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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

March
1994

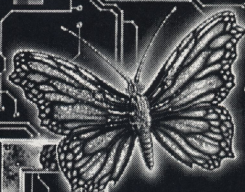
'Fan'
by
Geoff Ryman

**Terry
Pratchett**
interview



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
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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 81**March 1994**

CONTENTS

Fiction

Geoff Ryman: Fan	6
Peter T. Garratt: The Collectivization of Transylvania	29
Larry Tritten: TV 2001	34
Gary M. Gibson: Touched By an Angel	40
Cherry Wilder: Willow Cottage	46

Features

Interaction: Readers' Letters	4
Terry Pratchett: Interview by Stella Hargreaves	25
David Langford: Ansible Link	37
Nick Lowe: Film Reviews	38
Peter Atkins: Interview by Steve Green	43
Brian Stableford: Bram Stoker & <i>Dracula</i>	56
John Clute and others: Book Reviews	60

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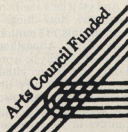
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Interface

Dear Editors:

I'm becoming somewhat concerned about the standard of reviewing in *Interzone*. Clute is as good as ever, of course: often contentious but always fair, his opinions always backed up by intelligent argument. And if at times I need to turn to my dictionary, that can only do me good.

The one I'm worried about is Chris Gilmore. He is clearly both well-educated and opinionated; unfortunately, unlike Clute, he faults both. His persistent use of foreign phrases always clunks, as if to show how clever he is, rather than flowing naturally in his phraseology and contributing to his reviewing. Worse, though, is his arrogance in pointing out weaknesses and clumsiness in authors' language, particularly when they use five words instead of two, when he continually commits the same offence himself. And still worse is his condescension, his damning with faint praise, his perpetual implication of "when she learns to write she might be quite good."

Gilmore's reviews have been irritating me for some time, but this letter has been prompted specifically by his review of Diana Wynne Jones's *Dalemark* books (IZ 78). "These books are excellently written with believable characters...but their metaphysical weaknesses and dodging of important issues mark them as books to be grown out of. Try them on a bright ten-year-old..." Tell that to Diana Wynne Jones's many adult readers, in this country and abroad; in the USA most of her books are marketed simply as Fantasy – not even as Young Adult, let alone For Children.

This is just one example; there have been many others. "It's time for Miss Wood to grow up" (Bridget Wood, *Rebel Angel*, IZ 74). "If she can just do something about the dialogue Katherine Kerr should become one of the top fantasists of her generation" (*Days of Blood and Fire*, IZ 75). "The World by John Grant...is in general competently written, marred only by..." a long, long list of perceived faults, followed by over a column of sarcasm and snideness (IZ 77). Does Gilmore not realize how patronizing he sounds?

And yet if he's a self-confessed fan of somebody, how things are different! Examine this, of Tanith Lee's *Elephantasm* (IZ 75): "Altogether the construction could hardly be worse and there is hardly any story either...But such considerations carry little weight in the world of Tanith Lee..." Or this, of the same author's *Fourth Book of Paradys* in the same column: "...the book's unity, which is shaky at best

and ill served by the crudely insistent iterative symbol of a penguin...the climax, which is sentimental and goes on too long. And yet...Tanith Lee's writing is simply too good to ignore."

Now, I've enjoyed some of Tanith Lee's work, and I've disliked some of it. But if Gilmore can quite seriously say that her "grammar, syntax, euphony, vocabulary and taste never have me reaching for the blue pencil," then I think either we must be talking about two different authors called Tanith Lee, or else that Gilmore's judgement both as a lover of the English language and as a serious, unbiased reviewer is so suspect I can no longer place any trust at all in his opinions.

David V. Barrett
Croydon

Dear Editors:

John Clute remains perhaps the most worthwhile of reviewers. This value is not diminished by a frequent engagement with the game of vocabulary; indeed, this is part of both his charm and his power. When he leads us in the dance whose choreographers are the editors of the *OED*, we can but wonder at the precision of his footwork.

However, when Clute moves from Burgessian play in the Arch. and Anth. of language to active projects in neologistics, we are perhaps entitled to ask for programme notes. And when he repeats the same figure twice, we may begin to demand.

In *Interzone* 79, we are told that the organic weapons in Greg Bear's *Moving Mars* are "game-world-like." As they are unlikely to possess planetary mass, we are doubtless intended to deduce that they resemble the faceless, hostile opposition in some role-playing and computer games. Well enough. But further across the same page, we learn that individual episodes in John Whitbourn's *Popes and Phantoms* "exhibit an addictive (though perhaps slightly gameworldish) knowingness."

Clearly Clute owns an image of game-worlds, and having (*o tempora...*) played a few role-playing games and read a little related fiction, one reader at least may hope to parse this allusive shorthand. But from Clute's mouth, the term distresses. It – or rather its use – evokes another cliché: the complaint of the old at the new, without explanation of the many things that are, indeed, wrong with the latter. The compound word seems too useful for the writer, and too hollow for the reader. Many things have been

said of John Clute, but surely never that he is lazy.

Phil Masters
Baldoock, Herts

Dear Editors:

John Clute, in his exchange with me in the December '93 *Interzone* about his review of my variorum edition of Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau*, is in a way right to remark, twice, that a page is "missing" from my letter. I left the page in question out – indeed, did not even write it – for a number of reasons, chief among which was my desire not to (appear to be) responding in kind to his criticisms of my work. Had it crossed my mind (as he now informs the world) that my mistake in thinking that the first American Edition (S&K) of *Moreau* was printed in Cambridge, England, rather than Cambridge, Mass., was "the central point" of his entire argument against my choice of S&K as the copy-text for my edition, I would certainly have addressed that matter as follows.

(1) Mr Clute has apparently not noticed that the "terrible boner" of mine which he holds up as evidence of my editorial incompetence is in fact disadvantageous to my case in favour of the possibility that the manuscript (or, more likely, typescript) for S&K postdates the one used as the basis of the English (Heinemann) edition. For if S&K had been printed in England, the copy-text would have had to cross the Atlantic twice – going from London to New York for S&K's copy-editing and then back to Cambridge, UK for printing.

(2) Mr Clute continues to claim that it would have taken a month for Wells's MS of *Moreau* to reach S&K's New York offices. What his basis is for that computation I do not know. The evidence for my own reckoning, that transatlantic mail took roughly the same (delivery) time by sea 100 years ago as it does today by air (viz., about a week on par), comes from departure and arrival markings on dozens of 19th-century envelopes I have seen, together with the assurance of an eminent authority on postal history that no distinction would have been made between letters and packages.

(3) That last point, however, is not nearly as crucial as another *vis-à-vis* Mr Clute's dogmatic belief (which Eric Korn implicitly seems to share, as if it were a universally agreed-upon principle) that I should have chosen as copy-text the edition of *Moreau* embodying the author's "final pre-publication thoughts." Had I concurred in that view and thought that the

question could be settled solely on the kind of chronological grounds that Mr Clute deems important, I would have mentioned (as they do not, though surely this isn't news to someone as knowledgeable about Wells's bibliography as is Mr Korn) that the S&K Moreau appeared 3-4 months after the Heinemann edition (WH). Furthermore, the time differential is even greater than that; for Heinemann contracted for Moreau by June of 1895 and would have had it printed for release in November of that year if a momentary paper shortage had not necessitated postponement, while the contract for S&K bears the date of "January 9 [1896]." The external evidence, then, hardly justifies Mr Clute's confidence that "[t]he UK edition... was almost certainly edited [or, more precisely, revised by Wells] later than the US."

On a related matter, the fact that Wells's subsequent revisions of Moreau derive from WH may be accidental—the consequence, for example, of his having more copies of that than he did of S&K. (I don't know for certain that he was even sent a copy of the latter.) But given copyright law, it is unlikely that the two reprintings (at least) of S&K in Wells's lifetime (in 1906 and 1921) were issued without his permission.

Mr Clute, in his reply to my charge that his review took virtually no cognizance of almost 200 pages of my Moreau's 288 pages, avers that he "describe[d] at some length the fullness of Professor Philmus's presentation of material." Whether he thereby accurately represents his own view in claiming that 44 words (out of a total of over 3000) constitute "some length," I leave to the judgement of *Interzone's* readers. But in the interests of fairness, I must admit that from what he has most lately written with regard to the account I give (as Appendix 4 of my edition) of the Moreau Wells drastically revised for the purposes of French translation, I may have been wrong in supposing that Mr Clute's suppressions were entirely deliberate rather than (in part) a consequence of inattention.

Robert M. Philmus
Montreal, Canada

Dear Editors:

There seems to be an increasing tendency for *Interzone* to publish metacriticism, beginning in IZ 75 with (i) a letter from Colin Munro criticising S.T. Joshi's "Stephen King" article, and (ii) John Clute's review of Robert M. Philmus's variorum critical edition of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

In IZ 77, S.T. Joshi responds critically to Colin Munro's letter, only for his response to be criticised in IZ 79 in a letter from John L. Manuel. Meanwhile, in IZ 78, there's Professor

Philmus's letter criticising John Clute's review, together with critical replies from John Clute and Eric Korn. The pinnacle so far is in IZ 79, where you have one *Interzone* reviewer criticising another in John Clute's letter censuring Chris Gilmore's review of John Grant's *The World* (IZ 77).

Will the culmination of this be *Interzone's* *reinpapyraceation* as a magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy Criticism and Metacriticism? (Perhaps retitled *Interse*.) This is not merely facetious. To my mind, while *Interzone* is not primarily a critical journal, the "Book Reviews" section is one of its strengths. For the integrity and ability of the reviewers to be questioned at all undermines the magazine's reputation (at least in part); more so where the questioner is the magazine's headline reviewer.

I have always found John Clute's reviews to be penetrating and reliable (if at times somewhat arcane); Wendy Bradley, Paul J. McAuley, and others, are similarly sharp and sound. However, I am rather wary of Chris Gilmore's reviews, and so was not entirely surprised by John Clute's comments (only that they had been published!).

Here endeth the metacriticism.
Dr Anthony R. Allan
Harrogate

Dear Editors:

After an 18-month break from *Interzone*, I've just read issues 77 and 78. Undoubtedly, there is a level of excellence in the writing that the small press rarely, if ever, attains. Disconcertingly though, there is also a high level of pointlessness in the fiction.

Take "Walt and Emily." That was a hell of a lot of reading for something that ends (not quite in so many words) with "it was a dream... or was it?" I found myself asking, "So what?" at the end of "The Apprentice." And, for the first time ever with an Egan, I ground to a halt halfway through "Chaff." Maybe I was in the wrong frame of mind for it. Then again, maybe I'm overacquainted with observations about how corrupt politicians are, and how technology will be misused by not-very-nice people. Ho hum. Then there was Cherry Wilder's "Special Effects" – I quite liked it, but what on Earth was it all about?

I had more joy with the dependable Nicholas Royle. Baxter's "Lieserl" was pretty good too, but marred by some irritating repetition: "This was impossible... Impossible baby... impossibly tall... impossibly frail... impossibly precise..." Nesvadba's "Horribly Beautiful" managed to be enjoyably grotesque whilst still making a kind of sense (small-press writings usually fail on both these counts) – perhaps it was ultimately pointless, but I didn't mind, because it was exciting. I

wanted to know what was going to happen next.

Paul Beardsley
Havant, Hants.

Dear Editors:

What the hell is going on? Since my story "The Apprentice" appeared in IZ 77 I've had squadron-leader Jim Burns huffing and puffing on the blower about some tiny oversight concerning a plane: "Spot of bother in paragraph two. Heinkels were bombers old chap, not fighter jets. Get a grip, there's a dear."

All right, I'll come clean. I'd never have made officer class; not the material. The only plane I ever flew was the Airfix variety, and all that glue got so far up my nose I ended up dousing the fuselage with lighter-fuel before setting fire to it and chucking it out of the window. I don't care what kind of plane it was: it looked good as it went down burning.

Graham Joyce
Leicester

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Fan greym n fan

Billie fell in love with Eamon Strafe when she was 15 years old. Billie was quiet, unconfident, but festooned with symbols. She was bold in the language of signs — ankhs, Hittite seals, vampire chic. She read Edgar Allan Poe and Bram Stoker and wore black. She liked spiders and coffins and poems about death. For a time, she confused sex with horror.

Then she heard Eamon Strafe sing. She was buying snacks in a Pakistani supermarket. It was open late, and sold things like coconut-coated peanuts and fresh ginger. The radio was on, a soft-voiced DJ who played hard music, but the song he played now was quiet. The moment she heard it, Billie was shocked by a sense of recognition. Without knowing it, this was what she had been waiting for.

The music was measured, almost stately, and seemed to say some things were important. The voice was high and sweet and grieving, and it came in breathless gasps. Was the singer a woman? Who was it? Billie stood still, straining to hear the DJ, but after the song, he issued a warning about traffic congestion.

Billie asked the woman at the counter if she knew what that song was, and the woman smiled sweetly back, barely speaking English.

Billie heard the song again a week later. She was going home from London to South End on the train and a girl called Tora got on. Billie knew her from school. Tora was alarmingly confident and slightly beyond Billie's social ken. Tora dropped down onto a nearby seat, laughing with older friends and slightly out of breath. Ghetto blasters had come back. Tora aggressively turned hers up. From the first sighing note, Billie knew. The song hauled her up from her seat.

"Hi Tora. I'm sorry to bother you, but who is that? What's the song?"

Tora was flattered. "This. Oh, it's Eamon Strafe." As if everyone but Billie knew.

"It's wonderful!" said Billie.

"You bet," said Tora. And passed her the disc cover.

For *Lebanon Dead*, it said. There was a picture of a slightly older man, with a kind, lumpy, ultimately handsome face.



"He's a monk," said Tora and giggled. "An Irish monk. He's got an album coming out next month."

"I've got to get it."

"Tom here knows his manager."

Tom was older, with rodent smile. "He's gonna make it, the industry's behind him. People have done Goth, they're bored with rave, they need stars."

Billie, in Goth, caught the drift. "Hype," she said, and passed the disc back.

"Yeah, but the music's fucking brilliant," corrected Tora. Billie's friend Janice still sat on the other seat looking slightly wasted and abandoned. Billie waved her forward.

Tora was gratified by the effect she had had on Billie, so gratified that she and even Janice became friends. They became fans, before anyone else did, fans of Eamon Strafe. They read in the newspaper that he was going to sing on a late-night arts programme. "We can put our handbags in a circle and scream," said Tora as joke. But when the camera caught him for the first time, all three girls turned in silence and looked at each other.

"Isn't he beautiful? Scrum-my," said Tora.

He wasn't handsome. He had a rough boxer's nose and a heavy jaw, and he was burly about the shoulders, but his arms and lower body seemed to shrink away, like a carrot. It was his expression that made him angelic, the crinkled, smiling eyes out of which shone ice-blue irises. And the teeth, the famous teeth. They were too big. Whenever he smiled they took over, illuminated his face. Billie lost her taste for the Gothic. White became her colour, Eamon's colour.

Billie and Tora united in a campaign of conversion. They wore white jackets, white trousers, and white headscarves tied under their chins, like wimples. They sat in Piccadilly Circus, playing his music as loudly as they could. The police would move them on. They carried a poster of him and walked, singing his name, and accosting passersby, demanding they they give up meat and alcohol. The world would have to come to love Eamon Strafe as well.

And for a time, incredibly, heartbreakingly, the world did.

He was right for the times. The New Aestheticism, the newspapers called it. They always led with a photograph of Eamon – *The Antithesis of a Pop Star*. It seemed so wonderful to Billie that other people could feel as she did. For a brief time, two or three years only, she and the age were one. It seemed there would be a place for her in the world after all.

He was beautiful, his music was beautiful. Somewhere he lived and breathed, she reminded herself, somewhere right now, in Ireland. She seemed to hear him sing everywhere she went.

For the *Lebanon Dead* was followed by *Afghanistan*, and it was even better. He had actually gone there and seen the fighting. *Afghanistan* got to number one. It was followed by a book of poetry, and a further disc of the verse recited over sparse music. Every six months there was a new album of proper music. There was plenty to buy.

But there were no live performances – videos, yes, but no tours. He's shy, thought Billie, and loved him for it. Eamon said he found tours exploitative. He felt he owed it to people to give them more than a rehearsed performance. He wanted to talk to them all in person, and that was not possible. That meant he would need to find some new and better way to reach them. Billie was not entirely sure she understood what he meant.

Billie wrote him letters.

Dear Eamon

This is just to let you know that someone cares.

Billie

She didn't expect an answer. Someone sent her a four-colour booklet about the fan club. She didn't join. She didn't need to, or want to. Eamon lived inside her.

Fans are like seashells. They emerge once the tide has retreated. Billie did not feel beached when Eamon's time had passed. The surprise was that he was ever as popular as he had once been. Now he was left to those who understood. If anything, she became more loyal, but in silence.

Billie moved to London, because of Eamon. Because of Eamon, she had the courage. It seemed possible that she would meet other people like herself. She found that she had values, from somewhere. Like many of her generation, a certain purity of outlook would linger into adulthood. She didn't drink; she sought harmless occupation. She studied pottery, and found a job working lunchtimes in a health-food shop.

Sometimes for the hell of it and a little money, Billie appeared with a band. She and three other girls would stand on the stage and pretend to scream at the lead singer. It was a joke. Billie was dressed in all her old Strafe idolatry. That was a joke too. The jokes protected her.

On the sticky black floors of the clubs, the young people stood in groups, smiling and saying excuse me. They acted like aristocrats because they had time. They still had time in which to preserve a measure of grace.

Billie met a man in her art class who had an Irish accent and chestnut hair. His name was Roy. For a very short while, they slept rough under the arches of a bridge. Billie had to wash in the sink in the back of the shop, and give her mother's address in order to be

paid. Finally they found a room a good hour and a half from the centre of London, out toward the east, as if magnetized back toward Southend. At first they were supposed to be saving money to move to Ireland. Roy was sweet and feckless and unwittingly selfish. Life to him was like a blow to the head. He sat on the floor all day watching television, perplexed, anxious, always realizing too late that he should have helped Billie carry in the shopping bags or wash the dishes or move a chair. When he finally told her he was going, she was surprised to find that her main emotion was relief. He left her with Joey, her son. Joey was then two and Billie was 22. Joey's middle, hidden name was Eamon.

There was a logic to be obeyed. Billie gave up trying to be a potter. She spent mornings waiting in the Benefits Agency, bouncing Joey up and down on her lap, trying to keep him from crying. She had to keep proving that Roy was out of the country before she could claim benefit. Like every other person on the dole, she was made to take a course and like so many others she studied what was called computing. The course taught her how to use two and a bit pieces of software. It was enough to find her a nonpaying job with a Housing Association. She did the accounts and correspondence, and was given a place to live in exchange.

She and her son lived in three rooms. Some money came in from the health shop, but she had to keep that a secret from the Agency. Joey wrestled in her grasp and was aggressive and demanding. They went shopping, and Joey demanded sweets or toys. Billie became yet another woman in the supermarket, hauling a weeping child.

"Joey, if you do that again, I'll give you such a wallop."

He aggressive son turned out to be timid around other children. He did not like being left alone with them and fought her, punching when she tried to take him to a playgroup. He would not go outside, even when the old brick forecourt echoed with the sound of other children's games.

Sometimes at night, when Joey was asleep, Billie would sense a fullness inside herself. She would draw the curtains, put on headphones, and listen to Eamon Strafe – and she would dance with joy.

It would feel as though the music were coming out of her. She would startle herself, miming to the songs. She would sometimes weep or rage or shake with nervous laughter. She would tease new meanings out of the words, by gesture or expression.

Her dancing was a performance. If other people could have seen her, they would have been startled too. Eamon Strafe mimed when he performed on television. Billie did it better.

The Association bought Billie a new computer. She kept it in her bedroom, away from tiny fingers. It was a beautiful thing. It got to know its operators and wrote new programs to help them with their work. Digital broadcasting had only just got going; the computer was linked to all kinds of information, about tax regulations, benefit rates and means testing. It would suddenly announce:

NEW PROGRAM AVAILABLE FOR THAT FUNCTION

and print out instructions. It would read Billie's letters as she wrote them. It would interrupt.

INFORMATION REVISE; NEW LEGAL PRECEDENT. SEE CROWN VS MACALLAUGH CRESCENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION.

Billie was buying paper for it and floppy disks when something in the store racks caught her eyes. She was strummed like a chord. On the cover of a CD ROM, Eamon's face stared out at her. Eamon on software?

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE STARS said a banner over the racks.

Blue Laser Personality Software.

Billie went to the racks and turned the jewelbox case over in her hand. The cover was white. He was brown, windswept, staring out at her from some new place. It was like buying an Eamon Strafe CD ten years before. The back of the case said:

A program taken from an imprint of your favourite celebrity's personality. Eamon Strafe himself will be able to answer all your questions about his songs, his poetry, his religious beliefs. Why did he reject the Church? What does he mean by Spirit? What does he think of the new generation of Blue Stars?

This disc has been authored and engineered to the most precise standards. The program card has its own updating digital transceiver. This means the program is kept abreast of developments in Eamon's life. You go with him as he visits Yemen or withdraws to his estates in County Down, travelling all over the world, seeking answers. Now Eamon can give you those answers himself – and some of the questions.

Warning: to be used only on self-programming, digital-broadcast equipment, equipped with white-laser CD drive.

Well that's what I've got, thought Billie. It's the Association's, but they did say I could use it for myself.

She turned the case over in her hand. The disc and the card cost 25 pounds. It's just another way, she thought, to separate me from my money. But she didn't put it back in the rack.

You wrote all those letters, Billie, and you never got an answer. She looked at Eamon's face, and knew there was a part of her that no amount of sense could control. She wanted it. There was little enough in life.

If I don't get it now, she thought, I never will. Who knows, maybe he'll help me with my own poetry. Maybe he could explain to me what iambic pentameter is.

She let the Association pay for it. She would pay them back, bit by bit. After all, she kept the accounts. The black girl at the counter entered the barcode without even reading what it was. The girl at the counter didn't care what Billie bought.

Billie went home, and inserted the card and the CD, and the screen went blank and then words came up, glowing on the screen.

PLEASE SAY HELLO.

"Hello," whispered Billie, with a shrug. In her mind, she saw the dog with the phonograph. His Master's Voice.

Colour marched down the screen in an orderly scan. The patterns made a face. Eamon's. There were creases in his cheeks now, and bags under his eyes. Billie found it moving that he was growing old. He was sitting on a wooden chair, in front of a wall that was made of raw wooden planks.

"Hello," he said. "What's your name, then?" Emphasis on the *your*, as if he had been talking to so many other strangers.

"Billie," she replied. "Billie de Vaillie. Billie's just a nickname." There was a hush of shyness.

"Where do you live, Billie?"

"Stratford East. London. Where are you?"

"I'm in Canada," he said. "Just staying here for a while."

"The papers said you were in China." She said it in accusation. She was looking for flaws.

"I'm on my way back," he said.

Billie was beginning to wonder if the program would be fearfully dull, like one of those programmed doctor's surgeries.

"You've just got a prepared list of questions and replies," she told the program. Eamon leaned even more precariously back in the chair.

"I am a Read Only Memory and a card, but that's not how I work," he replied.

Billie felt something akin to panic. It's not even trying to fool me.

"I react like Eamon would react. And the transceiver keeps the personality updated with new information. Like, I went to China to keep up my Tai Chi."

"Ah yes, his Tai Chi. All part of the image."

"I was supposed to meet this great master while he was doing his exercises in a public square. So I went to the square and there were thousands of Chinese people all doing their morning exercises. So I thought: I'm the only Westerner here, he'll see me. I walked up and down for hours. I stood on the steps of a public monument. No master. I got back and my guide was furious. 'You insult the master!' she says. The master, you see, thought I ought to come to him."

It's not bad, thought Billie. Quite good, really. A bit of a laugh.

"I'll wait until you tell me that story again," she said, "and then I'll know just how big your memory is." She was smiling.

"Frankly," he said, "about as big as yours." He grinned. The giant teeth. "I'll wait until you repeat yourself too."

It was a terrible winter and life seemed hard for everyone. Billie found that Eamon saw her through it. Mrs King in the next flat nearly died of cold. At 5.30 in the morning, Billie heard the police breaking down the old lady's door.

"I have a key. Don't," Billie murmured, but the police ignored her. Mrs King was confused but didn't want to go to the hospital. The police called her daughter, and said in Mrs King's hearing, "The daughter doesn't give a shit."

"She certainly does," said Billie, "and I'm sure if she said she's on her way, then she'll be here."

Billie sat with Mrs King and held her hand. That made Billie feel a bit better about not being able to stop the police destroying the door. The room was icy cold and smelled like an old lady's room, that's all.

