wake of darker dust churned by the ray's passage. For a moment it ran parallel to the rippling edge of the creature's port wing: then it tacked inward. Its hull shudderingly vibrated as it dragged across the tough tissue-thin wing. Lee ducked the sail's swinging boom, saw the harpoonist rise as the boat turned parallel to the ray's body.

The ray was as long as a locomotive, as flattened as a bed bug. Its tiny eye, like a bottle end set in its blunt armoured head, was red as a stoplight. Breathing spiracles densely fringed with hairs pulsed arrhythmically down the midline of its long flat body.

The harpoonist beckoned to Redd, had him brace one foot on the blunt raised prow, and handed him the harpoon. It was, symbolically, not attached to a line; nor was it armed. She moved his right arm and harpoon back, told him to throw when she did, it didn't matter where. Then she reached across and lit the rocket fuses.

'Throw!'

The cowboy threw as hard as he could. Sparks from the fuses sprayed his shoulder; the harpoon tipped head up as the rockets ignited, made a wobbling arc and struck the ray's body behind

the armoured head, clattered down scales with the rockets still fizzing and came to rest at the flexing junction between wing and body.

The majestic rhythm of the ray's feeding didn't miss a beat.

The Free Yankees raised a muffled cheer, and the harpoonist thumped Redd between the shoulder blades with such enthusiasm that he couldn't breathe for a full minute afterwards.

Meanwhile the harpoonist took up her own weapon, this one fully primed. She raised it in her right hand to her shoulder, held her left hand across her chest, a glowing wick between finger and thumb. She spun the harpoon's shaft and the wick dragged across the fuses of the rockets.

Then she leaned right back, flung her weapon forward.

For a moment it seemed to hang in the air, sparks flying from the furiously burning fuses. Then the rockets lit and it arched away in a flare of blue flame. It struck just behind the ray's tiny red eye, skittered sideways down its body. Then the charge blew. Dust rolled out from the explosion's brief red flower, leaving a ragged wound at the creased junction between the ray's body and its wing.

There was a convulsive shudder under the boat. Everyone except Lee and the harpoonist fell on to the coils of cables in the well. The ray's filter combs collapsed into its mouth and sheets of dust blew sideways, but the combs didn't shake themselves out again.

The muscular woman grabbed another harpoon, but as she braced herself something heaved under the boat and it rose until its prow pointed straight at zenith. The harpoonist flew backwards and hit the mast, and slid down it until she was sitting. The boat fell back and as the harpoonist struggled to her feet something plummeted from the top of the mast. It was the painted ironwood eagle. It hit the harpoonist's head with a heavy thud and fell into her lap as she slid back down again, this time quite unconscious.

Veils of dust were rising all around the edge of the ray's vast wingspan. The boat rocked as wave after wave passed over the wing on which it rested. People were hauling on the sail. One turned to Lee, jerked his thumb across his throat, pointed down, made a whirling motion.

Lee understood. The ray was about to sound. When it did, the boat would go with it, sucked under in a maelstrom of displaced dust.

Virus reflexes made it easy to brace himself, exactly as the harpoonist had done. Redd saw what Lee was going to do, left off tending to the harpoonist and grabbed a slow match. He

kicked away someone who made a grab at the harpoon and lit the fuses of its rocket cluster. Dust clouds shaken up by the ray's flexing wings made a dense smog, like fire-lit smoke. Its body was no longer visible by ordinary light, but Lee could see it clearly by infra-red, saw a hot spot just behind its bottle-end eye, a patch of blood-rich skin where the lapping armour plates had drawn apart. There was no time for thought. He aimed and threw.

The rockets exploded in mid-flight, blindingly bright through swirling dust. Lee balanced like winged victory. The rocket's red glare vanished – then a dull explosion blew out thick goutts of blood and pulped flesh which spattered everyone on the little boat and drummed like hail on the sail.

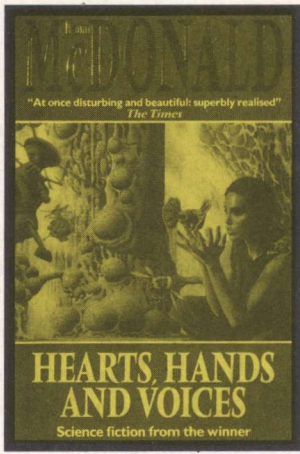
There was a moment of silence, and then the Free Yankees yelled and began throwing clusters of recurved hooks attached to the long thin lines. When enough of them had snagged, the Free Yankees started hauling them in, dragging the boat across the now still wing and jumping on to the ray's body like so many pirates boarding their prize, armed with silvery bladders which they promptly began attaching at the dust line.

Lee followed Redd. The armoured scales were like a tiled roof; beneath them, through his boots, Lee felt a complicated tremor, the failing of the ray's nervous system.

The harpoon's charge had made a big fleshy crater. Blood, thick and black as crude oil, was drooling from it, and the dust seethed as blood sank into it: plankton feeding on the life fluid of the creature which had fed on myriads of their cousins. As the dust slowly cleared Lee saw that the ray's wings had sunk below the surface, and that the taut bladders were mostly buried; attached by hooks, they were all that were keeping the ray afloat.

Masked men and women were capering and stomping up and down the ray's long flat body. The harpoonist had recovered, and was alternately rubbing her sore head and semaphoring her arms up and down as if she was trying to take off.

Redd grabbed her, whirled her in a brief waltz. Someone knelt, hands cupping flame. When he stepped back a rocket shot up at an angle over the dust sea, burst in a golden falling flower, bright against the soft pink of the sky. After a minute another flower bloomed, small with distance. Lee backtracked its trajectory, saw a speck at the horizon line. It was the shoal, black sails crowding every tree as it bore down on the dust ray.



HEARTS, HANDS AND VOICES

• Shortlisted for The Arthur C. Clarke Award •

The advocate Kalimuni and Mathembe's grandfather had been firmest friends. Their friendship was of the kind that is nourished by the friends' total inability to agree upon a single point. Over their endless games of *fili* under the awning of the Teahouse of the Celestial Blossom, they had argued Proclaimerism versus Confessorism, Imperialism versus Nationalism, organic technology versus inorganic technology with such vehemence that proprietor Murangeringi had been on the verge of calling the constabulary at Tetsenok to restore peace to the glass squares of Chepseny. They had once argued long into the star-filled night, long after the chairs had settled back into their sleeping configuration and the awning had retracted, over the colour of a speed-dog that sat across the square from them scratching at parasites. They argued in Old Speech, of course, for it was the language of dissent and laughter. Now even the word 'speed-dog' had been reduced to meaningless sounds.

As a Confessor, Mathembe's grandfather could not resort to the law and organs of government with the same facility as Proclaimer Kalimuni. Nevertheless, he too played his part in the protest against the New Namers. He embarked upon a word boycott. He refused to call by name anything that had been renamed by the Emperor's linguist. A point, a nod, a shrug, a general indication of 'that there' or 'this here' or 'yonder thing' was all he would permit himself. People were reduced to monosyllabic grunts: family, friends of many years' standing; grunt. Whole districts of township, prefecture, nation and world became a *thitherwards* toss of the head. He spat them all out as if they were shit and ashes on his tongue.

In his boycott, Mathembe felt solidarity with him. His silence was not as complete as hers, but it was a bond between them. They became eloquent in silence. Even at the end when it was obvious to all that his dying was upon him and the time to enter the Dreaming and the fellowship of his ancestors was nigh, he had obdurately refused to allow words tainted by the hand of the Emperor Across the River to remain on his lips. He had summoned the advocate Kalimuni (by grunt

and general indication) and demanded that he draw up a will that made sure everyone received their dues without actually having to be mentioned by name. He became legendary: the township came to know him as the man who was starving himself to death on silence. Though, as he confided to Mathembe, 'No one ever died for want of words in his mouth, or you'd be dead long ago, granddaughter of mine. No, you have it right. Never to speak at all: that is the highest, the noblest protest.'

Unto the very end, when the people from the House of Heads came with the ritual masks and valises of organic technology to lop off the head, connect it to its support systems and transport it, closed-eyed and cyanotic, to the Grove of the Ancestors, he had refused to call Mathembe by name. Even when he had felt the dying break over him like a cold, drowning wave and he had cried out for someone to help him, hold him, please, hold him – though he knew that the journey into the Dreaming is one we must all make alone – he had called out, son of mine, daughter-in-law of mine, granddaughter of mine!

After the head had been grafted into the Feleli family tree, many in the township came to congratulate it for having protested unto death. The head did not acknowledge their presence. The people went away, hushed and reverent. The head was obviously in deep communion with the ancestors in the Dreaming, the great network of roots and synapses that underpinned the physical landscape into which the individual consciousness of the dead passed.

The head was doing nothing of the sort. The head was maintaining in death the protest it had made in life. It would not accept the praise and platitudes of those who honoured it for doing something they had not the integrity to do themselves. It closed its ears to their words. It would not even recognise Dr Kalimuni when he came to visit his old friend. It was a bold thing for the Advocate Kalimuni to do – if the shrine moderator learned that he had been to visit a pagan Ancestor Grove, he would have been Named and quite possibly shunned by his co-religionists. Proclaimers, when they died, were gathered straight into the person of God. Mathembe admired their confidence. The Dreaming might not be heaven but it was a fairly safe bet on some form of immortality, and required no undue exercise of faith.

The only visitor that earned a flicker of

recognition was Mathembe. She established a fuller communication with her grandfather in death than she had ever been able to achieve in life. Her visits to the Ancestor Grove became daily affairs. When the forests fell silent in that space between evening and night and the glo-globes began to stir themselves in luminescence, she would slip through the forest gate into the perpetual penumbra beneath the great trees that stood in the Grove of Ancestors. Twisted, gnarled trunks, knotted and carbuncled, extended upwards twenty, thirty, forty metres before arching into a dense canopy of branches and red leaves. Dead ancestors cast dark shadows. Each knot, each gnarl and whorl on the trunks, was a soul – a head ten, a hundred, a thousand years old that had been absorbed into the flesh of the tree. If some seemed like faces it was because they were faces: lips, noses, eyes of wood, bearded and haired with red leaves, a slow metamorphosis from flesh life to root life. In the deeper shadows between the root buttresses tiny lights glowed: vials of bioluminescents, placed there with bread and fruit and wine as an offering to the dreamers. Anticipations of oracles to be given, heart-thanks for oracles received. The soul of the dead flying free through the natural matrix of the roots could access an incalculable wealth of information. Occasionally they might be cajoled into offering insight and wisdom on specific problems of the living. Occasionally. More often than not they preferred to remain incommunicado within the nirvana-communion of the Dreaming, the ecstasy of being everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere, simultaneous and instantaneous at once. The dead surrendered their existenceless existence grudgingly and resented demands to solve problems that would yield to the simple application of common sense. Small wonder the popular belief that the dead were a testy crew.

Mathembe moved between moss-carpeted root buttresses glowing in their dark recesses with a thousand tiny bioluminescent stars. Prayer wands, each bearing a paper petition impaled on the end, bent and whispered their messages to the souls of the dead as wind stirred the grove. You had to be careful of those long, thin wands in the twilight between the trees. Only the season before an old woman coming to nag her dead husband about his selfishness in leaving her a widow had tripped, fallen and needed a new left eye grown in by the medicals. No uncertain petition to leave on a prayer wand, a left eyeball. She had died the following season. Prayer answered. Mathembe slipped between the swaying prayer wands. Half dendrified heads rolled their eyes to watch her

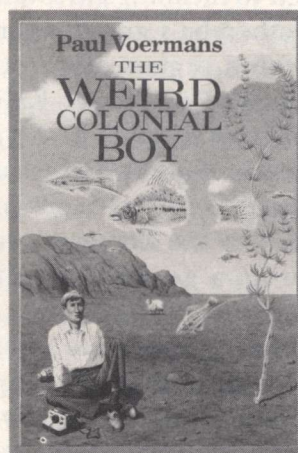
pass by. Framed by wooden lips forever half-open, moss-green tongues shaped silent syllables.

Her grandfather's head was the lowest on the tree that had sent the souls of two hundred generations of Filelis into the Dreaming. The callous of wood immediately above him, which still bore a caricature of a face, was Mathembe's grandmother. Her absorption into the Dreaming had been swift and blessed: Mathembe's grandfather had told Mathembe that he had searched long for her along the roots and fibres of the matrix but always in vain. He wondered that she might have transferred her spirit on to one of the Saint-ships that on rare occasions entered planetary space and sent her mind flying out across the universe among the Daughter Worlds. It was a great sorrow to him that beyond the loneliness of death could be the loneliness of the Dreaming.

VOG

THE WEIRD COLONIAL BOY

PAUL VOERMANS



Soon he felt much better. Bright thoughts penetrated the demented riff of self-pity in him. After all, he wasn't the average stupid

Georgian peasant. He had his fair share of the typical modern Australian virtues: dauntless courage, a body honed by rugged outdoor life, a fine education, and above all an ability to hoodwink the gullible. Like Bing Crosby in that musical about King Arthur he could wow the locals with his twentieth-century know-how. He could go to the gold-fields in Ballarat before anyone else and pick up a fortune off the ground. He might write a future history which would prevent depressions and world wars. Yes, and to make a living he could become an inventor.

VOG

But he could not go home.

He would have to live with that. No use bawling. A new world lay out there past the trees awaiting discovery. Finding a town remained his first task. Employment and a bed came next. With some kind of secure base he could carefully map out a course for the long term. Nigel Donohoe was not about to simply walk into trouble like they did in the movies, give himself away, maybe burn at the stake, nope. Not him.

The sound of clanking was an uncomfortable reminder of such mistakes. Nigel gathered his tools (he could sell some for a meal) and slithered down the slope on his back. He put himself well out of earshot before he dared stand. As he headed for the blessed cool of the trees and where he guessed a road might lie he picked leaves from his hair and brushed the grass and droppings from his clothes. He told himself that in no way whatsoever was he the itsy-witsiest particle hungry, and he was not. Full of pride at this feat, he pointed in a definite manner at where the trees seemed to thin. He set off.

During the hour he spent lost in the woodland he distracted himself with a story which explained his odd appearance and lack of local knowledge. He debated the pros and cons of amnesia, but in the end rejected it because it might get him institutionalised. The sun made fragrant pools of heat here and there, pleasant on the skin and vital for orientation in this seemingly infinite stand of mottled cream and grey trunks carpeted by dead gum-leaves. It was some time before he clued into the unique shapes of the little clearings, however, so delighted was he with his idea of pretending not to know English and of having been robbed. It only clicked that he was hopelessly off beam when he spotted the huge stack of rocks once more through the trees ahead.

He shoved his hands in his pockets.

'Right son,' he said aloud, 'back again, and this time pay attention to where you're going.'

This was not so easy. It took Nigel another hour by his digital watch just to find the road which cleaved the forest. By then his head was hammered by images of crows eating him alive whilst he gasped and flailed, too weak from hunger to fend them off. For some reason he craved spring rolls. Chiko rolls. When the trees were abruptly replaced by a swathe of waist-high stumps and a fresh – no doubt convict-built – road scrunched underfoot, Nigel broke into a silly grin of achievement, widened by the sight of a crossroad not far away. With signs.

He ran toward them full tilt, stumbling twice, kicking up gravel and dust out of joy as he

neared them on steadier feet.

The sign read, *Milton Keynes 7L*.

Milton Keynes? No place in Victoria had ever borne such a silly name; to Nigel's knowledge, no place on earth. He shrugged. He was not exactly Vasco Polo; he hadn't pored over every square inch of every map. It was probably a ghost town in 1978.

He set off whistling a Stranglers' song. Confidently he tramped down the road which meandered through scalloped fields of what looked like oats into the rounded distance. Remember son, he told himself, you're a foreigner. You don't speak da English. He stopped for a second, to try out his language on a fat black crow perched on a stump. 'Aktivite, ramalan, barishnykov toy boy?' he asked politely.

The crow sharpened its beak ominously on the stump.

So close to Milton Keynes, Nigel held no fear of death. He shrugged. 'Kremlin pignog,' he dismissed the bird. 'Ramalan shoo-be-doo wah-wah.'

'Luck,' said the crow.

'Ta,' said Nigel, nodding. He rubbed his hands together briskly and turned back to the road.

'Ay mate! You bound for Milton Keynes?'

Nigel looked up at the buggy's driver with an uncomprehending smile. He was a compact customer, in his forties, Nigel judged from the peppered hair. The hands that gripped the leather reins were thick from work, the face looking down on him in an open, expectant but not stupid way was as dark and gaunt as those of the convicts down the road. He wore a floppy grey hat, with a band which looked like plastic but must have been polished leather, cocked back on his minuscule head.

Nigel's gaze met the man's friendly eyes for some seconds before he found the wit to answer as planned.

'Seiko elastoplast meshugga?' he asked.

'Foreignator, ay?' the man answered. 'Don't get many wokies round here.'

Nigel continued to smile fatuously as if he didn't understand a thing.

'I SAID, WE DON'T GET MANY OF YOU BLOKES ROUND HERE!' he boomed. It was a large sound for such a small head.

'Ah?' said Nigel. He nodded vigorously. 'Veznuzz nuzzle nick faldo!' he said, as if explaining the secret of why lighting a cigarette makes your bus come on time.

He appeared to have done so, and more. 'UNDERSTAND BETTER THAN YOU CAN SPEAK AY?'



Nigel nodded again, still grinning like a galoot. 'GOING TO MILTON KEYNES?'

'Nick faldo, nick faldo,' said Nigel affirmatively.

'POOR THING! IT'S A BLOODY NIGHT-MARE!' yelled the buggy-driver. 'HOP IN, I'LL GIVE YEZ A RIDE.'

When Nigel hesitated, the man shouted, 'DON'T WORRY MATE. WE DON'T CASTRATE FOREIGNATORS NO MORE!' He laughed. 'I MEAN - THIS IS NINETEEN SEVENTY-EIGHT!' And he roared at his own joke.

Nigel, half-way on to the back of the buggy, tripped and fell painfully against the wood face-first with the shock of it. There was no mistaking what the man had said, the pinhead seemed to have bellows for lungs.

With a cluck from the man and a rattle from the harness they set off for Milton Keynes at a trot. Nigel rolled over, looking up at the back of the driver's neck. The criss-crossed scars of a convict's flogging corded above his collar; Nigel followed a stray one right to the back of his ear.

Nobody flogged anybody in 1978. Yet this was Australia, there were convicts, so where the hell was he?

'WE'RE ABOUT THREE LEAGUES OUTTA MILTON KEYNES,' shouted the driver over his shoulder.

Yeah, but where's that? wondered Nigel. He sat up casting confusedly about him at the pleasant farmlands, his brain a curdled apprehensive moosh. A couple of hours passed. Nigel remained too mooshy to think of questioning the driver until it was too late. As they approached - then began to encounter - the bustle of the obviously sprawling town of Milton Keynes, he became less and less eager to find out where he'd landed after all. The driver was right: Milton Keynes was indeed a nightmare. Nigel was sickened by what he saw.

I want to get *back*, he wailed inside, I just want to get *out* of here. This is *not* 1978. This is *hell*!

But this was not hell, nor was he out of it. The cart crunched over real gravel, the screams Nigel heard came from real agony, the howls from undeniable anguish, and beneath the ordinary aches and bruises and scratches about his body Nigel found within him the dreadfully mundane certitude that around him lay not even another reality but the only one that had ever been possible. The horrifying had become the norm. His own world was a dream - and the dream was finished. He was awake.



READER SURVEY

THE FIRST 50 TO RESPOND GET THEIR CHOICE OF A FREE BOOK. PLEASE CIRCLE OR FILL IN YOUR RESPONSES BELOW.

1. Which of the three excerpts did you enjoy most?

- a. *Red Dust*
- b. *Hearts, Hands and Voices*
- c. *The Weird Colonial Boy*

2. Do you plan to buy it? **Yes No**

3. If not, why?

- a. too expensive
- b. you'll wait for the paperback
- c. you'll get it at the library
- d. other _____

4. What influences you most when buying books by authors?

- a. The book's price
- b. an ad in *Interzone* or other magazine or newspaper
- c. a friend's recommendation
- d. a good review in *Interzone*
- e. a good review in _____
(another of your favourite magazines or newspapers)
- f. the book's jacket
- g. other reason _____

5. Which newspaper(s) do you read regularly? _____

6. Which magazines do you read regularly? _____

7. How many paperback books do you purchase in a year?

- a. none
- b. 0-5
- c. 6-10
- d. 11-15
- e. 16-25
- f. over 25

8. How many hardback books do you purchase in a year?

- a. none
- b. 0-3
- c. 4-10
- d. 11-15
- e. 15 or over

9. What is your profession? _____

10. What is your age group?

- a. under 17
- b. 18-25
- c. 26-35
- d. 36-50
- e. over 50

11. Do you think the Gollancz *SF/Fantasy Preview* will be helpful to you in making choices about your book reading? _____

Are there other ways publishers could help you decide which books to buy? _____

Thank you so much for responding to our survey. Please choose one of the paperbacks below that you would like if you are one of the first 50 respondents.