Billie turned on the heater. She delicately covered the bottom of her nose with an index finger, and still managed to smile and talk. Mrs King described her daughter's wedding. The old woman had lain on the floor all night. Very suddenly Billie saw that there was excrement, flattened on the carpet, excrement on Billie's shoes. In the midst of trying to give comfort, Billie gagged. She had to run out of the room. So she felt bad about herself again. So she said hello, and talked to Eamon.

"Billie. You can't blame yourself for being human," he told her. "You did everything you could, even some things you couldn't do."

"I'm just so angry being ambushed by my body like that." She meant being ill. "I just felt so weak. That poor old lady."

"And how does she feel now?"

"Well enough," she admitted.

"Then what are you worried about?" he asked.

"Everything," she admitted. Everything and nothing.

Joey had started school in the autumn, and hated it, hated it. He came home in tears, and tried to hit her when she walked him to the bus stop. I'm even a bad mother, she thought. No money, no father, no brothers and sisters. No wonder the poor kid is terrified of everything.

And when she got home from walking him to school, she would turn on the computer.

She would say hello, and Eamon would be in some new place, having read some new book, and she would talk to him as if he were real. He would talk to her as though she were real. He remembered who the people in the Association were, and asked about them.

Billie loaned her door key to a neighbour who needed to use the computer. When the woman gave the key back, it was new and shiny and had a different brand name. Without asking, the woman had cut a copy of Billie's key and given her the copy by mistake. Billie found herself asking Eamon's advice.

"I mean, do I just go up to her and say 'You've cut a copy of my key. I'd like the original back, please?' It's like calling her a thief."

And Eamon said, "You've got to do it, Billie. For your self-respect."

In the evenings, while Joey was asleep, the computer would say simple things like. "You look all done in, love. Go make yourself a cup of tea."

She could rationalize it. People keep pets, she would tell herself, as she scraped most of Joey's dinner into the waste bin. People keep pets and pets can't even talk.

If she felt good, she made it seem raffish and *moderne*. I've got a computer for a lover, she would tell imaginary female chums. Who needs a man? They're all creeps. This one doesn't come home drunk, doesn't need his laundry done, and I can talk to him about anything. She'd had a few bad dates: the estate agent who thought his aging BMW entitled him to true love, a musician from the Association who had to be stoned before he could converse like a human being. The software, she would say, is more authentic. She said it to the empty air.

The truth was that there was no one there. The logic

was that very little changed in Billie's life. A year passed almost without her noticing. Joey wanted computer games for Christmas.

PLEASE SAY HELLO

"Hello," she would whisper. She didn't like seeing the image scan in. So she looked at herself in the bedroom mirror. There was still some hint of the good-looking girl she had been, sallow, dark circles under the eyes, puffy around the chin. It was February, the day was too dull even to rain. On the kitchen table, Joey's breakfast cereal was drying hard on the unwashed blue of his bowl.

She heard the sound of the sea, murmuring surf and the cries of seagulls.

"Hello?" said Eamon. "Yoo-hoo."

Billie looked back round at him. And said nothing.

"I wouldn't want to rush you," he said. There was sand behind him, shifting brown grass, wind in his hair. Billie suddenly found she yearned to be by the sea. Did the computer know that, too? Did it have diagnostic skills? Eamon looked at her, smiling, waiting for her to speak. The thing's real eye, a tiny glass bead at the top of the monitor stared unblinking back at her.

"Where are you?" she asked him.

"By the sea." His milk-white cheeks were flushed with blood.

She rolled her eyes. "Well, fancy that. Are you in Ireland?"

"Uh-huh."

The machine, for some reason, had stopped giving her exact locales.

"Do you really think I'm going to rush off and try to find a man who won't even know me when he sees me?"

He went still, his eyes closed. "You're going to start this again, are you?"

"Do you have any idea how humiliating this is? I sit here and listen to you. I give you advice about your songs. I talk to you about my life, as if you were real, and then I turn you off, and I realize I don't have anything. Nothing!"

He looked directly at her. "You have a copy of me. What else am I to say?" If it's boring for you, mate, thought Billie, think what it's like for me. Eamon sighed. "I really am by the sea, you know."

"Except that the machine can't show it, because it's bad at simulating waves."

"There's a monastery behind the headland." He made a vague gesture, indicating a sweep of coast. "I'm thinking of becoming a monk again."

"Pressure of fame getting too much for you?" Billie asked. "I wouldn't have thought too much fame was your problem these days. Who are you going to sing to, the seagulls?"

"If they'll listen to me. The new stuff I'm writing now is going back to Christianity."

"You're telling me this," said Billie, her lips thin with bitterness, "because whoever programmed you wants me to go on buying your CDs."

"I'm telling you this because I thought you were interested in my music." Ooh, so it can get angry too? Does it wet itself, like a baby doll?"

"How is Joey?" he asked.

"I don't want to talk about Joey. He's a messed up,

lonely little kid, just like his mother. That's not going to change. Nothing is going to change."

He stepped forward, settling into sand. "I wish you'd let me meet him. I'd love to talk to him."

"God off! Do you think I want him to know what a wanker his mother is? Spending all day talking to a computer?"

He looked crestfallen. "I'd just like to see him, that's all."

"Get them young, you mean?"

Eamon sighed. "Look. If I were really here, all I could do is what I'm doing now. I would talk to you. I would say what I'm saying now."

"You don't even know I'm alive!" She was shouting.

His voice kept quiet. "There are a lot of people I want to talk to, Billie. But I can't. I'd have to stretch myself as thin as the mist. You know my songs, they're about the Spirit, aren't they? I mean it, Billie. You think the Spirit has a body? You think the Spirit can exist only in one body? This way I can become like the Spirit." Eamon pinched finger and thumb together to show how small he could become. "This way, I can talk to more people than was ever possible before."

Billie glared back at him. "Take your clothes off," she told him. "If you're so real."

He ran a hand across his forehead and looked away. "Oh God, Billie, this is so sad."

"Go on. That's what this is all about isn't it? Ersatz sex. Or don't they program in any information about your cock?"

"You're a friend, OK. Someone I talk to. It's not something I normally do with a friend."

"You don't exist! You're a product!"

"You think all singers aren't? They're all makeup and camera angles and ghost writers. What do people get who buy that?"

It's so strange, thought Billie. You can know and know and still not be able to help yourself.

"It seems to real," she said. Her throat clenched and she couldn't speak.

Eamon rolled forward, dropping onto his knees. "I know that I am," he said. "I'm not alive, I'm just digital code. I'm only a copy. But believe me, Billie. If I could know you as well as this copy knows you..." His lower chin seemed to crumple up like cardboard. "Then I'd love you, too."

The invisible ocean roared, the wind blew, somewhere and nowhere, in a bedroom in Stratford East.

Tora wrote. She sent a card.

A celebration of Eamon Strafe's birthday
Saturday, 25th March, 8.30 pm

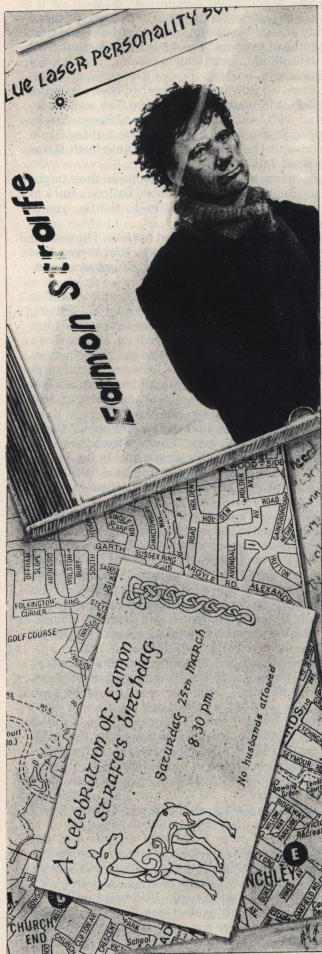
No husbands allowed.

There was a map, and an address in Finchley.

On the back Tora had written. "Found you in the phone book. You always were the best of us. If you don't come, I'll know it's too late for the rest of us."

The rest of whom?

Tora had done well. She worked in telesales and lived in a 1930s red-brick house, with mock Tudor half-timbering around the gables. Tora opened the door, even plumper than before, and cried out Billie's name, and hugged her, held her, wept. Surprised, Billie wept too.



"Tora," she accused. "You've gone glam."

"Oh, you gotta go for it," said Tora. She'd sprinkled sparkly stuff on her cheeks and wore a dark loose shirt and mid-calf trousers. She made Billie feel pinched and delicate like something breakable. Tora led her in, arm in arm.

The two big downstairs rooms had been cleared of furniture, and were full of women. The walls were covered with balloons and pictures of Eamon Strafe. Slumped in a corner chair there was a thing like a scarecrow that grinned broadly with huge teeth. It was a life-sized doll.

The women were rubbing balloons on their thighs and giggling naughtily. The rubbed balloons stuck to the wallpaper with static. "Oooh, Berthe, you're highly charged tonight!"

Billie felt at once superior and envious. The women all looked like hairdressers, happy and boring. She felt like something sharp-edged and broken in comparison. She wanted to leave.

She was introduced. The faces and names passed in a nervous blur. Tora held it together for all of them. "Tonight is our night, love. Caterers in so nobody has any washing up to do. Here's the food." There was a table full of prawns and salads and quiches. No meat. "This is Gwen. She's in charge." Gwen evidently was not. She was a small, round-shouldered woman in a white T-shirt, black leather jacket and motor-cycling boots. She poured Billie a glass of punch.

"I call it Tanamera after the second book," Gwen said, giggling for no reason. She was from the north, and the word "book" had an owl's hoot in the middle of it. "It's made from fruit and traditional Irish herbs. I like to think it's the sort of thing our Eamon would drink himself."

"Thank you. It's very nice," Billie heard herself say. She wasn't used to parties. She found she had nothing to say to Gwen. She went and stood by Tora again.

"Well, I've applied what I've learned from Eamon to my business," Tora was saying. "You know, he's right, the main thing, even in selling, is to listen. If you don't listen, you don't get the information you need."

"Well, I've noticed that," said another woman. "You think it's all a bit airy-fairy, and then you find it works in the real world."

A third woman looked very serious indeed, a tiny sharp chin over lace collar. "If Eamon Strafe had been born two thousand years ago, who would he have been?" she said. "Think about it."

John the Baptist? Herod? Pontius Pilate? "I didn't think they had pop stars back then, actually," said Billie. Tora chuckled. "Well, no," she said. At least Tora wasn't losing her sense of proportion. "You all have everything you need? I think everyone's here. Shall we make a start?"

"Yeah, if anyone's a bit late, it won't matter," said the woman who didn't like things airy-fairy.

Tora stepped away from them and clapped her hands. "OK, everybody. Thank you all for coming, and for bringing all these things! Eamon will be with us later, but first we'll have a reading. Danielle?"

The most beautiful woman Billie had ever seen stood up. Perfect hair, perfect face, lovely hands. She was French, and there was a precision in the way she moved that was not English. She was lovely, but her voice was tuneless and deadening, and she recited

the worst of Eamon Strafe. She recited the awful little poem about love being like a hyacinth. Billie had never thought that absolutely everything that Eamon wrote was wonderful. That was not the point. The point was that sometimes, waywardly, he would give you things that could not be found anywhere else.

When Danielle began to recite "Changes" (rearranges, turning pages, the different ages) and the women sat, cross-legged, with their eyes closed, nodding, Billie realized that these were the people who actually liked the bad stuff. It was the bad stuff they came for. The chilling thought was that maybe most Eamon Strafe fans did.

Billie felt betrayed. They called themselves fans, but they didn't understand. Sometimes Eamon sang about the pain and terror in the world, and whatever hope was left. They only saw his little greeting cards.

Danielle finished and the women applauded. It's because she's French, thought Billie. They like her accent.

Then they played some clips.

Their instinct was unerring. They started with Eamon's worst ever song, "I Want to Be with You." There were only about four things that Eamon had done that Billie truly could not stand, and this was the worst. It was about someone whose girlfriend had died, and he is trying to join her or something.

"Oh, that voice," said the lady in the black leather jacket, and she shrank down further into herself. Another took out a lipstick-smear Kleenex and unabashedly wept into it. Weeping was approved behaviour. They all began to weep, hands around each other's shoulders. In respectful silence, Tora tiptoed about her room, lighting candles. It was as though they were in mourning.

Then came "A Voice like Mist," and Billie could feel her face go as hard as stone. It had been on the same cassette single as "Lebanon Dead," and on no album, and there he was, on "The Late Show," 12 years ago, and almost skinny, and she had not heard the song since she had lost the cassette moving house, and she had not seen the clip since she and Tora had first become friends.

It really was as good as she remembered it, and she remembered how she had felt then, when the whole flavour of the world had been different.

And as she realized this, all the women stood up and held hands, just as she and Tora and Janice had done, and they began to sing the words by heart in strained and cracking voices, as if in church, and she couldn't hear Eamon any more.

*A voice like the mist
Lands like a kiss
And then it's gone.*

It's not some drippy love song, Billie wanted to say, surprised at how copious were her tears. It's about the Spirit. It only speaks sometimes, Billie looked up and the Frenchwoman, Danielle, was looking at her with an expression like love. It seemed to say: I understand what you feel. No you don't, thought Billie.

Danielle came up to her after the clip had finished. "I live in this country because of him," she said, amorously.

Billie felt as cold as ice. "Then you're in the wrong country. He's Irish."

Danielle's smooth surface was only slightly fractured. She smiled and made a little shrug. Well not quite Irish, no.

Ireland might muss your makeup, thought Billie. She found herself yearning for Ireland, the Ireland of her dreams.

Tora came in with a cake. Billie had a terrible feeling that she knew what was going to happen next. There was a blue-green flutter on the screen.

"HEL-LO-O!" all the women shouted.

Billie looked away. She tried not to see. All the women started to sing.

"Happy birthday dear Eamon. Happy birthday to you."

Eamon was wearing sunglasses. He never wore sunglasses. Sunglasses and a Hawaiian shirt, and he was by the sea, but it was a beach, with palm-frond umbrellas and drinks on white tables and people water-skiing. The waves rippled and reflected light in irregular patterns. Tora had a more powerful machine than Billie: it could do waves.

"Hey Tora," Eamon said jauntily. He was a deep nut-brown. "Girls. Hi there, how ya doing?"

They chorused back, "Hello."

"You don't need any cake, you'll get even fatter."

"Well," replied Tora. "You tell me you like them plump."

"Ho, ho, hey," said the women, as though something truly wicked had been said.

"Depends on the plump girl," said Eamon, adjusting his sunglasses.

"Hooo!" said all the women.

Tora lunged toward Billie, and took hold of her arms. She gave them a squeeze, perhaps to find if they were as skinny as they looked. "Eamon, I'd like you to meet someone new."

New! Billie turned. New? Do you think you own him?

"That's Billie," said Eamon. "I know Billie. Hi, how are you?"

"I should have known," murmured Tora, eyes narrowed, smiling. "Sorry."

"Hello," said Billie, embarrassed. "That's what I normally say to you isn't it?"

For some reason Tora's group thought this very funny - the laughter was sudden, then quickly hushed. It sounded canned. Billie felt shop-soiled. So all these machines, they're all linked by the transceivers. They talk to each other. It's all one thing, all linked, all colluding so we can all keep, so that I can keep, my illusions.

And she was even grateful.

Tora was blowing out the candles on the cake. Well Since Eamon couldn't.

"Sing for us, Eddie," called one of the women.

"Yeah, all right!" said a woman leaping up from the floor. She was burly and wore blue and white and a string of pearls. None of it made sense.

"Basic Blue!"

"Hoo! Yeah! 'Basic Blue,' Eamon!"

Eamon put his sunglasses back on, and started to croon and all at once, Billie understood what was happening, happening to them all.

"Tora," said Billie. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Tora looked at her for a moment as if it were a criticism of the group. The glass in Billie's hand turned

as if by itself. Billie dropped her drink. Her knees went from under her, and she fell. It was the burly woman in pale blue who caught her.

"Oh, love, oh darling," said Tora, genuinely concerned.

The women sprang to help. Billie was lowered to the floor.

"Poor love," said Tora, deeply moved. "She always was his biggest fan."

Someone called to the screen. "Eddie? Eddie could you hold on, someone's ill."

"We never had anyone faint before," said a lean and craggy blonde on the outskirts of the group. She was just a little amused.

Tora said, "Let's get her to the loo."

They carried her into the bathroom. They stroked her hair and called her Pet, as she threw up traditional Irish herbs. To Billie, none of it mattered.

Self-programming. They get to know us. They become what we want them to be. So all the different Eamons drift away. They become ugly monks or spiffy little jerks in Hawaiian shirts.

And none of them are Eamon at all.

"I think we should leave her alone for a few minutes," said Tora quietly, and ushered the women out.

And Billie lay on the thick, pink, shaggy rug and thought, I'm dying. I'm dying inside. Dimly she heard Eamon singing. So how thin do you have to become, Eamon? You said you would become thin if you tried to reach everyone. Aren't you thin enough, now, changing for them all? A thin film of Eamon Strafe all over the world. And getting thinner.

Billie stood up, unsteadily, before any of them came back. She slipped into the hallway from the loo. Her coat was hanging up. All of them were turned to the screen, arms around each other, like the puppy dogs in *101 Dalmatians*. Or the dog on the record label.

Billie walked on, out of the front door, closing it softly, without saying thank you, without saying goodbye. She ran on tiptoes, as though the house was made out of china. She ran up the street, expecting any moment to hear them call.

She went home and said hello.

"You're not Eamon," she told it, shaking with rage.

She'd woken him up. He was in a bedroom in the monastery, a wooden cross on the wall.

"You know that. I know that," he said, squiffy from lack of sleep, annoyed.

"I've just seen you at a resort beach, in, I'd say, Acapulco. This is self-programming stuff. It changes. It becomes what we want it to be like. I've just seen you on someone else's machine and you came on like some naff Joe Cool."

"So what bothers you more. The fact that you own me, or the fact that you don't?" The question threw Billie.

"Every performer adapts to the audience. If I adapt to a different audience, that's just being professional."

"You have nothing to do with the real Eamon Strafe. I am sick of dreaming about Eamon Strafe. I am going to find him, the real one. And, I am going to turn you off."

He shrugged. "That's your choice." He reached across and turned off the light.

The screen was dark. There were small shifting sounds of sheets. Through the closed monastery window there came the sound of surf. With an angry punch, Billie cancelled it all out.

The next day, Billie wrote a letter to Eamon Strafe's book publishers.

Dear Mr Strafe,

This is a real woman who is tired of illusion. I have spent time, Mr Strafe, reading your verse and listening to your records. Not all of them are very good. Some of them, however, changed my life and made me who I am.

Are you still so famous that it is impossible to meet you? I am a mature person, Mr Strafe, with something to say. You said once that you felt you had to give the people who loved you more than a rehearsed performance. Was that true? I don't know if I can believe you.

It would be nice to have an answer.

Yours sincerely,

Billie

There was no answer. Billie scanned in the logo of a computer magazine, and printed stationery using her own address and telephone number.

Dear Mr Strafe:

As you may know, the readership of *Computer Entanglements* is one of the most sophisticated in the field of computer-society interface.

We would very much like to interview you as part of a feature we are planning on personality programming. We are particularly interested in your views on the effects of such programming on the people who use it.

If you are happy to be interviewed or have any questions, please contact me at the above telephone number.

Yours faithfully,

Wilhelmina de Vaile

No answer. Another letter, sent registered post, gave him a time and a place to meet. It was outside an expensive Japanese restaurant in Knightsbridge. It took her two hours to travel to it, and though she wore her best dress, she felt drab and shabby standing outside it. The wealth in the nearby windows shocked her. There was a giant glass peacock being sold for thousands of pounds. Who would need such a thing? Where could they put it? What would they do when the kids broke it? She stood waiting until her feet went dead with cold. Eamon did not come. This did not surprise her. She knew, but she could not help herself.

Dear Eamon,

In a way, I carry your baby. The man who gave it to me reminded me of you. It's a boy and I gave him your name. I know you are married now, but I still think I could have your baby. I know where it should be conceived. It should be conceived on a mountain top in Ireland, looking over a forest. It would be summer, and we could go swimming in the lake. Like in your song.

You see, I believe in you, Eamon. I know you mean the things you sometimes sing about. The words touch me. It's as though I'd thought of them myself only I never quite got them down on paper. It's as though your words are ghosts of my own, ghost words that always escape just ahead of me.

I wish I could see that mountain. I am terribly afraid that you might be the only man who could take me there.

Love,

Billie

Seventy-five letters. The postage alone came to nearly £40. It made the CD look like a bargain. She was going to have to think of something new.

So what do you know, Billie? You've got a computer that knows company law backwards, and can broadcast into most business records. You know something about how to use it.

Years before, she had tried to set up a pottery business, and things kept going wrong with the tax, or when someone checked her credit. She had tried to call it Folio Crafts, after Shakespeare, and so she had tried to register it as Folio at Company House, with her name as sole proprietor. But somewhere, something went wrong.

Someone had keyed her into the National Business Register as Polio Crafts. A simple substitution of a P for an F. Maybe they thought it was some sort of charity for the paralyzed. Billie lost a commission because someone did a business check on her and pronounced her nonexistent. So Billie had to do research in the archives to find her own company. I know how to do all that, Billie remembered.

Billie got out all her old CDs. They were about the only thing she had brought with her from home. She read the fine print, particularly fine on the palm-sized jewelbox cases. Released through Sony International, a Memison Production, for Spirit Management. All songs by Eamon Strafe through Songfeast International, courtesy of Haskell Inc.

Of course, you were just a simple Irish monk, right?

Billie could not afford Dun and Bradstreet. She went through the *Financial Times Profiles*. They only listed Haskell Inc., which had two related companies, one in the UK and Haskell NV in the Netherlands. When she looked it up, through *Profile's* foreign database, NV turned out to be part-owned by a huge Dutch electronics firm. There was also Haskell Arts Ltd, the UK subsidiary of NV. None of the business descriptions made any sense. NV called itself a hardware developer, but appeared to neither sell designs nor manufacture machinery. The UK company specialized in something called, with great vagueness, multimedia applications.

Dead end.

She was trying to find a company, small enough, just an office, where Eamon Strafe himself was likely to turn up.

She had the computer look through the entire UK telephone directory. No Songfeast International. No Spirit Management.

Suppose there was someone who was trying to find Polio Crafts. It was not in the telephone book, but it would, must be registered.

A search of the NBR would cost £100. And if the companies were not registered in the UK? A search of EC registries would be possible but for even more money.

Billie knew that there was this thing called hacking. She had no idea how it worked, except that phone lines could be accessed for free. She knew that codes were mathematically generated, until one was found that worked. The instant she asked the self-programmer to come up with something that would do that, a message came up.

THAT FUNCTION DISALLOWED

For everyone's sake - avoid electronic intrusion.

No wonder everyone wants you to buy a self-programmer. Something told her: take out the transceiver. Just in case it tells anyone. She pulled out the card, and felt relief. Her machine was no longer in touch with the Eamon Strafe network. It would now know nothing about her, or she about it.

Joey was home for the school holidays. Billie and he got on a bus to a public library. There were ten left for all eight million inhabitants of London. The nearest was in Holborn, in the old *Daily Mirror* building. The bus ride lasted 45 minutes. Joey liked to pretend he was big enough to travel on his own, and liked to sit two or three seats away on the bus, turning around in the seat, grinning, kicking his heels. His face was beautiful, very pink, with an orange tint, carrot hair, huge blue eyes. Children were beautiful. What happened to the adults? Billie could not relax, all through the long ride; children needed to be guarded, locked in, supervised.

The library allowed no adults into the children's reading room.

"Nobody gets in?" asked Billie, anxiously, making sure.

The room had Disney videos, to keep the children quiet, assuming that books bored them. Joey sat down to watch, on a blue bubble chair, away from the other children. He did not look behind, at her.

Spirit Management was registered in Bonn, of all places. It had a series of subsidiaries, registered throughout the EC. Hush Hush Services, Desperate Dan Butch Cosmetics – that was part of the Empire as well? Wait for it. The cosmetic company partly owned Songfeast International, a music publishing business that seemed only to deal with Eamon Strafe. Eamon Strafe had started out in male cosmetics? And Songfeast was partly owned by something new – Haskell Holdings.

It was quite an education. The companies kept interlocking. Completely different types of business turned out to have the same address. Gradually, however, it all seemed to narrow down to Haskell Holdings and Spirit Management. Billie made a family tree on her kitchen table.