- a. *New Worlds 1* edited by David Garnett
- b. *Hearts, Hands and Voices* by Ian MacDonald
- c. *And Disregards the Rest* by Paul Voermans

Name _____

Address _____

Send your comments and survey answers to:

**Promotions Department,
Victor Gollancz, Villiers House,
41 - 47 Strand, London WS2N 5JE**

If you do not wish to cut a page out of your copy of *Interzone*, photocopies of the survey are welcome.

Ansible Link

David Langford



Publishers don't much like losing £60,000 in legal costs and being told to get a whole series of novels out of the shops within one week. Throughout the book trade, this outcome of the Games Workshop vs. Transworld lawsuit had been thought wildly unlikely...but British law is full of surprises.

The background: Games Workshop once did an sf game called *Dark Future*TM and published several tie-in books, mostly by Kim "Jack Yeovil" Newman. More recently Bantam/Transworld unknowingly launched a series of young-adult sf novels by Laurence James, with the overall title *Dark Future*. When GW discovered this they grew very stropy indeed and started making loud legal noises. (A new GW co-publishing arrangement with Bantam was launched this January, though no *Dark Future*TM titles were initially scheduled. It was thought that the game and therefore the tie-ins had been scrapped.)

There's no copyright in titles. Evelyn Waugh's novel *Men At Arms* may be famous and in copyright, but it's fine for Terry Pratchett to use the title (as he plans) for the next Discworld book. The trademark sign in *Dark Future*TM was the trouble. British trademark protection seemingly applies only to a distinctive logo: anyone can write "IBM" but the IBM logo is strictly controlled. Since the two "Dark Future" logos looked deeply unlike, Transworld seemed safe.

This recent court session was an interlocutory hearing on GW's injunction demanding that Transworld's books be withdrawn. The trial proper, for charges of trademark infringement and "passing off," remains far distant. Meanwhile, the legal reasoning whereby the injunction was granted was unclear to laymen, being apparently based on the points (1) that a descriptive phrase can't be used as a trademark on a book; (2) that "Dark Future" is not a descriptive phrase; (3) that GW's books carry distinctive TM or (R) marks near the "Dark Future" cover logo (in fact none of them do); (4) that there would have been a trademark infringement had the books been magazines; (5) that for practical purposes magazines are the same as books (sound of dropped jaws throughout the publishing industry); and (6) that therefore there was an infringement.

It seems hard on author Laurence James, who prudently searched *Books in Print* and library databases to avoid

duplication of titles, and found no *Dark Future*... (However, the GW "Dark Future" books were reviewed during 1990-91 in publications such as *Interzone*, *Foundation*, *Vector* and *Critical Wave* - Ed.) Transworld continue to support their author and an appeal is imminent. This one will run and run.

The Late Breakfasters

Orson Scott Card (in a recent speech) offers a sweeping critical approach to sf which I've heard writers formulate before, but perhaps never so nakedly. The thesis is that there are no bad books. Therefore there should be no bad reviews. "Those critics who are condemning other people's work are really saying 'I don't understand why people like this. I don't understand why the writer wrote this. I don't get it.'" Any bad review merely indicates a dumb critic who didn't get it. You thought you were a disappointed reader who was short-changed by some lazy, lacklustre sf novel (not, to be fair, that Card himself writes such)? No, you're just dumb. Sorry about that, Mr Clute.

Neil Gaiman, alias Mr Cool, is rarely seen without dark glasses. So I was charmed by the Aussie report of how he was persuaded to give a reading in a strangely dim place where, once he removed his shades to see the text, cameras began to pop with mysterious synchronicity...

William Gibson's sf fan past returns to haunt him despite his vast fame: New York editor David Hartwell wickedly sends xeroxes from a 1963 sf news fanzine (*Fanac*) containing real Gibson cartoons and even a convention masquerade report featuring "young Bill Gibson as a priest of the Beetle God." Ho ho.

Christopher Priest popped up in an *Observer* piece with his glum memories of the Best Young British Writers promotion he featured in long ago. In the same article Julian Barnes commented: "Priest always was a chippy bugger"...leading to serious Priestly thoughts that his unsold book on the horrors of modern publishing could be retitled *Chippy Bugger*, with the Barnes quotation paraded on the jacket.

David Wingrove published a *Daily Telegraph* article explaining that poor reviews of his legendary *Chung Kuo* sf series have a wicked common cause! "Long before this over-the-top editorial

appeared [in the BSFA magazine *Vector*], I had been singled out by the British science fiction field for a sin which, for many, went beyond that of the pornographer. I was politically incorrect." Though well calculated to appeal to *Telegraph* readers, this seems slightly revisionist: early bad reviews of *Chung Kuo*, when not going on irrelevantly about its vast and eccentric launch publicity, seemed to be calling it not so much politically incorrect as, er, stylistically challenged. But anyone publishing a poor review can expect a letter of passionate disagreement from Susan Oudot, the author's wife and (now) publicity agent...

Infinitely Improbable

The Science Museum's Xmas/New Year "Science Fiction, Science Fact" programme was an exciting challenge for speakers Brian Stableford, Jack Cohen, John Gribbin, me, etc... thanks to audiences composed chiefly of small kids and parents taking the opportunity to sit down for a bit.

A Bum Steer is what an informant called my recent mention of *Tomorrow*, the sf magazine published by Pulp-house. "Algis Budrys, who has purchased the new magazine from the ailing Pulp-house, is 'bought up for two years'."

Club of the Crabs! You gaped at the quondam Brian Aldiss fan club, you goggled at the Jacqueline Lichtenberg Appreciation Society...now a publicity pack for the new Guy N. Smith Fan Club has stirred my very bowels. Thrilling Smith memorabilia are offered - "Wow, you should see those clockwork crabs clicking and shambling, if you've read any of Guy's Crabs series, then it's all really happening and you'll run a mile!" The newsletter spares us the Ultimate Horror of how much it costs: enquiries to 59 Meriden Ave, Wollaston, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 4QR.

Your Neighbour May Be A Space Alien: this traditional tabloid story has resurfaced in the USA, with "theoretical biologist Dr Thomas Easton" telling how to spot hidden extraterrestrials in our very midst by their aberrant behaviour. Aberrations include experiencing discomfort on Earth transportation, and compulsively buying Earth books, magazines, computers... *Interzone* staff and subscribers can shortly expect a visit from Men in Black.

Tube Corn

Television Reviews by Wendy Bradley

Cyberzone doesn't work. Look, when was the last time you were in one of those shops that has a bank of computer games set up for the punters to try before they buy? You elbow your way to the front of the crowd of little boys relentlessly racking up the points and what do you do? Either you elbow one of the little darlings out of the way and grab the controls for yourself or else you watch for a couple of seconds and then drift off to look at what's new in the video section. Because computer games – watch my lips – computer games are not a spectator sport.

No, I don't care that I'm writing this in January after only two episodes of *Cyberzone* have been broadcast and that you'll be reading it in March after the series is over. No, I wouldn't even care if in the meantime it became a cult classic; it wouldn't make any difference to the argument. I'm still right: the concept doesn't work.

The concept is that two teams of players can meet in "virtual reality" and have a contest which the rest of us can share in via our television screens. We can't.

Now "virtual reality" is such a sexy idea these days that everyone wants to have a go at it, even though what's really on offer is nothing like the cyberpunk models we're all waiting for them to build. In particular, the square child's-building-block spaces that can be created in the game are nothing like the detailed, better-than-life spaces of fictional "virtual reality." Watch the way that in *Cyberzone* floors acquire pattern, doors acquire detail, only as the "borg" approaches them...

How does it operate? Teams of two (celebs vs special interests – for example the footballers John Barnes and John Fashanu vs two members of The Dangerous Sports Club – play against each other in a computer landscape. Each team has a "borg," a computer-generated figure, which is operated by the team's "runner" advised by the other member, the "guide." The runner moves the borg by running on a treadmill and turning a wheel to determine speed and direction respectively. The guide has an overall map of the game, so can advise on direction and on the whereabouts of the other team who are in pursuit in a "virtual vehicle." In various locations there are games to be

played – using two controls to move obstacles and fire weapons to get, for example, a mouse to jump a simple course, or the borg through a maze, or an obstruction out of the way of a target.

The overall effect, however, is *The Crystal Maze* on a Game Boy with an audience of neanderthals.

The first problem is that the "borg" isn't viable as a viewpoint character. We are interested in the celebs and their reactions to the frustrations of the game but we can't watch them and the game itself at the same time. But the borg is a featureless construct (it has to be coloured in to let you know which team it represents) with no visual interest at all. We are more involved in the computer-generated landscape when the camera moves through it as the borg's viewpoint, when effectively we "become" the borg, but we can't stick with that viewpoint either without losing track of where in the game we are. We need to see (1) the celeb trying to play the game, (2) the overall picture of the game screen held by the runner, and (3) the borg's-eye view of the cyberzone *simultaneously*, and a fussy little TV screen is too small to let you have a split screen that would give you all that information at once.

(Incidentally, I assume "borg" stands for "cyborg" as in "cyberzone." No doubt the producers aren't science-fiction readers and so don't care about fussy distinctions between cyborgs and androids and computer constructs.)

Secondly, and the reason the series suffers so much in comparison with *The Crystal Maze*, the game itself looks to be no fun to play. The chase element doesn't take off and the puzzle-solving is both too simple and too difficult. Simple, because the puzzle element is almost non-existent – even if the contestant is too stupid to realize you have to move the two bars so that the gaps in each line up with the target, Craig Charles is on hand to give the game away almost at once so that the pace doesn't slacken. The skill element in solving the puzzle is not in comprehension but execution – having deduced what you have to do it seems to be extraordinarily difficult to carry it out. So for the spectator, whereas in *The Crystal Maze* your natural tendency is to shout advice to the screen as you can clearly see what they have

to do to succeed, in *Cyberzone* your natural tendency is to thump something impatiently because you want to get your hands on the controls and shift the thing yourself since this fumble-fingered moron can't seem to tell the difference between the red and green buttons. Instead of willing them to succeed you will them to get out of your way and let you have a go.

The third barrier to the success of the programme is the testosterone. No, go on, bear with me for a moment and think about it; I'm not just being girly here. Craig Charles brings to the programme Lister's lads-in-space persona from *Red Dwarf* as well as a catch phrase – *awooga!* – which sounds like the mating call of a hundred brain-dead hooligans, particularly when pitched down in the diaphragm, accompanied by that circular arm-waving motion Julia Roberts does in the racing scene in *Pretty Woman*, and produced by a studio audience apparently selected entirely from the ranks of the recently lobotomized. The word even gets its own press release:

"Craig Charles reckons that after 10 years in the business it is time he had a catch phrase, and his unique computer game show *Cyberzone* seems sure to create a new household word... What does it mean? 'I don't really know' says the Cyber-Gamehost 'It just makes you feel good to say it loud.'"

This gameshow twilight zone is strictly for dudes: Craig Charles orchestrates it, James Grout (Inspector Morse's boss) is the computer "Thesp," and I suppose we should be grateful they forgot to include a token babe to keep score.

Still, in a world where the "Game Boy" can advertise itself in *Cosmopolitan* under the headline "Here's how to make life more exciting for the man in yours: buy him a Game Boy" and not be besieged by rampaging feminists I suppose *Cyberzone* will be as big a hit. All it needs is a slogan. How about "stand by your man... while he watches *Cyberzone*"? Because "here's how to make life more exciting for the woman in yours: buy her a Game Girl" just doesn't work, does it? After all, in popular parlance a man who is "game" is a good sport, ready for adventure. A woman who is "game" is a slut. ●

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On the Sharing of Worlds

Liz Holliday talks to George R.R. Martin

From “With Morning Comes Mistfall” to “Wild Cards” and from *Dying of the Light* to *Beauty and the Beast*, George R.R. Martin has made a name for himself as a romantic – a romantic with a bitter edge that never lets him fall into sentimentality.

Perhaps it isn't surprising that if you ask him about his background he is almost laconic: “Let's see. I was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1948. Lived there most of my life until I went away to college, which I did at North-Western University, Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. I have a master's degree in journalism – can't say I've ever practised it. Sold my first story while I was still in college. It was a sale in 1971 to *Galaxy*, a story called “The Hero.” Continued to sell stories in the years thereafter. Worked as a VISTA volunteer. VISTA is a kind of a domestic equivalent to the Peace Corps in the United States, or was at that time in the early 70s. I was a conscientious objector, so rather than go in the army you did two years with the Peace Corps or with VISTA. So I did that, but while I was doing it I was still writing science fiction and fantasy and selling it. I've done a few other jobs over the years, but for the most part I've been predominantly a writer.

“If you want to look at the periods here, from the early 70s through the late 70s I was writing my romantic science fiction. Then I did sf horror and contemporary horror for a few years, with the “Tuff” stuff mingling in with it as an occasional diversion for me. In the early 80s I did my two big horror novels, *Fevre Dream* and *Armageddon Rag*, and then since the middle 80s it's been my work in television and film and *Wild cards*.”

Dying of the Light was an early work, but one which seemed to me to sum up a lot of things Martin was doing at that time. “It came out in 1977. I think *Dying of the Light* was the conclusion of the first period of my work. In the early 70s I wrote a lot of hard sf of a particular type: you know, very far-future stories set in a coherent future history, and frequently with similar themes of romanticism and lost love and so forth. *Dying of the Light* was the culmination of that.”

It was terribly romantic yet almost unbearably bitter too: “There is a sadness to romanticism. There always has been classically. I mean, the whole literary tradition derives from the romantic poets who were not exactly, you know, happy guys. I mean, Byron, Shelley – this is not exactly *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* here, you know. Their lives were definitely edged by hurtiness and as intensely romantic as their moments were, they were short-lived.”

Horror came next, but the transition to material such as *Songs the Dead Men Sing* was not instantaneous: “I did a number of hybrid stories about that time, in the late 70s. I was interested in seeing if you could do, within the context of a science-fiction story, other kinds of forms. One of the things I was interested in was sf horror. I'd always read horror stories as well as sf stories. I'd been a big reader of H.P. Lovecraft when I was a kid, and Poe and so on. So, I tried my hand at combining the two forms, actually in a number of stories.

“Probably the earliest one was a story called ‘In The House Of The Worm’ that I wrote as early as 1975. It wasn't entirely successful; it works as a kind of sf adventure story but I don't think it works as a horror story. ‘Sandkings’ was a later attempt to do the same thing, as was ‘Nightfliers,’ which was done about the same time.

“Then, about a year after that, I started writing a few contemporary horror stories without the sf element. ‘Remembering Melody’ was one of the first. I wrote that in Texas while staying with Lisa Tuttle. She was writing a lot of horror stories at the time. We were working on *Windhaven*, so I decided to come down and spend few weeks with her and make some progress on that. While we were there doing that I was reading the stuff she had in manuscript and decided I'd try my hand at a contemporary horror story. I like to try different things. I always have. I suppose that's my trick. As a writer it suits me but its certainly not what the market likes these days. Publishers largely like you to do the same thing over and over again, not to do different things. Different things are considered too hard to market.”

One of the things that is supposed to be hard to market, especially in America, is pessimism. Perhaps surprisingly, Martin has had few problems in that area, however.

“Well certainly a few people over the years have said that I was downbeat but I don't really think it's ever become a whole chorus. It's not something I've worried about exceptionally. It was funny that in my early years I sold a lot of stories to *Analog*, which had a reputation for being a magazine that would not publish a downbeat story, and yet, nonetheless, they published a great many of my stories. There's downbeat and downbeat, I suppose. With rare exceptions in one or two of the darker stories I've done, most of my stories, even the downbeat ones, say that life is worth living. There's an affirmation there; and also in the science-fictional setting there's a kind of optimism about the capacity of human beings to achieve. The stories may be tragic, in the sense that the individual protagonist fails to achieve love or conquer his goal and all that, but they don't necessarily say that these goals are impossible or false. The pessimism, let us say of some British sf goes far deeper than that. It's not just the tragedy of one individual person but almost a general societal collapse that forms the background of some of those stories.”

Oddly enough it is in his more lighthearted work – the “Tuff” stories from *Analog* (collected as *Tuff Voyaging*) – that Martin has dealt with the bigger issues that face whole societies. “Tuff was fun and fundamentally lighthearted, despite the fact that they deal with some very serious themes. Tuff is very much the old-fashioned *Analog* hero, which is a construct of John W. Campbell and the sf of the 40s and 50s, that I find a little hard to take very seriously. So I've done him in Tuff, but I've done him kind of with my tongue in my cheek. It's the ultimate power fantasy, right? Hop around the galaxy have a great big spaceship, remake planets at will.”

It couldn't have been further away from *Fevre Dream*. Martin's novel of vampirism, riverboats and obsession in America's Deep South.

“In the late 70s I lived in Dubuque,



George R.R. Martin

Iowa, for three years, teaching college. Dubuque is on the Mississippi. It's an old river town that was once a centre of steamboat manufacture. It's very much a town that looks back to its past and is imbued with a very rich sense of history. I got interested in that history while I was living there, and particularly as it related to the river, which is an amazing thing that very much dominates that town. I began to read up on the steamboats. I'd always wanted to do a vampire book. I had a few ideas of my own about how to do it, which were largely science-fictional ideas. I mean, even though vampires are traditionally a supernatural-horror construct I wanted to adopt a more rationalist approach to them, and treat them as a case of parallel evolution – a predatory race living among us. This was the approach I took, but I combined it with the steamboats and the historical setting; exactly why, I don't know. They just sort of fit together in my head."

Putting vampires on boats is perhaps not the most obvious thing to do – after all, traditionally they aren't supposed to be able to cross water. "Well, that's one reason why I had to do a science-fictional approach. Obviously you couldn't do it with the supernatural fear of water thing. But the water thing really makes no sense. I mean, even when I write horror I think my mind works in a very science-fictional way.

"I'm not a religious person in any sense. So much of horror when you examine it, is rooted in Christianity – in the case of Satan stories or possessed child stories, or even vampire stories, which have a certain Christianity underlying them. Or, if not Christianity, pre-Christian religions, paganism and things like that.

"Religions are allowed to be illogical: after all, it's all God and devils and stuff. But a lot of it when you look at it logically doesn't make any sense. Like vampires: I mean, why can't they cross running water? You can make sense of some things. They don't go out in the sunlight because they are photosensitive, because sunlight burns them. It harms them. Their skin cannot take the ultraviolet light. That makes perfect sense. You can even justify garlic as an allergy. But other things? You know, they don't show up in a mirror – Why not? If you go back into vampire legends, the reasons they don't show up in the mirror are again predominantly religious reasons in one sense or another. One is that vampires have no souls. Their souls have been lost. It's the soul that gets reflected in the mirror, which is a lovely romantic theory but what we know about light reflection and things like that lead us to say 'that's not true.' There's another even odder legend that says – and I always thought this one was particularly goofy – vampires don't show up in the mirror

because Judas Escariot was paid with thirty pieces of silver, and so silver was defamed. So to make it up to silver, God said that silver would not have to reflect vampires. Anyway, so my vampires show up in mirrors, and they can cross running water, but they are sensitive to light."

Martin's other "big novel" was *Armageddon Rag*: "It's my rock-and-roll novel, very different from *Fever Dream*. It has a contemporary setting but is really about a survivor of the 1960s. A very hard novel to classify – kind of horror, kind of fantasy, kind of mainstream, a bit of a murder mystery. It served to confuse my marketing identity even further. That's the last real novel I've done."

It brought the tally of Martin's novels to three, plus *Windhaven*, his collaboration with Lisa Tuttle. "Lisa still lived in the United States then, but we lived pretty far apart. When we first started working on it I lived in Chicago and she lived in Texas, and we continued it after I moved to Dubuque. Essentially I would write a section and send it to her. She would rewrite what I wrote and write more and send it back to me, and so on. So it kept going back and forth and getting longer and longer. We would occasionally have discussions about where we were going, but for the most part we just started at the beginning and kept going

until we reached the end. We didn't really work from an outline or any kind of intensive plotting. It was written as three novellas, which we then assembled: 'Storms of Windhaven' was first."

This is pretty old stuff, however. More recently: "I'm working on a new novel, and I'm continually working on *Wild Cards*. In addition to editing the *Wild Cards* books I also write a fairly substantial amount."

Wild Cards is a superheroic shared-world series that has gone on to spread into other forms: "The books are still the primary thing. Though there's a comic, a game and there's about to be a movie, those are all deriving from the books. The books now have nine volumes out. We've got two novels and one more anthology in the pipeline, and we're negotiating for more."

Of course, superheroes are primarily a comics phenomenon, so it may seem perverse to try to do them in prose: "I love comics. I've always loved comics. I started reading with comics. If it hadn't been for comics, God knows what would have happened to me, because they were certainly a lot more fun to read than the stuff they gave you in school. So I'd always had a sneaking desire to write comics or to write about those kinds of issues. A number of people involved in *Wild Cards* come out of the same kind of story. They're people who always loved the old heroes, the comics heroes, and had a secret – or not so secret – desire to do their own versions.

"The immediate cause of it was actually a game. A lot of the Albuquerque and New Mexico writers – that's where I live presently, in Santa Fe, New Mexico – were gamers, and they started up a role-playing game. Some of them invented characters for it, and it was a lot of fun. And being writers, they put an enormous amount of work into these characters. It seemed a shame just to waste them like that. So the notion for *Wild Cards* was born out of that, but quickly transcended it, I think. I know there's a lot of stuff today that's 'game fiction,' where people play D&D and then write up the results. I think that usually produces pretty horrible fiction. Some people might say the same of *Wild Cards*, but you know we certainly tried to grow beyond our origins. The game that we once played many years ago bears little resemblance to the stories that have actually come out, although some of the characters are the same.

"Also, in some ways *Wild Cards* is almost a reply to comic books. Comic books have their own conventions which have been established a long time, and are fun, and people take them seriously; but we wanted to do it a little more gritty, and a little more realistic, and say, 'Well, what would the world really be like if people had

these outlandish powers and so forth? How would it change people's lives, and how would it change history?' The *Wild Cards* books are the result."

So why didn't Martin – and friends – do *Wild Cards* as a comic? "I wasn't a comics writer. Neither were the other people. Stuff I wanted to do as a comic has been done to death in comics. The interest was to do something new: was to do it in prose. To my mind prose is a better medium than comic books. I mean, I enjoyed comics, and they're OK for fun. But for a writer, particularly, in comics you are so dependent on the artist. In prose, the writer is his own artist. You can really do what you want. You can draw the character without being able to draw, and you can achieve a depth of internal characterization that is very hard to do in comic books."

Shared worlds, of course, pose particular editorial problems in terms of continuity and maintaining the original focus of the work: "It's certainly a lot of work, but I've been so immersed in it that I don't think keeping control of the continuity has been particularly difficult.

"When I first started doing *Wild Cards*, right in the beginning, we started with the Albuquerque people who had been involved in that game; but then, that's only a very small group of writers. I wanted more contributors, so I wrote letters to a number of writers who I knew loved comic books or loved the old pulp heroes, and that's how I got the Austin crowd like Howard Waldrop and Lew Shiner and Roger Zelazny and people like that. But I invited a lot of people who never contributed to the book.

"When we were soliciting for characters we got a lot of kind of silly, goofy powers, even from some of the people who later contributed serious characters to the anthology: their first impulse was to do something silly. I don't know if this was just because the idea sounded silly first off the bat. To my mind it's only a defensiveness, you know: 'Ahh, I'm a serious writer and this is a goofy comic-book idea, I'd better not take it seriously. I'd better make fun of it.' But there's certainly fun to be had in some of these concepts. We've had some ourselves in the *Wild Cards* books.

"I weeded out a lot of the really silly stuff right at the beginning. We had fun with it, but that wasn't what we were going for. I didn't mind having some wit, but I didn't want the kind of thing that, essentially said, 'Well the whole premise is ridiculous,' because we didn't think the premise was ridiculous. I mean, it's a perfectly science-fictional kind of theme, the superman theme: what would happen if people did have these powers. The nature of the powers is not important.

"Now, what's true is that over nine volumes – and a number of fans have commented on this to me – *Wild Cards* has got darker. I don't think it ever was silly. I mean, there were silly moments, there were silly stories, there were silly characters, but the overall tone was fairly serious. As it's gone on, it's gotten to the point where maybe it's a little more than serious, maybe it is dark in certain aspects. Why has that happened? It's certainly not a deliberate thing, that I've sat down as editor and said, 'let's write a bunch of dark, grim, gloomy stories.' It may just be that as we explore the world more and more, and as we extrapolate what we think would really happen, it's not possible to be as sunny as the comic books. I think that the conclusion that a lot of writers are reaching independently, and the conclusion we are reaching collectively in the *Wild Cards* books, is that if there were super-powered people among us, they could have a pretty rough time of it, because the world is not necessarily going to hail them as heroes, no matter what kind of funny suits they might wear or what colourful names they take. And that adds a certain tension to the series, at the point it's reached now: you know, the impulse between hero-worship and fear, and the line between them is very thin."

One of the basic differences between comics and science fiction is sense of wonder. In comics, almost anything can happen, and probably will. Grafted on to everyday America you get all kinds of alien races wandering around with no one batting an eyelid, dead characters rising up a few issues down the line because particular creators always wanted to work with them, and feats of super-science bordering on the miraculous that make no impact whatsoever on the life of Joe Public. This is not an element that *Wild Cards* has chosen to incorporate. "We tend not to do that. I mean, the whole basis of *Wild Cards* has been more to realism than comic books. It is always amusing if you can take a character who people think is dead and somehow bring him back, but you have to play within the rules while you do that – and I think that a lot of comics, particularly in longer running series, don't play within the rules. They cheat. Most of our people who die stay pretty dead. And death can happen to anyone in the world. One of the benefits of the shared-world form is that no one is safe. You can't say so and so's the hero and he's going to be around for the whole series."

Another advantage is having other people's characters to work with: "Most people tend to write from the viewpoint of their own character, but they do heavily use other people's characters in secondary or antagonist

or guest-star roles. Indeed, they are encouraged to do so. The whole point of a shared-world anthology is that it be shared. This is one of the things that readers enjoy about it: the consistency, the continuity, the common background. Artistically, I think it's also one of the most interesting things about it.

"These people who do shared-worlds anthologies but don't edit them carefully enough to work out a consistent background for it – they're slapdash things. I don't have much good to say about them. I think if you are going to do a shared world you really have to do your homework. You have to make it function and make the stories fit, eliminate inconsistencies and make the continuity there: all this is the editor's job. The readers are rewarded, I think, with a richer world and more consistent stories – and a better reading experience overall.

"It's an interesting thing for writers to work in too. The shared world is really a new form, and I think very few of the shared-world books have explored that form properly or reached for what it can offer. It's a fascinating experience for a writer to work within. There's a dialogue that takes place in fiction – and particularly in science fiction, if you look back through the history – of people replying, in their work, to the works of another writer, a writer of a generation ago. In a shared world, all of that is compressed in one book. You're writing this character and you have a very fixed idea of what he's like in your head. And then someone else picks him up and writes about him. That's a strange experience, the first time it happens. Suddenly you're discovering that what they are writing doesn't necessarily fit what's in your head. So what happened here? Did they get it wrong? But you know this guy, you've been reading him for years and he's a very good writer. Did he get it wrong? Is the character coming across differently from what you imagined he's coming across as? So in some ways it gives you an insight into your own characters. You begin to perceive the character through the other writers, the way the readers are perceiving him, not necessarily the way you are imagining that character.

"There's also that whole dialogue I talked about taking place between writers or generations of writers, that can take place in one book or one story. Book Seven, *Dead Man's Hand*, is a collaboration between myself and John J. Miller. In that story a murder mystery occurs and two characters – my character J. Ackroyd and John's character Brennan – set out to solve the mystery, and we alternate their viewpoints all the way through the book. It's one of our mosaic novels: the most tightly interwoven of the shared-world forms, I think, and one that we originated.

"The climax of the book works, I think, because the two main characters are very different. I mean, Brennan is a vigilante. He's killed hundreds of men. He believes that the system doesn't work and that the only way an individual can get justice is by meting it out himself, so to speak. He has no hesitation in killing his enemies. My character, Ackroyd, is by comparison almost a pacifist. His teleportation power can inconvenience and imprison, but doesn't kill, his enemies and he doesn't carry a gun. He doesn't approve of violence.

"The clash between these two men ... you know, if I had been writing the book I could have put a character like Brennan in it, and there maybe would have been a little argument at the end. But my character would have won, right? And if John had been writing it the reverse would have happened – the character like mine would have been brushed aside. Instead, it was like negotiating the Paris Peace Accords here, especially since Melinda Snodgrass's character Doctor Tachyon was in the scene and we're both having to consult her. It becomes very complex. But I also think that it reads better than if John or I had done that alone, because it reads the way two people holding opposite views really would argue about it. It wouldn't just be boom boom boom, argument's over, one guy loses. Nobody convinces anybody. I mean, these two guys go in feeling certain things and they leave – both of them have changed – but they leave still feeling certain things. A shared world can do that, if it's properly run."

Martin is obviously very enthusiastic about shared worlds. He's careful to draw a distinction between them and share-cropping, where a (usually) newer writer does a novel set in a more famous writer's pre-established universe: "It really gets me annoyed when shared worlds get bracketed with share-cropping or leased worlds, as I call them. I mean, when you have Andre Norton inviting a bunch of people to do a *Witch World* book or Isaac Asimov farming out the robots, these are not true shared worlds. This is like: 'This is mine, you can come in, you can play here a little bit, but don't change anything, don't move anything: it belongs to me.' That's the share-crop situation. A shared world is a group of very strong, idiosyncratic individualists coming together, each with their own moral system and their own style and their own ways of writing, and collectively hammering out a shared background, and setting very different kinds of characters into motion, to clash within it – and collectively owning the whole thing. So it's not my sandbox, it's everybody's sandbox. When you own a piece of it I think you are a little more

committed than the people who do these franchised operations."

So much for writing collectively. Martin's other big recent project was the *Beauty and the Beast* television series – but that's another story.

Those of us who miss his own, unalloyed, work will be glad to know he's working on a new fantasy novel. Just what it's about we'll have to wait and see – Martin isn't telling.

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When Carmichael left to walk through the ruins with the forensic scientist he told Sergeant Andrews to stay with the jeep. Andrews obeyed, but didn't relax; he used the binoculars to scan the grounds carefully. Andrews was a scrupulous man; he didn't like being on bodyguard duty, but he wasn't about to get lazy – or to let his men get lazy – simply because he didn't like his job.

There wasn't much to see, with or without the aid of binoculars. The establishment had been obliterated; the roofs had caved in and the walls had collapsed. Everything that had been inside the buildings was reduced to powdery ash. The institute had been scientifically torched by people who intended to leave no traces.

"This is where they found the human remains," Burke, the forensic scientist from Ashton, told Carmichael, pointing to a mess of comprehensively-sifted rubble. "The animal stuff too. Even the bones were all but gone. We tried to use the teeth to check IDs, but it wasn't easy. We think there were five human bodies and two others, but I can't even be sure

that the others were chimpanzees. We have two premolars and a molar with fillings that match the dental records you sent through for Abel, but I can't be absolutely sure that Franklin was one of the others. I could only confirm the identity of one of the local men with any confidence – and we have seven names listed as missing. We may never know exactly who died and who didn't."

And by the same token, thought Carmichael, we may never know exactly which of them should be numbered among the perpetrators. and which among the victims.

He felt numb inside at the thought of the waste, the stupidity. Even if the lab had been doing the kind of work the anti-biotech extremists thought it was – even if its sealed chambers had been brim-full of armaments for use in the ongoing plague war – this would have been a meaningless act, a gesture of blind rage. Always assuming that it *had* been the anti-biotech brigade who were behind the attack; that hadn't been proved yet.

"As you can see," Burke went on, "we don't have



Brian Stableford

a lot to go on. The police really are doing the best they can.”

“I don’t doubt it,” said Carmichael.

“I can show you all our lab data – and what’s left of the gleanings. You can check it over – take stuff back east with you if you want to, for genetic fingerprinting or whatever. If you can get a result, you’re a better man than I am.”

“No one doubts your competence, Dr Burke,” said Carmichael, “or the enthusiasm of the local police. I’m just here to compile a report. You know how things are.”

Burke nodded to indicate that he did, but Carmichael knew it was a lie. Nobody knew how things were – not any more. Things were coming apart at the seams, and you couldn’t rely on any of the old routines.

They went back to the jeep and got aboard.

Andrews waited until all his men were loaded into the truck before telling the driver of the jeep to move off. He wanted the vehicles in close conformation while they rode into the town, just in case the road

was booby-trapped and the territory was lousy with enemy agents.

In fact the road was empty, and the surrounding countryside was utterly desolate.

“Did you know Abel and Franklin personally?” Burke asked, after they’d gone a mile or so in silence.

“Not very well,” said Carmichael. “I worked in the same building as Abel once, but we were on different projects. I met Franklin at a conference back in ’17.” He wouldn’t have been grieving for the two biotechnologists even if he’d known them better. With thirty million dead in little over six months it was difficult to feel grief for individuals any more. Nor was the project any great loss, from the point of view of the ongoing war effort. It had been a speculative thing, funded in days when priorities were different. That was one reason why the place had been understaffed and underprotected – easy meat for the arsonists.

“I don’t think it was local people who did it,” said

Illustrations by Kevin Cullen

Burke. "They're a little crazy, with the war and everything, and there were some wild rumours circulating about what the labs might have been cooking up, but that wasn't the work of some over-excited mob. It was an expert job."

Carmichael nodded. Some of the anti-biotech groups were committed and not without expertise in matters of sabotage, but the most highly-organized also had the best intelligence, and they'd have taken the trouble to make sure that Abel's establishment really was doing plague-war work before sending in commandos. Local people, on the other hand, were much more vulnerable to crazy talk about the war not being a real war at all, but simply a series of escapes from the government's own labs, possibly engineered by mad eugenicists trying to slim down the economic population. All nonsense, of course – but way out here, the people had always regarded the distant federal government as a false friend and potential oppressor.

The plague war wasn't the kind of catastrophe that enhanced nationwide social solidarity; the common enemy was too diffuse, too uncertain. Communities were drawing in upon themselves as people lost faith in Washington, in the Union. As it came to seem that the whole world was collapsing, backwoods folk became desperate to preserve the land between the horizons they could see – and many of them refused to think beyond. The survivalist ethos had taken off in a big way. These were crazy times.

Plague war wasn't like the kind of wars people had been taught about in history; there was no army for the young men to join, no evident enemy to fight. The only responses people had to the deaths of their kids and their cousins were containment and cauterization: trying to burn out the plague germs wherever they appeared and limiting their spread. It was easy enough for some to turn their frustrated ire upon the government's own biotech research establishments, figuring them as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. It was easy, but it was dead wrong; if there was hope for the future, Carmichael thought, it was contained in the labs that were working flat out to find effective defences for use against viral and bacteriological terrorism.

"On the other hand," Burke said, "the townspeople never wanted the lab here. A lot of people thought it was forced on them. Nobody ever took the trouble to tell them that the people there weren't engineering viral weapons. Nobody told them much of anything, except maybe to mind their own business while the world went to hell."

"People like Abel and Franklin are trying to save the world," said Carmichael. "Whether genetic engineers are somehow to blame for the war or not, we're the only people who can possibly rescue the human race from its effects. The men that torched that establishment aren't just treasonous, they're insane."

Sergeant Andrews was looking the other way, pointedly ignoring the conversation – but he was listening. Carmichael knew that Andrews was neither treasonous nor insane, but he also knew that the sergeant didn't feel any particular loyalty to the men who'd made the weapons of the ongoing war. He was a soldier; he'd been trained to fight enemy soldiers

from armoured positions, firing good honest bullets. Being shoved into the front line of this kind of conflict must have seemed to him a kind of betrayal.

The streets of the town were almost as deserted as the road from the burnt-out lab-complex. Half the houses were empty, already falling derelict. The people who remained stayed indoors as much as possible, fearing that every breath of wind might be contaminated. Even so, life went on. The shops had little enough in the way of goods, but they were open for business and gossip.

Burke guided them to a hotel in the centre of town which still had a full staff, and they booked in. The sergeant sent two of his men out on a foraging expedition to buy in supplies.

"I need to speak to someone who worked at the labs," Carmichael told Burke. "If you could find me someone who can tell me what was going on in the weeks before the attack, I'd be grateful. I need to get a better idea of the stage the experiments were at. Abel was a little behind with his reports, thanks to the war and being so short-staffed."

"I'll ask," said Burke, "but it might not be easy. The survivors aren't exactly in hiding, but some of them became very shy about what they did long before the fire. You know how it is, with the rumours and all."

Carmichael knew how it was. Even cleaners and gate-guards who worked in biotech installations had become shy since the war began – and their reluctance to talk to strangers would amplify that all-round reticence. Everybody in Ashton would have been happier if he and his guardian angels had not come.

"Do what you can," he said with a sigh. "The quicker I can find something substantial to put in my report, the quicker I can get away."

After he'd eaten supper with Andrews and the men Carmichael took a flask of boiled water up to his room. He'd managed to locate a working TV set but the official broadcasts were all routine and both the news channels were reeling out ancient tapes he'd seen way back when. It didn't take long to write up the day's notes, and when he'd finished he loaded a chip into his bookplate and settled down to read. He was just getting absorbed when somebody tapped on the pane of the curtained window.

He was on the third floor, but he realized that someone must have climbed up the fire escape. He went to the window and opened it. It was raining outside and the woman who was waiting was pretty wet. She was in her mid-20s, with short-cropped brown hair and steel-rimmed glasses. When he let her in she took time out to clean the raindrops off the lenses.

"Dr Carmichael?" she said. "I heard – indirectly – that there were army personnel asking around for anyone who might know what had happened up at the labs. Your name was mentioned." She slipped off her wet coat and draped it over the back of the room's only armchair.

"What's wrong with the door?" he asked, thinking: *I misjudged you, Dr Burke – I didn't expect results this fast, if at all.*

"I'd rather keep this between the two of us. There's some bad feeling about the labs and what happened up there, and I wouldn't want people to think I'd come here to finger anyone."

"Have you come here to finger someone?"

"Of course not. I don't know who torched the place or why – I was off shift, tucked up in bed. If I hadn't been, I guess I might be dead. But there are some crazies around, you know, and there was a certain amount of talk about what certain people thought the good people of Ashton ought to do about the germ-factory on the ridge, and some of those certain people now want to keep a low profile. I told anyone who'd listen that the germ-factory stuff was all nonsense, of course, but no one believed me. Anyhow, I didn't want it noised around that I'd gone running to you the moment you came into town."

He shrugged. "I'm not here to chase the people who did it. I'm just here to make a report about the work Abel and Franklin were doing – not that it's going to be easy. Whoever wiped out the labs did a very thorough job."

"Abel and Frankin are both dead, Dr Carmichael. So are the apes. They were in quarantine – they never got out."

"What apes?" he asked carefully.

"You must know about the apes" she replied equally carefully. She squinted at him through the polished lenses, and it was obvious that they were both wondering how much the other knew.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "Abel's reports may have been more than a little out of date. He wasn't always punctilious about making official reports on experiments in progress... I don't suppose anyone is. We all like to have the results in before we report to our masters. His working notes must have gone up in smoke, unless he kept back-up discs at some distant location. The only chance we have of finding out exactly where he was up to is to find someone who was actively involved – however limited their role might have been. Exactly what *did* you do, Miss...?"

"Vollman – Lucy Vollman," she said. He recognized the name from the list he'd scanned, but couldn't connect it to a role. "I started out as an equipment orderly," she added. "Bottle-washer, animal-handler and all-purpose spare pair of hands. They promoted me to technician when the people they had were recalled to war work." She must have seen his face fall, because she went on: "That doesn't mean that I'm a moron, Dr Carmichael. I was more than half way to working my way up to technician anyway. It can be done, you know."

He knew that she was right. Nobody tolerated fools in high-security labs. No matter how menial the tasks to be carried out, they had to be done efficiently and with intelligence.