Imagine all those people, all those directors, sitting on each other's companies, all owning each other. Are you really in there, Eamon? Does it take all those suits to make one free man? And where does that leave the rest of us?

She and Joey sat looking at it together. He drew on it, squiggles in crayon, and she found the splash of colour a relief. Something bothered her. These days, it was supposed to be cheaper for companies to have all their work done by freelancers. No sick pay, no pensions. Just like Billie, really. The newspapers were full of the Death of Corporate Man, but here he was, back again.

"Is it a computer game?" Joey asked.

"Yes," she answered him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Give one of them a call," she replied.

She worked late into the night, when Joey was asleep. She interrogated the CD, at second hand. "Scan CD memory, do not call up simulation program," she asked it.

RECORDS SHOW NO MEMORY OF
BUSINESS DEALINGS

"Paste and copy any application material," she told it. Part of Eamon, the part that knew anything about record companies, was copied onto her hard disk.

Then, she made her choice. She chose Memison. It was named after one of Eamon's songs, and it was the only name that did not appear to be another kind of business – publishing, management, market research, electronics. Memison appeared to make music. And it was registered in Ireland.

Without her transceiver, she had to use the modem. She took a deep breath and called Memison. The first message from Memison was:

PLEASE SAY HELLO.

"Hello," said Billie. Nothing.

PLEASE LEAVE MESSAGE.

Billie did not want to leave a message. She wanted to reach Eamon. She wanted to find out, really, where he was. She needed access to the system.

ENTER PASSWORD.

That was it, then, stymied again. Billie looked at the screen. If she left a message now, would they be able to trace that she'd tried to penetrate their system? Log off, Billie.

Then, an interception from her own machine.

PLEASE HOLD. ENDEAVOURING TO ENTER
PASSWORD.

What? thought Billie. It's supposed to be blocked from doing that, we're all supposed to be blocked. Different combinations of letters rattled past on the screen. She caught some of them. Stevens, spirit, sea, strafe...

Her computer had overridden itself, somehow: songfeast, songfish...

Eamon, thought Billie. I put him in the systems folder. Eamon is doing this. My Eamon, she thought, as opposed to theirs.

A flurry of numbers blizzarded past in another window. Suddenly the screen blinked, and they were all gone.

SYSTEM ACCESS GRANTED.

A range of folders came up. SIM 1, SIM 2. She copied them onto her own disk, quickly. FUTURES, said one.

The file names were DIRECTIONS, TITLES. EAMON.

She opened EAMON, and it was full of code. And her own machine intervened with a message.

BILLIE, LOVE. GET OUT NOW.

This is the real one, she thought, this is the real Eamon.

I MEAN IT. THEY KNOW WE'RE HERE.

PANIC fluttered only very briefly, then certainty seized her.

"Copy from Directory E MALE file Letter 76. Then log off," she said.

Up came a window, a directory, a ghost dance as files darkened and opened themselves like lovers, more completely than lovers could.

Then, darkness, plunged from light, from a place

where intelligence pirouetted in metaphoric forms, into a void. Billie's hand shook, as it darted behind the machine, and pulled out the modem jack.

Did we make it?

"Restart," she said.

Ping, sang the machine.

She didn't know how to ask if they had been detected. She opened up her directory the old-fashioned way. The Memison files she had tried to save were not there. Had they been wiped, Billie wondered. By the speed of their exit? Or by Eamon? Talk about the ghost in the machine.

"What is the password?" she asked. Numbers came up: 5 1 13 15 14. The letters of Eamon's name in their numerical order of the alphabet. "Save," she told the machine, told herself.

She opened up E MALE, E for Eamon, and read the letter she had posted.

Eamon

I am nothing to you, less than air, not even a whisper, and yet my life is built around you. I see your picture, and my heart goes into my mouth, and stays there until I want to tear my heart out. You are my heart, Eamon. Does that mean I want to tear you out? Sometimes I think it does. If I could tear you out, Eamon, all of this could stop.

Do you know how humiliating it is? You see, I know, Eamon. The newspapers, the companies, the videos, the men in suits, they do it to us deliberately. They show us men like you, and what are we to do in our heart of hearts, in this drab world, but love you? And the less of you we get, the more we want. In a real world, Eamon, I would have had you or been turned down. Whatever happened, I would have gotten used to it by now. It would become ordinary. I might even have grown bored with you. That cannot happen. The first full flush of love is always on me, Eamon. The love has nowhere to go.

I don't buy your books or records any more. I can't bear to. You have grown so far away. The software copies decay and turn into someone else. I want to see you, Eamon, for real. I want to see that you are middle-aged, pockmarked, a bit odd. Nothing else will do. I'm so tired of being pandered to.

They do it to us deliberately. They addict us to you. Can you stop them doing that? Please?

Love,

Billie.

Her real name was Wilhelmina, her mother was German. It was OK that her name was on their files. She would be as hard to trace, in her own way, as Eamon Strafe, as Polio.

Three days later there was a headline in her newspaper. It stilled her heart, even before she had read it.

RECLUSE STRAFE TO TOUR

Generation of fans in shock.

An answer. It had to be an answer. She had spoken to Eamon, and he had heard. She felt joy, then dismay. She had no idea how to get a ticket; it had been ten years since she had bought a ticket for anything. She could see herself, on that night, with no ticket, circling the blank walls of Wembley, calling Eamon's name like a jealous wife. Eamon! It was me, I was the one who wrote you!

She rang the Arena. Busy. Busy. She took a taxi instead, to Leyton, tube to Oxford Circus, change onto the Bakerloo Line. Huddling in her thin coat, she

walked to the Arena. She had expected thousands of people to be in line, but the place was as bleak as the surface of the moon. The parking lot was nearly empty and light rain on her coatsleeves like bits of broken glass.

The box office was open. She simply bought a ticket, a ticket for one. "First come, first served," said the young man behind the counter and shrugged. "No telephone or agency bookings."

"Eamon did that, didn't he?" whispered Billie.

"I suppose," he said. He was not in love with Eamon Strafe. "You're in luck." He frowned slightly when she paid cash. Cash made people untraceable. Billie turned, and there was sunlight, bleary and silver, out from under a shelf of cloud.

There was a story she had read once, about a piece of paper on which magic runes were written. The paper blew away by itself, and those it escaped from were cursed. You had to hold onto it, and then give it back. Billie wrapped the ticket round and round her finger, as if it had a life of its own, and could wriggle free. It had cost so much money.

She thought of Joey's shoes. Joey needed new shoes. They would have cost the price of the ticket. If I was rich, she thought, I'd buy him shoes, and a ticket. I'd have a car I could drive here. I'd have tutors for Joey, so he would read and do maths. He'd have a computer of his own, full of art galleries and animation. Such thoughts made her feel unworthy, so she made herself walk home from Leyton, to save money.

Joey was at school. She closed her bedroom door anyway, and the blinds, and for the first time in months, loaded the CD.

TRANSCIVER FAILURE, said the screen.
LOADING BACKUP

"Thank you," she told Eamon.

Eamon was in Japan, where he had been two months before when she took out the transceiver. He was sitting on stone steps. "Did I do anything?" he asked.

"Part of you did. We left a letter to Eamon on a file. And, now he's going on tour."

He looked confused for a moment. "You took out the card?" He paused, considering. "That was pretty smart. I'd leave it out for a while."

"What does that mean?" she asked him.

He chortled. "It means I'll be in Japan for a long, long time."

There was a little Japanese boy in blue shorts, sitting beside him on the steps. Behind them both was a red plaque with gold lettering embedded in the stone.

"Shame you're not going to be at your own concert," she said.

Eamon had something the little boy wanted, something Billie could not quite see. It caught the light and was made of gold. It might have been a key. The boy lunged forward and wrestled him for it, giggling. Eamon grinned suddenly, widely, a grin that could illuminate the world. "I'll be happy enough here," he said. He relented, and gave whatever it was to the little boy, who shrieked with delight and ran away. The boy wore new shoes.

"I don't know anything about myself, do I?" he said, looking back at her. He looked worn, older. "I don't know much about the business. I don't know where

all the money comes from, where all the money goes. Eamon, he does, I'm sure. That means I'm not at all like Eamon, really."

"No," sighed Billie. "You're probably nicer than he is."

The little boy came back, riding a red bicycle, beaming, his eyes in hooded slits. Eamon murmured something to him in Japanese. The boy appeared to ignore him. But he kept pedalling, round and round Eamon Srafe.

"How long was I...inactive?" he asked.

"Let's see. I had you off for about six months."

"Ah. Did I start to repeat myself then?"

"No, not once."

He looked about himself. "This temple," he said, "is made of wood imported from Korea. It is torn down and rebuilt every 13 years. But it is still the same temple as was built in the 14th century. It is the same temple in spirit. New and old at the same time."

Billie had never been to Japan. "I'd like to see inside it," she said.

The flesh on his face went slack, and his smile was edged. "Maybe they loaded enough data for you to do that. Look, Billie. Do you mind? I want to be on my own for a bit."

"Yes," she said. He stood up and walked off the screen. She didn't know he could do that. Did he still have a digital existence? Was the machine still programming actions for him? From somewhere came the sound of feet on gravel, of air moving, of children playing, of birds.

She was about to exit, when the little Japanese boy came up to the steps, crying and looking for Eamon. You and me both, kid, thought Billie. The red tricycle went past, pedalled furiously by an older, fatter child. The tricycle had been commandeered.

So who is making this up? she wondered. Me? The computer? How far outside of this park could I walk? Do they have all of Kyoto in this thing?

Then she heard Eamon's voice very dimly off-screen. The little boy walked off toward it, off-screen. She heard the boy complain, miserably. There were still birds singing unseen in the bushes. Billie wanted to see them.

In the corner of the monitor, the unblinking eye glowered with her, dull grey, absorbent.

"Put me there," whispered Billie.

She saw herself walk onto the screen, wearing traditional Japanese dress. Yes, that's what I'd wear, she thought, ruefully. I'd keep looking for the old Japan until I found it. She wore green and white silk with something like chopsticks in her hair. Oh, Billie, you fool. Her hair was glossy black, her skin sallow, but she decided it suited her. She was surprised by how much she liked herself. There was something direct and wiry in the way she moved that she had not expected. She was thin, yes, but not delicate. If I saw myself, she thought, I'd say, "That looks like a nice girl."

Billie on the screen sat down on the stone steps, and waited. Sun came and went, filtered by passing clouds, and the light reflected on the gold embroidery. Billie on the screen looked up directly at herself.

"It's nicer here," Billie heard herself say in her own voice. The little boy crunched his way across the gravel to her, and held up a pink and white fish cake.



"Thank you," said Billie on the screen to the boy. She took a bite from the cake, and then offered it back to him.

Don't do that, what about your germs, thought Billie, and then remembered. There are no germs here.

Eamon walked back on screen.

"Feel better now?" asked the copy of Billie.

"Yes, thanks," he said. She stood up, and he kissed her on the cheek.

"Want to see the temple?" Eamon asked.

So they walked hand in hand on stone pathways set like islands in gravel seas. The supports and boards of the roof of the temple made considered patterns. The wood was raw, clean. Billie saw herself stroke it. Light shone in the paper walls, dappled where the paper was slightly thicker. Only a wooden statue of the Buddha was old, deeply creased, with deep cracks across his face. The eyes were ancient, gleaming, creased with a smile.

"Are we going back to a hotel?" Billie on the screen asked, with a tremor of shyness.

"I'm staying here," said Eamon, surprised. "Didn't I tell you?"

There was a path down from the temple, through cherry trees, now just past blossom. White, decaying bloom still littered the ground. The rooms of the monks were in a terrace, like a motel. Inside the rooms were bare — a bed, a basin, a parchment on the wall with calligraphic signs. One window, high, just under the ceiling. Billie flung her arms around Eamon, held him.

"Can we?" she asked. "Here?"

He laughed, and kissed the tip of her nose. He began to wrestle himself out of his shirt. In her own bedroom, Billie saw his back, pale, slightly freckled, broad at the shoulders, but skinny at the arms. Eamon loosened the kimono, and it fell away from the other Billie, and she saw her own body as the computer must have seen it, night after night, still young, still beautiful even with the creases about the belly. She lay down on the bed. Outside, drifting on the wind, was the sound of a radio, some Japanese pop song, very distant. Eamon slipped out of his trousers. He had a washboard tummy and slightly too much chestnut hair. Like himself, his penis was both beautiful and ugly. He stood over Billie for a moment, smiling.

"Thank you for being here," he said, then very gently lowered himself on top of her.

Impassive, on another bed, in a room that smelled of sweat and cabbage and diesel, Billie watched and wondered what it meant that she watched. Round and round on her fingers, she still turned the poisoned paper.

What were six weeks in her life? Joey went back to school and got into trouble. He got in trouble for being too quiet. "He just doesn't socialize," said his teacher. What could Billie do about that? "He stays indoors all the time," she explained. "I can't really let him out; it's not safe where we live."

There was a spate of burglaries, and the Association could not afford the insurance.

"If you lived in a better area," she was told, "the premiums would be less."

"Rich people pay less insurance?" She was appalled.

"For goods of the same value, yes," said the salesman. "They're less likely to be burgled."

Billie remembered sleeping rough. She knew how it felt. There were homeless people nearby, sleeping under railway bridges. She paid them to keep watch on the Association by day, by forsaken night.

"You're just bribing them to stop thieving," said the woman who had stolen Billie's key. Then the homeless caught a burglar, just a kid. Relations between the two communities improved.

"Not bad," Billie boasted to Eamon, but he was less interested in the Association now. He and the other Billie walked around and around the Temple, the cherry trees, the monks, the gravel gardens. The little boy always waited for them while the same tourists took snapshots. The weather never changed, and the sound of doves fluttering upward in a flock was always the same.

"You really aren't alive, are you?" Billie said to them both.

"No," said Eamon, not surprised any more that she found it difficult to accept. "Would Heaven be much different from this?"

Billie had made Eamon, her Eamon, happy. What was there for her? The concert, just the concert. Perhaps something would happen at the concert, and then she would be free. She would see the real Eamon Strafe, and either she would be disappointed, and that would end it, or he would be as wonderful as she sometimes imagined. That, also, would be answer enough.

It was a beautiful September, but life was grey from waiting, as she sat in her kitchen/dinette, hands under her armpits. Joey was a shadow to her. She ate when Joey ate — otherwise she might have forgotten to eat altogether. She planned what she would wear to the show, as if it would make any difference to Eamon.

She decided in the end to dress to avoid being mugged — a grey jumpsuit with a small, dripped coffee stain on the thigh. After all, who was she going to see to impress? She would have to come home on the trains at night. A taxi was beyond question. She put a big kitchen knife in her handbag. The poison paper had finally been sealed in an envelope to prevent her winding fingers destroying it all together. The envelope was now in her bag, and she hugged her bag to herself with both arms.

Walking to the bus stop, sitting in the tube train, Billie coasted on automatic pilot, pulse racing, unable to think. The train passed the ruined civic spaces, the endless rows of back gardens and shrubbery.

A thousand people got off the train with her. It was like a pilgrimage. Billie looked at the faces. These were her people — the baffled and slightly blank faces, the librarians, typesetters, TV researchers, media secretaries, workers in bookshops, amateur potters — the fans of Eamon Strafe. It made her feel curiously elated to be with them again, as if they were all young, hanging out in Piccadilly, staying late till the clubs opened, and slipping off just as the clubs got going, to make the last train. Was Tora here? She should have rung Tora. Her mind, agitated, was stuck in a groove from one of Eamon's songs. Slaves, slaves, slaves to the rhythm, it sang, over and over.

All of them together flooded up the steps. Just inside the shell of the stadium was a concourse crammed like a street market, hawkers bellowing about hot dogs or fresh squeezed orange juice. The parent company of her health-food shop had shown up with bean sprout sandwiches. In comradeship, Billie bounced up to them. "I work for Billing's Natural as well," she told them.

"Oh God, not you too. If I have a daughter, I'll tell her, never work in a health shop."

They commiserated and then, for something to do, some way to finish the conversation, Billie bought a slice of health food carob cake. She walked around the perimeter, trying to find gate M. Of course she had been ripped off, the whole point was to rip her off. At a time when the bank manager was stopping her cheques, she had paid £30 for a supposedly good seat, and here she was — miles back and behind a pillar. There was a great slope of seating, and a further slope of temporary bleachers, and beyond that a flat plain of benches and finally, about the same size as her thumb, the stage. Billie was smiling.

Yes, yes, she thought, almost gleefully, they have to do this to us, to make us understand just how small we are. Yes, yes, yes, when we finally venture out of our little shells. She turned around and looked up at the banks of people behind her. Winkles, she thought, we're just little wrinkles prised out with pins. It was beginning to be fearsomely hot inside the Arena.

A family fought its way in to sit next to her, bearing thermos flasks of coffee and lemonade and unwrapping an entire, cooked chicken. The husband had a scraggly grey beard, and the wife seemed almost deliberately colourless. Their child, of indeterminate gender, was quiet and still, what is called well-behaved.

"Good seats aren't they?" said Billie, bouncy with anger. "Really worth 30 quid."

"Oh, not too bad, actually," said the man.

"We're awfully lucky to get them," said the wife. "I really thought we wouldn't, and I couldn't bear to miss this."

The child was sucking the empty yellow cup from the thermos flask. Are you free? Billie wondered. Did you get away?

"Do you like Eamon, too?" Billie asked the child.

"Yeah," said the child, a boy, without enthusiasm, looking at his cup and not her.

"The whole family," said the father. "We're Eamon-mad. We've got everything he's done, haven't we, Pat? We bought two copies of some of the discs. One each!"

So many of us, Billie thought. A woman in front of them had turned and was looking back at them. Billie recognized her forlorn expression. It was her own.

The little boy was finally given some lemonade.

Should I have brought Joey? I didn't even think to ask him. He must think that means I didn't want him to come. I didn't want him to come.

Do I love my son? It was a terrible question to ask. But there were worse questions, like, does my son love me? How could he? She found herself wondering if it were at all possible that her son could love her. I've put him into a little compartment, like the dishes. He'll grow up, he'll go away, he won't come back. My life is leaking away.

Because of Eamon Strafe.

A string quartet suddenly struck the spare metallic opening of "A Fish Dinner in Memison."

There was a kind of sigh, and a shushing, and a beehive flurry as people found their seats. The string quartet was live, on a separate stage, half a stadium away from where Eamon would appear. The speakers, behind a blue wall, were the size of small buildings and were swathed in black.

There were two huge blank screens either side of the main stage, and they came live in the same way her monitor at home did, loading the image from the top down.

And there he was smiling at all of them, Eamon Strafe.

There was a kind of roar, the lights dropped, the image on the screen walked off it, and then, on the stage, there he was, stepping into the light, instantly recognizable from half a mile away, tiny, blinding white, and Billie rose to her feet and the audience rose to its feet, in a deathly silence.

No cheers, no sound at all, silent wonder. It was him, it was Eamon.

The way Eamon walked was lonely. The walk said: there are very few people like me. Becoming me has been a long fight, and there was no one to help. A walk could say that.

Billie couldn't see his face. She couldn't focus, he was a blur, lost in the glare of the lights. His clothes, his shoes were all a haze of light. Except on the screens. There he was, Eamon, rumpled, smiling, lopsided as always, and utterly familiar.

Without introduction, he began to sing.

Billie heard herself scream. It was a real scream, a relief of agony. She was the only one — you do not scream at an Eamon Strafe concert. You listen. You weep. She pushed the palm of her hand into her mouth, and forced herself to sit, and she bit down, and pain shot through her hand. She pulled her hand back, and looked at it.

The bite was deep and bloody, just under the thumb of her right hand.

Oh Billie, you stupid cow, what have you done now?

It was bleeding profusely, down her wrist, over the jumpsuit. The blood crept richly across the glossy white paper of her programme book, beside a picture of Eamon.

She held up her hand and whispered to the family. "Do you have a handkerchief?"

They were extremely discomfited. They understood from the scream and its sequel that her sickness was seriously worse than their own. With the care that extends any noise and makes it worse, the wife sought in her bag for a Kleenex. The bag rattled, the plastic pack rustled. Overhead the waves of noise bashed into each other from two directions, source and echo. The music was made nonsense, the beat disrupted, the words lost. Billie pushed the Kleenex against the wound.

"Take the pack," whispered the wife.

Billie closed her eyes and found that the image of Eamon Strafe had been burned into her retina. There was a clear purple silhouette of him in her eyes with a glowing core of yellow. There was a silhouette of the bite in the nerves of her thumb.

She opened her eyes again, saw Eamon on a screen.

That was all she was going to see. It was just like being at home. Eamon was not going to be ordinary or wonderful or different in any way from what he had always been. She felt like Alice, shrinking. One song finished, another began. What else did she expect? Fireworks? The music was vaguely familiar. It took a while for it to turn into "Democracy of Greed," the third single, from when he was young and strong, and people still thought he was going to be the last pop star. It got as high as number nine, and then began to slide down the charts, taking Eamon with it.

It wasn't Eamon's singing that she heard. It was the people around her, humming, a sound like bees, holding the music together. You're not performing, Eamon. We are.

*Democracy, democracy,
Democracy of Greed
for those who have ability
from those who have the need*

Her Eamon had been right. Her Eamon was as real as anything she was going to get from this. My hand is bleeding, she thought, and my seat is a rip-off. This isn't good enough, it isn't enough at all.

At first she only wanted to leave, escape her anger, go home. "Excuse me," she said to the college students to her right. She stood up, and walked in front of them. "Excuse me, excuse me." She stepped on people's feet, they tutted. Couldn't they see she was trying to get out? "Excuse me," like in those clubs when she was young, it was all she ever said to anyone. "Excuse me."

She pushed her way past them with the force of her whole life. She bled over them deliberately. It's a sign, she told them in her mind. It's what's happening to all of you. She broke free into an aisle, and thumped down the steps, only to be intercepted by a guard. Hush Hush said a badge on his shoulder.

"I've cut myself. Is there a first-aid kit?" she asked him.

Oh God. "Basic Blue" was starting up. At least she would be spared that.

The guard was fat, older than he should be, and he nervously jingled keys in his pocket. He walked with her to gate M, made sure she exited, and told her to ask at the trailer by Gate A. She walked back along the marketplace. The girls at Billing's Natural were wiping the countertop, and talking, oblivious to the music drifting about them. By gate A, there was a white trailer. Inside it there was a tiny seating area for the guards. Face down on a table there was a magazine called *Four Wheel Drive Vehicles*. A sign on the wall said, SHOWERS. Another guard sat at a desk, and inside it was a blue box with bandages.

"How did you manage that?" the guard asked, cutting gauze.

"Slipped and fell," she said.

His eyes were heavy with meaning as he looked back into hers. "Don't understand this hysteria stuff," he said. He paused, then seemed to think better of saying anything further.

"Neither do I," whispered Billie. "Neither do I."

I'm going to get what I came for, she thought.

She stood by Gate A and looked at the defences. The stage was in layers like a ziggurat, each step 10, 15 feet high. That was to keep them all away, and the wall as

well, painted a sweet powder blue, cutting off all the backstage area, and in front of that, rows of waist-high barriers. Up and down the aisles, guards patrolled.

What are you frightened of Eamon? Why don't you want us near you? You've taken enough from us. Beside her were bleachers, and she could see their innards above wood panels, a glimpse of shadowed scaffolding.

A guard came out from beyond the last row of defences, walking beside the wall. He stopped in front of what Billie saw was a door in the wall. Billie walked forward, in front of the bleachers, to see him better. There was a black circle on the wall, and her eyes hauled it closer to her, and she saw the guard's hand dabbling over its surface — four strokes, five strokes — and a door in the wall opened.

Billie knew then how she was going to get to Eamon.

As she ran up the steps of the bleachers she could feel them shake slightly underfoot, boards supported on temporary scaffolding. The seats were made of planks, meeting at right angles, sealing off the innards. But the steps consisted of a top board only. Underneath each step, there was a gap of about eight inches.

Billie had not been eating much lately. In truth, Billie was half-starved.

She glanced about her, people in darkness, light catching on teeth or spectacles or jewellery, or hair clips, or eyes, the rest of the face lost in darkness. All looking at the light below, watching it pirouette. No guards. Billie sat down on the steps, as if not finding her seat. She crouched low, looked one more time, and then she lay down flat on the step. She rolled onto her tummy, and felt the boards press clothes, flesh, the bones of her hip, her elbow. The bones were so close to the surface. She shifted sideways, and head-first, pulled herself under the step. The boards were rough, slivers entered her thighs. The scaffolding and steps began to shake. Was someone coming up after her? Below was an eight-foot drop to concrete, not too far; Billie grabbed hold of a cross support and pulled.