"How much do you know?" he asked, sitting down on the bed and pointing to the armchair. She moved her wet coat to one side and sat down in it.

"He never began any human experiments," she said, without further procrastination. "He was probably disappointed with the way things went with the apes. There were just the three chimps – or what *had* been chimps. They're all dead, reduced to ashes. You do know about the chimps, don't you?"

Carmichael nodded.

"That's it, then," she said. "If you know about the chimps there's nothing more to tell." But she didn't make a move to get up out of the chair.

"I need to know exactly what happened to the

chimps," he said, as she had known that he would, "as accurately as you can tell me. I'd also like to know who else knew."

"I don't think anyone burned down the labs because of the apes," she said, mistaking the reason for his last inquiry. "Something may have slipped out about them – garbled, of course – but it wasn't the kind of horror story to excite firebugs. You know there are rumours flying around that the plagues were actually cooked up by the government, don't you? People whisper it back and forth that Washington is using them to wipe out the blacks, or the Hispanics, or the Californians while the rich hide out in their bunkers. They talk about international conspiracies of the rich against the poor, about human culling... all kinds of crazy stuff."

"It's all lies," said Carmichael, "but..."

"That's what most people say," she interrupted, "but what the crazies reply is, *how would you know?* And we wouldn't, would we? If things like that were going on, who'd tell the likes of us? Me, anyway."

"Who else do you know who might have information?"

"Less than half a dozen," she said. "Only two who worked on the inside. Nobody knows any more than I do, Dr Carmichael. I don't think any of the others is going to come tapping on your window, and I'm sure that none of them is going to march into the lobby and ask your soldier-boys where to find you."

"I need you to tell me where I can find the others," he said. "You all have to be properly debriefed."

"Forget it," she said. "This is it, Dr Carmichael. I can tell you everything there is to tell, and I'm not going to give you any names. You can go home to Washington but I live here. There really isn't anything to hunt around for. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

"Okay," he said. "Tell me what you know – about the project, and about the progress Abel and Franklin had made."

"I know about the jigsaw hypothesis," she said. "I may have been only a makeshift technician, but I know the general outline of it.

The entire solar system is made out of cosmic wreckage, right? All the heavy elements are debris from a series of burned out stars. Abel thought that DNA was debris too – that there's tons of the stuff out in deep space. He thinks that the evolution of life on earth has been – what did he call it? – a *re-collection*. He thought that there were pathways already laid down for natural selection, because what it's really doing isn't building from scratch but *re-building* something which already existed once before, millions of years ago and thousands of light years away. Like putting together a jigsaw of DNA. He thought that we might already have the next evolutionary phase mapped out within us, didn't he? He was trying to make those chimps *evolve* – and his ultimate aim was to try it out on people too, to turn us into supermen overnight. Except that I saw those chimps every day, Dr Carmichael, and whatever it was they'd become, it wasn't human. They changed, all right – but not into people."

Carmichael was relieved to discover that she knew as much as she did. Even so, she didn't *quite* have the idea in her grasp. "There's no reason to think the chimps would evolve into people," he told her.

"Chimps aren't one step below us on the evolutionary ladder. They're our cousins – practically our brothers."

He saw a gleam in her eye, as if she thought she'd scored a point. Perhaps it had all been guesswork, and she hadn't really been sure until he confirmed it. Perhaps she didn't know as much as she was pretending to... or perhaps there was some subtler game that she was playing.

"They weren't any smarter, so far as I could tell," she said. "Just weird-looking. The lost their hair, and their skin got thicker, like a rhino's. They grew taller and more thick-set, less playful. They got to like me while I was feeding them, before the experiment started, but afterwards they got confused – maybe depressed. Abel kept trying to talk to them in American Sign Language, but he didn't seem to be getting anywhere. It's possible that the whole thing was a dead end – if it wasn't, he never got the chance to make the breakthrough."

"But his *methods* seem to have worked out," Carmichael said. "That's a breakthrough in itself – and the chimps were still alive after they changed, still functioning. You probably don't realize how significant that is."

Lucy Vollman shrugged. "Maybe if you tell me more," she said, "I'll be able to tell you more. Maybe it'll trigger something."

"Okay," said Carmichael, a little warily. "As you say, Abel's so-called jigsaw hypothesis proposes that the DNA making up earth's biosphere is recapitulating, at least in broad terms, an evolutionary sequence that's already taken place elsewhere in the universe, perhaps on millions of other planets orbiting other secondary stars – that is to say, in other systems formed out of the debris of ancient supernovas. If it were true, the process of evolution on any particular world would be analogous to the way in which plant species invade virgin ground, each species in its turn transforming the environment so as to create niches for other invaders, until you eventually reach a mature climax community.

"Some people who find Abel's hypothesis attractive think that human beings are the climax community of Earthly evolution; others think there may be one or two pieces of the genetic jigsaw left to slot into place. Abel's own opinion seemed to be that we might be so very close that it might only be a matter of switching on and off a few genes already *in situ* among the quiet DNA of our chromosomes. The differences between humans and chimpanzees aren't the result of our possession of genes that they don't have, but simply the result of the differential switching of genes we already hold in common. We already have techniques for controlling the expression of genes in primitive organisms; Abel was trying to use those techniques on chimps. He wasn't trying to humanize them, at least in any narrow sense of the term – he was trying to explore the potential they had for becoming... well, maybe in some respects *better* than human. He was trying to find in them the potential that might be in us for completing the jigsaw, and bringing the story of our evolution to its allotted climax. Not that it could be that simple, of course; we have hundreds of thousands of years of *cultural* evolution behind us, and that's what has shaped our

minds. Our genes only shape our bodies and our brains. It was all just a hypothesis anyway – maybe just a fairy story.

"I've read the reports Abel managed to file, but they don't track the metamorphosis as far as you've observed it; they only mention a few relatively subtle physiological changes – interesting enough, in their way, but not *proof* of anything. Unless you can give us a strong reason for continuing the work, the project will probably die, at least until the war ends. We have more urgent priorities now. Even so, I have a responsibility to salvage whatever information I can, and file it away in the hope that when better times come it will give someone else a flying start. Can you add anything further?"

The gleam in her eye was still there. He hadn't told her anything she didn't know – was she pleased that he didn't know any more?

"I don't think so," she said. "I wish I could tell you something really exciting, but I can't. As I say, the chimps seemed to me to get stupider rather than smarter, and if the next step in evolution involves growing that kind of skin, I'll be happy to stay primitive. I can't say anything about physiology and biochemistry, but looks-wise those apes were going backwards, not forwards. I guess we have to win the war before we try again – if we can win the war. If things go on the way they are, we might just lose *everything*. Wouldn't it be ironic if, just as we were about to put the last piece in place, the whole damn jigsaw fell apart? If we go, the rats and the cockroaches will have to start over with the business of re-collection."

"It's only a hypothesis," he reminded her. "Nothing you've told me counts as proof. What I'd like you to do, if you will, is write down everything you remember – including things that may not seem important."

She shrugged. "Sure," she said. "I'll get on it tomorrow." After a pause, she added: "I'd better go now."

He nodded, although she really didn't need his permission. She put her wet coat back on, and left the way she'd come in. He didn't stir until she was out of sight. Then he picked up the phone from beside the bed and dialled the lobby.

"It's okay," said Sergeant Andrews. "We saw her climbing the fire-escape. I sent Kravitz after her. He'll find out where she's going, and report back."

"Good," said Carmichael. "Smart work, sergeant." It was, of course, no more than he'd expected, given the sergeant's entirely understandable determination to be watchful at all times.

Carmichael spent the following morning at the police lab, going through the reports of the investigating officers and the results of the various tests carried out by Burke's team. The atmosphere around him was uncomfortably frosty; everyone was scrupulously polite but they all felt that his presence implied some criticism of their work. It was a relief when Andrews came to tell him, shortly after noon, that Kravitz had returned.

"What the hell took him so long?" Carmichael asked.

"It was a long trip," said Andrew. "She doesn't live in town – at least, she didn't *stay* in town when she left your room. She went way up into the hills. Walked all the way. Kravitz nearly lost her two or three times,

but he had the IR image-enhancer from his rifle-sight, and he picked her up again.”

“She went back to the burned-out labs?” said Carmichael, puzzled.

Andrews shook his head. “Cabin in the woods,” he said. “Miles away from the installation – from anything. Guy let her in – Kravitz didn’t get a good look at him then, but he hung around for a while. There are at least three people living there. One of them’s tall, slim, fair-haired, fiftyish.”

Daniel Franklin was – or had been – tall, slim, fair-haired and fiftyish. So were lots of other people. Carmichael rooted out photographs of Franklin and Abel, and told Andrews to show them to Kravitz while he finished up what he was doing.

He dropped in to see Burke before he left. “You did a good job,” he said. “You didn’t conclude anything you weren’t able to confirm – I appreciate your caution.”

Burke didn’t look pleased; he thought it was just a line, to soften him up. “That’s okay,” he said dully.

“About the apes,” said Carmichael. “Your best guess is that there were two corpses, not three?”

“No,” said Burke. “There wasn’t enough to justify any kind of educated guess. The remains we found were consonant with the theory that there might have been two non-human primate corpses, which might or might not have been chimpanzees. There were anomalies. I wouldn’t swear to the number or the nature, or that the bones we found came from anything that was alive before the fire. I didn’t draw any conclusions at all, Dr Carmichael.”

Carmichael nodded. “Too little to go on. Whoever set the fire knew how to make it burn exceedingly hot – anything left could be disinformation. Even Abel’s teeth.”

“You think Abel set the fire?” said Burke.

“I don’t think anything. I’m on your side – no conclusions, no guesses, no theories. It’s the only scrupulous way.”

When Carmichael got back to the hotel, he found Kravitz in a similar sort of mood, unable to confirm or deny that the man he’d seen at the cabin was Daniel Franklin. “Didn’t see him clear enough,” he said. “Could have been the guy in the photograph, but it’s a lousy picture and I was looking through a night-sight.”

“Do we tell the local cops about the cabin?” Andrews wanted to know.

“Not yet,” said Carmichael. “The people up there sent the girl down to talk to me, avoiding the locals. It’s just possible that the local cops are the ones they’re hiding out from – and if so, it might be as well to know why before we blow their cover. We’ll go up there – just the three of us. Discreetly, after dark. And we’ll walk – leave the jeep where it is.”

Andrews shrugged his shoulders. Kravitz, on the other hand, looked distinctly unhappy. He’d already had one sleepless night. Carmichael relented. “Okay,” he said to the soldier. “Just the sergeant and me – provided that you can show us on the map exactly where this cabin is, and how to approach it.”

Thet set off from the hotel at ten; there was no evidence they were being watched or followed. The sergeant wore a sidearm but didn’t take a rifle; they both carried night-sights. They didn’t



have to go far, in terms of miles on the map, but it was mostly uphill and the rain had left the ground muddy and slick. Carmichael found that he wasn't quite as fit as he'd assumed. By the time they got to the trail out to the cabin he was breathing hard.

The advice Kravitz had given them was easy enough to follow, and they were able to approach the cabin stealthily enough – but when they got there it seemed that there had been no need for stealth. It was dark and seemed deserted.

The door was locked but the enterprising Sergeant Andrews got them inside without using brute force. The interior was neat, but there was no real sign of contemporary occupation. It was like hundreds of other homes which had been abandoned in the course of the plague war. It had not been looted – but it was no treasure-house by anyone's standards, and looters could afford to pick and choose nowadays.

"Looks like they moved on," said Andrews, when they'd briefly checked all the rooms. He wasn't the kind to insult his own man by wondering aloud whether Kravitz had somehow contrived to direct them to the wrong cabin.

"Leaving precious little behind," Carmichael agreed. He knew that he'd have to search more thoroughly, looking for something that might prove that Franklin had been here, and he knew only too well how tedious such a search might be.

"I'll take a look around outside," said the sergeant, probably feeling that it would be diplomatic to give Carmichael some space.

Carmichael nodded. He didn't have equipment with him for dusting for fingerprints – he'd have to come back later, or ask Burke for help, if it became necessary to look for evidence of that sort. All he could do for now was look for clues of a grosser kind. He started in the larger bedroom, checking the floor and the drawers. After ten minutes without any result he moved into the kitchen.

When he heard the front door open he assumed it was the sergeant coming back. He didn't bother to call out as footsteps approached the kitchen door, which stood ajar, but waited until the door swung inwards before looking round.

The man who stood in the doorway wasn't Andrews – it was a man in a police uniform. The expression on the cop's face was difficult to read, but Carmichael realized that his presence in the cabin might take some explaining.

"It's okay, officer," he began, as the policeman drew his gun. "It's..."

While he was speaking his arms spread out reflexively, palms wide open to indicate his harmlessness. He realized with less than a second to spare that the gesture wasn't having the desired effect – that the cop was going to shoot. He had no time to scream for help; he barely managed a plaintive "Hey!"

The gun made a curious spitting sound, which seemed to make the whole experience surreal. Carmichael looked down at his chest, and saw some kind of dart sticking out of his shirt, with a red stain slowly spreading around it.

It's not a bullet, he thought. It seemed almost as bizarre as it would have if the gun had released a flag with BANG! printed on it.

He felt his amazement turning into giddiness, and

swayed to his left. He had time to catch himself up once, before swaying the other way. This time he couldn't help himself, and he was conscious of slowly falling over, crumpling at the knees. As soon as he hit the ground consciousness fizzled out.

He awoke in a dimly lit room, slumped in an old armchair; it didn't take his eyes long to adjust to the light, but there was a roaring pain in his head and he squinted in the hope that it might help the pain to go away.

"Drink this," said a voice, pressing a cup to his lips. It was cool water. After he'd taken a sip the cup was placed in his hand, and when his eyes were fully open he saw two white tablets in an open hand. He looked up at the man who was offering them to him.

"Aspirin," said the blond-haired man. "Good for your head and your heart."

Carmichael took the tablets and swallowed them, washing them down with the water. As he did so he looked around. There were two other people present: a second man, and Lucy Vollman. The second man was dark, shorter than the other. Like Kravitz before him, Carmichael couldn't tell from the photographs he'd seen whether the blond man was Franklin – nor could he tell for certain whether the dark man was Abel. He handed the cup back to the man who stood over him.

"There was no need for this," he said, glancing at the girl. "If you wanted to talk, all you had to do was call."

The girl looked down at her fingernails, but she didn't seem particularly guilty about having lied to him.

"We have to be discreet, Dr Carmichael," said the dark man. "These are troubled times." Carmichael noted that he seemed to have a full set of teeth, which – if they weren't false – were in remarkably good condition for a man of his age.

"Dr Abel?" he said, experimentally.

The dark man grinned. "Am I still recognizable?" he asked.

"You'll have to do better than a little superficial somatic engineering," said Carmichael. "Your genetic fingerprints will still be the same. Even if you've done a little creative gene-switching, you can't change that. And the fact that you left a few teeth behind for the investigators to find does rather imply that you weren't an innocent victim of the attack on your labs. Perhaps, like Dr Franklin here, you should have been content to leave nothing. What did you do with Sergeant Andrews, by the way?"

"Sergeant Andrews hasn't suffered any permanent damage," said Abel. "Even his ego will recover, in time – and he doesn't ever have to know what happened to him, if you decide not to tell him."

"Actually," added the blond man, "the fire may have been a little *too* effective. We had hoped to convince the investigators that we were both dead. But we didn't start the fire, and we didn't leave any of our own people to burn. We simply had enough advance warning to make a few preparations. The human bones were those of plague-victims – easy enough to acquire around these parts. We hoped that everybody would believe that the bombers had succeeded – including, of course, the bombers."

"So your story is that the bombers really were local anti-biotech fanatics?" said Carmichael sceptically.

"They certainly had some local help," said Abel, "but we're really not sure who was behind it, in the ultimate analysis. Do you know, Dr Carmichael?"

It took Carmichael a second or two to realize that if the question was sincere Abel must mean to imply that the order might have come out of Washington. Even that was possible, and it was possible that the people who'd sent him out to check up hadn't levelled with him as to the reason for which he was being sent.

"I'm not here to find out who did it," Carmichael said cautiously. "I'm here to retrieve any information which can be retrieved regarding your research. For purely scientific reasons, we'd like to know how far advanced your project was." He glanced around at the room. It was nondescript – just another abandoned room in another abandoned house. The ragged curtains weren't completely closed, but beyond them the cloudy night was still pitch-dark.

"No doubt you were anxious," Abel purred, "because I was a little dilatory about filing my reports." Carmichael glanced at Lucy Vollman again, knowing that she must have repeated everything he'd told her, more or less word for word. This time she met his gaze steadily enough.

"Aren't we all?" he said.

"Not when they concern the war situation," said Abel. "Not that ours did, of course, except in a rather oblique fashion. Ordinarily, I might have been quite prepared to publish what we found, at the risk of meeting some hostility and ridicule, but in the present situation, I must confess, I was inclined to hesitate – and was nearly lost. You must forgive us our extreme caution, Dr Carmichael. These days, anyone who isn't paranoid is certifiably insane – isn't that what they say, back in Washington?"

Carmichael's head was clearer now, and not so painful. He sat up straighter. "Did you bring me here to give me an explanation in confidence?" he asked. "Or are you intending to hold me for ransom?"

"We brought you here because we need help – help that you can provide."

"You want me to help you get another lab?" said Carmichael disbelievingly.

Abel didn't answer the question. Instead, he said: "Lucy says you know all about the jigsaw hypothesis – chapter and verse. In that case, perhaps I can ask you to speculate a little. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the jigsaw hypothesis were true – that evolution on earth has been rebuilding a close approximation of a path that DNA has already followed elsewhere in the universe, and that human beings are just one significant step short of becoming the true kingpins of the climax community. Tell me, Dr Carmichael: what characteristics would you hope or expect to find in the *ultimate* hominids, our destined – and I do mean *destined* – successors?"

It was on the tip of Carmichael's tongue to say that the ability to grow a new set of teeth probably wouldn't come amiss, but Abel was clearly serious and there was no point in frivolity. "I don't know," he said. "The kind of things, I suppose, that genetic engineers would like to build into us: longer life, better powers of self-repair, better immunity to diseases."

"And better looks," said Franklin drily. "Don't forget better looks. That's why we've made such rapid progress in superficial somatic engineering, after all. Cosmetic engineering was the big business, until the war broke out."

"Everybody wants to be a demigod," said Carmichael. "So what?"

"That's right," said Abel. "We've always made our gods in our own image, according to our own ideals of beauty. And we've tended to assume that any progress built into the evolutionary scheme would take us in the direction of our ambitions and aspirations. If we really were to take control of the evolutionary process, that's what we'd do. But even if what we're doing, here on Earth, is mere recollection and recapitulation, what it's recollecting and recapitulating is the result of *natural* selection, where hopes and ambitions have to submit to the rigours of the struggle for existence. Would you like to see our successor species, Dr Carmichael? Would you like a glimpse into the future which awaits us, if we can't and don't take control of our own destiny?"

So it wasn't all lies, Carmichael thought. She didn't lie about the chimps. Aloud, he said: "Okay." He began to rise from his seat, but Franklin gestured him back again, before striding to the door.

"You can come in now, Mike," he said to someone waiting in another room. Apparently, the person he had spoken to was the man who had shot Carmichael back at the cabin, and he still had the gun in his hand, but he was no longer wearing the uniform to which he wasn't entitled. Presumably he had the gun ready because the creature which was with him wasn't under any kind of restraint, although it seemed quite docile. It walked through the doorway ahead of the man, and stood there staring at Carmichael. There was curiosity in its stare, but no apparent malice.

It was about five feet tall, and it walked more like a man than a chimp, although it was round-shouldered. Its features were vaguely Neanderthal – pronounced brow-ridges, bull-neck, peculiar teeth visible behind rubbery lips – but it wasn't hairy. Its hide bore only the faintest resemblance to that of a rhinoceros, but Carmichael could see how Lucy Vollman had made the connection. It was thick and tough and dark. It reminded Carmichael of the rubbery suits they used to make in Hollywood when they had to dress some luckless actor up as a thing from outer space. The hide was smooth, and there were no external genitalia – only a shapeless fold of skin that just might have been a natural codpiece. The creature's eyes were very narrow, with slit-like pupils, more like a snake's than a man's.

Carmichael and the creature looked one another over for a couple of minutes. Carmichael had to make an effort to still the beating of his anxious heart as that alien gaze bore into him, but the thing that had been a chimpanzee seemed quite relaxed.