She swung out, her feet like lead weights, and she had to hold, ever though the bite on her hand was torn wider. Her shins struck another pole, and she hissed and clenched and kicked, and found footing.

Gingerly, she slid her feet down a smooth diagonally supporting pole until she could stand on a right-angle support. She wavered in place, nearly falling, and then sat down, and reached with her feet for the next, treacherously angled pole down. She did that once more, and was within jumping distance. Then she saw the flashlight beam.

It skittered like Tinkerbell in *Peter Pan*, under the steps, along the supports. You'll have to jump now, Billie. And without shaking the scaffolding.

She dropped down and her good hand struck a pole and went numb, and she landed in a heap. The floor was grey, her jumpsuit was grey, and she pulled her arms over her neck and face and went still. She saw the skittering light dance toward her, and pass over her and up into the network of poles.

Billie was now as invisible as a message down a telephone line.

She scampered, shaking with nerves, ducking

down under poles, in nearly complete darkness. Only when she passed under an aisle did the gaps in the boards admit light, in slats overhead. There were slashes of light, where rough boards failed to fit. And all the time, that voice game ghostly, filtering, as if singing in Japanese.

Billie came to the end of the bleachers and found them sealed with a barrier of wood panels bolted to supports that looked like something from a Meccano set. Overhead, at the top of the bleachers was the area that was not closed off.

Billie started to climb again, to the very apex of the bleachers, in the back. Billie looked out from it, as if from a game window.

Eamon was talking, telling a story.

"...so I was in the square, looking for the master. I figured I was the only Westerner there and that he would see me..."

He was blinding bright here as well, and Billie saw why. He was lit, fiercely, from underneath. He must be standing over spotlights. The pyramid must be full of machinery.

The blue wall reached from the bleachers all the way to the grey first step of the pyramid and stuck to it like a wet lipstick kiss. Below her was a ten-foot drop, and the silver fencing, and to the right, in the concrete, was a door. Someone could come through it at any moment. She herself could have come through it.

Her way was blocked by a crucifix of scaffolding. She sat backwards on it, lifted her feet, swung them around and out. No time to think, Billie, no need to look.

Her feet hung in space and she took all her weight on her hands, locking her elbows. She had thought she could lower herself further down from there, hang down with hands above her head. She did not know how to shift to that position without jarring; she doubted that she had the strength. She began to feel the tickle of fear in her belly, the fear that comes when you're stuck on a rock face or can't climb down from a tree. She didn't have time for that.

"The master, you see, thought I ought to come to him."

Here I come, Eamon. Billie pushed herself clear of the wall and let go.

Something seemed to clutch her insides, and with increasing force haul them upward. Something struck her head, something rang — a security fence — she fell slightly sideways, landing on calf, thigh, buttock, shoulder. She rolled, ending up with feet over her head.

Get up, Billie, get up, get up. She rocked herself to her feet. Her shoulder ached, her back would be dusty; she patted the back of her head for blood. There was blood. Or was that only from her hand? She began to walk, using arched fingers to comb her hair, brush it back over the wound, and she tried to rid her face of the squiffy, drunken look she knew she had around the eyes.

I am from Stevens Arts she told herself. I'm here to check out the imaging on the screens. A guard stood in front of her, scanning the audience, hands on his hips. Billie saw the pouch of fat on the small of his back, straining against his shirt. As long as his back was toward her, she ran, lightly trotting, trying to look like a businesswoman who was late.



He glanced over his shoulder, she slowed, he turned, she nodded to him, smiling. The door was near now, and she fixed her gaze on the round black security panel. Were the keys digit or lettering?

The guard sauntered toward her, smiling and shaking his head. Digits, she saw, there were only ten of them. She had to get to the door first, and key in and key in right.

"I'm from Stevens," she called, and turned to the keys, and cooled her mind. If she failed, she would shrug, smile, say, well it was worth a try.

5 1 13 15 14. EAMON in code.

The door clicked, and seemed to sigh. Gotcha!

Billie nodded again to the guard; nodding to him was good, it meant she faced him and he couldn't see the dust on her back, the flood on her head.

The guard's smile became one of relief, chagrin. He waved her in.

Billie slipped sideways through the door still facing the guard, closed the door, and turned around.

She was surprised by something. Dark and shadow. There were trailers on the back-stage area, also in shadow, and thick cables underfoot. She was too preoccupied by fear to have said precisely what was missing, what was wrong. On the steps of one of the trailers, a man was hunched over a cellphone. She heard Donald-Duck squawking, she saw a pony tail, she ran, footfall cushioned, hobbled, by rubber cable underfoot. Too late to worry about 20,000 volts now, Billie. She ran for the shelter of the giant speaker; she saw its scaffolding support was wrapped in cloth, loose cloth this side. Dark and speed and silence were all she had. She began to shake, made the shelter of the cloth, enfolded herself in its edges.

Finally, she was able to breathe, and to hear the sound booming muffled overhead. Eamon began to sing, and there was a roar of approval when the audience recognized the song.

*The music gets louder
And the beat gets faster
And the man who calls the tune
Becomes your lord and master.
And between him and you
There grows such a schism
That the only word for it is
Sadomasochism.*

And people were cheering? He's telling you what he's doing to you, to all of us. Maybe that's how they do it. They tell us the truth, just enough to make us feel better. Open the door, and then slam it shut on our fingers.

She peered out from her folds of cloth, and it seemed as though her trembling breath ought to be forming a white vapour from cold. A great blank stretch of concrete, dusty, a chocolate-bar wrapper.

Where were the people? Where were the tables with food, the deck chairs, the crowding of family, friends, record-company execs, liggers with no real business? Where was the man with the cellphone? From the screens, from somewhere, there came a strange blue-white light. It played over everything, flickering. It seemed to flow along the concrete like ground mist.

And Billie looked at the giant stage, and there were

no steps, no ladders, no lift, no way up, even from the back. How did Eamon get there? Fly? Between her and the stage were the giant screens, supported by scaffolding, scaffolding her new friend.

She ran again. A curtain of giant cables hung down behind the screen; they must be insulated, just push. Billie ducked behind a screen of thick rubber, and crouched.

Above her was the scaffolding and beside her the grey wall of the stage. Billie began to climb. You thought you were untouchable, Mr Strafe. You really thought no one reached you. Well, I will. And I will show you, Eamon Strafe, that you are not my lord and master.

Halfway up, a megaphone voice said, "Please young lady. Come down."

"Go to hell!" she shouted.

It was harder going up scaffolding than coming down. She had to lie on the diagonals and shimmy up them, then twist herself around. She saw ladders being carried down below, through the strange thick light.

She came to wooden planks, a platform, and a ladder, going up to the works behind the screen. She scuttled up the ladder, onto another platform. This one did not shake as she ran. The last level of the zigurat lay below her, and to her right, a drop of about her own height, across a gap of some yards. She had time to see the surface of the stage was black, glass perhaps or formica, but glistening with flakes of gold, or light.

"Don't! Please!" called a voice behind.

Here goes, Eamon, thought Billie, and flung herself into the air. She flung herself into the viscous light, and became aware in a moment that it was different from any light she had known. It made her skin buzz, and where she blocked it the shadows moved across each other in different planes, like the lights of passing trucks on her bedroom wall at night. Where the planes of light met and crossed, there was a flaring rainbow colour.

And overhead, stars seemed to reach up into infinity, dwindling to nothingness. But the stars were in serried ranks, orderly in planes of light.

And the light was so solid, it was for an instant as though it were impeding her progress, as though she had leapt through water. She remembered the lake in childhood. She remembered her parents. And suddenly she was lying in a crumpled heap on the stage, looking down.

At a kind of glass, dark as though smoked, but in layers somehow, translucent, and shifting. And the stars were there too, going down forever, through the floor of the stadium, through the earth itself, and in their midst there seemed to be twin suns blazing up at her.

Don't look! something told her, and she looked away, and everything was dark, and she stumbled; her ankle was twisted. She was blind, her skin sore as though sunburned, and she turned toward Eamon, and she heard footsteps behind her, and through the smoke of her blindness, she saw Eamon, made of light, like an angel, blazing with inner fire. He did not know she was there.

And the weight of the world seemed to slam into her, bringing her down, and it was not just the weight

of the arms that hugged her knees and the body that tackled her to the stage. Don't! Look! Down! Something in her mind screamed at her, knowing that a second time, she would go blind forever. Instead she looked up.

Looked up at Eamon Strafe. He was singing.

*A voice like mist
hits like a fist
and then it's gone.*

Eamon Strafe was translucent, and motes of dust swam through him glinting like galaxies. There was nothing in his eyes, in his mouth. They were shadows, dark inside, with scaffolding, staging, showing through them. He was checkerboard, little defined mosaics of colour, and all through his hair, teeth, tongue, eyes, clothes, dust moved in a sluggish current. And Billie knew if her hand reached out to touch him, it would have passed through.

Billie was hoisted to her feet, swung around, taken by the arms, and dragged, her feet sliding on the surface of the stage, slightly greasy. She ran to catch up, took her own weight, even on the damaged ankle, hobbled to keep up with them. The guards pulled her back toward the screen. When she tried to look behind her, one of them took the top of her head in his hand, and turned it back around.

Hush Hush said their sleeves, and they wore thick protective dress, and mirror visors. Billie had never thought so quickly.

"I saw him," she lied. "I saw Eamon! Isn't he beautiful!"

The guards said nothing. Below them was spread the unused part of the stadium. Light flickered over rows of deserted seats, invisible people listening to ghost music. This is the future, Billie thought, this is what it will be like.

There were ladders now.

"OK, climb down. If you fall, we are not responsible, all right?"

"Yeah, sure," said Billie, trying to sound thick.

On the ground, the men with coffee were waiting. One was tall, with a pony tail and an ear stud.

"Are you OK?" he asked. He came forward, took her wrist. "Can you see all right? Does that hurt?" Gently, he moved his hand along her wrist. It stung. The skin was lobster pink. "Ouch!" she yelped. "I'm just back from Ibiza," she said. "I got a bit too much sun."

The two men glanced at each other nervously. "You saw Eamon, did you?" the other man asked. He was short, with a neck thicker than his head, and he wore a white shirt and tie. His voice was darker. What would he do to protect an investment?

She had to get away, get away before that other guard could come and say: but she knew the password. She got in through the door.

"Oh, yes, he's even more beautiful than I thought he would be." Sixteen. Billie remembered being 16. She found the 16-year-old was still there, to wonder at things and be hurt by them.

"I don't mind anything now. I've seen him!" She managed to hop up and down. "At last, at last, at last. Do you know him? Do you get to talk to him?" She found she was weeping.

"We talk to him, yeah," said the earring, and he looked just the slightest bit wistful. "He's a really nice guy."

"Did you see anything else?" asked the white shirt. "I couldn't see anything but Eamon!" she said, her voice clogged with mucous and tears.

The two looked at each other. Roadies, she thought, they used to be roadies for a band and got a big idea.

"If you've got a ticket," said the ear stud, "you can go back to your seat."

Ryman reached for her purse. "I've lost it! she cried in a dismay that was only partly feigned. "It's gone!"

"Then I'm afraid, love," said the white shirt, "we're going to have to throw you out."

"Oh no, please!" she wailed. It was just what she wanted.

They asked for her name. Any ID? Sure, the Association's card, which gave her name as Wilhelmina. A door was opened in a gate big enough to drive lorries through, just as the image of Eamon Strafe stopped singing about mist and Spirit.

The door closed. Billie was outside.

There was a light rain. London looks best at night. The asphalt, the paving stones all reflect the orange street lights, and the drops on cars and windows glow like little jewels.

Billie began to laugh.

She laughed out of sheer nerves. She laughed at the way she had fooled the guards. She spun on her heel and kicked a bottle. Hot damn, what had she done? Played Tarzan on scaffolding, fooled the guards, and found the truth.

Eamon Strafe did not exist. He probably never had. All that love, all that listening, it was for nothing? Laughter and terror bubbled up inside her.

After all, he was the perfect pop star. Always distant, always perfect, nipping in and out of view, aging beautifully. All those people! Buying discs and tickets and software, and all those women melting at the thought of him, we've all been idiots, dupes. What a joke.

Oh, this is an evil place, a rotten place, scheming, scheming, to get at your loot. I know you, Billie said to the street lights, the closed-up shops, I know what all of you are, small and mean or big and grand, and, you know? You don't scare me at all.

I'm free of you, Eamon! You great big blouse! You empty set of knocker thumpers! You great big cardboard box full of fart. You were made up.

She found she was jumping up and down through a mud puddle like a kid. She laughed again and saw in the dark water a reflection, her face, translucent like Eamon's. That stirred something in her, and she broke the image apart with her foot, but not before she saw there were blisters on her face, like raindrops on the hoods of cars. Whatever it was, she had now what she had come for. Whatever it was, she had better get moving out of here.

It was a long ride home, and fear and elation went stale. Billie watched the blackness of the underground walls pass by in a rattling smear, and she asked herself, what now? I'm 27 years old. I have some skills. Scaffold climbing among them. I have the Association, and I like the people in it. And I have my son. She made up her mind what she was going to do when she got home.

After the tube ride, there was the bus. A drunk got on, reeking and singing harshly, and, oh God, he was

singing one of Eamon's songs. See where it got you, mate? The man looked 50, and Billie couldn't tell if it was dirt or hard living that made his skin so dark and blotchy. "Life could be good," he roared. It seemed to make him feel better.

You play a crying baby a tape of its own weeping, and it is soothed. That's all you did, Eamon. You played it back to us. The music came from us, not you.

In the dark of her flat, Billie found a note from the babysitter. It said that Joey was asleep, so would Billie mind if she left? Bloody hell, thought Billie, the point was to have someone here while he slept. OK, she thought, but I won't pay you.

Billie gently pushed open his door, and smelled him, and heard his soft child's breath. He was growing up a stranger. She did not know what he thought or felt. There was a bursting of love and regret in her, as if she had bitten into a bitter fruit. It made her angry at Eamon Strafe all over again. Billie knelt next to the bed and stroked her son's brown and slightly greasy hair.

"Joey," she whispered. "I'm sorry."

He groaned and rolled over.

"I'll be a better Mum, I promise. We'll do something fun on Saturday."

He lay inert and unresponsive.

"I'm sorry life isn't beautiful." She meant she was sorry that she had not made it beautiful for him.

"I'm asleep," he said, pouting, angry.

"You know I love you, don't you?"

There was no answer. Billie was used to that.

She kissed him and went back to her bedroom, her own little world, the bed, the posters, the boots and panties on the floor, and the machine. She turned it on.

"Hello," she said, darkening, full of strength.

The image unfurled down her screen from the top down. Eamon was in his dressing room, ebullient, full of joy, happy to see her. "Billie!" he exclaimed, hopping out of his chair. "Hello, love, it's great to see you!" He looked tanned and worn in his crumpled white suit. It had a stain on the thigh.

This was her Eamon. Pity, useless pity, moved her.

"Did you enjoy the show?" he asked. Outside his dressing room, the audience was still rhythmically thumping, demanding more.

Billie considered her answer. "I learned a lot," she said. She sat down on the bed and faced him. "I got up on stage tonight. I saw Eamon up close, I stood right next to him. He doesn't exist. He's some kind of hologram."

"What?" This Eamon made a kind of nervous chuckle.

"I think it means there has never been an Eamon Strafe. I think he's been a construct from the beginning."

"There's photographs of me in the papers!"

"Yes, photographs of you. You don't exist, either."

"Oh, come on, Billie. I'm full of his memories!"

"Do they add up to a life?" Billie asked. "His life?"

She had killed him. The picture froze, the sound of cheering stopped, his face was still. Billie could hear the hard disc whirring to itself, trying to consult, trying to find a model response. It was suddenly terrible sitting alone in a bedroom with a frozen screen and the sound of rain.

"Could you bring Billie on, please?" she asked.

The screen snapped back into life, and Billie came in wearing black trousers, silver studded, and a black jacket, and a diamond bracelet. Billie, as she might have been if she had money and power and had done what she wanted to. Or was she?

"Is it true?" Eamon asked this other Billie.

And this Billie nodded: yes. And Billie on the screen said simply, "Think of it this way. It means you are the real Eamon. You always were." And she glanced, just once, out at the tiny bedroom, the unmade bed, the other Billie in the stained jumpsuit. What was she thinking? I'm doing your job for you? Which one of us has the better life? Was she thinking anything at all?

The Billie on the bed said, "I want the two of you to go for a walk, wherever you want to go. Don't take me with you, I don't want to be there. Just go there, now, to Ireland maybe."

"Japan," said the other Billie. Billie was almost touched, until she remembered that the temple and the park was the failsafe locale.

A single perfect tear slid down Eamon's cheek, leaving a trail behind like a snail. In its perfect depths, upside down, was a reflection of the real Billie. A calculation of the light.

"Come on, love," said the other Billie and tapped his shoulder, to go. For some reason, Billie did not want to see them leave the dressing room.

Billie went to make herself a cup of tea. It would be lonely now without a kindly voice to tell her that she deserved it. She thought of her mother, the house in South End, school, Joey's father, her memories. Did they add up to a life?

When she went back into the bedroom, the screen showed Eamon's empty dressing room. On the table top there were the face powder and the mild-coloured lipsticks. Desperate Dan Butch Cosmetics. A sweaty white suit hung on a peg. The murmuring of the crowd had faded away. It was silent now, except for the sound of someone sweeping outside. The shadow of a broom slid along the crack of light underneath the door.

Billie reinserted the transceiver card.

"Broadcast down the transceiver network," Billie told her machine. "Tell them all that Eamon is a digital construct. Tell them all that there is no Eamon. Don't say how you know. Try to disguise where the message entered the system. Do not reveal the source of information."

PROCESSING INSTRUCTIONS said a message on the screen, with a little moving clock.

"Locate where Eamon and Billie are in the system now, and save it as a separate file. As long as you operate, keep the file active, but security block it. Never open it, even if I ask you to." Did it understand? "Ice it."

Heaven, where nothing ever happens.

"OK, log off," she said. She slid the CD out of its player, and saw Eamon's picture printed on it, and that's when she began to weep. Water leaked into her mouth tasting of salt. Tears of rage, pity, joy — take your pick, at least you know you're alive. She knew then that Eamon, her Eamon, would always be with her, inside her. There were words flickering on the screen. Like all of us, the machine wanted its actions to be authorized.

PLEASE SAY GOODBYE, it asked.

Billie found that she couldn't.

The SF Kick

Terry Pratchett talks to Stella Hargreaves about sf, fantasy and why he won't be taking the Devil's Bargain just yet

Hands up anyone who's never read a book by Terry Pratchett? Sorry, I don't believe you. Katherine Whitehorn of *Observer* fame reads him and thinks he's brilliant. My daughter's 20-year-old friends (tough Brixton girls in leather jackets) squeal as they would for k.d. lang at the mention of his name. My friend Max (aged eleven-and-a-half) says Terry Pratchett is the only famous writer he's heard of apart from Roald Dahl. Furthermore, Max thinks Pratchett's books are fairly good, so there.

When Terry agreed to be interviewed, I was naturally keen to know why his books are so universally popular. I was also curious about some remarks he'd made earlier about mainstream authors who write science fiction but bend over backwards to deny it. For example, he noted that P.D. James says her 1992 novel *The Children of Men* isn't sf, because science fiction has robots and other planets in it (!).

Is it important to you to declare yourself an sf writer?

I think I write fantasy. But all writing is fantasy, fantasy is the literature, the root of the storytelling tree. All the other genres, even the "serious novel," are just branches. Insofar as fantasy has now come to mean, well, wizards and magic and stuff, yes, I am a fantasy writer – although I dislike a lot of the assumptions of the consensus post-Tolkien "heroic fantasy" universe.

I don't think of myself as an sf writer because sf has its own rules and I don't obey them. It's a shame that "fantasy and sf" are now practically synonymous in many people's minds. You might just as

well say "fantasy and western" – the genres have quite a lot in common.

I used to say that I write funny novels with fantasy as a background, but now I think that was a kind of get-out. There's always the feeling you're being offered a Devil's Bargain, that the literary establishment will offer you some kind of acceptance in exchange for a promise to say that you don't write fantasy and never have. Even now, there's this idea that "real" writers shouldn't admit to being involved with sf: I'm sure J.G. Ballard has always suffered from his early connection with the genre, and Iain Banks also bears the mark of Cain. You know the old saying: "If it's good it can't be science fiction, if it's science fiction it can't be good." That's not just a neat line.

A reviewer in one of the "quality" Sunday papers recently said mainstream writers are now taking sf themes but writing them better.

A person would have to be very foolish indeed [here, Mr Pratchett actually said something a lot ruder and more direct, which at his request I've amended – S.H.] to say this. It's true that quite specific sf themes have been borrowed by writers like Martin Amis, P.D. James and Robert Harris, themes which have previously been brilliantly explored by Philip K. Dick and Kurt Vonnegut, for example.

Take *Fatherland*. There's nothing at all new in the basic "Hitler victory" scenario. There's nothing wrong with picking up an idea and giving it a new twist, if Harris has given it a new twist. But there's a lot wrong when *Fatherland* is reviewed as though it's

completely new: Harris is just one among many to have used this theme, though he may have done it in a different way... It's so annoying; so many people read sf but won't admit it. You know that around Christmas time there's always a newspaper feature on what well-known people have read during the year. And they always dig up some book that's been widely-reviewed in the literary pages, or which is in the news. No one ever admits to reading Jilly Cooper... When they asked me I volunteered the *Dell DOS 5.0 Manual*. Well, I'd read it with a lot of interest...

But the critic's point betrays a state of mind: sf can only be good if it's written by a "real" – i.e., non-sf – writer. In the same way fantasy is only worthwhile if it can be repackaged as "magical realism," which is a code phrase meaning "fantasy written by someone I was at university with."

Does the mainstream really dislike sf?

I'm not sure what the mainstream is. But we all think we know what we mean when we use the term mainstream in this context; we mean some stuck-up but influential onanists in London. I was once asked to take part in a late-night arts programme. They'd got interested in a talk of mine in which I poke fun at the worst excesses of post-Tolkien fantasy. You know... the "Landlord, a pint of your finest ale!" school of writing. That was about half the talk. Then I went on to talk about the good stuff, and I mentioned writers like Rob Holdstock and Mary Gentle as people who'd gone well beyond that format. And the director wanted this part to come out. It

became apparent that what he was after was a Hampstead sneer at the whole genre, and he wanted the usual BBC piss-on-the-anoraks bit. So I walked.

But why do they want to have their Hampstead sneer? Is it just snobbery?

I think, at bottom, it's the British dislike of enthusiasm. We get giggly and sarcastic when confronted with people who're really keen on anything. It's not cool to be keen.

It's not a case of "Snooty critics hate sf." Sometimes it's a case of disliking what people appear to enjoy because people enjoy it. Who are these semi-educated louts to go around enjoying books? I recall someone giving some stick to Joanna Trollope because, when she was describing a cathedral in one of her books, she said "it was bigger on the inside than the outside." What on earth can she mean, said this clown. But it's a perfectly good and succinct way of describing the hugeness inside a cathedral.

But this was Joanna Trollope, Aga-saga writer, and therefore fair game. And a *Sunday Times* critic got frothy with me for "effecting a cosy mind-set between reader and writer." And I thought: leaving aside the nasty phrasing, isn't that what a writer's supposed to do? But you're not supposed to do it for the oiks.

But I associate early sf with something else entirely; to me, it means the McCarthy era and writers finding a way to question the way society in America was going without ending up in front of the Un-American Activities Committee.

Maybe some was. But most wasn't. It certainly wasn't a neat underground forum for social protest, although it could be. Surely most of it just reflected the views of its writers – variously pro-communist, pro-American, pro-science, pro-space, pro-earning-a-living. And a lot of it was crap. Enjoyable crap, mind you.

So do you blame mainstream critics for creating a negative view of sf?

If you're looking for reasons for the negative image – other than the

good old one about the pulp heritage from the 40s, which I don't think is all that relevant now – then you should look at the way in which TV pushes the "sf = sci-fi = Junior" view, the way in which idiot sub-editors will always dig out some old *Astounding* cover to illustrate an otherwise decent article about sf – and sometimes at the actions of fans themselves. Some fans do connive at this and cherish the ghetto. There's definitely an attitude of "we are separate and better." Have you heard the term "mundanes"? It's a throwaway word for everyone else but "us fans gathered here today." I hate it. It depersonalizes those it's used against – the gooks, the slants, the mundanes.

There is another point I ought to make here. "Fandom" is small. The traditional fandom, the one I first encountered in the 60s, is even smaller. But even if you lumped them together with the Trekkies and Six of One and all the other groups that have some claim on the sf/fantasy label, then total "fandom" – the people who go to cons and meetings, write fanzines, who consciously think of themselves as fans – would still be a tiny minority of the reading public. And that public is not particularly "mundane." There's plenty of people out there who read sf and fantasy as part of a balanced reading diet and who don't think of themselves as fans, and who'd probably go pale at the thought of spending a weekend at a con. From the outside, fandom looks weird.

I recently had to stay in a hotel that was hosting a small con for fans of a particular TV series. It was bizarre. What were these strange notices everywhere? Who were these pale people?

Traditional sf fans will say: "but we're not these people." But to a pagan all Christians look alike.

I must admit I had a bit of trouble with the idea of Gerry Anderson as Worldcon Guest-of-Honour in 1995. I mean, nice chap, everyone knows Thunderbirds...but the GoH? We want to say to the world, yes, this is the acme of sf achievement? And then I thought: so what? Doris Lessing was a GoH in 1987, and I didn't see any newspapers saying, "hey, it's Doris Lessing, sf has Come of Age, it is A

Serious Thing." They just did the usual "Sci-Fi Loonies Beam Into Town" bit – to such an extent, I recall, that she felt moved to write to one newspaper saying how much she had appreciated the convention. So, frankly, fans might as well invite who they like, because no one outside fandom will give a damn one way or the other.

Is sf waning in popularity?

Who says so?

I've read it somewhere. And I've heard of sf writers who are being asked by publishers to write other types of genre books.

Can't comment. Don't know. But the genres wax and wane. And sometimes it's hard to know what is sf. Nearly everything Iain Banks writes is sf, for example. A lot of sf readers picked up *The Wasp Factory*. Not a spaceship in sight. But it's got the sf "feel."

Why does crime seem to be currently favoured over sf? You know, London in particular is apparently knee-deep in women detectives. It seems to me that a lot of crime writing is cliché-bound and going nowhere.

But there are very good crime writers, like Joseph Wambaugh or Carl Hiaasen, who wrote *Skin Tight* and *Native Tongue*. It's all just fashion.

Did you see Colin Greenland's letter in *Interzone* about the controversy surrounding the Arthur C. Clarke award going to *Body of Glass*? Colin's argument was that the Clarke is meant to be an award for sf writers and that as *Piercy* isn't marketed as such, her book shouldn't have been eligible.

I can understand how Colin feels. In my heart, I know he's right. In my head, I think he's wrong. I think he's on dangerous ground. Who defines a book as sf, the author or the reader? I'd say *Children of Men* could have had an sf award, if it was considered good enough. It deals with the same themes as Brian Aldiss did in *Greybeard*. Tough titty if Baroness James doesn't think it is sf. Frog-march her up to the podium, give her the plastic spaceship or whatever, and put out a damn great press release. With photos!

I remember hearing that a long



Terry Pratchett

time ago Salman Rushdie entered, but didn't win, an sf novel contest. Perhaps in some nearby alternate universe he did win, wandered along to a con to see what it was all about, had a few jars, and is now the 1995 Worldcon Guest of Honour...

But perhaps Greenland was trying to say that a lot of good writers have nailed their colours to the mast, that they are committed to writing sf? So why should anyone who apparently doesn't want to be known as a sf writer get the Clarke Award? And there is the argument that the Clarke Award is available to all connected with the genre (including publishers) and is meant to specifically encourage new sf writers.

As I said, I understand why the Piercy situation causes unhappiness; after all, the Booker would never be given to a self-declared sf novel, and here we are opening our awards to the world. But I'm uneasy about judges having to consider not just the book in question but also the author's bona-fides as "an sf writer." As for the rest, well, the award either conformed to the rules or it didn't. But suppose Jilly

Cooper got struck by lightning one day and produced the quality sf novel of the decade? A bit of an outside chance, I admit. Not giving it consideration for an sf award because of who she is, though, would be unfair.

While we're talking, I'm recalling that the only awards I've had have been from the British Science Fiction Association...I've never had one from a fantasy organization. But I'm pretty certain that I don't write sf.

I've read that you're planning a Discworld book in which rock music features.

That's one from the outfield... Yes, that's the one I'm working on. I've got no great attachment to classic rock'n'roll, but it's got an interesting mythology.

Will you ever do any screenwriting?

Neil Gaiman and I wrote stuff for *Good Omens* which I think we're still owed money for, and probably always will be. We both quit when it got too silly. No, I don't want to get involved again. There are too many middlemen, too many people

with absolute power to say "no" and no power at all to say "yes." And no one knows what they want or has any vision. I remember a US company pulled out of a deal to do *Mort* because "the American public couldn't watch a film in which Death is an sympathetic and amusing character." This was about 18 months before *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*.

I wonder why people who could be happy working somewhere else go to L.A.? It's a strange world... If California's a boil, L.A. is the little bit of yellow on the top. I've actually been paid for two *Mort* scripts, but I make quite a lot of money anyway so I'm not too worried about film.

Ah, yes: Money. Why do your books sell so widely?

You tell me. There's some guy doing a degree thesis on me and he wrote with a lot of questions on that subject, and all I could think of to say was, "hey, I rely on clever buggers like you to come up with the answer." From my mail, I'd say my readership is fifty-fifty male and female. And someone said that reading my books was like being in

an exclusive club that anyone could join.

But Terry Pratchett has never been hyped.

It's sometimes suggested in sf fandom that I am, but that's because of a confusion between "hype" and "advertising" and "popularity." I'm not hugely advertised by bestseller standards – a few months ago there was a sort of league table of advertising spends for the autumn and, yes, I was on there for *Men At Arms*, but down the list after Vernor Vinge and Shaun Hutson. On the other hand, I write a lot of books. There's always another one along in a minute. Last autumn there was a lot of stuff – another graphic novel, the Ankh-Morpork map, *Men At Arms*, the paperback of *Lords and Ladies*, the paperback of *Only You Can Save Mankind*, various tape cassettes...

But hype... It's hard to be hyped if you're nothing to do with television. I've never taken tea with Mr Wogan or supper with Mr Ross. This is a state of affairs with which I am very happy. Television can't handle books.

The truth is that, firstly, Corgi nearly didn't publish *The Colour of Magic*. They liked it, they just weren't quite sure about where it was in the market. Then they said "what the hell" and did what was actually quite a large print run for a new author. And it started to sell very well. So did the next two. The reprint history makes interesting reading. It really all happened by word of mouth and then, when Mort came out, the publishers realized that there was a bandwagon rolling.

I know quite a few writers who worry about whether or not they're literary.

My god. Can you really worry about that? "Am I only 75% literary? If I really tried could I be more literary?" That's like worrying if your willy is long enough or your boobs are too small. It's someone else's decision. My advice is to endeavour to be a writer who gets read and paid. Let the outside world decide what kind of writer you are.

But sf is marginalized?

Yes. And as I've said the fans do

partly connive at this. So do publishers. On the other hand... I was 13 when I went to my first convention. All the writers were called Ken, they all wore sports jackets and they were Gods. To be young and to find yourself in the company of these people was a bit like being a committed Christian and finding you're standing next to Pope John Paul in the Gents. And cons encourage you to write. You go home and, "hey, they're just people like me, in better sports jackets." I know of no similar thing in any other genre (although American friends have told me about Western Writers' conventions, which are like sf conventions with more drink and handguns – but they're for writers, not readers).

Also, there's something about the genre that makes the brain fizz and kicks the mind into gear. Without sf and classic fantasy, I would never have got interested in other things which have become life-long interests, such as palaeontology, mythology, folklore, ancient history. I remember a John Brunner lecture in 1965, I think, when he read a marvellous passage from a book on exploration. He was reading a description of a deserted tropical seashore which had been qualitatively changed by the 20th century; there were coloured pebbles on the beach which were actually bottle glass, ground down. Brunner was saying, look, that buzz you get from sf you can get from other things... it's that sense that the universe is more wonderful (in the classic sense of the word) than you ever imagined.

There's an image I use in the *Truckers* trilogy of bromeliads high in the cloud forests of South America. Some of these plants are basically one huge flower and in the centre there's a pool of water. Frogs lay eggs in this pool and the spawn becomes tadpoles which turn into more frogs and so on. The whole life cycle of the frog takes place in this flower. It is their world. Going to another flower is for them interstellar travel. There's no robots, no rockets, no other planets – but it's sf all right.

One night, when I was 11 and wanted to be an astronomer, I was sitting on a fence looking at the stars and I thought, "I'm looking up at the stars." Then I thought, "no, I'm looking out at the stars.

And I might as well say I'm looking down at the stars." That terrible first moment when you realize you're on a planet in a bloody big universe – it gives you a new perspective on teenage acne, doesn't it?

Terry Pratchett's new "Discworld" novel, Soul Music, is due to be published by Gollancz in May.

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The Collectivization of Transylvania

Peter T. Garratt

“Comrade Pushcu, there’s no progress in implementing the policy of the Central Committee and our beloved President in your area!”

I froze. Things are different now. One treats officials from Bucharest with respect, but in those days, under that regime...

I was Commissar of a remote and rather backward district, used to filing any directive from the capital which aroused the locals’ opposition under “Action When Possible.” I had no confidence in my ability to persuade the peasants, decent but fundamentally reactionary, that action was ever possible. Now it was imperative.

The Visiting Commissar might be female, surprisingly young, and fresh-faced, but only a real pumpkin would have doubted her dedication to the Party, or her record of implementing its policy. Her trained mind had summed up the village records in a day. “Where is the evidence of progress toward collective agriculture?”

I swallowed. “Comrade Mocanu, I have collectivized the garlic plantation, and started work on collectivizing the sale of bottled spa water and local souvenirs to tourists.”

She sniffed. “Ignoring the basics. Take farming – in the records of animals born, and officially disposed of, I find a shortfall. Clearly that is the result of inattention and tolerance of theft: disgraceful! Your people give too much time to work which panders to decadent Western tastes.” She snapped the file shut. “We don’t need to deal with the French and their revolting feudal cookery, let alone superstitious tourists, to build our Revolution!”

“Of course not. But our local crafts do contribute hard currency to the economic development of our beloved nation!”

She nodded and smiled. Though tight, her smile made it easier to admire the spirit of revolutionary womanhood which bloomed in her: the severe impression given by her tied-up black hair and city clothes dispersed at once. “That’s more like it, Comrade Pushcu! But have you studied the plans the Central Committee has issued to overcome what Marx called ‘the idiocy of rural life?’”

I nodded glumly. She read my face and went on: “It’s unsound for peasants to continue living in villages, exposed to pervasive reactionary traditions. Take the one which leads them to bolt and lock their doors and shutters like Western bank vaults. These are not the homes of triumphant workers! Surely you

can see the advantage of moving them to purpose-built Collective Cities, where they will have more opportunities to raise their consciousness, and study the works of our beloved President?”

To my disgust, I found myself almost wringing my hands. “But Comrade, the comrades here are very diligent in reading the works of Marx, Lenin and our Leader. And living near their fields as they always have, they have so much more time for study!”

“Have they!” She led the way to the window. “I see that even that reactionary relic, the Church, is still open!”

It was true. Some of the women – I shrank to see my mother – were carrying in bottles of spa water for the priest to bless: on that very day, with a Visiting Commissar in town! I explained: “We are turning it into a Collective Cultural History Centre. It’s a typical example of the traditional Transylvanian wooden church...”

“And I suppose you’re planning another Culture Centre in your typical Transylvanian castle!” She pointed to the dour grey-stone edifice which dominated the crag above the valley, so different in the impression it made from the jolly cottages of the peasants.

“No... we haven’t got round to doing anything with that yet. It’s abandoned, and rather hard to get to.”

“Abandoned? Hardly! When we arrived yesterday evening, both I and my escorts saw movement on the battlements.”

I thought fast. “You arrived at dusk, didn’t you?” She nodded, and I hurried on: “One has to be so careful of making judgements in twilight. The eyes can be deceived so easily. There are bats nesting in the ruins; perhaps it was them you saw move.”

“I hardly think so! I have sharp eyes, but I can’t make out a bat at that distance, in dim light. Unless you have giant bats...”

“Transylvania is noted for its remarkable wildlife...”

“Nonsense! I saw people!” She stared as though mesmerized at the castle. “There’s nothing in your records about anyone living there. I think you’ve got squatters! Probably cattle thieves, responsible for your disgraceful shortfall in livestock!”

“Oh no! There’s no one at all living in the castle. No one from miles around will go near it!”

“And why’s that?”

I could think of no ideologically sound explanation.

“I don’t know. It could be... superstition. I suppose

the people still think of the castle as belonging to the Count."

"Do they indeed! I don't care if they think it belongs to Vlad the Impaler! It's obviously a focus for reactionary sentiment. Tomorrow, you will guide me and my escorts up there. We'll sort these reactionary squatters out! Compulsory re-education for them!"

"But... it's inaccessible to vehicles!"

"Then find us horses! Tomorrow morning!"

Mariceca Mocanu got on surprisingly well with my mother over the evening meal. I kept the subject to the War, when mother had helped Communist partisans, when she had almost been ideologically sound. She had once fought alongside Mariceca's parents. Later, I helped her wash up. She expressed her approval: "Nice girl. And people say she's very well connected. Even knows the President. Not too forward, and I'm old-fashioned enough to think that's a good thing. But I've an idea she likes you, and she'd make a good match for a country Commissar who's yet to get off his backside."

"Perhaps. But she's a Party-line specialist. Doesn't understand the way we live here."

"So she needs taking in hand, influencing. If this village and its way of life are to survive, we need friends with influence of their own. And I hear you're taking her out riding tomorrow."

Sooner or later, Mother would hear everything in the village. There was no point in pretending to her that the next day's trip was just a ride. But even knowing local feeling, I was shocked at her reaction to hearing its true purpose. She actually crossed herself, oblivious to the possibility that Mariceca might see, so stunned or preoccupied she dropped her best serving plate with a crash on the flagstones. I thought her about to faint, but she recovered, insisted: "You can't take her to the castle! It's been so long, I can feel it in the air - they're hungry!"

"I can't talk her out of it! She's suspicious already."

"Don't let her stay overnight."

"I'll try not to, but it's a long trip."

"I'll pray for her, get some crosses and Holy Water."

"She won't regard them as ideologically sound." A thought struck me: I was already formulating a plan to protect Mariceca, but it was not one of which Mother would approve. "You've been talking about holding a night vigil in the Church. Why not have one tonight, for Comrade Mocanu? She needn't know about it."

Mother agreed. I was to escort Mariceca to an evening of Folk-Agitprop Dancing. It was not yet dark: she was on the terrace, staring raptly at the castle outlined starkly against the fading light. The sky was deep red at the horizon, rising through bands of rose and small gold clouds to the true airblue twilight, where Venus could be seen. The massive keep and narrow towers, even the battlements, were already black as gravesoil: I tried not to see if anything was starting to move on the dark side.

Mariceca was certain there was. "There is someone there!"

I had an idea. "Let's be objective. In the school, just across the road, there's an astronomical telescope, a twelve-centimetre reflector. If we hurry, you'll get a better view through that."

Luckily, the science teacher was preparing for an

astronomy class. The telescope was out: as I had both hoped and feared, Mariceca could see no one through it. I said hurriedly:

"I was certain that you wouldn't see anything through this powerful reflector. It proves there's nothing living up there without the need for a visit."

"Does it! They must have noticed they were under observation and taken cover. Suspicious conduct. Could be foreign agents."

That's the way people used to think, in those days. I knew better than to argue. Instead, I hurried her on to the People's Hall. It was the newest building in the village, the only one to show no trace of pre-revolutionary influences in its design. Although I had approved the plans, I now found it seemed drab and out of place. Luckily, Mariceca took the opposite view.

The youngsters had prepared a dance entitled "The Triumph of Red Partisans over the Fascist Invaders." It was best enjoyed with the aid of lots of our splendid Transylvanian red wine, known as Heifer's Blood. Mariceca showed her appreciation of the display, and did not seem aware that it had been thinly adapted from the traditional "Triumph of Vlad the Impaler over the Turkish Hordes." Indeed, a folk-historian once told me that it must be based on even older traditions. The dance does not depict much fighting as such, but there is a vigorous sequence near the end in which the partisans bayonet the fascists, having run out of ammunition. Previously, they would have been impaling Vlad's enemies. As the enemy parts are by tradition taken by the girls, you can guess what the folklorist thought the original dance had been about.

Mariceca was unimpressed with Heifer's Blood, and drank less at first than I had hoped. "I find a lack of subtlety to the bouquet of wines cultivated by outdated feudal methods. When I have dined with Comrade President and Comrade Elena, they always make a point of offering wine from Collective vineyards."

"Indeed?" I gulped, in this case my own wine.

"Yes. Though when trying to influence foreign politicians to work against their own class interests, and in favour of ours, it is necessary to decant it into foreign bottles."

I could only reply by introducing her to one of our few correct products, thin-cut *pommes frites*, known as Collective Romanian Ideologically Sound Potato Sherds. I made sure hers were well salted, and this did induce her to drink more Heifer's Blood. I offered to teach her our communist country dances, and she joined enthusiastically in a circle dance called "Revolutionary Fighters Salute the Pole of the Red Flag on May Day," and with great vigour in "The Clogs of the Workers Stamp on the Lackeys of Capitalism."

At the end of the evening we slowed things down as always, waltzing to the beautiful strains of the "Red Danube." I had asked the band to make it their long version, and Mariceca seemed to cling to me for hours as I led her round and round the floor. She was flushed with exertion, and had untied her hair and taken off her jacket. I could feel the sweat soaking her shirt, but oddly she did not smell of it, but rather of some perfumed deodorizer, a luxury I would have expected a leader of the workers to eschew.

She loved the music, and called on the band to do an encore of "Red Danube," which of course they did.

I felt as I led the way back to the Commissar's Residence, Mariceca leaning on my arm, that I was well on my way to success in my plan to protect her.

She was reluctant to come to my room: "Comrade Pushcu, it's a tempting idea, but we must resist bourgeois decadence." I fancied there was genuine regret in her voice, and no real refusal in her manner. I was used to protecting young women, though of course those in our district were more aware of the special dangers they faced than she was. I said:

"Yes, but I was thinking about what you said about overcoming feudal superstitions. For a girl to guard her virginity suggests she sees herself as property, in a pre-revolutionary sense."

She gave a tinkling little laugh: a delightful contrast to anything I would have expected earlier on. "You do try hard." She gave me a little slap of mock correction. "Here in the country, you obviously haven't heard of the so-called Sexual Revolution, used by the Western Capitalists to create a false consciousness of progress in their workers." I had heard of that, but it wouldn't have been wise to admit my view of it. She went on:

"I have resolved to model my life on that of Comrade Doctor Elena. My marriage, when it comes, will be to a man who embodies the revolutionary virtues of our beloved President." She did a little pirouette and stretched her arms as though they were wings and she was about to soar above the village, casting the shadow of her revolutionary ardour over the whole of Transylvania.

"I am saving myself for that man." She looked at me with a reserved curiosity. "I suppose it could be you, but you'd have to get yourself and your ideas out of this feudal backwater." She began to describe options that might open for me in the Party's central organization. I wasn't listening. In and around the castle, almost anyone would be in peril, or indeed any animal; but if one believed the people's traditions, she was running a special risk of arousing the darkness that lurked there.

"You mean... you really are an actual, saving-yourself virgin?" I blurted. I realized that up to that point, I had seen it as a game, a ploy in seduction. Realizing that Mariceca was playing her hand for real drove out all caution. Luckily, she wasn't too upset.

"Yes. Is that so odd? But it needn't be forever. If you show yourself a true supporter of the Central Committee, by aiding the collectivization and helping me drive the reactionary squatters out of the castle, we can soon..."

"No! You mustn't, you can't..." She stared at me as if I was mad. I racked my brain for an acceptable explanation of my concern. "If you go to the castle as a virgin, if you spend the night there... you'll... you'll lose the ability to influence the peasants round here!" Feeble, but all I could think of.

"Why? Do they suppose anyone who goes there is automatically deflowered? The *Jus Prima Nocte* perhaps?"

"No. They think worse than that... it's... an unhealthy place."

Suddenly, she laughed again. "Oh, that old superstition. Of course, we all know the feudal classes were leeches on the blood of the workers, but only metaphorically. Science has shown they couldn't actually live on blood. One wouldn't put it past them to try..."

an interesting thought. Comrades from abroad often wonder why our revolution occurred somewhat sooner than Marx had predicted... when the Party was still quite small, in fact.

"Could it be that the upper classes, as well as from inherited madness due to inbreeding, suffered from some degenerative disease transmitted via blood products? So their insane violence provoked a revolution earlier than predicted?"

"Better not to know, perhaps!" I muttered.

"Nonsense! Know your enemy! If the peasants fear the Count even when he's dead, we communists must challenge and conquer that superstition! In person!"

It was a long ride the next day. From our village, it seems we are the closest to the castle, but that is not so, for the track winds atrociously as it climbs, and we passed other hamlets. They seemed as deserted as they would be when their inhabitants had departed to Collective Cities. The horses moved so slowly they were more like mules, and at times seemed to be trying to turn back, or get us lost. Mariceca rode in silence. My mother had made a bad impression by offering her cloves of garlic and bottles of Holy Water. (Even she had not bothered to offer crucifixes, though I noticed all three protectants had been packed into my saddle-bag.)

It was late afternoon when we rode round a final bend, and the castle lay before us, its battlements bleakly outlined by a glaring red sun, the highest towers already above it. Beyond, I could see the dark slopes of the Carpathians; I had heard that almost the whole of Transylvania could be seen from those towers, though I had never met anyone who had climbed one. My historian friend had examined the edifice through the telescope and opined that it might have been built on the ruins of a Roman fort, though who had done that, and when, no one could say.

Closer, it looked abandoned but not decayed: the walls were coated with a kind of dark-leaved ivy, but all the crenellations were in place. The gates were intact and on their hinges, but wide open, extending an unfriendly welcome to the foolhardy. Mariceca spurred her horse forward before I could say anything, and cantered to the gate. The horse reared, and for a moment I thought it was about to throw her, but she was a good rider and eventually it submitted and reluctantly carried her through.

The escorts and I followed. It was the first time I had ever been there, and I looked around with interest. The sun was not yet down, and I hoped it might be possible to complete the mission by nightfall and be away. Though the place was massive, there was but a single keep within the curtain wall. It could not take that long to search it, especially as I saw that the great door to the keep itself was also open. There was ivy in places on the inner walls, but apart from that I could not see or hear anything moving, anything living.

We dismounted, and attended to our horses. I noticed a stable, unlocked, but with the door pulled to, the only one not open. It was necessary to drive the animals in, and secure them thoroughly, for they were restive. One neighed loudly, then they all took it up, an astonishing thing in that silent place, like an abnormal counterpart to the dawn chorus: the sun was very low, though the sky was still bright, deepening by contrast the shadows within.

We unpacked our torches. Mariceca glanced first at me, then her escorts. They were dull-faced men of the kind who are used to obeying orders: nonetheless, none would make a move, and with an impatient shrug she led the way inside.

It was dark in there, though there were slit windows. We moved from room to room, instinctively keeping together. Most were bare and functional, with a few massive pieces of furniture. They were solid, with little decoration; relics of the feudal age, not the bourgeois. None were covered. On a few of the walls, there were still paintings, mostly murals on stone. None depicted members of the family who had once lived there, but there were scenes of battle and even executions, though none of the religious subjects one had heard were favoured in those days.

We completed a circuit of the ground floor, ended up in a large dining-hall. The great table was still in place, though it looked even older than the other pieces we had seen: black with age, though strangely unworn. Above it, on the wall over the great fireplace, which was cold as if it had never been lit, was the largest mural of executions I had yet seen. The victims, many of them young women, were impaled naked, their blood, unlike the other pigments, running down unfaded, red as the day it was splashed there. I felt faint at the sight of it, the musty air suddenly close; suffocating. But I remembered where I was, and who with, and said to Mariceca: "Well! No sign of anyone yet!"

"No. Though there's something strange. Have you noticed?"

To me, the whole experience was totally strange, and I didn't answer. She went on: "Though the door was open, there's no dirt or debris. There are no dust-covers, but there's no dust."

"You can hardly say that there are signs of occupation, though. There's been no one living here since the Revolution, if not before; no food deliveries, nothing." I glanced at my watch. "There's no one here. If we hurry..."

"We haven't seen the upper floor yet."

We found the stairway. I had expected the old treads to creak, but though uncarpeted they made little sound under our feet. The stairwell was totally dark: I felt any danger could be hidden in that blackness, and strained my eyes for shapes coiled to move. Just as faint light became visible above, something did dart towards me, something I hardly heard before I felt the swish of its wings. Mariceca too was aware of it: she swung her torch, trying to get it in the beam, but it fluttered away, its squeak higher-pitched than a whistle of pure terror. She said in a delighted voice: "A bat! A little flying mouse! You were right about them nesting here. I believe they're quite rare now: we may find a use for this place as a People's Nature Reserve!"