"That's okay, Steve," said Abel, with a faint grin teasing the corners of his mouth. "You and Mike can go get dinner now." He looked at the man, so that Carmichael would know that he'd been tempted to a false conclusion when Franklin spoke earlier. "Mike" was actually the ex-chimp. As if to underline the point, Abel added: "Thanks, Mike."

The monster nodded, gestured with his oddly slender fingers, and turned away.

"He's really pretty bright," said Abel. "We thought at first his IQ had gone down rather steeply, but he was probably just confused. Of course, we don't know what he might have been capable of if he'd been born into a community in the normal way. He's in an anomalous situation; it's as if he were a feral child brought into a society of aliens. Maybe his kind have the potential for speech; maybe he'd be very smart indeed if he hadn't spent most of his life as an ape — we're not sure. Without trying the process on a human being — preferably a baby — we'll probably never be sure, but somehow I don't think we'd get the experiment past an ethics committee, do you?"

"Just because you switched on a few quiet genes," said Carmichael, "it doesn't mean that you're looking into the evolutionary future. That's just a freak — it doesn't mean a thing."

"That's possible," Abel conceded. "But on the other hand, Mike and his two companions have certain traits which are not uninteresting, and far from useless. That skin of his may not be what the fashionable demigod is wearing this year, but it's one hell of a tough tegument. It's a far more effective shield than your skin or mine against all kinds of harmful radiation, against barrier-transmissible poisons of the class which includes many of our best nerve-gases, and against most common-or-garden instruments of assault. It won't necessarily stop a bullet, but it's at least as good as the army-issue flak-jacket we took from your sergeant. As for things which do manage to get inside, one way or another... well, Mike has a truly ferocious immune system. It doesn't come without cost, of course. As far as we can tell, Mike ages at least fifty per cent faster than his old self — more than twice as fast as you or I — but while he lives nothing much can touch him. As I say, we don't really have much of an idea of how intelligent he'd be if his mental potential were fully-developed, but *physically* he's a lot closer to the superman than we are."

It wasn't difficult to see where the argument was pointing. "The sort of people our remote descendants might become," Carmichael said, "given the right — or do I mean wrong? — environment. Civilization cracked apart, no longer able to sustain its productive base; soils poisoned by pollution; cancer and mutation rates running riot; decimation by plagues; war, war and more war. Back to the stone age, with all kinds of added hazards."

"That's an oversimplified view," Franklin put in scrupulously. "It's possible, you see, that *Homo sapiens* was always an aberration, a dead-end sideline. Maybe the sequence was supposed to run from the guys that were common ancestors to the chimps and ourselves more-or-less straight through to people like Mike. That's one of the neat little touches to the jigsaw hypothesis, you see — the picture you'd get on any particular world would build up differently, depending on the order in which you put the pieces in, and the opportunities there are for fitting in pieces which don't actually belong in the final, completed puzzle. In the end, though, there's only one satisfactory answer."

"I don't believe that," Carmichael said. "We're on the threshold of taking charge of our own evolution.

If we can only become competent genetic engineers, we can become anything we want to be — including demigods."

"The question," said Abel, "is whether we can cross that threshold before the whole edifice comes crashing down around our ears. My guess is — and I speak from bitter experience — that we'll be burned out before that happens. My guess is that the whole fucking human species is burned out like a dying leper, and that the plague war is just one of a host of symptoms... just one of a whole horde of marauding horsemen of the Apocalypse."

"So what do you want to do?" said Carmichael, spitting the words out. "Found a colony of Mikes, hiding out from the end of the human world?"

"Pretty much," said Abel, unperturbed by the sarcasm. "I know it takes a lot more swallowing than an aspirin, but all you need is time to think it through. All those backwoods morons who think they're survivalists have got the right idea but they don't have the means or the will to carry it through. Given the opportunity, we just might. All we need is a couple of million dollars' worth of equipment, and some real security. When I say *real*, I mean *really* real. We want in on the bunker culture, Dr Carmichael. We want a place in the best bolt-hole in the world. And we want you to persuade the people that matter that we deserve it."

"What makes you think that I'm in a position to do that?" Carmichael asked.

"We don't know that you are. In a way, we hope that maybe you aren't — quite. But you and I once worked in the same building, although you probably don't remember. I was an outsider, working along very speculative lines, but you were an insider even then. You may be lower down the totem pole than you like, but you know where the ladders are, and how to buy yourself a slot. I'm doing you a favour, and I think you'll be able to see that when you've had time to think it over. I'm well up to date with my reports, by the way — it's just that I haven't been filing them for a while. Nothing really worthwhile was lost in the fire. As I say, we had advance warning that something of the sort was due to happen. But if your people want to see my reports, they'll have to come up with an offer we like. I'm not just going to hand them over — and the best bits are staying right in here." He tapped the side of his head.

Carmichael thought of saying something along the lines of "You're crazy," but he knew there'd be no point. Everybody was crazy these days. Instead, he sighed, and said: "Where exactly are we?"

Abel smiled. In fact, they all smiled. They thought they were winning. Perhaps they were. He'd have to think it over — but in the meantime, there was nothing to do but play along. He'd got what he came for, and he'd have time enough to think about what he actually wanted, and what it might be possible to get.

When Carmichael got back to the hotel he found Sergeant Andrews in a very bad mood: bitterly embarrassed and even more bitterly angry. There were two local detectives with him, but his own men were wisely keeping their distance.

"They jumped me," he explained awkwardly.

"There were three, I think – but they shouldn't have got close."

"Survivalists," said one of the detectives. "They're trained, and they probably knew the territory. They were probably after the gun, the night-sight and the flak-jacket rather than the money-belt, but of course they took that too. You'd think you'd be safe inside the city limits, but nobody is – not these days."

"It wasn't complacency," said Andrews. Carmichael didn't doubt it for a second. "Doc, I need to take a couple of the men..."

"That wouldn't be a good idea," said the second detective swiftly.

"No," said Carmichael, "I don't suppose it would. I'm sorry, sergeant, but I can't do that. We don't have the time. We have to go back east tonight."

Andrews looked genuinely surprised. "But, Doc...!" he protested. He was too good a man to say anything about the girl in front of the local men, but his eyes spoke volumes.

"I'm sorry," said Carmichael again, before turning to the policemen. He assured them that there'd be no problems, that it would all be left to them – but that Washington would be in touch again if they couldn't make progress. He added a remark to the effect that if civil society really had broken down to the extent that was apparent, it might be time to consider martial law. The cops' grins turned into half-scowls as they caught his implications, but they left without starting any argument.

"It's okay," said Carmichael, raising his hand as Andrews opened his mouth to speak. "I'll take the responsibility for the equipment and the money. I'll tell them that I recklessly ordered you into a dangerous situation against your better judgment, and that I told Kravitz to stay behind, leaving you without back-up. Your superiors will be only too happy to blame it all on some dumb-ass scientist."

Andrews looked uncertain.

"I don't want the local police asking too many questions," Carmichael added. "I don't want them to know that I found the girl. She's scared of the people who burned down the labs, and she doesn't trust the police. I can't blame her."

"You saw her?" Andrews seemed surprised.

Carmichael nodded. "I looked for you outside," he lied, "but I couldn't hang around to search the bushes. Anyhow, I saw the girl again – and two of the other people who worked up at the labs. I got a full enough account of what was going on – full enough to make up into a passable report. That's all we're here for. Given the way things are around here, I'd like to get back home as soon as humanly possible – know what I mean?"

The sergeant still looked uncertain, but he nodded again. He felt the back of his head, where he'd been hit. "Feels like enemy territory," he said. "I mean, this is the USA, right? We're supposed to be on the same fucking side."

"Things are falling apart," said Carmichael sympathetically. "So many people are dying that the infrastructure is collapsing. It's not safe to drink the tap-water, and they can't even keep the TV networks going. Sheer cultural inertia is all that's holding the Union in place, and the barbarians are at the gates, looting, pillaging and burning. The survivalists might



be just a little bit ahead of their time; the war of all against all could be just about about to begin."

"Hell," said the sergeant, "I never thought to see it in my lifetime – leastways, not unless the nukes started falling. But I guess that could happen too, if we ever figure out just who it is that's attacking us. If things go on the way they are..."

"They'll have contingency plans back in Washington," said Carmichael. "In Washington, they have contingency plans for everything. That's the place to be, when the going gets tough. Let's get back there as soon as we can, hey?"

The sergeant stood up. "I'll tell the men. How soon d'you want to hit the road?"

"I've got nothing else to do here," Carmichael told him. "I can be ready in an hour."

"You look a little rough," Andrews observed. "Not as rough as me, but rough enough."

"Lack of sleep," said Carmichael, although his fingers came up reflexively to touch the wound on his chest where the anaesthetic dart had hit him. "It doesn't matter. I'll catch a little in the back of the lorry, once we're on the road to the airfield."

The sergeant nodded, and went to the door. As he

opened it, he looked back. "This really was a wild goose chase, wasn't it?" he asked. "There was nothing here to find – we were just sent out here to put up some kind of show."

"I'm afraid so," said Carmichael consciencelessly.

"Sending us out on a job like that was a pretty stupid thing to do, wasn't it?" said Andrews. "Considering how ugly things are getting."

"I guess it was –" Carmichael was already beginning to think hard about how much of what Abel and Franklin had told him was really believable, and how much was likely to be lies – and what, in any case, he ought to tell his superiors back east. It was a difficult puzzle, with many facets, but he had every confidence that in due course he would find the best way to fit the pieces together. The best way, that is, for *him*. As he had just told Sergeant Andrews, the war of all against all was just about to begin.

Andrews was still looking at him, and he realized that he had let the last sentence dangle, as though he were about to follow it up with some profound remark. "But things could get uglier yet," he added regretfully. "A whole lot uglier."

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- 37, July 1990 – Bear, Brooke, Egan, Lee, Stross, etc.
- 38, Aug. 1990 – special Aldiss issue, Bear, Stableford, etc.
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Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

If, like my local, you get the stock code wrong and inadvertently order a dumpbin full of unshiftable novelizations, you can actually treat yourself to Fred Saberhagen's Francis Ford Coppola's James V. Hart's **Bram Stoker's Dracula**. For a project that takes its progenitor's name so visibly in vain, that's an awful lot of dead weight above the line, and it's not surprising the poor old Count lumbers up to his near-centenary a touch overdressed for the occasion. Risible, overblown tack, not a doubt; but full to squelching with weird fascinations, not least of which now has been the global public's eager compliance in the whole enterprise. I watched with a paying audience, and was amazed to see it was 70% female – mainly parties of two to four women in their twenties, with occasionally a solitary outnumbered male in tow. Somewhere, amid all the humiliations heaped on Stoker by this bloated corpse of a narrative bearing his name, something's certainly managed to hit an unusually juicy and untapped vein.

Overall, what Hart's script does with Stoker, disastrously inappropriate though it is in some essentials and deplorably misguided on many matters of detail, still has a lot more to commend it than what Coppola and his merry troupe of muggers do with Hart. As with his *Hook*, Jim V.'s made a screenplay that positively sweats with respect and sympathy for his literary source, and that bravely assumes a similar depth of familiarity from its audience in its attempt to shed the skins of earlier film versions and return to the source made fresh – only to drop tailgate and tip in a steaming hundredweight of home-made added ingredient, with a perverted view to making the resulting stew more conventionally appetizing to a mainstream Hollywood palate. In *Hook*, it was the redemptive power of fathering; and in *Dracula*, of course, it's Love Never Dies, the undying passion of Mr & Mrs Wlad across the barriers of time, continents, death, everlasting damnation, sexual and dietary habits, and uproariously ill-fitting accents.

Some of the transplant actually does take reasonably well (particularly the tradition of Lady Impaler's evocative suicide); some requires a stiff dose of suppressants ("I understood at last how our love could release us from the powers of darkness. Our love is stronger than death!"); and some, alas, simply pops all stitches and jumps out across the room on a seven-foot cartilaginous spring



Winona Ryder and Gary Oldman in 'Dracula'

(such as the unmarried Mina's apparent freedom to walk the West End streets of 1897 unchaperoned, picking up swarthy strangers with whom to invent the back-row-of-the-cinematograph experience).

Indeed, Hart's at his consistent worst when his improvements to Stoker require him to tangle with the intricacies of Victorian manners, of which he seems

to have no measurable grasp, and where he seems compelled to respell the novel's social and sexual subtexts in enormous red block capitals. To convey the notion that Lucy Westenra is a bit of a goer, Stoker simply had her flirt in a rather mild way with a trio of tasty suitors; Hart has her leaf with Mina through illustrated unabridged Burtons, tease her beaux with music-hall double-entendres

about the size of their equipment, and drop her night-drawers on a cold tombstone for some frenzied legover with the beastly prince of the damned. And it's particularly unfortunate that this, of course, is exactly the kind of material that Coppola plays up in his turn. No place for sublimated eroticism here, or indeed sublimated anything: it's all tits-out, nipple-slurping, four-in-a-bed romps. Ironically, this is a *Dracula* that arguably ends up saying more about sexuality and its discontents at the turn of the millennium than its eloquent model ever did for the turn of the century.

But there are incontestably fine things here too, particularly where Hart's gone back to images, episodes and ideas neglected in the screen *Dracula* tradition: the Count crawling round his castle, the crates of earth, the novel's memorably strange and haunting obsession with transfusion scenes (complete with the original dodgy late-Victorian haematology). The log of the *Demeter*, one of the sheerly creepiest bits of the book, has for once been succinctly and beautifully transferred; and Stoker's fascination with modernity in technology and thought – Lucy's typewriter, Seward's phonograph, the medical use of hypnosis – has been picked up with fidelity and flair. This is certainly the first version of the novel to capture its remarkable Doylean sense of the exuberant mixture of science and pseudoscience that hung in the intellectual air of the age: "mesmerism, electromagnetism, materialization of astral bodies" are Van Helsing's examples of phenomena not yet understood. It's also, of course, the first version to make any attempt to transfer the book's complex, but masterly, epistolary and documentary polyphony, even at the price of deliberately violating some of the most sacred unwritten laws of cinematic narrativity. It'd be hard to claim the babel of voiceovers exactly "works," but it comes over less completely odd than it ought.

What Coppola thought he was up to, though, is anyone's surmise. Nobody could deny the movie's, erhm, stylistic bravura, and the undoubted strength and originality of its Steranko-guided images. But this is strictly Ken Russell territory, the unfailingly watchable but ghastly drivellings of genius, and it's been won at the cost of appalling sacrifices of plot, pace, and especially performance. Muffled climaxes, confusions or ellipses of motive and detail, and impenetrable portentous proclamations ("We've all become God's madmen – all of us!") clog the storytelling throughout, particularly in the final scenes; while as an anthology of world's worst film performances there has surely never been a single movie in which so many fine reputations have been so thoroughly unmade by such a relentless programme of miscasting, joke accents, and heavily-salted hamming.

The Harkers come off marginally worst, principally because Reeves and Ryder have each made the lonely decision to underplay severely and work terribly hard on inflection ("Heaugh's yeowr ecksint getting aoghn?" "Nawght tough well, Aigh'm afreaghd"), while all about

them are energetically campaigning by example for the immediate institution of a coarse Oscar. There's a terrible virtuosity about it all, that virtuoso terribleness that belongs only to the genuinely gifted as they self-immolate. It's a real shame, because a lot of the ingredients for the great 90s *Dracula* are undeniably here: an often clever and imaginative rereading of Stoker (though it's got to be said that words like "clever" and "imaginative" undergo an automatic currency devaluation at the border into Hollywood, and any serious comparison of this stuff with the likes of Aldiss's *Dracula Unbound* or Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* would frankly trigger the collapse of language as we know it), a firm but relatively discreet acknowledgement of the inescapable AIDS metaphors, and an acceptance of the need to absorb into the *Dracula* myth the new versions and new ambiguities that have emerged in vampire fiction over the last two decades. *Bram Stoker's* isn't that *Dracula* by a long chalk – I suspect it would need something very close to Merchant Ivory – but at least it's made ready a convenient bandwagon for such otherwise improbable upcomers as Neil Jordan's *Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire* and Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. And best of all, now everyone knows who wrote the book.

Apropos, a much less conspicuous credit, carefully interred in the end titles of *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*, awards "Special Recognition to Kit Reed for The Attack of the Giant Baby." It's pleasing to ponder what bloodied intricacies of savage legal trench warfare lie behind that marvellously grit-toothed phrase "Special Recognition," but I'll vow they weren't any too pretty. Given the *Honey* films' origins with the renegade nucleus of the fondly-remembered Empire Pictures – unchallenged mid-eighties masters of well-made, witty, cheap'n'cheerful video-oriented genre amusements – it's hard to be sympathetic to Disney's creative-rights lawyers here. The contract clearly specified bigger-but-otherwise-much-the-same sequel to unassuming family comedy about bringing up nutty boffin father; and it's been filled with exactly the kind of competent professionalism ("okay, we'll do War of the Colossal Tyke That Ate Vegas") that automatically looks to the pool of public-domain ideas for its material. If they'd actually wanted *Honey, I Turned the Dog to Antimatter* or *Honey, I Mutated the Social Worker*, or *Honey, I Projected the Entire Neighborhood into a Parallel Universe in Which President Ciccone Had My Love Child*, they'd never have got into the mess in the first place.

But even with fairly low expectations, this is disappointing stuff. Despite its resolve to go for enlargement across the board (corporate politics replace domestic, crossing the lawn gives way to taking out Vegas), an odd feature of the sequel is the large number of points in the script where expensive effect scenes appear to have been dropped from the budget and replaced at short notice by reported narration: "He put your son and the

babysitter in his pocket and left!"; "He grabbed the truck!" – "What did he do with it?" – "What do you think he did with it?"; &c. Moranis, meanwhile, who presumably had more control on this pass, is regrettably required to be notably less nerdy, and there's a rather depressing attempt throughout to present positive images of twerpitude in father and son alike. ("I guess the world needs people who are *different*," opines the babe upon her extrication from jeopardy: "people who see things differently, you might say.") A great majority of the jokes don't really go off, the title's an inexcusable cheat, and it goes without saying that the actual plot is constructed from kit to a standard-package blueprint for a Disney family comedy – down to the full portfolio of one adult, one early-teen, and one child character and plotline to capture the maximum range of audience sectors.

This, as it turns out, is frankly optimistic; I watched this one with a paying audience too (a Saturday toddlers' matinee, which is just about right if you don't mind the youngest ones tending to sing along on auto every time Moranis breaks into Twinkle Twinkle) and I didn't hear a whisper of chuckle at the admittedly lamentable Rosebud joke. Still, there's still some of the first film's agreeable deadpan of dialogue and situation in the face of spiralling absurdity ("Wayne Szelinsky, you unshrink those policemen right now!"; "It's a helicopter – and it looks like a giant stuffed animal of some sort hanging from it!"); and I was quite pleasantly surprised by the Kid, who though insufferably cute and impossibly sunny-tempered in comparison with any normal 150-foot two-year-old is well directed and well observed throughout. You do have to put up with big holes in the logic, some unfortunate humour about Yugoslavia, much implanted father-son stuff about Dad's worthiness as a role model when he's a head-to-toe drongo from Mars, and some matching boy-girl stuff about how you compete for the lips of major babes without the assistance of looks, charisma, or personality. (A: catch her from falling 150 feet to certain death, whereupon she will announce "This is for saving my life" and give you a discreet taste of her lip gloss. Try it, guys! It really works!)

But much of the time it does manage to be funnier than you'd expect, and in the end it's only its very low ambition that prevents it from getting far out of the gate. You'd imagine that somewhere between *Dracula* and *Honey*, between "I shall rise from my own death to avenge hers with all the powers of darkness!" (subtitled, from the putative medieval Romanian) and "Remember we told you kids never to tell anyone you got accidentally shrunk and lost for two days?", there might be room for some mid-reach – for a new take on old material that falls somewhere between the extremes of obesely high camp and anorexically low concept. But the suspicion lingers that the Hollywood machine is shipped with just two factory presets.

(Nick Lowe)

Icon Speedway

John Clute

Into the pot of many colours of the sf of the latter days, once more Paul J. McAuley dips a sly palette, but this time he pulls out his thumb. His fourth novel, *Red Dust* (Gollancz, £15.99), which is his best by far, takes place on a Mars as full of reflections of the fictions of the past as any Christmas ornament, and tells a story whose profound (though ultimately subversive) orthodoxy serves as a remarkably sustained homage to the sf tale which lay at the heart of the genre in America for half a century. It is the story of the orphan who becomes king, and changes the world, into Camelot or Trantor. It is the story that Gene Wolfe – McAuley parodies him with loving intensity in a couple of passages – transfigured into the tale of Severian in *The Book of the New Sun*, at which point it was possible to think the story could not be told any longer in a new voice; certainly not (as in this book) in the guise of a Western set on Mars, starring Billy the Kid.