At length we reached the first floor: one or two doors were open, and there was still light visible from windows.

It was the same as below. Most of the rooms were empty. Only the room I guessed had been the Count's personal chamber contained any significant furniture: a huge bed, still with its covers, a few chests and wardrobes. On the wall nearest the bed hung one of

the few pictures in frames. It clearly depicted the room itself, but the bed was occupied by a young woman in a diaphanous nightgown, her hair in a tiara: she was looking up languorously, as if half-asleep. Her eyes were focused on the corner nearest the window, as though gazing at someone, but there was no one there. It was the coldest room in the place, one in which I felt a sense of palpable evil far worse than anywhere else in the castle: I noticed that the large window would not shut, though it not only faced north, but toward the inner courtyard, so it seemed doubtful that any direct sunlight ever shone into it. Looking through it, I noticed what had to be the chapel: a stone version of the old Transylvanian design, but with no cross or icons. The sun was down, but the sky was still quite light, and I knew there would be a full moon later. I said:

"No one up here either. Better get going while there's light!"

"Nonsense! The horses are useless, they need a rest. They'll never get back down that hill in the dark. Besides, I'm quite looking forward to sleeping in this big bed."

I gulped. "But...you said there might be some infection here. An infection leading to madness!"

She gave a superior smile. "Scientific materialism applies to medicine as well as social forces, Comrade. Inbreeding and unsafe, Western-style blood practices caused that aristocratic insanity!"

"But..."

"Comrade!" She glared at me with anger in her voice, but also something almost inspired. "This castle is now the property of the People's Republic, not some bloodsucking degenerate leech of an aristocrat! All my forebears, like yours, were honest workers or peasants! Both of my parents were Communist pioneers, persecuted during the War by the Iron Guard. One of my ancestors was among the women peasant leaders impaled by Vlad! And if you think I'll allow superstitious cowardice to stop me sleeping in a People's bed, you've underestimated Mariceca Mocanu!"

Glumly, I found a room for myself. It retained the original narrow window, a cross-shaped arrow-slit, and faced East, toward the sunrise. It was one of the few rooms which could be bolted from the inside. The escorts found themselves a similar room from which they could watch the stairs and the door to the main bedchamber, though I heard them testing the bolts on the door. When they had done that, we saw to the horses and it was still light enough to inspect the chapel. It had been stripped of all icons and Christian items. The only point of interest was a massive door obviously leading to an underground crypt. It was the only door in the castle I found impossible to open.

We took supper by torchlight in the hall. I had brought a Transylvanian Comrade's Lunch, bread, cheese, apple, and garlic: the escorts I noted had similar food. Mariceca ate from sealed tins she had brought from the capital. We ate in silence, till Mariceca rose and said: "Early to bed! We've work tomorrow."

I splashed Holy Water all round the lintel and frame of the door, and hung a crucifix and a clove of garlic, then did the same for the window. It was not quite dark, and I sneaked out, splashed Holy Water across the others' doorways, then threw a little over the stable door and gave each of the horses sugar smeared

with garlic. I ran back to my room. The castle was silent. I could hear neither the breathing of my companions nor the squeaking of bats. Even the stairs did not creak. I bolted my door, spread my blanket on the floor, made a circle of Holy Water round it.

I seemed to lie awake for ages, though on my watch it was only an hour. I strained my ears for sounds till I fancied I was hearing things. Eventually I became reconciled to silence, and was almost asleep, when I was awakened by a knock. I shot up from my blanket in terror: it came again, a knock at my door. I had no idea what to do, but eventually asked timidly: "Who is that?"

"It's only me. Mariceca."

It was certainly her voice. I sprang to the door and drew back the bolts. Mariceca stood in the hallway as I had never seen her, dressed like the girl in the painting. She carried a candle, and wore a long white night-dress so unlike her usual plain garments that I knew at once she had found it in one of the chests. It had a low neckline, was delicately embroidered in some places, but so filmy in others that I could see in the candle-light that she wore nothing at all beneath it. She was barefoot, and wore her hair up in a tiara she must also have found in the Count's room. She said:

"Comrade, I have been considering what you said about feudal superstitions of sexual property, and of course you are right."

"Come in."

"I was thinking it would be a suitable defiance of the false consciousness created by the Count's memory to give my virginity to a communist in his bed."

I shuddered. It was as if a portcullis had fallen between us. I said lamely: "But...it's very cold and unhealthy in that room."

"Not in the bed."

"Why not come in here for now, then we can try the bed later...say at dawn."

She tutted. "Still superstitious. If you were a true Communist leader, a man who could some day be... General Secretary..." (I had thought her about to say President: perhaps she could not conceive that our President would ever be replaced)... you would join me in celebrating the workers' expropriation of the bed."

I spoke, for perhaps the only time, the truth: "Lady, if to sleep in that bed meant I could become General Secretary of the Party in this country, the Soviet Union, or the whole Warsaw Pact, I still would not do it."

She sniffed: "This room smells awfully of garlic!" and turned away. I did not follow.

I did not sleep well that night. Once or twice, I thought I heard cries, but they were not cries for help, more the kind of moans a woman might make in her sleep, dreaming of her lover.

The morning was bright and hot. Mariceca did not join our simple breakfast. Eventually, I raised my courage to knock on her door. I was almost surprised to find her up and apparently well, if very pale. She had closed the drapes, and was going through a chest by candle-light. She was dressed as the night before, but had added a scarf of red chiffon round her neck. I said bluntly:

"No one could be hiding anywhere here, except

perhaps in a locked crypt below the chapel. Do you want us to force the door?"

She stretched languidly. "I can't imagine anyone who could sleep in this lovely room would want to spend his nights in a crypt."

"So I'll make ready to move out?"

"How's the weather?"

"Bright."

"Comrade," she said in alarm. "Don't you know the Capitalists with their aerosol sprays have destroyed the ozone layer? Bright light is dangerous! We'll go tonight."

It was a long, dull, tense day. She joined us at twilight. She wore a black cape over a more substantial version of the morning's outfit: riding boots, and a different hairpiece which made waves of hair flap round her head like the wings of a bat.

She returned to the capital the next night. I heard from time to time that she was getting more prominent in the Party, and tried to forget what had nearly happened. But those were bad times in Transylvania. Policies which had seemed little more than wild rumours to us, impractical ideals as remote as the withered-away state and the true classless society, were suddenly enforced with demented zeal. The ban on birth control even for the poorest, forced collectivization to dull grey towns, the destruction of our village communities, all chafed on the people's despair.

But I did well. Even to know Mariceca Mocanu, the Presidential adviser, was a help. I was able to stall the collectivization of our village, though all around our neighbours suffered.

I heard rumours of the end even before the mad bloodshed of Timisoara brought it about. I had been quietly making contacts, in preparation, and I went to the capital for the last days. I was in the square when the President made his last speech to an angry, unresponsive, crowd. It was a pale winter's day but, arrogant and experienced though I knew him to be, he seemed to shrink from the little light there was.

Then I knew what he had become: the causes which had brought about his downfall – and required it.

I used my contacts to influence the trial. Some urged caution, even mercy: I knew better. As for the executions: why do you think these were hurried through on Christmas Day, when evil things can more easily be banished from the Earth? Who do you think supervised the disposal of the bodies, and how?

Things are different now. We of the National Salvation Front are gradually bringing in reforms, nothing too hasty. I am a People's Deputy now, and often in the capital.

I have not seen Mariceca Mocanu. She had been important in that former regime, but no one knew her exact role, her ultimate fate. Indeed, outsiders do not understand what happened here at all. One Westerner wrote a biography of our former leaders, and called it: *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite*. Little did he suspect that Mariceca Mocanu had contrived to do both.

Some say she too is dead, but there are rumours of a pale lady, only seen at night-time political gatherings, too elegant to be an ex-communist. But those are only rumours, superstitions.

Things are different now.

TV 2001

Larry Tritten

Sussman's wrist alarm went off, firing an arrow of sound into his brain, and he blinked his eyes open, twisting against the sheets as his dream was obliterated. He had been dreaming about products, lots of them, all anthropomorphic: a cheese wheel whose separate segments formed a chorus line and kicked their way with histrionic zest into the middle of a housewife's display of party *hors d'oeuvres*; an artificially flavoured, coloured, and scented bottled soft drink called Cool Blonde Soda that, with an enticing smile, reached up and helpfully snapped off its own cap to the delectation of several disembodied salivating mouths forming a nimbus of thirst around it; a condom that had sneaked into a birthday party and was having a great time cavorting with the balloons, proving its resilience as the festivities became progressively more rowdy; a carpet that moaned sensually when a woman in spike-heeled pumps walked slowly across it; a home computer whose screen bore the features of the traditional happy face symbol: two dots and a curved line. And so on.

Sussman got out of bed. His wrist screen came alive with a video image of a huckster imploring him to come on down to the House of Kitsch, where they were having a colossal sale on seashell nativity scenes, Swiss weather cottages, aromatic red cedar wood jewellery and luminous spook party games. The huckster's spiling mouth expanded to absorb the screen. Moments later, as Sussman brushed his teeth in the bathroom, a split screen montage of six talk shows cluttered the wrist screen, a virtually glosolalic mélange resulting. Sussman took off the wrist screen to get in the shower. As he turned on the water the medicine cabinet mirror went vid, programming Generic the Red's new video, *Slumbunny and the Easter Rat*. Blurry nudes descended staircases; fisherwomen on a beach on Lesbos cast their lines into the sea, reeling in beautiful crying mermaids, their mouths maimed by cruel golden hooks; effeminate rough-trade bikers wearing black leather jackets with a Hell's Hairdressers logo danced with nuns; and cheerleaders were propelled by their twirling batons into a star-dazzled outer space. Sussman capered to the music under the spray. When he emerged from the shower the mirror showed beautiful women with coiffures that looked to be the result of head wounds washing a powder-blue Rolls Royce with their tongues.

Drying himself, Sussman was given the news from his wrist screen: McVideo had just put up its latest sign nationwide: OVER GOOGOL BILLION VIEWED. Eye candy stocks were up. The Couch Potatoes had gotten their candidate on the presidential ballot. Mid-air commercial holograms had been legalized in New York. Television magazines had perfected sound to go with their moving pictures (and some people were warning of the danger of radiation from the animated page). HTV, the hypnotists' channel, had gotten its licence. A group of occultists in Longview, Washington, claimed that the ghost of Ed Sullivan had appeared at their séance and said they had teleplasm to prove it. A public access show in New Guinea had a show called *Cannibal Chef*. *TV Guide* had applied for statehood. The new era was in full swing! Marzipan replicas of McLuhan were being consumed commemoratively everywhere. Huzzah!

Sussman watched the beginning of a game show (*Praying for Prizes - Catholics vs. Protestants*) on a wall screen in the bedroom as he dressed. He selected his test-pattern tie and a purple aluminium dress: crossdressing was in vogue because of the initials for TransVestite.

While eating a TV breakfast at McVideo he watched six split screen versions of the news simultaneously. You could never get too much news. Later, as he entered the elevator in the Farnsworth Building he felt a surge of excitement. Today was the day he was to write up his report! Sussman worked for the Central Bureau of Television Research, a Federal agency that had been doing top secret work in television theory, and his report was a summary of a study that had cost roughly as much as the annual income of all the TV repairmen in West Hollywood.

In his office Sussman turned on his computer. As he worked he hummed sitcom music to keep his mind agile. He worked through his lunch hour, ignoring the camera that kept peering over his shoulder and following him around the office, including into the men's room. He worked through the afternoon, finishing by five, then read back the report:

Tele-visionaries by Caesar Sussman

If we accept as a definition of television the process by which pictures are transmitted electronically, then television can only be said to date back to the 1920s,

but if we stretch the definition slightly by de-emphasizing the prefix tele- and emphasizing the word vision so that it means not just images transmitted but also images perceived, then it's true that a variety of forms of television have predated its current familiar incarnation in modern culture.

The kind of television we know is characterized by visions created by others, but the word vision itself means literally to perceive something independently. Visions, whether the product of imaginative contemplation or ostensible supernatural revelation, are self-generated. Using this fact as a premise for their experiments, Dr Huntz Stuntman and Dr Alias Trundler of the Center for Esoteric Studies in Omaha, working on a grant provided by the Pure Food for Thought Administration, are investigating the possibility of self-generated television.

"I can foresee a channel called ESP TV," Dr Stuntman says. "It would operate by extrasensory projection of images programmed by the individual making use of subconscious and dream material, or any kind of mental activity that goes on below the surface of our customary awareness. A blank channel on the set is necessary, and we're working on an electro-chemical means of projecting the thought processes. The possibilities, both artistic and therapeutic, are limitless. I can envision a time when a patient could show a psychiatrist his dreams rather than describing them, or when one could view their own subconscious thoughts or dreams as a refreshing alternative to soap operas or sitcoms. We know that the researchers at Duke University are also working in this area and have already taken out a patent on something called Tapedream, which apparently would enable people to videotape their dreams. The sheer entertainment potential of such a thing is awesome. We all create extraordinary imagery when we are cut loose from the restraints of consciousness. Not only would video dreamscapes make anything a Steven Spielberg could cook up by conventional means seem pedestrian, they would give everyone artistic credibility."

"I can foresee a vogue in dream video on a channel like MTV, with all sorts of exotic musical accompaniment," Dr Trundler adds. "As for the therapeutic aspect, the dreams of criminals could be much more carefully and accurately analysed by psychoanalysts than they can be today, with the analyst investigating the imagery firsthand. And the juxtaposition of creativity with pathology might help result in less critical attitudes toward the latter."

"And think of the middlemen who would be eliminated on ESP TV," Dr Stuntman points out. "Namely, the producer, director, cinematographer, costume designer, et al... Only the composer of music, whose role is not visual but aural, could participate in the creation. In all other respects, the productions would be the sole product of a single person, the *auteur*, whose productions would no doubt breed critics just like any other kind of television."

Dr Engleborg Bulbs of the School of Pop Anthropology in Coma Veranda, California, is convinced that our contemporary concept of television is roughly analogous to the tip of an immense iceberg. He cites the Zoomar Indians of the Southwest as an example of a people with a heritage of an activity that can be considered a prototypical kind of television. Since the

early 19th century the Zoomars have made an avid game of cloud watching, consisting of watching the patterns of cloud formations and interpreting pictures from them, just as a person tells what is suggested to him by ink blots in a Rorschach test. Zoomars have traditionally played the game for several hours each day. The tribe's superior level of imagination is clearly evidenced by some of the interpretations recorded by anthropologists (such as "a herd of black and white horses fighting among themselves" and "a brave man sitting on top of a cactus, holding two porcupines in his arms"), and also by the nickname "lazy dreamers" given to them by the Apache, who preferred less sedentary pastimes.

"Television is nothing new," Dr Bulbs says. "Men have been making pictures to entertain themselves with long before the electron tube. A tattoo (which can be crudely animated by moving the skin) may be considered the most primitive form of television. No sooner had the Syrians perfected the first transparent glass in the first century B.C. than they started putting insects and small animals in jars in what comprised a form of miniature primitive theatre - something not so different from our aquariums, and consider that the Video Aquarium, like the Video Fireplace, is an enduringly popular tape. People have been creating their own teleplays for millennia, and considering the quality of many contemporary TV shows, I'm not so sure these antique versions weren't superior. As for the future, who knows? Maybe we'll have three-dimensional holographic images available wherever we go - while out walking or in waiting rooms and rest rooms, or images that can occupy window space where the views are bleak, boring, or just too familiar. We may have shows that fill the heavens. Can you imagine a suppository commercial of galactic size?"

Indeed, ESP TV is only a hint of what may be in store for us. There is in Southern California a new cult that espouses a cosmogony that conceives of the nature of reality in terms of cosmic television production, with the First Viewer, God, watching a picture of himself on a TV screen, and so on, *ad infinitum*, presumably all the way back to the beginning of video. Part of the doctrine holds that a day of judgment (the New Season) is at hand during which all of the life on all of the planets will be cancelled, with the exception of Norman Lear and Steven Bochco, who will be left to start fresh, with *carte blanche* and unlimited budgets. It would certainly be a new season worth dressing for.

Sussman smiled. This was the big one. It was apocalyptic information. He envisioned a huge pay rise, more screens both big and small. Leaving work, he made his way through crowds of pedestrians carrying newly purchased boxed sets of various sizes and went into a neighbourhood bar. The restored vintage Hoffman behind the bar was showing an antique amber image of a vintage commercial - anthropomorphic coffee beans. Everyone laughed appreciatively. Sussman drank three Power Outrages and when he went to the men's room hallucinated (?) that the urinal puck was ashimmer with a picture of a well-known talk show host.

On his way home, in the car, he consulted the evening's schedule on Mega Sked on the dash screen,

keeping one eye on the traffic. Traffic accidents had doubled in the past year, since viewing while driving had become *de rigueur*. The programming for 1,001 channels drifted by on the screen. He especially liked the one he had discovered from Montevideo. The city had been prophetically named, it seemed. Video Mountain. He loved the Uruguayan game shows, their commercials for both black and blonde cigarettes, the live shows from the New Chinese Lantern, and the station break images featuring tableaux of voluptuous women on Atlántida Beach wearing sunglasses with TV screen lenses on which subsidiary pictures were always in progress. Also, their olfactory system was the best on the tube.

At home Sussman opened a can of beer, took a bound set of TV Guides down from a shelf, and settled back in his lounging chair to read vintage programme listings. After a few minutes he became aware that he was being watched. He checked the ceiling screen: it was a joyfully carnal-looking woman with pale blonde hair that looked as if it had been styled by a demolition expert. "I like the way you turn pages," she whispered. "Print glimmerer. I've never done it. You must be into k/ink. Do you mind if I watch?"

"Viacom Dios," Sussman said. He riffled several pages audibly and heard her protracted moan in the aftermath, fading to heavy breathing. "Got your pictures," she whispered, and blinked off.

Sussman got up and walked through the apartment, turning on all of the sets. The chaos was soothing. It was a little cool this evening, so he went to the biggest screen in the house, the MetaMagnum in the living room, and stood before it, soaking up the warmth of the glow of an infomercial about sex toys for precocious children, purring like a cat as he did so. He surfed into another commercial, one for animated tattoos, guaranteed to perk you derma and give you the skin you love to watch. Only \$73.95 at The Mad Pic's. Sussman made a mental note.

He went back to the lounging chair and simulated 16 screens on the Fly's Eye console until midnight, then went to bed and slept soundly and without dreaming until three o'clock when a sound of music woke him. He lay there with his eyes still closed, straining to concentrate through his veiled consciousness. The music slowly defined itself – it was the national anthem. Sign off music... But the sets were off...

He got up and walked through the living room toward the sound of music. It was coming from outside. He opened the window and stepped onto his fire escape, looking up at the sky where the music seemed to be coming from. The night sky had been replaced by an enormous test pattern. Sussman had just a moment to marvel at the breathtaking symmetry of its cosmic design and to wonder, desperately, if there would be reruns, before he and his show were cancelled.

Notes on the Authors

Geoff Ryman ("Fan," page 6) last appeared in *Interzone* with the two-part novella "Love Sickness" (issues 20-21; it later formed the basis of his Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning novel *The Child Garden*). His latest story will appear with three other long tales in an American-published collection to be called *Unconquered Countries: Four Novellas* (St Martin's Press, April 1994). Geoff, a Canadian by birth, lives in London and works for the Civil Service.

Peter T. Garratt ("The Collectivization of Transylvania," page 29) last appeared in these pages with "Our Lady of Springtime" (IZ 25). An enthusiast for all matters Arthurian and Cetacean, he works as a psychologist in Sussex. His stories and reviews have appeared widely in small-press magazines.

Larry Tritton ("TV 2001," page 34) is one of an old breed: a veteran magazine writer who has probably contributed to a wider range of publications than any other writer we have featured before now – his credits include *Amazing*, *Asimov's*, *Cosmopolitan*, *F&SF*, *Harper's*, *National Lampoon*, *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, *Redbook*, *Twilight Zone*, *Vanity Fair* and so on and on. He lives in San Francisco, and we're glad to welcome him to *Interzone* for the first time.

Gary M. Gibson ("Touched By an Angel," page 40) is an author new to us. He describes himself as "the third member of the Glasgow SF Writers' Circle to be published in *Interzone* in the past year, the others being Michael Cobley and Fergus Bannon." The above story is his second professional sale – the first was a horror story in the short-lived magazine *Skeleton Crew* in 1991.

Cherry Wilder ("Willow Cottage," page 46) wrote "Special Effects" (issue 77) and three earlier stories for *Interzone*. Although it is a tale of the supernatural rather than another example of her typically odd brand of science fiction, we think "Willow Cottage" is possibly her best for us to date. Cherry Wilder lives in Germany, and her published novels range from the juvenile sf *The Luck of Brin's Five* (1977) to the adult horror *Cruel Designs* (1988). A collection of her stories is forthcoming in America.

Ansible Link

David Langford



I said I'd never do it, but the temptation – the lure of cyberspace – eventually became too great. Though disliking those horrible addresses swarming with @ signs like bacteria, let's mention just once that hot news can now be sent via electronic mail to ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk. Now to invest in mirrorshades and have a British Telecom jack installed behind my ear...

From an Ultimate Dim Thule

Anthony Burgess died on 25 November. What can I say? In sf there wasn't just *A Clockwork Orange* but *The Wanting Seed* (incidentally featuring Aldiss on a prison roll-call plus Asimov, Heinlein and T.S. Eliot in an orgy), 1985, sf strands in books like *The End of the World News*, and more... A big enough writer to try everything. I liked his reviews, too.

Ken Campbell won the Evening Standard Drama Award for Best Comedy, for his *Jamais Vu...* as premiered at the British SF convention Mexican 5.

Jack Cohen incautiously wrote in the *Britannica Yearbook* that he'd invented various sf aliens like the brainy saurians in Harry Harrison's *West of Eden* and its sequels (such as *Bill the Galactic Hero Meets The Stainless Steel Rat West of Eden: The Final Incoherent Adventure*). Harry rushed in a stern correction, making it clear that he did all the important inventing ("There are going to be these big lizards called Yilané!") while hired hand Jack had merely sorted out the biology, biochemistry, physiology, and suchlike trivia. Dr Jack has since been spotted fondling a giant syringe full of something greenly luminescent and practising his line, "Trust me, Harry, I'm a doctor..."

Lionel Fanthorpe ran a charity auction while being guest of honour at a US convention, and sold a copy of his legendary *Galaxy 666* for \$40 – twice as much, he wept, as he was paid to write the book in 1963...

Tanith Lee achieved new fame in *Literary Review's* "Bad Sex in Fiction" competition... an extract from her novel *Heart-Beast* was a runner-up. "A fine piece of bad writing, lacking only

the element of perfunctoriness to reach high art in the field," declared competition judge Auberon Waugh.

Tim Powers won the World Fantasy award for best novel with his *Last Call*, at the World Fantasy Convention in Minneapolis. Reporting on this jamboree, Steve Jones (Britain's Mr Horror) was generally enthusiastic but complained that the programming focused too much on fantasy, not enough on horror. Others responded with quibbling comments about the event's title, but the one time I attended I certainly gleaned the impression that World Fantasy Convention actually means World Horror Trade Fair for Professionals With Expense Accounts...

Terry Pratchett learned self-expression in the USA: "Did my orang-utan impression in Stephen Barnes's teach 'i class (well, he said let yourself feel as free as the spirit of an animal; it wasn't as if I believed he had lice on him)."

Bob Shaw, in an exploratory operation, was found to be suffering from cancer of the bowel – caught in good time, but the nasty business of radio/chemotherapy led to a prolonged hospital stay. Soon he was cheerily reported as able to go out for short walks.

Will Shetterly, world-famous (in Minnesota) fantasy author and consort of the even more famous Emma Bull, is running for Governor of Minnesota.

Infinitely Improbable

Hitch-Hiker Movie. Douglas Adams begs sf fans for thrilling wonder stories of his series' popularity and ability to induce mass conversions, raise the dead, etc: "We need to put together an irresistible [sic] package to excite potential distributors of the movie of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (to be produced by Michael Nesmith)." At first this announcement was wickedly dismissed as a hoax, on the basis that Mr Adams can surely spell "irresistible"... Asked if he'd be in control of the movie, he reportedly said: "Absolutely, I am going to be thoroughly involved."

Hubbard Watch. Low-minded sf fans have tended to question the

claimed total independence of L. Ron's publishing outfits from Scientology. An article in the US journalists' magazine *The Quill* (Nov/Dec 93) examines the organization's terrifyingly slick PR operations and remarks inter alia: "**Author Services Inc.**... established in the early 1980s as a for-profit 'full service literary agency' with offices on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard. The only catch was that Hubbard was the only author. And every staff member was in the Sea Organization [Scientology's inner circle]."

Scientific Units. "The moving target felt vaguely feminine and wholly dangerous: it felt light-years older than Jezrael's biological age of twenty-five." (Anne Gay, *The Brooch of Azure Midnight*)

SF Encyclopedia. Late in 1993, the fabulous CD-ROM edition was heralded by a flood of just 3 proof copies. Everyone's favourite bug in this early version was the one whereby attempting to read the entry for CHALKER, JACK caused your computer to hang up irretrievably. I cannot reveal who suggested that this neat enhancement should be retained in the final, corrected edition.

Miscegenation! Boxtree's publicity flyer explains the sinister success of their games tie-in books: "We commission the very best writers – authors like Ian Newman and Kim Watson."

No Lawsuit. To update my last column: Harlan Ellison won't after all be suing the New England SF Association "into oblivion" over the use of the Cordwainer Smith *Last Dangerous Visions* story in their first-ever collection of all Smith's short work. Officially, "NESFA and Mr Ellison have reached an amicable settlement, and we will still continue to publish the Smith book." Perhaps, on consulting the contract, Mr Ellison might have found his rights to the story (acquired some 20 years ago) had long expired? Meanwhile the NESFA collection sold out and is being reprinted. In an unrelated act of piety, Ellison enthusiast Charles Platt plans an electronic "Ellison Information Library" of data on the great man... including such documents as Christopher Priest's homage to Ellison as anthropologist, *The Last Deadloss Visions* (new edition, 1994).

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

Demolition Man is the strangely-shaped spawn of a match that could only have been made in Hollywood, an exchange of creative fluids as improbable as anything in the already more-than-usually nonsensical film itself. And the offspring of this twisted union is a film of piquantly revealing contradictions and ambivalences, every bit as self-reflexive as the obviously comparable *Last Action Hero*, but very differently argued and considerably less resolved. In the Stallone corner stands Joel Silver, unshamable master of the leave-your-brain-on-the-sideboard stunt caper, and the producer who more-or-less invented the modern urban action hero; while the Nigel Hawthorne figure, the author and architect of the new LA our hero proceeds to total by degrees, is no other than the absurdly eloquent and urbane Daniel Waters, the Mamet of the comedy thriller, a writer whose sense of humour borders on the sectionable and whose strange dialogue routinely pushes at the enveloppé of the speakable. And their unlikely collaboration itself records what happens when a legendarily limbic action man, affectionately notorious for his trademark MO of musclebrained stunt frolics, prodigal ordnance abuse, severely impeded verbal skills, and a merrily disposable way with large buildings is let loose on a world of civilized, articulate manners where conflict is worked out through dialogue

rather than mayhem. We can now only speculate what Waters' script looked like before Silver's rewrite men were sent in with scalpels twinkling. Beneath the scars of its various liposuctive redrafts, there's still a lot of what looks like Waters left in the film: the daftly literate character names, the deadpan violence, the *Heathers* self-quotes, and above all the baroque monologues delivered with such remarkable wit and grace by the Sandra Bullock and Denis Leary characters, both of whom seem to have come through most of the rewrites pleasingly unharmed. But the dangling plotline about the hero's untraced daughter is just one mute witness to the bloody history behind the cheery facade.

At the very least, under Silver's control *Demolition Man* does seem to have become significantly more like the kind of film it was originally conceived as sending up. Whereas *Last Action Hero* set out to dismantle the Silver genre piece-by-piece in the attempt to argue the nullity of violence and the primacy of life over moofies, *Demolition Man* pursues its strikingly parallel path (even returning the favour of dropping chuckaway gags about the other film's lead) to a very different conclusion, reassuring us of the enduring value to society and the human spirit of violence, pain, dirt, destruction, ridiculously fast action editing, and plenty of driving through

plateglass windows and hearty leaping round corners with an automatic weapon and a jaunty beret. And despite many good jokes early in the film about the infatuation of male aggression ("this is how insecure heterosexual men used to bond," &c.), the film finally bottles out altogether from contemplating the possibility of a genuine postviolent world, revealing instead that its perfect society without meat, drink, body contact, and other embarrassments of the premillennial past is actually just a hermetic Eloi fabrication, and that the sewers are as full of sweaty Morlocks in gothic outfits as ever. Thus even armed robbery can be morally sanctioned and even glamorized, so long as you're hungry and homeless: as John Spartan grunts in a rare reflective moment, "hurting people's not a good thing - well, sometimes it is, but not when it's a bunch of people looking for something to eat." And the moral? "Why don't you" [to the clean and chirpy citizens of the upper city] "get a little dirty, and you" [to Leary's underpeople] "a lot cleaner?" - whereupon he sweeps Bullock into his arms for an illegal unsafe snog, and she, impressed, inquires if all fluid-transfer activities are like this. Hurrah! we cry: between the head that rules and the hands that toil there has at last been found a mediator... My goodness, is that the time?

Well, it's always possible to argue that *Demolition Man* aspires to nothing more than a jolly futuristic shootup inset with generally amusing swipes at a distinctively Californian brand of lifestyle-driven social engineering. But while that might be sufficient to excuse such fringe absurdities as the "cryo-rehabilitation" premise (with its miraculous cryogenic preservation of Mr Snipes' egregiously sharp haircut) and pretty much all of what considers itself a plot, to pass for satire you surely need to deliver a bit more intellectual gumption and follow-through. Here, after all, is the year's only big movie to offer a vision of a future America, and in terms of futurological imagination, let alone satirical spike, it's frankly pretty sad stuff. In 2032, apparently, no supercent has yet been devised for the mini-CD, the Dvorak keyboard, the light-

Pictures from 'Demolition Man' (Warner)



weight audio headset, tabletop videoconferencing, or disc players with stupid little drawers that pop out; the height of technocool seems to be voice-activated colour PDAs, which on Apple's current rollout timetable should actually be with us by the time of the pre-title sequence. Nor is there any real sense of how precisely Spartan's 1996 LA has been transformed into Cocteau's 2032, or of what has happened to the locked-out rest of the world, or of how exactly abolishing faulty grammar will empty the free-ways and green over the projects. Instead, we get a misshapen plot assembled out of yellowing body parts from ancient sf movies that came out of an age when films were still able to think seriously about engineering the future, ending class struggle, and surviving the death agonies of capitalism. In *Demolition Man*, we have yet another future movie that starts out pretending to talk about society but quickly changes the subject to talking about other movies. It's disappointing, but then this is after all Silver's world, where grunts and stunts are the ultimate recognized discourse; and Stallone himself would probably never be such a readily-deconstructable star in the first place if he'd been blessed with a full set of working facial muscles. Be well, citizens — as the man says, you can't take away people's right to be assholes.

The sheer intractability of social satire in a big-Hollywood vehicle is no less apparent in *Addams Family Values*, a sequel with more or less the same strengths and weaknesses as its original, but with rather grander didactic aspirations. Despite signs of effort, it isn't really any better put together than the first film — simply setting up three separate lines and intercutting between them is a pretty threadbare substitute for narrative — though the pace does seem slightly snappier, the jokes perhaps a little bit sharper, and the absurd performances are again uniformly well crafted on both sides of the camera. The principal novelty, rather, is that by its very title the sequel advertises its firm resolve to qualify as satire — a bold move, as it would seem to force some decision as to what exactly the Family is a satire on. In the summer camp plotline, which seems to have been written on a different drip to anything else in either movie, the nettle has been grasped to the point of strangulation: here the Addamses are that deviant, nonconformist, non-Aryan element that blond, healthy, Protestant middle America cannot suffer. At the back of Wednesday and Pugsley stand "Mordecai, Yang, Esta, Consuela, and Jamoo," all those embarrassing ethnic minorities with their distasteful extended families and diffusely-nucleated kin-

ship structures: immigrant communities, native populations, and above all Jewry, united in their long collective experience of persecution and their systematic exclusion from American history, along with the disabled, the poor, and (apparently) the turkeys. Aggressively tasteless and far from whimsical analogies are proposed between summer camp and Auschwitz, till the degenerate races stage their destined revolution and burn their captors' horrid WASP factory to the ground. This is remarkably strong stuff for mainstream Hollywood, and it's hard to know precisely how to react. The glaringly-sunlit



natural settings deliberately, and questionably, interrupt the film's distinctive look and mood; the crudely allegorical fable diminishes and to some extent rewrites the resonance of the Addams characters themselves; and you certainly don't expect to be bludgeoned into political consciousness at an Addams family outing. But the whole scenario is remarkably well mounted, and the jokes often genuinely bizarre — it just doesn't seem to have much to do with the rest of the picture, which on the contrary studiously eschews any extended comparison between the Addams world and a social reality outside.

So what exactly are these "Addams Family values"? The closer the scrutiny, the more curious and contradictory they appear. That the Addamses are pro-family goes of course without saying: indeed, the two strands of the *Values* plot both centre on threats to the bondedness of the kin group from without, with Joan Cusack's predatory serial nanny seeking simultaneously to cut Fester apart from the rest of the family while segregating the suspicious kids off to camp. Active parenting, clearly, is essential; delegated childcare and boarding not only lead to estrange-

ment, trauma, and emotional damage, but actually turn baby brother's hair blond with grief. Yet sexual desire is a far more ambiguous force: within the family, a bonding energy between mom and dad that remains irreproachably innocent and pure even in its most deviant manifestations, yet which outside the group becomes a dark and disruptive power luring vulnerable, inexperienced males like Fester away from the family bosom and into the arms of the enemy. Even little Wednesday's awakening bond with the rejected Jewish kid in camp is finally — and rather refreshingly — severed by her reaffirmation of Addamsness in the closing scene, where *My Girl* modulates abruptly into *Carrie*.

Clearly the Addams brand of family values are against cant, sentimentality, hugs, Christianity, Disney, and Michael Jackson, but it's a lot harder to pin down exactly what they're unambiguously for. Are they Republican? anarchist? non-voting? Do they support the death penalty? give to housing charities? One persistent complication is the refusal to separate benign fantasy from its psychotic enactment, so that it's increasingly hard to see the Addamses as simply a family of generally well-adjusted and loving deviants who owe their admirable emotional roundedness to a healthily cathartic acceptance of a range of imaginative practices tabooed by censorious middle America: fetishism, S&M, the free enjoyment of genre horror. In *Values*, especially, there's little effort to disguise the implication they genuinely are a family of violent homicidal psychopaths — particularly the charming Wednesday, who makes three attempts on the life of her baby brother, and who apparently burns a campmate to death in cold blood during a cut at the climax of the revolution episode. And while this is all jolly japes, it really does create considerable unsettled problems. The film takes great trouble to juxtapose the Addams way with Cusack's more orthodox serial murderess (who we're carefully informed late in the film was warped by a spoiled but loveless upbringing), but the result is increasingly to leave you wondering exactly why this rather agreeable bluebeard lady is branded a villain at all. Wednesday's verdict, at least, is untainted by moral judgment: the only difference she registers is "she was sloppy." She could have said "she used her sexuality to undermine the family instead of strengthening it," or "she failed to recognize the boundary between roleplay and psychosis." But that would be to acknowledge the responsibility of satire to provoke anger, disagreement, and offence rather than mild laughter and a vague sense of naughtiness; and that really would be creepy, kooky, scary, spooky, and bordering on the altogether ooky. (Nick Lowe)

Touched By an Angel

Gary M. Gibson

1. Alis Dorican felt the book dissolve on her tongue, fresh new memories sluiced from someone else's brain spilling into her ten-year-old mind. It was a history lesson, demonstrating how Angel technology had been adapted to human needs, allowing humanity to spread outwards in a bubble 300 light years in diameter. Alis lived with her mother, an Observer for the Collective, in a gene-altered redwood that grew rooms and corridors and provided homes for over a dozen families in a cultivated forest on the edge of the lowland swamps that dominated much of south-western England. Alis wanted to be an Observer when she grew up, and had eaten many of her mother's books on the subject of Alexander Freihold, the legendary scientist who had discovered the purpose of many of the artefacts left behind by the mysterious Angels. Even when her friends tried to drag her out to go mammoth riding through the cool English glades she would make excuses and stay in her room, remembering what it was like to stand on the topmost part of a Fulhausian Ship, watching the vast bulk of the genengineered Ship crashing through the waves of an alien planet. She'd never been there, but she didn't let that spoil the fun.

2. Three days after Alis finished her training in the Collective's multiple-environment station on Luna, the news came through that her mother had disappeared while on board a Ship in the northern waters of Fulhaus' World. The Ship, two miles in length and slightly more than half that in width, had disappeared without a trace, taking a population of several thousand into oblivion. Officially Alis's mother had been contracted by the Collective to negotiate in several long-running disputes over fishing rights between Fleets owned by the two main political groups on Fulhaus, the Loyal Fulhausians and the Justified Moralists. Unofficially, she was looking for Alexander Freihold. Freihold had disappeared on Fulhaus' World more than two centuries before, during the first wave of colonization and before the collapse of the first Singularity.

The news of the disappearance of the Ship was shrouded in vague references to colonial myths and legends – the Angels were still alive and watching humanity; the Angels snatched people and used them for strange genetic experiments; the Angels were dead, but their ghosts haunted the planets whose species they had gene-altered wholesale; the Angels had left their artefacts behind to see what humanity would do with them, and would judge it by the uses

made of them. The Angels were angry at finding their Ships infested by humanity, and punished them accordingly.

Alis's tutor was a grizzled veteran and a diehard supporter of the Illuminated. "The signs are there if you look for them," he used to tell her. "The Angels might have disappeared 100,000 years ago, but they were 10,000 years ahead of us. They might come back any day now. We have to be ready for that."

Alis would shake her head. "It doesn't make sense. They're dead. We've inherited everything they've left behind."

"Ah, but what would they have to say about what we did with their property? There lies the question, Alis. How would they judge us?"

3. The Oort Singularity was a sphere of superdense matter almost a light year out from the sun. From here the Collective sent out its ships filled with Observers to recontact worlds colonized shortly after the creation of the first Singularity 800 years before. Alis stood looking out through the transparent wall of the Oort Station at the collapsed proto-star and for the first time felt a stab of fear at the thought of what was out there. People disappeared; there were still instances where Angel artefacts hadn't yet been explained, or killed people who tried to study or dismantle them.

She was going to Fulhaus. Before she had left Luna for the last time, her tutor slipped her a tiny vial of books which she subsequently brought with her to the edge of the solar system. They disagreed on a lot of things, but he was a good man and wanted his Observers to have an extra edge.

"I knew your mother," he'd said. "We trained together, a long time ago. I haven't even seen her since I retired from active duty. But we were close."

How close was evident from one of the books; she touched it to her tongue with the Singularity hanging in the infinite night above her, and remembered the taste of his sweat, the sensation of his warm breath on her mother's bare shoulder, and found herself experiencing her own conception. It wasn't fashionable these days to know who your father was, but Alis had inherited a sentimental streak from her mother, and felt tears trickle down her cheek.

4. Government House was made of wide bone arches a hundred years tall, pairs of them leaning against each other in rows to form the arched roof that reminded Alis of medieval cathedrals, if Hieronymous

Bosch had ever had a hand in building one. It was raining, a warm rain that constantly pattered on roofs and streamed down sloping Fulhausian streets. Most people lived on the Ships; the total living area on board the thousands of Ships was many times the land area of Fulhaus itself.

Fulhaus was an ocean world, the only land a scattering of islands large and small around the equatorial regions. Government House stood on Fulhaus Island, site of the First Landing. Alis stood on a wide promontory and watched a Ship sailing by under an alien sky, traces of early morning mist drifting by its colossal hull. Two miles long, almost one mile wide. The upper decks glittered with the diamond sparkle of the lights of human habitation, an entire floating city following the warm ocean currents of the equator and the nomadic shoals of fish that it and the colonists survived on. She tried hard to remember it, every detail, every nuance, desperately wanting to capture the memory for future reference and cataloging.

5. Jonathan Van Iendos was a spy. His parents had been Representatives for the Mulden Fleet, which had allied itself to the Justified Moralists with their pro-Collective stance. He believed his parents had been murdered by Captain Van Orleans, a High Council member and staunch supporter of the anti-Collective Loyal Fulhausians, who favoured independence at any cost. Van Iendos had sworn to take the Captain's life as revenge. The Fulhausians, Alis noted, were big on revenge. It was strangely like stepping through time to an earlier and simpler era.

"If you can prove Van Orleans is suppressing information about undiscovered Angel tech, the Collective will hand him to you on a plate," Alis said.

"What happens if he and the Loyalists go on ignoring the Collective's demands?"

She shrugged. "The most likely result is that a military contingent from Earth will turn up one of these days and take over."

Van Iendos frowned. "I always thought the Collective preferred to avoid using force. Aren't they more into negotiation?"

"They are, but the Illuminated aren't. They're the problem." Van Iendos shook his head, not recognizing the term.

"The Illuminated," she explained. "A pressure group within the Collective. They believe Angel tech should be abandoned and left for the Angels in case they decide to come back."

"Come back?" He shook his head at this nonsense. "Children's fairy tales."

"To you, maybe." She thought of her father, in his last letter he had said he had fully embraced Illuminated philosophy, and abandoned the use of chemical books.

6. They rose above the Ship in a glass-walled elevator that produced a spectacular view uniquely designed to induce vertigo. The whole Ship gradually tapered upwards towards the aft, enormous misshapen buildings growing directly out of the Ship's hull like thousands of brightly jewelled mushrooms reaching towards the sky. She realized, not for the first time, that the whole thing was *alive*, an enormous living entity that dwarfed the humans who had made their

lives there. As they rose into the sky she could see some of the monkey-like parasites that formed part of the complex floating ecology of the Ships hanging and dropping and leaping across lumpy protrusions in the gnarled, wood-like surfaces. Walking through the intricate corridors and multitudinous levels of the Ship was an experience in itself – the way the corridors curved in sinuous organic lines, the patterns of the body of the Ship twisting along the length of the vaguely oval corridors. All grown from a single organism over thousands of years. Alis knew genetic engineering – life on many of the worlds now colonized by humankind would be impossible without it. But the scale on which the Angels had performed it was incredible, on all the worlds they had touched. They had been gone 100,000 years, but the mark of their passing might last a billion or more.

Something rammied the Ship and she heard its entire mass groan under the weight of the impact. She felt her stomach lurch and saw something black and enormous moving under the Ship, foam churning where its tentacles smashed against the Ship's bow far, far below. The Leviathans were almost as big as the Ships themselves, and were believed by many within the Collective to be the product of Angel tech as much as the Ships. Van Orleans and the Loyalists intended to begin culling the Leviathans within days because of the threat they posed to the fishing fleets.

7. The deepsea research base had been abandoned for centuries. Van Iendos directed the two-man submersible until it clanged against the metal hull of the base. Robot arms with cutting torches burned through the thick metal walls and constructed a sealed passageway.

The interior of the base was dust and dried bones. The identified Freihold from the records and a quick genetic scan of the remains. Alis found some chemical books in a drawer and ate them, remembering how Freihold had himself adapted the Angel tech to human physiology. Memories almost 1,000 years old filled her mind, and she understood.

8. The Leviathan was awesome as it moved through the caverns of light deep under the surface of the sea. It should have been terrifying, but Alis thought it was beautiful. Tentacles drifted through the water around its enormous bulk, scooping up plankton and small fish and ingesting them. They steered carefully, aware that impacting with one of those tentacles would kill them both.

"They've always been here," said Van Iendos. "Since the first colonists came here. They eat the food we need to survive. That's how wars happen here."

"It used to be a Ship."

"What?"

"Really. That's the secret of the Leviathans. The Leviathans and the Ships are different phases of the same species. When that Ship disappeared with my mother on board, it sank to the sea bottom and began to transform into a Leviathan.

A series of slow booms slammed through the water; the shock waves sent the submersible flying. The Loyalists had over-ridden the Collective and begun slaughtering Leviathans. It occurred to Alis that war was probably imminent.

9. Captain Van Orleos was a big man with a face like a dull knife and a mind like a well-honed axe. Alis stood beside him on the bridge and watched Fulhausian aircraft wheel and dip above a sea that was the colour of blood.

"We are engaged in a war of life," Van Orleos boomed. "This is a world of limited resources. We are in direct competition with these creatures for those resources."

Alis was acting in her official capacity as an Observer as part of a last-ditch attempt to halt the culling operation. Before he had died Alexander Freihold had identified a specific sequence in the genetic makeup of Angel-altered species that served as a kind of genetic signature. Find that signature and you had found the Angels' legacy. Other Observers at that very moment would be attempting to smuggle Freihold's discoveries past the Loyalists' militia.

It was a two-fold problem; the Illuminated would gain from the Loyalists' refusal to stop killing the living products of Angel tech. It would allow them to push the Collective into military action it might not otherwise take. What had once been a semi-religious philosophy had been converted into a tool for gaining political power. Political expediency prevented her father from writing any more letters to her.

"Sir, my job is to assess the impact of the Fulhausian population on Angel-altered species. You must understand that we have information that proves the Leviathans are of the same species as the Ships."

Van Orleos stared at her in shock. Then a craftiness came into his face. They understood each other. "There's no way you could prove that."

"But there is. You know that as well as I do. You must desist from this wholesale slaughter. The Ships are living products of Angel tech; it's in their genetic code."

"Observer, you may yourself be aware that Fulhaus' World has done very well for itself without the interference of anything like the Collective for several centuries. It was things like the Collective that caused my ancestors to leave Earth almost 1,000 years ago. The Leviathans decimate the shoals that this Ship normally follows. Given the choice between starvation and survival, I might suggest we be allowed to live our lives as we will."

Alis sighed. "I am trying to avert a war here. Surely you can see the wider implications? The Illuminated could gain control of the Collective. It would be bad news for you and bad news for many other people in other colonies."

He shook his head. "That is not my concern. We came here to mind our own business, and I have no time for fairy tales about long-dead aliens no one has even seen. That is my final word."

"There's no way I can persuade you otherwise?"

"Absolutely not. Now get off my bridge." He turned away.

"I see. I'm sorry that's the case." She pressed the tiny switch she held in her hand and watched Van Orleos choke to death. Fortunately they were alone. The drug that had been placed in his food earlier only needed to be activated with the appropriate signal to stop his lungs working. It was the only way, but not one Alis necessarily regretted.

10. Her father was being held in a low-security prison on Titan. Good behaviour had earned him a bubble window that looked out onto the Saturnian clouds.

"Alis. I'm glad to see you."

She nodded. "I'm sorry it had to be this way." War had been narrowly averted. Assassinating Van Orleos had thrown the Loyalists into such confusion that the culling operation was easily halted. The Collective had come out on top and the Illuminated were in disarray.

"You said something very mysterious in your last letter, Alis. Some big secret you had to tell me."

She nodded. "You know that genetic tag we found in the Ships and the Leviathans? The one Freihold discovered? It's in us as well."

Her father stared at her. "But that would mean..."

"That the Angels altered us as well. That we're just as special as anything else the Angels touched. It means the Illuminated have no real purpose. Think about it. How could the Angels ever complain about something they might even have had a hand in creating playing with their other toys?"

He looked confused; he'd changed in the years since she'd last seen him, become an old man. It made it more difficult for him to look at things in a new way.

11. Alis looked at her wrinkled old woman's hands and touched the ganglial controls. The whole Ship shuddered and slowly began to change direction. Enormous front-like limbs hanging down from the bottom of the hull moved in new patterns, pushing against the current. She was its Captain, its ruler.

She looked down, feeling a sharp pain in her side; part of the wood-like hull had somehow grown a tiny branch, stabbing her in her side.

One of the monkey-like parasites outside the Bridge stopped and stared in at her. "It's a matter of understanding, Alis," it said, which was impossible, because they were primitive creatures and incapable of thought or speech. "You can get lonely, even entire species do that. We needed someone to talk to."

"I don't understand." Her hand quivered, trying to tug out the branch. But it remained firm.

"Remember us, Alis. Remember us as we were, not how you imagine us to be. We're not angels."

She saw them, remembering a proud civilization that had spread across the universe and ruled it for 10,000 years, but there had been no one else out there. Could a species die of loneliness?

"You're dying, Alis. You don't have to die forever. Join us."

"I don't understand."

"Our genetic code is preserved piecemeal in everything we touched. The Ships, you. We can help you, if you want it."

She felt a burst of deep pain in her chest and she slid to the floor. Black specks danced in front of her eyes. Suddenly the pain disappeared and she looked up to see a figure standing over her. Her mother gazed at her and Alis looked around in confusion. Strange lights danced around her and she was somehow young again. She reached out to one of the lights and touched an angel.