Red Dust, which is set half a millennium hence on a Mars long under Chinese hegemony, is indeed new only in the dazzlement of the web of trope it quotes. It is the story of a very young man named Wei Lee, whose nickname is Billy, and to whom things happen like magic (as they do in fables). He is haunted by half-memories of his long-dead parents, the mystery of whose disappearance (and true nature) turns out to be pivotal to any understanding of the history of the planet; he crisscrosses Mars on a variety of trusty steeds in search of the knowledge of self which will transform everything, and manages en route to acquire a plethora of enablement icons, all of which turn out to be essential to his quest (and to any understanding of late-genre sf). These icons include an ever-growing cadre of deeply loyal companions; weapons galore; new martial arts; an assortment of virtual-reality eidolons (among them a librarian who searches cyberspace for helpful tidbits); a secret-sharer warrior-sister within the skin (like Severian's Thecla) who turns out to be profoundly that; an aspect of Elvis Presley who abides in virtual reality but who makes live broadcasts throughout the solar system, espousing (as the real Elvis never did) revolution; a pharmacopoeia of "totipotent fullerene viruses" which seed his brain and body with healants, strengtheners, brighteners, enhancers, little Plot Solvents of the Haloed Nanotechnology beavering away like the Neoplatonic angels who comprise molecular space in order to one-bound-free the hero of the various rite-of-passage scrapes and wounds and little deaths to which 1990s godlings are heir before they are permitted to assume the burden of dicing the quick and feasting the dead at the terminus of the book. And the more he

learns, and the more harumscarum seems his course onward, the more it becomes obvious (to us and to those he meets) that his true nature is being unravelled as he travels, that he is a holy innocent or bodhisattva, that his arrival at the goal is inevitable, that the old Emperor/King/Pa/God will be identified and dissolved in a great dying cry down the scars and the screeches of epiphany space into Death.

To say all of this is not to mock *Red Dust*. There may be echoes of the innumerable past futures of old sf throughout: Leigh Brackett and all the other creators of the Martian planetary romance; Cordwainer Smith (for "When the People Fell"); Greg Bear (for partials) and Wolfe (for aquastors, here called eidolons, and for chilling *segués*, which one passage can demonstrate: "Perhaps the Great House was great indeed, its rooms and corridors extending through time as well as space, so that if Lee walked out of this room he might find himself returned to his childhood. And then he had the strange idea that if he walked out into the garden he would find his parents, and for some reason that filled him with terror."). And there may be a powerful sense that McAuley is a full participant – along with Geoff Ryman (whose Consensus he invokes in passing), Ian McDonald and Colin Greenland and Robert Charles Wilson and Kim Stanley Robinson – in the agape of the new sf, whose banquet is the old.

His default imagery may run – like theirs – from Mad Max and cyberpunk and the various enticements of Abyss Frenzy so common to writers at the edge of millennium, on up to the daft totalizing epiphanies which are equally common to last chapters of books crafted in the latter days of genre. And he may indulge in the occasional writers'-workshop-style schtick: for instance, by reversing chapters 68 and 69, and papering over the gap at the beginning of chapter 70, he nicely demonstrates the workshop gimmick which has been coined (today) the Milford Twitch – a Cunning Plan through which the author "hooks" readers by starting a narrative sequence with a brightly-lit flash-forward into *medias res*, but then has to catch up afterwards with a sentence, or a passage, or a chapter of flash-back to set the scene, and then has to jump

over the point where the hook section would have fit, perfectly naturally, in the first place, and then has to start all over a *third* time with *another* sentence or passage which tells readers that what feels to them like a missing section is indeed a missing section. But the Cunning Plan is a passing foible, and the web of echoes is the sea a modern sf writer swims in.

What distinguishes the McAuley of *Red Dust* from the McAuley of the previous books, and from most of his contemporaries, is the glad speed and brio of the telling. It is as though, in this pellmell book, he had at last found his novel voice, the tessitura pace at which he can act out the tale, without grimacing. And this may be essential. It may be the case that voice, for Paul J. McAuley, is far more a matter of momentum than for most writers, that until the speed of telling blurs the calculus of rhetoric, he remains a bachelor at the agape, a UK joker grinning too slyly at the papier-mâché podiums of the Yanks; slightly flummoxed by the fractal selves the mirror informs on. In *Red Dust*, speed has a further function, too. It's what the filmmaker Norman McLaren famously said about animation. Animation, he said, wasn't a question of "drawings-that-move," but of "movements-that-are-drawn." In *Red Dust*, it isn't a question of icons-that-move, but of a web-of-echoes-that-are-drawn. Who can tell the icon from the tale?

There are passing pleasures as well. The Chinese hegemony grants us a protagonist of a different grain; the Western overlay is performed with love and dispatch; the long-defeated Yankees hilariously occupy, in the main city, what looks very much like Chinatown; Elvis is not quite the usual bloat of gas, though McAuley doesn't quite manage to answer the question so many of us have been asking, timidly, for years, *sotto voce*, of Elvis-invoking contemporary sf writers: *Why Elvis?* Why not any of the hundred or so almost infinitely more interesting composer-performers of the last thirty years? I mean, in one song, "Graceland," even the smooth-faced Paul Simon *said* and *sang* more about America and life and death and the future and the past than Elvis did in twenty years of overdose crooning. But the main pleasure is the chase, for *Red Dust* is like a game; but it is better than any game, because it is impossible to lose it.

It could not be said that **Slightly Off Center: Eleven Extraordinarily Exhilarating Tales** (Swan Press, \$9.50) was the best or fullest possible introduction to the work of Neal Barrett Jr. Too much of the book is made up of semi-barbaric yawps about sex and death and drink and deliquescence, tales and sequences set in Texas and environs which evoke but do not match the stone thanatopsical glee of *The Hereafter Gang* (1991). "Buckstop" (new here) and "Deviations" (1988) are extremely funny, true enough, and instinct with mortality; but they do not reflect anything like the full technical range of Barrett's work. "Tony Red Dog" (1989) – about an Indian in the Mafia – is on the other hand absolutely competent, though it sounds too much like Richard Condon's *Prizzi* novels to stand quite alone.

"A Day at the Fair" (1981), which is set on the usual colony planet, is like James Tiptree Jr without the sexual anguish or the deathliness: a constantly evolving storyline featuring lots of characters and unpacking itself in sly whumps. "Uteropolis II" (new here) is like Barry Malzberg pretending to be as cheerful as Tiptree at the height of her tropic for death, and fooling us, for a bit. And "The Last Cardinal Bird in Tennessee" (first published here) is a superbly savage grand guignol playlet about the near future. What one remembers mainly is the exuberance, and the razor-sharp intimacy of the assumption of the voices of others, the sense of something large and raucous and imperfectly bound sitting somewhere within, like a bomb. *Slightly Off Center* is a sampler, and presents fragments and odd tales and other material unlikely to be found elsewhere (none of the author's most famous short work appears here, and will presumably occupy any future collection from a trade press), and should be bought. The only problem is that Barrett is a burly man, and a bit of a shouter, and a writer of very loud author's notes (in the true and terrible tradition of the sf presentation of self in everyday life), and almost elbows this smallish volume into tatters.

Harvey Jacobs's new book, **Beautiful Soup: A Novel for the 21st Century** (Celadon Press, \$12.95), reads like timeslip. It is as though a wise person from an age long past had awoken in 1993, saw that certain awfulnesses from the years of his youth were still visible, to his sensitized eye, in the cauldrons of becoming, and sat down to chivvy the world for tolerating them still. What *Beautiful Soup* tells us is that – as was, once upon a time, discovered – it is dehumanizing to treat people as though they were identical with the labels – here called Bar Codes – used to describe them for

administrative purposes. (This is more or less what Hannah Arendt once defined as Eichmann's Law.) What *Beautiful Soup* also tells us is that big business and politics stalk hand in hand; that computers – the main one in the novel is a singleton called the Prime Mother Computer, which is kept at a hidden location, and which determines the status of every individual from the moment of birth – should not be treated as gods; and that psychiatry tends to the sham.

It is a book, in other words, whose thematic contents no longer contribute to the flow of imaginative thought in the world of sf, except as warp and woof. Which is not to say that it is no longer a bad thing to dehumanize folk with Code Bars, or irrelevant to read the runes of power, or wrong to address the tendency of the modern world insufficiently to differentiate between computers and wombs, or foolish to mock hydraulic metaphors for the rancorous jostles of self within the skull. It is to say that modern sf writers no longer address these issues through novels in which Candide-like guys who thought they were safe suddenly lose their status and fall by comic-inferno stages through archaicized admass torments into the depths but find love at the end. *Beautiful Soup*, in other words, is a geezer.

It is also marvellous. The simplicity of its imaginative message allows Jacobs – an extremely sophisticated writer, and the author of *The Egg of the Glak* (1969) – to tell his tale with a strange megaphonic austerity whose effect is both comic and resonant, urgently bald. He may have relatively little new to report, but nothing said can be forgotten. Some of the jokes are Vonnegutish; or reminiscent of Terry Southern. The New York discernible through the veils of timeslip has more to do with Philip Roth than Frederik Pohl, though both consort. But the central voice, like a megaphone, is fixating, dominant, ancient-mariner. In this voice, the antique plot buzzes with energy: the protagonist loses his A+ coding when he trips in a supermarket and is fortuitously recoded as a brand of Pea Soup; his father-in-law, a businessman about to run for President, shuffles him into a sanatorium, from which he descends to a penitentiary called Millhaus, and then to a circus. The language has perfect poise and an almost lubricious clarity; the story shouts, contorts, aims arrows, pirouettes and slams and does a dance. The protagonist is a vacancy, but with a great mouth.

Beautiful Soup cannot be faulted for a thing it tells us, though nothing it tells us is remotely innovative; what cannot be forgotten – what makes the book worth reading and rereading – is the whiplash presence of the telling. It is enough that from its narrow ledge of

utterance, from its different drum, a work of art does the world.

(John Clute)

Born to Run Wendy Bradley

Delighted as I am that there is actually a decent rock song involving someone called Wendy, I have always been suspicious of the sentiments involved. Not that, in certain moods, I don't fancy myself on a motorbike chasing a runaway American dream and all that: I'm just not keen on someone who wants to "guard your dreams and visions." Well, thanks, Bruce, but I rather think I'll guard my own. There are too many stories where the male viewpoint "guards" the world's dreams and visions (the male view treated as being normal, the female as abnormal, the story telling us what women ought to want) and not enough where women get to share a few unguarded visions of their own. Yes lads, you can stop reading right now because Fiona Cooper's **The Empress of the Seven Oceans** (Black Swan, £5.99) isn't aimed at you at all.

It is a roistering romp of a pirate tale but a purely female romp: in a 17th-century England – unsafe for any independent woman while the witchfinders are on the prowl – a pair of lesbian lovers, a stray nun, some kids, a circus acrobat, a couple of fearsome old battleaxes and a dancing bear steal a ship and follow a haughty mermaid to Atlantis. The world of the book is one where witchcraft works and is a force for good and where women really can live happily ever after. More engaging when the women are being independent in a credible way than in the wilder flights of hippiedom, nevertheless it's a groovy old page turner.

Well, OK, you have to be in the mood, I'll give you that.

A woman hero features too, as you would expect from the series title, in Book II of *The Taliswoman*, **Seed upon the Wind** by Carole Nelson Douglas (Tor, \$19.95). This is an interesting enough parallel-world story where the hero is a lady reporter who blunders back into the world of Veil and attempts to return the magical object, the Cup of Earth, she acquired in her previous visit. Along the way she teaches Rowan, the red-headed m.c.p. male lead, about taekwondo, sexual equality and plain old sex. She also finds an etherion pit, etherion being a lighter-than-air metal used to build aircraft rather in the manner of cavorite, and develops a theory that pollution from our world is also polluting Veil and creating its population of "little-lost," lost children frozen in size but

not development. Enjoyable enough but a bit middle-of-trilogy.

On the other hand **Xanadu**, edited by Jane Yolen (Tor, \$21.95), is a bit beginning-of-series, the first of what is described as a "prestigious anthology series." I am still undecided about this: just as the short story brings out all science fiction's strengths and hides its weaknesses (strange worlds versus cardboard characters) it can seem to do the opposite for fantasy, where the worlds are familiar but the characters should be new. This volume demonstrates this to perfection in "The Poacher" by Ursula Le Guin, a fine but minor piece tangential to the Sleeping Beauty story where we are all utterly familiar with where the story takes place and what the surroundings mean but can delight in the mind-set of the character who stumbles into the bramble hedge before the prince is due. The anthology is strong on big names even if some of them here only contribute small stories – Lisa Tuttle's easy-to-predict ghost story "Lucy Maria" and Tanith Lee's slight demon's-daughter story "Unnalash."

If second person stories are your particular bugbear you should avoid the two in this volume. In "To Scale" by Nancy Kress you are a boy with a macabre fascination for dolls' houses and in "Still Life with Woman and Apple" by Leslea Newman you climb into a painting of Lilith and Eve and strike a pose. The weakest contribution of all seems to me Stephen K. Brust's "Attention Shoppers," a remarkably undergraduate piece of verse not worth page-room.

However there are some substantial stories which make the volume worth its cover price, particularly Pamela Dean's splendid "Owlswater" about an apprentice magician's quest, and Eleanor Arnason's "The Hound of Merin" about an outcast in a society of warrior tribes. Arnason is apparently working on a novel set in the same society, and on the evidence of "The Hound of Merin" I will look out for the novel with anticipation. The best contributions, however, are short, sharp and perfectly hit their mark: Esther M. Friesner's chilling "Baby Face" about the effect of seeing the world with new eyes – eyes treated with fairy ointment provided by fairies who are the fairies of the old myths, feral and heartless – and William Stafford's poem "It Comes Lightly Out of the Sea" which deserves to become a classic.

Tad Williams and Nina Kiriki Hoffman's **Child of an Ancient City** (Legend, £7.99) is a lightweight cross between the *Arabian Nights* and *Dracula*, as a group of benighted Baghdad travellers fend off a vampyr with a story-telling contest. A mood piece mostly, well written but not at all to my taste.

It's a couple of hundred pages before you realize that Roger Taylor's **Farnor** (Headline, £16.99) isn't going to go anywhere. It is an absorbing, detailed and utterly convincing story but the gentle pace of the start peters out altogether midway, as if Taylor had been offered a series contract half way through the writing so had held off from a conclusion.

Farnor is the name of a person, a young farmer, who lives in a valley so cut off from the world it is years since the king's tithe has been collected. A sheep-worrying animal, a local lout with rudimentary magic and a band of mercenaries masquerading as the tithe-gatherers join to change everyone's life but particularly Farnor's when he finds he has rudimentary magic powers of his own which will, presumably, develop in volume two. Soon, please.

Finally, someone should try guarding the dreams and visions of Mike Jefferies, particularly in the area of character naming – you really can't call your hero "Denso" and expect to get away with it. In **Hidden Echoes** (Grafton, £8.99) Harry Murmers, a New York publisher, Denso Alburton, a fantasy writer, and Mya Capthorne, an environmental scientist, are kidnapped into a world full of clocks where time is, apparently, started and stored. It is explained to them that the Earth – aka "Paradise"! – was set apart from the other worlds at the beginning so that there would be one perfect, balanced world. Cracks in reality are opening up and various dragons, warlords and mythical monsters are falling through to Earth for a grandstand, Godzilla-vs-the-tank-corps, whoops-we've-all-read-H.G. Wells ending. Jefferies sure can make 'em up. If only he could make 'em half-way credible.

(Wendy Bradley)

Greg Bear's Fantasy Chris Gilmore

Owing to a switch between publishers the two halves of this book, *The Infinity Concerto* and *The Serpent Mage*, were released in 1988 under the shadow of the much inferior *Eon* (brought out by Gollancz). In an afterword written for this edition, the author expresses his pleasure that they are now presented as a single volume, a pleasure I share almost as much as I deplore the clumsy and pretentious title.

Songs of Earth and Power by Greg Bear (Legend, £14.99 and £9.99) combines fantasy with an unusual degree of psychological realism, and concerns the adventures of Michael Perrin, an American teenager who is manipulated into

entering a most uncomfortable version of Faerie, Realm of the Sidhe. There he has forced upon him the role of pawn in a game played among many factions of powerful beings (human, semi-human, inhuman) who must operate according to laws they can't or won't explain. They set about "training" him, very harshly, in mental and magical disciplines (without saying what for of course). There is more than a hint of the analogous scenes on James Blish's *Jack of Eagles* – a book that has retained far more freshness than the better known *Cities in Flight* novels, incidentally. The upshot is that Michael is forced to grow up.

Here lies the principal virtue of the books. Michael's transition from "manchild" to man is depicted with extraordinary skill, which as a bonus confers reality on the context. The Sidhe Realm becomes believable because we see it through Michael's eyes, as he makes violent and sometimes heartbreaking contact not only with sundry malevolent entities of compulsive personality, but with the important concepts of sacrifice, atonement and obligation. Greg Bear is fascinated with the concept of a personality divided and recreated, often in incomplete form. Though this hasn't always worked to his advantage in other books, it becomes a vital element in Sidhe magic, which proves the ideal milieu for its deployment.

The first part ends with a fine set-piece cataclysm and Michael returns to Earth, but it is obvious that the story is far from over. The Realm is beset with moral and physical degeneracy, as the quasi-immortals who have been sustaining the whole artifice fall ever deeper into solipsism, ritual and accidie. When the collapse comes the Sidhe will be forced to return to their ancestral home – which is also ours. This provides the theme for the second half.

Here Bear ups the stakes even higher, and in two ways. First he has the chutzpah to introduce Mozart and Mahler as minor characters, then he prepares to tackle something almost unheard-of – the only parallel I know comes in the closing chapters of Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*. The usual practice in writing of this kind is to maintain the integrity of the two realms – intercourse between them is allowed, but they remain distinct. Here, the Realm of Faerie is collapsing, so its inhabitants, creatures of great force and potency as they are, take on the status of refugees to be integrated and assimilated, no matter how distasteful the process may be for all concerned. This cannot be done without reference to the Serpent Mage, the hidden ruler of Earth, the oldest of intelligent beings, only sporadically sane, and undisputed master on his own turf. (The location of that turf provides

an excellent joke, by the way.) Michael's newly acquired background and capabilities make him the only logical choice to negotiate with this most sinister entity, but he must also neutralize the upstart Isomage, sorely wounded and bitterly resentful of the pasting he took at the climax to the first part.

Greg Bear's imagination never deserts him as he works towards the climax, and nor does his vision of Michael, still a young man, permanently scared stiff of his own potential no less than that of his opponents, and, throughout the book, always looking for the sort of affection that is the proper concern of a young man. Altogether, this is a brilliantly conceived and executed novel, and I was greatly surprised to learn that in conception it was also Greg Bear's first.

My single grouse against the publisher is that the second half is full of ugly interpolations explaining to the reader references to the first half, a relic of the book's former condition as two volumes sold separately. Even then they were deplorable; no one has any business reading *The Serpent Mage* without reading *The Infinity Concerto* first, and now would have been a splendid opportunity to cut them; I'm sorry it hasn't been taken up.

(Chris Gilmore)

Juke Book Jury Jones & McIntosh

No, sf anthologies don't have to have a theme to sell, but presumably it helps, because "concept" collections keep on appearing. Latest in this sometimes illustrious (but not always) line is *In Dreams* (Gollancz, £4.99) edited by Paul McAuley and Kim Newman, and this time the concept is daringly specific. This is "the anthology of the 45 – a celebration of the 7-inch single." Hmm. Specific and ambitious.

The marketing angle on this one is shrewd. The CD rules, and the vinyl record is going the way of the buffalo but there are a lot of folk who mourn the passing of the 45 and its LP cousin. Aim an anthology at them and you can hope to pull in not just the sf-committed but many more punters besides. Of course, there's still that irritating little problem common to all original anthologies: where on earth are you going to find 27 brand-new stories that meet your editorial requirements? (And in this case this means hitting the bullseye at the centre of a 7-inch single spinning at 45 rpm.) The standard editorial answer to this question is, ring round the usual crew, see what they turn in, and then go with whatever you've got. With *In Dreams* that

means (mostly) some better-than-average stories but also an anthology which is a much broader-band celebration of music than the blurb promises – in fact a collection of sf, fantasy and horror stories with (mostly) a rock n' roll backdrop. Even so, it's a varied mix of stories that are rarely less than readable and often very rewarding.

Ian McDonald heads the book, something that almost seems mandatory with a British sf anthology these days. Normally this would be good news, but this McDonald story – or at very least its lead-off position – seems misplaced. Because if *In Dreams* is the world of rock 'n roll, then "Fat Tuesday" is the rock video, all slippery, shimmering images and very little substance – of course the prose portrait of a nasty near-future Rio is about as impressive as you'd expect, but the story itself is both thin and overwrought. Fortunately, thereafter the stories settle down and come on strong. "The Discovery of Running Bare" by Jonathan Carroll, apparently slight at first reading, manages to draw out of its slender threads an evocative piece about the unwitting shattering of dreams in small-town America. "Night Shift Sister" is an excellent example of the work of Nicholas Royle, a fine balance of surrealism and gritty, everyday urban hell. "Sticks" by Lewis Shiner scores with its persuasive depiction of obsession and recording studios. "Nyro Fiddles" by F. Paul Wilson seems at first no story at all – just a rather prosaic detailing of a recording session towards the end of the 60s. But Wilson captures and records a sense of a frozen moment in time that lingers in the memory and makes the story rather more than the sum of its parts. By contrast, "Digital to Analogue" by Alistair Reynolds is very much a horror story, and a genuinely scary one at that, as the narrator, on his way home from a rave, finds himself sucked into a very bad trip indeed. In our opinion, easily Reynolds's best story to date.

There are some surprises as well. Who would have had Stephen Baxter tagged for a closet Glenn Miller fan, for instance? "Weep for the Moon" reveals his knowledge of the bandleader to be verging on the encyclopedic. Somewhat off-centre from his usual hard-sf terrain, but still a very enjoyable read. "Bold as Love" finds Gwyneth Jones also well away from her usual haunts, in a post-punk virtual-reality nightclub explored in extravagant and compelling detail.

"Life in the Groove," on the other hand, is surprising only if you're not familiar with the work of Ian Watson, in which case it's probably completely mindblowing, an sf interpretation of the vinyl record which manages both to be very literal and yet totally off the wall. Imagine an entire world – entire civilizations, strung out along an

endless vinyl Grand Canyon, literally "in the groove." Like much of Watson's writing you'll either love or loathe it – we divided each way on this one – but he has to rate as one of sf's most inventive minds.

Of the remainder of the stories there are quite a few which make for satisfying reads as well as some which just don't work. Of the latter we'd have to single out Colin Greenland's routine "Candy Comes Back" and Lisa Tuttle's "Honey, I'm Home!", a laboured TV-becomes-real tale where the ending is telegraphed a long way before it comes and so is doubly unsatisfying. It's also a story which, so far as we could tell, has absolutely zero bearing on the music scene, let alone the 7-inch single, and therefore there is no convincing reason for its inclusion here. Equally tangential is "The Reflection Once Removed" by Scott Bradfield, which is slight but smoothly told.

However, most of the stories more than earn their shelf space, and the best is saved until last. In his introduction, veteran rock commentator Charles Shaar Murray remembers some of the great rock 'n roll crossover sf stories, amongst them, quite rightly, Bruce Sterling's "Dori Bangs." Ian R. MacLeod's improbably titled "Snodgrass" is "Dori Bangs" revisited, and that's meant as a compliment to both stories. But whereas "Dori Bangs" chronicled the might-have-been life of American rock writer Lester Bangs, MacLeod's story lifts John Lennon out of this world and puts him back in a life where no assassin's bullet awaits him because – well, read the story. Suffice to say that "Snodgrass," like "Dori Bangs," is funny, moving and sad, and written with a command of detail and character which confirms that Ian MacLeod is developing into one of Britain's strongest short-story writers, sf or otherwise.

The one thing that the book surely lacks (well, two things actually) is a story each from editors Newman and McAuley, both of whom might have been expected to deliver the full 7" goods on current form. Still, it scores as a pleasing, value-for-money collection with more hits than misses. Enough hits, indeed, to make it one of the stronger British original anthologies to be published in recent years. Ignore the hype, read the stories, and you won't go too far wrong with this – if you'll pardon the expression – sound anthology.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

Why not take out a
subscription to
Interzone as a gift to
a relative or friend?

Fascist Hero- Worship Trilogies, Not!

Philip Gladwin

The M62. Leeds city centre. A cottage in Devon with tired yellow walls. A pub in Finsbury Park. The stories in **The Sun Rises Red** edited by Christopher Kenworthy (Barrington, £3.95) are grounded in real life. There is simple prose, specific about everyday settings, producing an almost imperceptible dislocation. It does your heart good to see it.

Yet when I first looked at the book the high visibility of Chris Kenworthy inspired misgivings. He writes the introduction, which is legitimate, but he includes three of his own stories, which is less so. But never mind. "Touching," the opening story, is his, and I find it excellent. Strongly imagined and original images of ordinary life portray a research scientist, Kathy, as she wonders how to lose one lover and take another. This issue is only a small instance of the lack of control she feels in her life, and we realize that this inability is shared by all of us. The elements of science fiction in the story work to underline the fact that while we may exhibit an increasing domination of the external world, the path we must take to gain control of our own inner lives is unknowable, chaotic, governed by unfathomably complex rules, and that "So many lives are sad and out of control."

This story sets the tone for the book, which will not be enjoyed by those among you who demand good cheer, or stories of manoeuvre and determined counter-manoeuve producing upbeat conclusion. Most of the characters are people who struggle to maintain commitment to anything – to life itself in places. The narrator of "The Mainstream" by Nicholas Royle is not a man who makes an impact on the world, and worse, he knows it. Driving south on the M1 overnight he stops at a motorway service station and becomes involved with some people who are not what they first appear to be. Some, less able, writers would have used vampires, random hackings, and fistfuls of gore. Royle has the strength to stay with simple elements: the dark, alienation, and the grotesqueries of ordinary people; and the result is a quite remarkable atmosphere of terror.

"And Some Are Missing" by Joel Lane is about the lack of love in the world. Or rather, how the amount of love is insufficient to provide meaning to human existence. Those among us who are fringe people or who are unfairly victimized – drunks, gay men, the underpaid, the rejected, the suicidal,

those unhappy in love – are preyed upon by strange, shadowy, vampiric creatures; the *antipeople*. Although the prose falters occasionally, there is little plot, and there is certainly no resolution. Lane manages to bring us a real sense of anguish and nameless betrayal.

"The Husband's Stitch" by Andrew Rollinson is a nightmare account of a confinement, detailing how the mundane abuse of woman by man becomes ritualistic. I was present at a birth recently, and I'm pleased to say that it was actually nothing like this. But then, of course, I'm a man. While I liked the story, I'm not so sure I agree with Rollinson's hints that the biological process of birth is intrinsically anti-female. This sort of thing is political correctness sophisticated to the point of redundancy, ignoring the fact that life's just like that.

"The Dead" by Simon Ings and M. John Harrison is run through with the awareness of aging, of the inevitability of death. Elizabeth sees adult life through a child's eyes as a series of mysteries, then grows up into understanding while the adults die. She inhabits a world where winter and summer are gradually becoming indistinguishable, where colour has become washed out, where all animation is gradually fading. Life is too much for the people in this story, whose days are weighed down by the memories of the energies of youth and the lingering presence of the billions of human dead. In the words of Elizabeth's father: "There are a great many dead, they far outnumber the living, we must pay our regards to them. We must accommodate them somehow." This is the most substantial thing I've seen from Simon Ings.

The closing story is "The City Calls Her Home" by Mike O'Driscoll and Chris Kenworthy. A woman arrives in London from Dublin to join her lover, at a time when England is on the brink of war. Bernadette Coghlan is possibly the one character in *The Sun Rises Red* who never questions the control she habitually wields over her life. However, the grime and the coldness of a London gripped by panic force her down all the same. She wanders, lost among the city, slipping quickly and noiselessly below the surface. As the war approaches she witnesses random and increasingly frequent acts of violence, and convincing moments of panic, despair and self destruction. The closing four pages, with their broken narrative and their movement toward meditative calm, are powerful.

This is by no means a perfect anthology. There are plenty of rough edges, and I think that the editor should have been strong enough to reject his own third story, "Movements." Yet it's a truthful book and it is apparent that the stories come from the heart. The

great shame is that, as Kenworthy recognizes in his manifesto of an introduction, because popular taste favours "egomaniacal writers hacking out hero-worship trilogies" it won't be read by nearly as many people as it deserves.

Then again, who can really be sure? Nicholas Royle's first horror anthology sold out its print run, and it is similarly small-press and marginal in feel (by which I mean belonging to the margins of its adopted genre, Horror, rather than meriting small consideration). **Darklands 2** (Egerton Press, £4.99) is the follow up. This is a good-value collection; containing 23 stories, as opposed to just seven in *The Sun Rises Red*, and they are all very readable.

However, it is primarily a book of conventional tales, well told but somehow tired, and too many of the stories struggle to produce effect, with plots and characters existing only as a setting for whichever strong central image or feeling of darkness the writer is pushing. Yet there are a few stories here, usually the ones that do more than set out to produce horror, that are better than that. The first piece that made me take notice was Julie Akhurst's "Recovery," which gives a miracle-worker a compulsion to kill, and produces *despair* rather than horror, being all the more memorable for it. "Clad Bone" by D.F. Lewis is also excellent. An insane rhapsody upon the retreat of hairline, it's short, powerful and very weird.

You can't really write science fiction about rockets any more, and likewise you have to be very careful about using ghosts, psychological or real, in dark fiction. "Cleaning Up" by Peter Crowther is an object lesson on writing a story about a haunting. A madman, hydrophobic, obsessed by deaths – some accidents, some he feels guilt for – spills his consciousness into ours for a time. Gruesome, disturbing, unsettling, and very good.

There are stories here that contain no appearances by the supernatural, or the insane, yet retain their unsettling quality. "Nearly Tomorrow" by Judy Hines is one, with its slight displacement from the conventional which strengthens our distaste until it becomes foreboding. "Foreign Land" by Mike O'Driscoll is another. A man, driven by his (too intense?) love for his sister, suffers until a murder happens. The feel is mainstream rather than genre, but that's a strength, and the conclusion, which springs from the inevitability of established character, is worth ten twists which stem from the mere desire to shock.

There are other good stories – "Under the Pylon" by Graham Joyce is a solid evocation of an unpleasant childhood incident, its tone closer to

wonder than anything else, and Elizabeth Young's "Lethality" is an apocalyptic near-future story with an odd, shocking climax, and has the distinction of containing the one image in the book that I wish I could forget.

Yet, overall, I was not very engaged by this collection. The many stories that have horror as part of the plot are weaker than the few stories where the horror arises from the convolutions of character or as an intrinsic part of an overall vision. Like *The Sun Rises Red*, *Darklands 2* has only one strong mood, but it has the disadvantage of being much longer. Too many of the stories work from the premise that death is both a proper conclusion to a story and frightening in itself, and, assembled as they are, they establish a situation of diminishing returns. Dip into this book rather than read it in one go.

Finally, **Eidolon** is a small Australian science-fiction quarterly, available from Richard Scrivens, PO Box 225, North Perth, Western Australia, 6006, at a cost of A\$44 (air) or A\$34 (sea) for four issues. On the evidence of the single issue I've seen (Autumn 1992) I can recommend it. Very well presented, with terrific, even elegant, artwork, it contains three strong stories (Geoffrey Moloney, Sean McMullen and Terry Dowling) and a weak one (Harlan Ellison); a rambling and slightly loopy film-review section called "Critical Embuggerance"; plus a column of scientific speculation/comment; plus a reviews section. Comparisons are both inevitable and in this case (I hope) productive; if you like *Interzone*, this is for you. Look it up.

(Philip Gladwin)

British Magazine Reviews

John Duffield

Arthur Straker has gone and done it! When we all thought it was dead and buried, **REM** has risen from the grave. Issue 2 is 56 A4 pages of neutron-star density typesetting, with graphicized photo illos and a glossy two-colour cover. It looks pretty professional, and is only £1.95 for no less than 10 stories.

John Shirley's "Where It's Safe" is a diatribe against big business and pollution. The People's Terrorists execute a fat cat in his home, but after a mock trial, tension and a shoot-out. I liked it. Another good story came from, gosh, Simon Ings with his "Witchy Miriam's Book," a droll old tale about a couple of US farmers struggling against the drought outside the domed city. Also good is "The Lord Y Comes" by David Wingrove, all about planetary explorers and a mega radio-beacon artefact

in a *Chung Kuo* future. It is delivered with a gentle, slow, ultimately deadly attitude, and touched me.

There's also some very average stuff from Andrew J. Wilson, Garry Kilworth, and sadly, Storm Constantine. The first is another story about planetary explorers and a mega artefact, though this time it's a maze covering a whole hemisphere. Instead of putting it up on the main console for a good decko, or even setting down smack in the middle, they send in a guy in a land-dozer to meander his way to the centre. Dozeballs. Garry Kilworth's "My Lady Lygia" is one of those Victorian-style stuffed-shirt efforts with the place names in the form of "M-----." Real zimmer-frame stuff. The Storm Constantine "Preservation" novella is about a tribe of self-imposed primitives intercut with the high-tech anthropologists saving them from the mid-tech aggressives. The viewpoint changes break the flow and make the story feel way too long.

And as for "Seasonal Greetings from Bacup," written by somebody called Colin Greenland... It must be a Colin Greenland, aged circa eleven and a half, not the Colin Greenland. There's more nonsense such as "The Electric Waterfall" by Marc Laidlaw, and Andy Darlington's distasteful porno "Under Two Moons." Sheesh, that'll really please the lady readers. And I did not like "Jump From A Speeding Car." It was written by some alternative pun-kette called Julie Travis, and features: *I snatched a little girl on her way home from school and strangled her in a back alley.* Enough. Hey Joo-ley, when us parents of young children get together to throw a lynching party for your sort of hero, I'm going to be the one who slaps the horse.

The magazine looks good, and you get a lot for your money. Including some awful drek. But seeing as the rubbish is the short stuff, the hit rate isn't that bad. Worth buying. Oh, and I almost forgot: the non-fiction is quite good too.

REM: A4, 56 pages, named after the band. £1.95 per issue, or a four-issue sub for £7.50. The latter will keep you going until the heat death of the universe. Available from REM Publications, 19 Sandringham Road, Willesden, London, NW2 5EP.

Back Brain Recluse is another magazine that's climbed out of its coffin. To give you the background, editor Chris Reed lost a lot of dosh printing 3,000 copies of issue 19 for a distribution deal that didn't work out. (Anybody who wants to lag their loft on the cheap should contact Chris at the address below.) Later came the slender, fiction-free number 20, despatched gratis to subscribers only; rumour has it that it was the best BBR for ages. Seriously though, the new

issue 21 is a chunky, 84-page perfect-bound A4 glossy in dangerous yellow and black. The cover is just beautiful, showing a cool underwater dude blowing bubbles amongst the piranhas. Inside, the paper and print quality is marvellous, with more lovely illustrations by Dreyfus, Jason Hurst, and Dave Mooring.

On the fiction front it kicks off with "Beach Weather" by Carole T. Noble of Massachusetts. This is a piece about somebody pulling on an unattended kite string. Only instead of a kite they draw down a hole in the sky that starts to suck up the beach. It's perhaps atmospheric, but that's all. In similar vein is "The Crystal Heart," a longer work about a man called D receiving a letter that unfolds into an unwashed shirt. Then, like the story, he rambles around on his bike for a while. Hmm. Author Gabriel de Anda is from Los Angeles.

A refreshing return to prose normality is brought by Uncle River's "Mogollon News," bite-sized snippets of New Mexico mountain life. The flavour here is lifted straight out of Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegone Days*, but nevermind, it's mildly humorous and likeable. Then comes "A Toothsome Smile, An Artificial Death," about a bunch of jobs stomping a robot performing dog whilst his owner stands silently by. It was written by a Czech lady called Eva Hauser. Anyhow, we get back to the seriously offbeat with "This Is Your Life Kit" by R.V. Bannham, from hey, Los Angeles. It seems to be about a guilt-laden Vietnam Vet reminiscing whilst assembling a kind of flatpack coffin. The story(?) was hard going, and didn't interest me enough to delve for understanding. Then there's more "Mogollon News," closely followed by hurray, our very own Tim Nickels from Devon, England. His "Born In The Forest" is another atmospheric piece, this time about an age-old wildwoods man evading a hunting party. It is however energetic, and did something for me.

"Photography Is Not Permitted" by Roger Thomas is interesting, all about a corporation which commission a painting that shapes their future in a mysteriously intangible way. It's written in the first person plural, with inserted memos and speeches, but the concept is good. I keep thinking about it. Then comes yet more "Mogollon News," which is getting a little tiresome now. But finally there's "Ancient Flavours" by Conrad Williams, featuring a restaurant owner in alliance with a Scylla & Charybdis couple of crusty creatures down in a cave at the foot of a cliff. The restaurant specializes in ambrosiac seafood with strong aphrodisiacal properties, but of course there's a price to pay. Not bad, Conrad.

What else? There's articles, letters, and a slab of reviews, including a

Directory giving details of no less than 69 magazines. It's good useful stuff, though there's an undertone which says if you like anything other than cutting-edge speculative fiction you're a real lobotomy case. Duhh... To sum up, BBR isn't your typical f&sf mag. It concentrates on contemporary Dark Fantasy with not a lot of plot or protagonists to root for. This makes it hard work to read, but I'm sure there are dozens of people who'll love it.

BBR: A4, 84 pages, every six months. £3.50 per issue or £11 for a four-issue sub from BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY.

Xenos calls itself a Literary Science Fiction/Fantasy Forum Magazine, at which point I narrowed my eyes. Issue 15 is an A5 typeset 72-pager with a white glossy cover. The pictures are scant, but the fiction looks substantial and the "forum" section is small and tucked way back.

The mag kicks off with "Love Story" by David Leicester, set in a future where you can always get a clone made up to replace a dead hubby or wife. Trouble is, the clones aren't quite as good as the real thing, so our hero does it the other way round and fixes up the woman of his dreams with his (illicit) clone first. Well, it isn't quite like that, but I don't want to spoil it. Next is another good one, Giles Dorrington's "The Condor, the Snake, and the Human Being." The latter will be a clue to the Comanches amongst you that this is a Red Indian story. It's interesting, about a spry old chief waiting for a spirit bird to carry him away. I didn't know that Red Indians, oh go on then, *Native Americans*, carried their shrivelled up umbilical cords in a little leather pouch round their necks. Then there's "Red Sails In The Sunset," about a robot barge skipper on an abandoned earth who breaks through the strictures of his programming, then hires himself a metallic crew. I liked this story too.

Sparing you a blow-by-blow account, then came a vampire, an anaconda and a salamander man, a diplodocoid, and true essence of Paris plus other travel spots. I quite liked them all. Oh, last comes that forum section, giving snippets of opinion about the previous issue. But you don't have to bother with it. In summary, *Xenos* is OK, giving you seven stories all nicely plotted, written and told. It's perhaps a tad pricey and a little staid, but it's patently a stayer and is well worth a whirl.

XENOS: A5, 72 pages. £3.45 per issue or £19.50 for an annual six-issue sub. Available and cheques payable to Xenos, 29 Prebend Street, Bedford, MK40 1QN.

Finally I wanted to mention **Focus**. This isn't that defunct little BSFA pamphlet, but a new glossy top-of-the-

shop popular science mag available in newsagents. It reminded me of *Scientific American*, but is pitched more towards your average Joe. Issue 1 is fat and colourful, with a ten-page special on dinosaurs, an article called "Doomsday Asteroid Alert," stuff about racing cars and our British world-beating technology, and a lot else. Such as the "Update" round-up covering solids that are lighter than air, Magneto-HydroDynamic 100-knot ships, modern-day mummification, and so on. There are also incredible crystal cave pictures, a gene therapy article, an interview with Arthur C. Clarke, UV and IR headlights from SAAB, and much much more. It's a beautiful magazine. Buy it. For your future, and for your children.

The World in FOCUS: as advertised on TV, £1.75 for 96 pages, monthly. Also available at £21 for an annual subscription from G+J, Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5AU. Phone 0858 468888 for overseas rates.

(John Duffield)

Everyone Gets the Razor

Andy Robertson

Despite the unbanning of their novel *Lord Horror*, those fabulous sweeties from Savoy Books are still in trouble. This time comics about Horror's side-kicks **Meng & Ecker** (Savoy, £1.50) are up for burning. We have received issue 5 which, in response to all the official hassling, concentrates on lampooning the ex-Chief Constable of Manchester, James "God's Cop" Anderton. It is obscene and deeply irreverent, the funniest thing I've read in ages. Kris Guido's artwork (by-Howarth-out-of-Misha, but rougher) exactly complements Dave Britton's script, and the whole thing shows terrific wit and style.

Be warned, though: Savoy's stuff is a bit strong for some tastes, and everyone, from nuns through Pakistani shop-keepers to gay AIDS activists, gets the razor. Because of this they have come in for criticism from all across the political spectrum.

They also sent us a rather fine one-off called **Monoshock** (Savoy, £1.50), and a CD which I couldn't play because baby Alice has jammed the machine with her sticky little fingers. And they sent us about 50 press releases which I haven't got round to sorting into order, let alone reading. According to the one on the top of the pile (August 1992) Savoy's comic titles are in danger of confiscation and destruction, so if you think you can help them contact editor Michael Butterworth, 279 Deansgate, Manchester.

And two more comics (sorry, graphic novels) from the new Gollancz line. Ian Macdonald and David Lyttleton's **KLING KLANG KLATCH** (Gollancz, £9.99) is a sort of film noir set in a world populated by animated children's toys – teddy bears, transformers, Barbie dolls – with real flesh-and-guts inside the fur and morals to match. It's a ridiculous idea, but the book balances the essential silliness of the scenario against the horrific living-doll images it can conjure up, and does it rather well.

Unfortunately, the authors lose their nerve and introduce themselves into the storyline in a couple of unnecessary metafictional longeurs (I wish people wouldn't do this: it's not clever, it's merely precious). But overall this is a successful work, demonstrating the power of the medium. I don't think you could have made it believable as an ordinary novel. High marks to Macdonald for the script, and to Lyttleton for the clever semi-naturalistic artwork.

Al Davison's **The Minotaur's Tale** (Gollancz, £9.99) is beautifully drawn but rather less well plotted. Davison is particularly good on the human figure: his female nudes look for once as if they are made of flesh, not lycra, and he manages to disprove the rule that the quality of a strip is inversely proportional to the amount of tit it contains. But, despite attempting some profound themes, the storyline is dangerously thin, and suffers from unemployed-lesbian-black-exjunkie-AIDS-survivor-singlemother-itis to an almost comical extent. This is a book worth looking at, but excellent artwork does not by itself a graphic novel make.

The secret of life was worked out, on pure cybernetic principles, by John Von Neumann, about 40 years ago. And quite soon after that his ideas were confirmed by the discovery of DNA. I assume that everybody knows this already? Right? Because if so, there's really no need to read **Artificial Life** by Steven Levy (Cape, £16.99), a book which makes a tremendous fuss trying to hide the fact that we have made no real progress since then.

But just to summarize: we know that DNA-life is a self-replicating machine, exactly embodying, in its genes and proteins, the basic structural elements that Von Neumann predicted self-replicating machines should have. It follows that there's nothing special about DNA-life, and that an infinite range of other classes of Von Neumann machines – other sorts of "life" – may be possible. Hence the possibility of alien life, artificial life, non-carbon life, mechanical life, you name it. From this belief has come a host of speculative and science-fictional ideas, from Moore's artificial plants right down to nanotechnology. But nothing has been

done about wrapping hardware round these ideas, and no one can offer more than the vaguest guess about how to do it.

This last fact is usually bypassed with a lot of hand-waving and an appeal to the example of Nature. It must be possible to build a self-replicating system, mustn't it? Because DNA-living things do it already? Well yes, it's true that it must be possible. But "possible" says nothing at all about how easy or how difficult it is, and, though the potential of (controllable) artificial life is as near infinite as makes no difference, it remains only potential, till someone actually builds some.

What has been done (and what Levy does describe rather well) is research into what might be called Virtual Life. This means the creation of things like Lem's "personids," but very much simpler, inside computers. Another brief explanation here: in cyberspace, replicators can be very simple, lacking the elaborate machinery needed in real-space to capture energy and build material structures. To put a rough figure on it, "cyber-life" entities may be made up of less than 1000 bits of information, while in contrast the simplest real-world Von Neumann machines (bacteria) have around 109 parts. Computer "life" shows little behavioural sophistication, but it can be used to investigate evolutionary, bio-social and even mathematical puzzles, and the experiments Levy reports in this area really are quite fascinating.

This bit of the book is good. But I'm afraid that what Levy really wants to write about is something dangerous and dramatic: tides of grey goo overwhelming the biosphere, silicon life succeeding carbon life, people downloading their brains into computers, stuff like that. There's nothing outside fantasy that can really offer these delicious threats, but, willy-nilly, that's the conclusion he imposes on his book. Which is a pity.

In truth, research into artificial life is at the same stage that research into artificial intelligence was in the 1960s. Which is to say, we are so ignorant of the real tasks that we are only just beginning to appreciate how difficult they are, and some people are still making the most ludicrously inflated claims.

(Andy Robertson)

UK Books Received December 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.

Aaronovitch, Ben. **Transit**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20384-4, 264pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition.) December 1992?

Barker, Clive. **The Yattering and Jack**. Adapted by Steve Niles and Fred Burke. Illustrated by John Bolton and Hector Gomez. HarperCollins/Eclipse, ISBN 0-586-21750-9, unpaginated, trade paperback, £6.99. (Horror graphic novel, first edition.) 25th January 1993.

Billson, Anne. **Suckers**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32806-9, 315p, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous vampire novel, first edition; one of seven paperback novels to be featured by W.H. Smith in a "Fresh Talent" promotion; the British author is known as a film critic, and has previously written the movie novelization *Dream Demon*.) 20th January 1993.

Cadnum, Michael. **Saint Peter's Wolf**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-918991-7, 344pp, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) December 1992.

Charrette, Robert N. **Never Trust an Elf: Shadowrun 6**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017543-1, 278pp, paperback, £4.99. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 7th January 1993.

Coppola, Francis Ford, and James V. Hart. **Bram Stoker's Dracula: The Film and the Legend**. Afterword by Leonard Wolf. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32858-1, 172pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Horror-film screenplay, with illustrations and secondary material; first published in the USA, 1992.) 4th December 1992.

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Dragon Knight**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21327-9, 503pp, paperback, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *The Dragon and the George*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 50.) 3rd December 1992.

Donnelly, Joe. **Still Life**. Century, ISBN 0-7126-5381-3, 554pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 21st January 1993.

Eddings, David. **The Losers**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21759-2, 298pp, paperback, £4.99. (Non-fantasy novel by a leading fantasist, first published in the USA, 1992.) 11th January 1993.

Eurudice. **f/32: The Second Coming**. Virago, ISBN 1-85381-551-9, 187pp, paperback, £5.99. (Feminist/pornographic fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; about a woman's genitalia which seem to take on a life of their own [yet more co-option of William Burroughs-like material by a female writer?], this strange book is decorated with commendations from Kathy Acker and Robert Coover; the author, we are told, "was born on the island of Lesbos, Greece"; this first UK edition is revised.) 18th February 1993.

Feist, Raymond E. **Magician**. "New Revised Edition." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21343-0, 681pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982; Feist's debut book, this new edition is 15,000 words longer than the original.) 3rd December 1992.

Fowler, Christopher. **Darkest Day**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90534-8, 570pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 22nd April 1993.

Grafton, John. **Great Ghost Stories**. "Dover

Thrift Editions." Dover/Constable, ISBN 0-486-27270-2, vi+100pp, trade paperback, £0.95. (Ghost-story anthology, first published in the USA, 1992; it contains ten fairly well-known tales by Benson, Bierce, Dickens, Jacobs, James, Le Fanu, Stoker, etc; this is the U.S. edition with a British price sticker.) 31st December 1992.

Holt, Tom. **Overtime**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-039-6, 243pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 28th January 1993.

Holt, Tom. **Ye Gods!** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-080-9, 296pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) 28th January 1993.

Keith, William H., Jr. **Decision at Thunder Rift**. "Battletech." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017549-0, 325pp, paperback, £4.99. (Shared-world sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 7th January 1993.

Klyve, Gregory, and Chris Oakley. **The Legend of Perseus**. Byronic Books [15 Pixies Hill Cres., Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 2BU], ISBN 0-9514571-0-1, 192pp, £3.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1989.) No date shown; received by us in December 1992.

Lindsey, David L. **Body of Truth**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-356-20795-1, 417pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992; oddly, this hardcover seems to follow a trade-paperback edition which Little, Brown published last July [see listing in *Interzone* 64]—unless the publishers have sent us the books in the wrong order.) 25th March 1993.

Lumley, Brian. **Fruiting Bodies and Other Fungi**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017302-1, 278pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first edition [?].) 7th January 1993.

Lumley, Brian. **In the Moons of Borea**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21467-4, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979; a "Cthulhu Mythos" novel.) 11th January 1993.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Dragonflight**. Adapted by Brynne Stephens. Illustrated by Lela Dowling, Cynthia Martin and Fred Von Tobel. HarperCollins/Eclipse, ISBN 0-586-21752-5, unpaginated, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf graphic novel, first edition.) 25th January 1993.

Maddox, Tom. **Halo**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965400-8, 216pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 55.) December 1992.

Marshak, Sondra, and Myrna Culbreath, eds. **Star Trek: The New Voyages 2**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-453-2, 252pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1977 [?]; the contributors all appear to be members of "Star Trek" fandom.) 26th January 1993.

Masterton, Graham. **The Hymn**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0057-7, 346pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991.) 28th January 1993.

Mitchell, Mike, ed. **The Dedalus/Ariadne Book of Austrian Fantasy: The Meyrink Years, 1890-1930**. Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-93-6, 416pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy/horror anthology, first edition; among the authors represented, most of them newly translated by the editor, are Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Franz Werfel, Alfred Kubin, Rainer Maria Rilke, Leo Perutz, Franz Kafka, Max Brod and, of course, Gustav Meyrink; an interesting book, dealing with a rich period of European fantasy which is too little known to present-day English-language readers—despite the fact that this Austro-

Hungarian [and German] vein of horror-fantasy was very influential in the shaping of the horror-film tradition, even in Hollywood.) 7th January 1993.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Shores of Death**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017352-8, 156pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published as *The Twilight Man* in 1966; it was originally serialized as "The Shores of Death" in *New Worlds* in 1964, and for some reason it has reverted to that title, though Moorcock's introduction still refers to the book as *The Twilight Man*.) 7th January 1993.

Niven, Larry, and Steven Barnes. **Achilles' Choice**. Illustrated by Boris Vallejo. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32474-8, 214pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novella, first published in the USA, 1991.) 8th January 1993.

Niven, Larry, and Steven Barnes. **Dream Park: The Voodoo Game**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32647-3, 346pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; sequel to *Dream Park: The Barsoom Project*.) 8th January 1993.

Park, Paul. **The Cult of Loving Kindness**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21261-2, 312pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; third in the "Starbridge Chronicles" trilogy.) 11th January 1993.

Saberhagen, Fred, and James V. Hart. **Bram Stoker's Dracula**. Afterword by Francis Ford Coppola. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32857-3, 301pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novelization, first published in the USA, 1992; based on the screenplay by James V. Hart, "from the original novel by Bram Stoker"; illustrated with colour photographs.) 4th December 1992.

Saul, John. **Comes the Blind Fury**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58170-5, 318pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1980.) December 1992.

Saul, John. **Cry for the Strangers**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58169-1, 320pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) December 1992.

Saul, John. **Punish the Sinners**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58171-3, 332pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1978.) December 1992.

Saul, John. **Suffer the Children**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58172-1, 315pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1977; this was the book which first brought its prolific author to fame as a horror merchant.) December 1992.

Saul, John. **When the Wind Blows**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58168-3, 319pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1981.) December 1992.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Face of the Waters**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21106-3, 428pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 51.) 3rd December 1992.

Smith, Wilbur. **River God**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-56874-5, 535pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; Smith, bestselling South African writer of adventure stories, previously wrote a timeslip romance called *The Sunbird* [1972]; set in ancient Egypt, this new book appears to be his first return to that "Haggardian" mode in over 20 years.) 26th March 1993.

Steele, Allen. **Labyrinth of Night**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-919931-9, 353pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; apparently, this one was published in hardcover by Century/Legend last year, but we never saw it; it's a Mars novel, expanded from a short story which first appeared in *Asimov's* in 1989.) 21st January 1993.

Steele, Allen. **Rude Astronauts**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-09-926001-8, 261pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Sf collection, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it has a 1992 copyright date inside, but we're not sure that's correct.) 21st January 1993.

Stoker, Bram. **Dracula**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32856-5, 382pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1897; it's described on the cover as "the original classic novel" – as opposed to the unoriginal, non-classic novel [see under Saberhagen, above].) 4th December 1992.

Walton, Tony. **Executive Relief**. Janus Publishing [Duke House, 37 Duke St., London W1M 5DF], ISBN 1-85756-020-5, 268pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror/crime [?] novel, first edition.) 27th January 1993.

Overseas Books Received

Aronica, Lou, Amy Stout and Betsy Mitchell, eds. **Full Spectrum 4**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-37142-8, 485pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains mainly original stories by Kevin J. Anderson, Stephen R. Donaldson, Gregory Feeley, Elizabeth Hand, Nancy Kress, Ursula Le Guin, Martha Soukup and a whole slew of newer writers; David Brin's "What Continues, What Fails" is reprinted from *Interzone*.) 16th March 1993.

Card, Orson Scott. **Cruel Miracles**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52304-0, 242pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in 1990; it doesn't say so on cover or title page, but this is in fact *Maps in a Mirror, Volume 3*, i.e. a quarter of the original massive hardcover volume [which was published in Britain in two paperback volumes].) December 1992.

Chalker, Jack L. **The Birth of Flux & Anchor: Soul Rider, Book Four**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52292-3, 374pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1985.) December 1992.

Daniel, Tony. **Warpath**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85282-7, 318pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel which comes garlanded with praise from the likes of Bear, Dozois, Shepard and Zelazny.) April 1993.

Hargreaves, Mathew D. **Anne Inez McCaffrey: Forty Years of Publishing – An International Bibliography**. Afterword by Anne McCaffrey. Hargreaves [P.O. Box 66099, Seattle, WA 98166-0099, USA], no ISBN, 338pp, hardcover, \$35. (Author bibliography, first edition; proof copy received; although self-published and lacking an ISBN, this is a real book; copiously illustrated with photos of book jackets, it looks to be a very thorough and professional job; British and European readers should add \$3 if they wish to order by mail.) December 1992.

Ing, Dean. **Systemic Shock**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50038-5, 313pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1981; it's a near-future war tale of the "survivalist" type, and clearly it has been updated since its first appearance [references to Chernobyl, the collapse of the Soviet Union, etc] although it doesn't say so anywhere on the book.) December 1992.

Jacobs, Harvey. **Beautiful Soup: A Novel for the 21st Century**. Celadon Press [101 West 12th St., Suite 8G, New York, NY 10011, USA], ISBN 0-9634185-0-5, 263pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; it's possibly Jacobs's first full-length sf work, though he will be known to

longtime readers of *New Worlds*, *F & SF* and other magazines for his funny tales which were collected many years ago in a volume entitled *The Egg of the Glak and Other Stories*; this is very much a "New York sf slipstream" book: Charles Platt is among the persons acknowledged by the author, and Thomas M. Disch is among the critics who commend him; another critic is quoted as saying, "Move over Philip Roth, Mel Brooks, Hieronymus Bosch, at last we've got another original...") *Late entry*: 31st October publication, received in December 1992.

Kipling, Rudyard. **Kipling's Science Fiction**. Edited by John Brunner. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85355-6, xiv+178pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains nine tales and a poem by Kipling, and introduction and story notes by Brunner; a companion volume on Kipling's Fantasy has been announced; recommended.) *Late entry*: October publication, received in December 1992.

Newman, Kim. **Jago**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-868-9, 537pp, hardcover, \$22. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 54.) 15th January 1993.

[Nice, University of.] **Actes du IVeme colloque international de science-fiction: "Science et science-fiction."** 2 vols. Université de Nice: Centre d'Etude de la Métaphore [98 bd Edouard Herriot, B.P. 369, 06007 Nice Cedex, France], ISSN 0290-6635, 653pp, paperbound, no price shown. (Collection of papers on the links between science and sf, first edition; contributors include Roger Bozzetto, Jacques Goimard, Elizabeth Anne Hull, Doris Lessing, Frederik Pohl, Norman Spinrad and Denise Terrel, among many others; the "colloque" in question took place in April 1991, and these big volumes also constitute the journal *Metaphores* issues 20, 21 and 22.) *Late entry*: September 1992 publication, received in December.

Norton, Andre, and P.M. Griffin. **Redline the Stars**. "The New Solar Queen Novel." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85314-9, 304pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Shared-world sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this appears to be a novel by Griffin alone, based on an old space-opera background created by Norton many years ago.) April 1993.

Resnick, Mike. **Purgatory: A Chronicle of a Distant World**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85275-4, 320pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as "the second of his planned Colonial Worlds triptych"; the first was *Paradise*.) March 1993.

Shetterly, Will. **Elsewhere**. "A novel of the Borderlands – where magic meets rock & roll." Tor, ISBN 0-812-52003-3, 238pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first published in 1991.) December 1992.

Slusser, George, and Tom Shippey, eds. **Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative**. University of Georgia Press, ISBN 0-8203-1449-8, vi+303pp, trade paperback, \$20. (Anthology of critical essays on recent science fiction, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the mainly academic contributors include Paul Alkon, Gregory Benford, Frances Bonner, John Huntington, David Porush, Eric S. Rabkin, Lewis Shiner, Gary Westfahl and others whose names may be familiar to readers of *SF Studies*, *Foundation*, etc.) *Late entry*: 26th November publication, received in December 1992.

Thomas, Sue. **Correspondence**. Overlook Press, ISBN 0-87951-480-9, 153pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first published in

the UK, 1992; proof copy received; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 59.) 19th March 1993.

Van Vogt, A.E. **The House That Stood Still.** "Masters of Science Fiction." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-884-0, 159pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1950.) 15th January 1993.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Hand of Chaos: A Death Gate Novel.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-09377-0, 464pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th March 1993.

Windling, Terri, and Mark Alan Arnold, eds. **Borderland.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-52261-3, 244pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Shared-world fantasy anthology, first published in 1986; contains stories in the "Borderlands" series by Stephen R. Boyett, Charles de Lint, Ellen Kushner and "Bellamy Bach" [a collaborative pseudonym].) December 1992.

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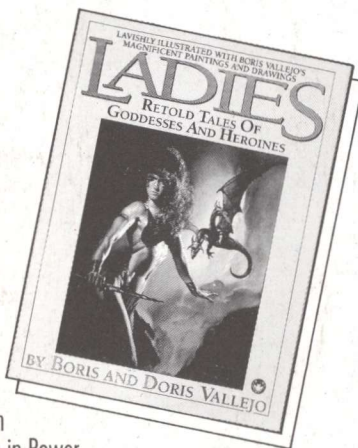
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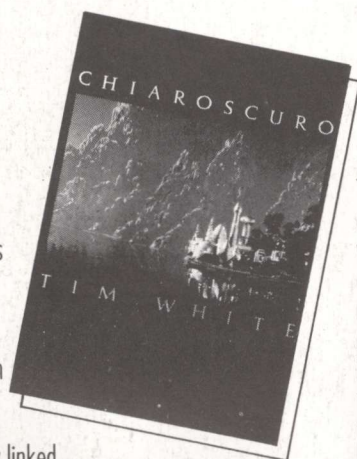
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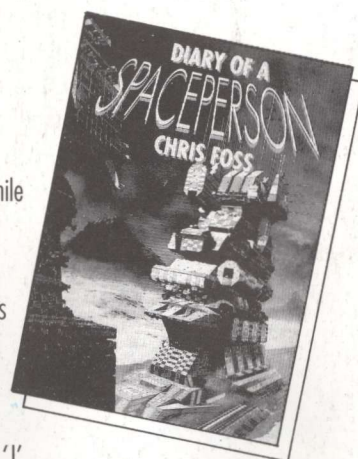
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