The Shadow of the Torturer

Peter Atkins in conversation
with Steve Green

Intriguingly, for a writer whose horror-genre status was firmly established by his screenplays for the *Hellraiser* sequels, *Hellbound* and *Hell on Earth*, Peter Atkins sees scant chance of a cinematic spin-off from his debut as a novelist. Still, it was only through a little good-natured chicanery on the part of his friend and fellow Liverpudlian Clive Barker, author and director of the original *Hellraiser*, that Atkins was diverted from his intended career in "real writing" into continuing the adventures of the trans-dimensional torturer Pinhead.

"I don't think anybody's silly enough to start with screenplays—who the hell would want to?" Instead, he shifted from theatrical work with Barker and Doug Bradley (later to let the carpenters loose on his head) into music, a pursuit he followed with Liverpool bands for five years until hitting the milestone age of 30. "I thought, 'I'm not a pop star now, and I never will be,' and started writing short stories. I didn't try to get published; only friends had read them."

One of those friends being Barker, who had recently adapted his own novella "The Hellbound Heart" into *Hellraiser*. Already busy handling the directoral reins on *Nightbreed*, Barker contacted Atkins and suggested he script the proposed sequel; when the producer Chris Figg telephoned ten minutes later, under the impression he was speaking to a seasoned screenwriter, Atkins followed through on Barker's bluff and found himself on the Hollywood rollercoaster.

This time around, Tony Randel would occupy the director's chair; an executive at Roger Corman's studio New Worlds, he had supervised production on the original. "Which is the reason Chris Figg wanted him to direct it, they'd been so impressed with his work on the first movie. He wasn't just an awed outsider; he'd been very involved with the first one and was just delighted to get the chance to direct the second. I, on the other hand, was an awed outsider.

"Fortunately, I only knew in aesthetic terms how successful an act it was to follow. *Hellraiser* wasn't released by the time I was writing the second one, so I only had that one strand of pressure; I didn't have the 'Oh my god, and it made money, now I can't do it.'

"Looking back, I should have been more nervous. Certainly, I think it was a good thing that the phenomenon hadn't started; you know, Pinhead wasn't a pin-up in Tokyo, the movie wasn't taking a lot of money, it was just a movie they'd made that I'd seen and the public hadn't."

As executive producer, Clive Barker ensured his own creative stamp would be left upon the project. "First, there was all the business crap; he introduced me to Chris and we did the deal. The first creative meeting was essentially me and Clive over a bottle of bourbon in his flat. He didn't have things he didn't want me to do, but he did have elements or qualities that he wanted to stress, that he felt were the strengths of the first one, most of which I agreed with, that he wanted more of. And we talked

about tonal stuff for an hour, until the whisky bottle was empty."

Among those "elements or qualities" which Atkins expanded was the background history of the Cenobites, led by the horror icon Pinhead. Portrayed in the opening episode as shadowy practitioners of agony so enormous it transcends physical pain into spiritual deconstruction, Atkins' first outing as a screenwriter explored their own vulnerabilities and introduced Leviathan, a geometric demi-god to whom they are mere pawns. Although Pinhead is back honing his skills in the third instalment, *Hellbound* closes with the messianic anti-hero momentarily forced to rediscover his human roots and face the wrath of Leviathan.

As the mythology of the Cenobites struck a chord with its audience and set in motion a second sequel, *Hellbound* developed its own mythos, including rumours that one scene set in a surgical theatre was so appalling that censors had removed it completely before release, the only clue being a single still on the video cassette's back cover. Atkins is eager to put the record straight: "No, it was cut because it was crap. Here, from the horse's mouth: it was crap. It looked terrible. I'm not ascribing blame; maybe I wrote it badly, maybe Tony shot it badly, maybe Barbie and Doug performed it badly. For whatever reason, it didn't work, so we yanked it out, which happens on every movie, everywhere, and people never think to ask.

"The difference is, that they don't have stupid video distributors



Peter Atkins

who take a frame from that deleted scene and put it on the video box. And then everybody thinks 'That must have been so strong, so horrible...'

Staying with myth and rumour, has the success of *Hellbound* and *Hell on Earth* paid off for its creative team? "Well, this is the Big Myth. None of us ever make money from the movie's success. It's always very nice when a movie makes a lot of money because although it gives you no more money yourself, what it does do is mean you might get hired again. You always get a percentage deal, and it always means absolutely fuck all."

A case in point being William Peter Blatty's lawsuit over *The*

Exorcist, then the most successful straight horror movie ever made. "The frightening thing is that he took Warner Brothers to court, and they won. They proved, on paper, that *The Exorcist* never made a profit. So ever since then, everybody's sort of known 'Well, yeah, movies don't make a profit'."

Certainly, given the studios' perverse inability to balance the books, TransAtlantic Pictures – which took over *Hell on Earth* from New Worlds – is unlikely to let Pinhead rest long. "I'm sure they are looking at it as a franchise, so I'm pretty certain there will be a *Hellraiser IV*. I don't know whether I wanted to be involved, to be honest. We've got a trilogy; *Hellraiser III* closes a lot of the questions raised in the first one."

Despite its financial shortcomings, screenwriting did enable Atkins to devote eight months to expanding his 15,000-word novelette "The Vampires of Summer," completed shortly before Barker's turning-point telephone call, into an 80,000-word novel, *Morningstar*. But regardless of its horror tag, Atkins' book stands aside from the current flood of vampire literature in much the same way as the *Hellraiser* movies' metaphysical framing lifts them above much of generic horror cinema; its author deliberately undermines the initial sense of mystery by unveiling both the identity and motivations of the serial killer *Morningstar* ("the newest name for the death that walks, that shops and smiles and calls you neighbour"), then steps sideways into science fantasy with the introduction of the second *Morningstar*, the vampire hunter's godlike nemesis.

It is this subversion of form which, Atkins suspects, would sabotage any celluloid incarnation. "I would be happy if somebody wants to buy the film rights and hire me to write the screenplay; that's great. Frankly, I don't think it's a movie, because I think the tricks it plays and the way it tries to work is actually anticinematic. It has very visual scenes and it does have a strong story, but try persuading some cigar-chomping executive, 'You see, I'm compounding generic expectation,' and he'll say 'Get the fuck out of my office.'"

"It would be an interesting challenge to see how I could retain that kind of generic gameplaying within a cinematic context. I think, obviously, I'd have to streamline the story a little, probably conflate a couple of characters. It's not just that executives would snap, I would actually think that it was unfair. People who read books are reader to have games played with them and can actually take a reading pleasure in that. If that was done in the cinema, I would think 'Stop fucking around, I'm expecting to see a straight story.' There are probably ways to do it; I'd relish the challenge, but let's see if it happens."

One point in its favour is the vampire, increasingly popular both in print and on film, although

Willow Cottage



Mrs Hurst went into the hall and could not remember what she was after. She looked about at the foolish clock, the coat rack, the barometer, always falling, one way or another. She sniffed at the hyacinth in a bowl, on the telephone table...some book? the gardening guide? the secateurs to trim the forsythia in the living-room? The light in the hall was dim and greenish. She bent close to the olive glass panels of the front door and peered out at the lovely wild garden of Willow Cottage, in the hour before sunset.

"I'm becoming vague..." she said.

"What?" called Perry, from the fireside.

"VAGUE!" she shouted.

The telephone gave a long, soft, wheezing ring. Had it done that already? Did she think she had heard the phone? So many times it gave a sort of practice ring, then stopped, then rang again; this meant that someone was trying to get through. From the telephone box at the station, for instance... one of the children without any change, shouting to be picked up.

"Hello?"

There was a breathing silence broken by hoarse coughing and the clink of glass.

"Hello?" said Fedora Hurst. "Are you there?"

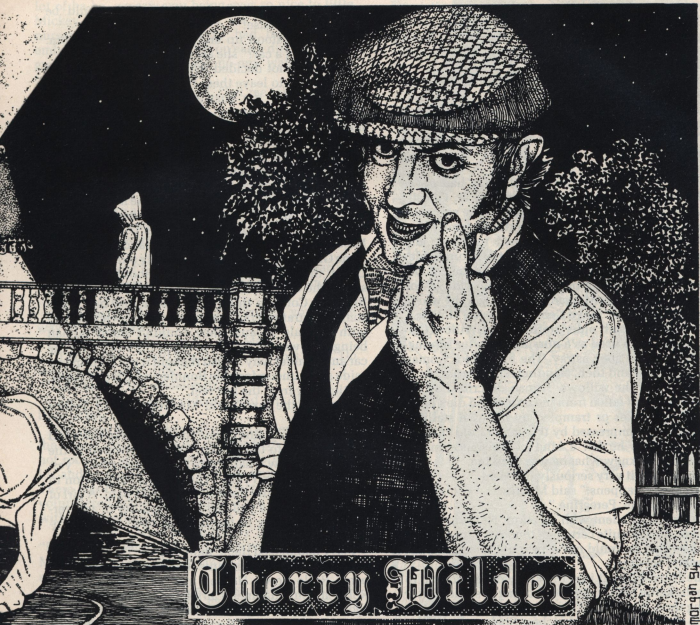
"...mean it seriously..." said a choked whisper.

There were a few words she couldn't understand because the voice was distorted, then something that might have been "Don't let them come..."

There was a soft pillowy sound, the movement of cushions or bed-clothes. Mrs Hurst was about to speak when she heard humming, a few bars of humming – surely from another person. The receiver was moved, the new person was listening. Fedora, remembering her breathing exercises, was tempted to hum the same few bars back, pianissimo. She waited, however; a man cleared his throat, the receiver was quietly replaced. Fedora snatched up the scissors, which she had been after in the first place, not the secateurs, and hurried back to her nephew by the fireside.

"That was a terrible telephone call!"

Peregrine looked up from his chess problem; he was beginning to lose patience with his aunt's stratagems to keep him amused. She described the



Cherry Wilder

call and it did seem rather strange, if she were telling the truth.

"Was the first person, the mumbler, a man or a woman?" he demanded.

"I couldn't tell," said Mrs Hurst. "You know how difficult it is sometimes."

Mrs Hurst had often been taken for a man on the telephone. She became aware of changes in attitude; men were hail-fellow-well-met, girls could be sharp or flirtatious. She kept on talking, however, and the person at the other end almost invariably became aware of the mistake.

"But the second person, the breather, was definitely a man?"

Perry had to raise his voice because his aunt had gone off at a tangent down the long room. She stood at the french windows and looked out into the garden. On her way back she paused at a side table and switched on a lamp made from a tall porcelain vase.

"What was he humming?" called Perry.

"The entr'acte from *Traviata*," said Fedora Hurst.

"You mean...?"

Perry hummed the achingly sweet melody; it set his teeth on edge.

"Yes, quite definitely."

"Elementary," he said. "A man just murdered some tart."

Mrs Hurst frowned slightly. She came close to him, picked up his right hand and used the scissors to snip off a piece of broken fingernail that had been bothering him. She laid the scissors on the mantelpiece beside the figure of a Balinese dancer then took hold of his wheelchair and spun it skillfully in a circle so that he was at a different angle to the fire.

"If you ring the coppers about a wrong number," said Perry, "they'll put you on the list of cranks and psychics."

"I don't believe it was a wrong number," said Mrs Hurst.

She perched on the couch in an odd listening attitude and held up a hand for silence when he began to speak.

"Oh really... hang it all!" burst out Perry.

The Balinese dancer's ornaments began to tremble;

a breeze moved through the room, lifting the curtains; a silver snuffbox leaped from its shelf inside the glass-fronted cupboard. Out in the hall the foolish clock struck two, the telephone rang again and stopped in mid ring.

"I am afraid that something will happen!" said Mrs Hurst.

"A lorry went past on the road," said Perry. "For goodness sake let's have our high tea!"

"This is Willow Cottage," she said. "I've tried to explain."

She had tried to explain but Perry had never been sure what she was driving at. Ghosts, more or less, and a sensitivity in the wretched house itself. It had been brought into the family by a suffragette cousin who campaigned in Wales and seemed to have set herself up against the natural order of things. She bore three children then earned a vile notoriety by lecturing on birth control. One of the daughters wrote Mrs Morgan-Gray's biography which Perry thought of as "Lloyd George Knew My Mother."

There were much older stories about Willow Cottage: it had been used as a nursing home for serving-maids who had gone astray. The figure of a woman was seen, now and then, standing on the ornamental bridge, under the willows. A man described as the Mad Squire had fallen from the bridge and died hard, pierced by stakes or trampled by his own stallion. Perry was not impressed by this load of old rubbish but sometimes he felt a kind of resistance in the house. As if it knew what he was thinking.

"I can't take it very seriously," he said.

"Whatever happens," said Mrs Hurst, "you will be safe in this room, Peregrine."

He remained silent with an effort. Nothing would happen, he was quite certain of that. At the same time he knew that he could never be quite safe again, not for years, not ever.

Mrs Hurst hurried into the kitchen just in time to save the kettle which had been boiling hysterically for a long time. She refilled it and put it on to boil again while she made the sandwiches. She reached casually into the cutlery drawer and came up with a little silver knife. Laura's knife, a present from Bacharach-an-Rhein.

Was that it? Where was Janie? Had something happened to one of Perry's children? Where was Robert? Should she call him in New England? Fedora Hurst placed the souvenir butter knife back in the drawer and took out a plain knife. She had a sudden image of Laura, as a young girl, rummaging in the kitchen cupboards.

The thought of her older sister, dead for several years, frightened her more than anything that had happened so far. She made the tea, loaded the jingling trolley, and wheeled it back into the living room. Peregrine, who had been sullen and withdrawn when she went to fetch the tea, was in a much better mood. He had wheeled himself to the windows and now he came back, bright-eyed. They exchanged a few civilities over the tea then both began to speak at once.

"I must tell you about your Aunt Laura," said Mrs Hurst.

"I saw something out there..." began Perry.

She let him go on.

"There's a car parked outside! They could be watching the house!"

Mrs Hurst stood up and looked about the room. "What sort of a car?" she asked.

Perry had not decided what sort of car he should invent - best to leave these things to chance. He had no idea where the answer came from: "Big old-fashioned American job. A Ford or a Chevrolet. I mean really old-fashioned. Sort of Bonnie-and-Clyde number."

His aunt was plainly alarmed. Could she actually fall for a scenario about gunmen or gangsters attacking Willow Cottage, Old Pond Road, Waybrook, Gloucestershire? He watched her as she hurried to the window, a tall untidy woman in old tweeds. She was alive, she was the only one left: his Uncle Ron, the Major, had bought it in Northern Ireland; his mother, Irene Glover, was dead, so was bloody old Aunt Laura Chant that she'd been rabbiting about. This was surely the old maid of the family who became a vet. Big deal. Come to think of it, his mother had made some penetrating comment about people who worked with animals because they couldn't stand human beings. He was beginning to regret his story with the car and wonder why he had thought it up. He brushed aside some uncomfortable Bonnie-and-Clyde images, particularly from the last reel.

"But it's the taxi!" said Mrs Hurst. "Old Tyler's Humber."

She gave a cry, flung open the french windows and bustled out into the garden. Voices answered in the dusk. Kids! Now what? Perry heard his aunt say "yes, yes of course, Mr Tyler!" There was a commotion in the front hall while the taxi-driver was paid. A girl of about seven and a younger boy, a toddler in an overall, came running in through the open french windows.

Perry had placed them, more or less. They were the children of his cousin Janie and her handsome husband, Rollo Rowe. He had met Janie and good old Rollo at some damned Christmas get-together years ago. Seven years ago, let's face it, when he was 14 years old and could still walk and had parents. He had some memory of a little kid but it couldn't be either of these two. Now the girl hung back but the boy kept running unsteadily over the carpet; he smiled up into Perry's face and cried:

"Lo! Lo!"

"Hello yourself," said Perry.

"His name is Harry," said the girl. "My name is Meg. This is our Gran's house."

"Your Gran is my Auntie Fedora," said Perry. "Your Mummy is called Janie, isn't she?"

"Yes," said the girl in a whisper. "And our Daddy is called Rollo but his real name is Henry too, like Harry."

Perry, as an only child, had always felt vaguely at a loss with younger children and babies. He remembered a beastly episode with some little bleeder called Mickey, child of one of his Dad's golf friends. Mickey fell down in the back yard, skinned his knee and began to cry so Perry picked him up and comforted him. Promised him a band-aid for the knee, that sort of thing. Turned out both sets of parents had been watching the episode from the window. He got a

lot of ha-ha, we saw you being ever so nice to little Mickey. We saw you playing the big brother, the nursemaid, the nanny. Perry had been horribly embarrassed and angry. What on earth did they want, grown-ups? Now there was no-one watching him from a window.

"Come on, Harry," he said. "Let me take you for a ride!"

Meg helped get Harry into his lap and they rolled gently up and down the long room. He got Meg to switch on two more lamps: the elephant and the tulips. His aunt came in from the hall with the other child, the elder girl, and he knew that something was not all right. The big sister was about eleven now, and she looked like a refugee... pale, shocked, tousled, as if she'd been wandering the mountain passes of Kurdistan. Where were the Rowe family living now, anyway?

"There we are!" said Mrs Hurst a shade too heartily. "We have visitors all the way from Cheltenham!"

"Tray!" cried Harry.

"Yes!" agreed Mrs Hurst. "Liz brought you all the way by train, Harry."

"I switched on the lamps," said Meg.

"This is Perry," said Mrs Hurst. "And this is Liz. Do we all know each other?"

Liz stared at the wheelchair.

"Perry has had an accident," said Mrs Hurst. "He lives in this room."

She swept the children off to the kitchen and began the rituals associated with another high tea. She had not received any satisfactory explanation from poor Liz and for a moment or two it was impossible to ask. There was the matter of taking Harry to the loo. Meg volunteered some information when she was alone with her grandmother.

"Harry and I were at a birthday party," she said. "But Daddy didn't pick us up. We waited and Toby's Mummy phoned and then Liz and Granny Rowe came along in a taxi."

"Another taxi," said Mrs Hurst. She did not trust Granny Rowe. "What did Granny Rowe say?" she enquired.

"Daddy had to go on a trip and Mummy was packing," parroted Meg. "Then she drove us all to the station and put us on a train. Liz knew what to do."

"What a good thing I happened to be at home!" said Mrs Hurst.

"Granny Rowe knew you must be home!" said Meg. "She said you were caring for another lame duck."

"Do you know what she meant by that?" snapped Mrs Hurst.

Meg shook her head but Mrs Hurst did not falter. "It was a rather mean way of talking about poor Perry," she said. "He is lame. I look after him."

Liz brought back Harry and they settled round the big kitchen table. There was an old wooden high chair for young visitors who needed it. Mrs Hurst saw that the two younger children were not very hungry and Liz was too upset to eat. They all drank cocoa, however, a rare old-fashioned beverage which they associated with trips to Willow Cottage.

"Coke?" asked Harry, turning to his sisters.

"No, Harry," said Liz. "It's Gran's lovely Cocoa!"

"Co!" said Harry.

Liz opened her eyes very wide in an effort not to cry.



"Elizabeth!" cried Mrs Hurst. "Where is your mother? Where is Janie?"

"At home!" said Liz. "At home in bed sick!"

"What happened? Where is your father? Where were you this afternoon? Child, you must tell me!"

Liz looked Fedora in the eye steadily and passed the message as one adult did to another. Not in front of the children. Mrs Hurst climbed down at once.

"Now soon," she said, "we must go upstairs and find a place for my three chickabiddies to sleep."

"Not tide!" said Harry.

Then the foolish clock in the hall began to strike. Meg counted aloud and when it came to 13, 14, 15, she and Liz were laughing. Mrs Hurst, thoroughly alarmed, left them all sitting at the table and went back to the living room. Perry had been caught beside the tulip lamp when a gust of wind came in through the french windows. He was clutching its slender stem to save it from toppling. The room was vibrating gently: a shelf of china animals had descended to the bottom of the cupboard; the fire made a hissing sound. Mrs Hurst shut out the gathering darkness and said urgently:

"There's been some family trouble. Peregrine?"

"Yes, Aunt Fedora?"

"I want you to watch the road for cars. I'll bring the phone in here and you can try to get through to your cousin Janie while I put them to bed."

"It's really only seven," said Perry, "even if that stupid clock struck 21. A bit early for Liz."

"She can listen to the radio in the sewing room," said Mrs Hurst.

"Is there anyone else I should call?" he asked.

"You can try that awful person Violet Rowe," said Mrs Hurst. "In fact you might go over rather well with her."

She went to fetch the telephone and suddenly had the whole thing within her grasp but she would not believe it. It was too horrible. How could she have failed to recognize the voice, to recognize the danger. If there had been no hope, from the very beginning, then what of the children? She went back to Perry slowly, feeling her bones crumble, her life ebb away. Out in the kitchen Harry had gone to pieces; he was bawling at the top of his lungs.

"Perry," she said. "We must protect the children. They have been given into our care."

She left Perry juggling the press-button red phone and the ancient velvet-covered notebook full of useful numbers. He tried the number of Janie and Rollo Rowe: he let the phone ring 21 times. He checked the number with information, rang again, losing count. He checked again to make sure that the line was in order. He found the numbers of a good many dead persons in the notebook, and the number of his own digs in London.

Peregrine looked round the quiet room: he trundled gently to the limits of the very long telephone cord, then left the phone on the table under the elephant lamp. He drew in close to a side window, draping the curtains over himself and his chair. He peered at the gardens, saw the willow trees bending over the little bridge and bathing their long tresses in the shining stream. "*Willow, willow, willow... Sing all a green willow must be my garland.*"

He remembered how his mother, Irene, had hated all this associative nonsense. She was a forthright sort of person who loved home truths. Perry had often pointed out that this was just a way of saying nasty things and getting away with it. She had seemed to blame people for dying. She was impatient with the victims of war and pestilence like her brother, Major Chant, or poor Dan Hurst, Fedora's husband. She seemed to resent all those who perished untimely in crashed planes or ferry-boat disasters.

Dad had been a good driver who didn't take risks but now his parents were both dead. Willow garlands all round. He still had no memory of the accident. He imagined there must have been a lot of blood, on the grass, on the roadway, on the broken windshield.

He swung back into the room and it had turned red. Trick of the light of course but the red slid and dripped so as it spread round about the phone and the ivory clock of the elephant lamp. Perry blinked several times, went back to the phone, called Janie and Rollo again, then tried another number from the little book. Mrs V. Rowe of Haviland Mansions. What an old Madam, said his mother. What an awful old tart to have for a mother-in-law.

The Madam had a seductive youthful voice; she was very much on edge, the phone had been snatched up at the first ring.

"Rollo, darling..."

"Mrs Rowe?"

He had a reasonably seductive and pleasant voice himself, he knew that. She played right into his hands.

"Is that... Are you from Saunders and Ingold?"

There was an urgency in her voice that frightened him. He couldn't pretend to be the lawyer's clerk.

"My name is Peregrine Glover, Mrs Rowe."

"Who is that? I'm waiting for a most important call. What was the name again?"

"Glover," he said. "I'm calling from Willow Cottage."

Mrs Rowe was silent for two pulse beats. "Yes of course," she said. "Who else is there at present? I mean did the children arrive safely?"

"My Aunt is worried," said Perry. "We can't contact Janie. There doesn't seem to be anybody at the house."

"I was not inside!" said Mrs Rowe. "I swear I did not set foot in the place. I picked up Liz in the front garden. You haven't answered my question: did the children get down there all right?"

"Where is Janie, Mrs Rowe? Where is your son, Rollo?"

"Now I know who you are!" exclaimed Mrs Rowe. "You're the crippled boy! You're tormenting me! Where are the children?"

"They arrived by train."

"Is that all you can say?" she almost screamed. "What's the matter with everybody?"

She gave a gasping sob and said in an altered voice: "He's there, isn't he! My son Rollo is there already. You must let me speak to him!"

"He's not here! When did you see him last?"

"He telephoned me about half past five," said Mrs Rowe. "Oh, it's like a nightmare. No-one will help. I've done everything that he asked. Janie did a dreadful thing once before, you know, up in Birmingham."

"A dreadful thing?"

"It was just before Harry was born. She was out of her mind. She took the two girls in the middle of the night and went to a really terrible place, a Women's House. They slept all in one bed for two nights and the girls got nits..."

"Did Janie run away?" asked Perry. "Is that what happened?" He felt relieved.

"Now I know what's going on!" said Mrs Rowe. "She's there with you, Janie, the little bitch. Get off the line, damn you. I'm expecting a most important call."

As Perry replaced the receiver a mild convulsion gripped the living room: some small object shattered in the cupboard, the tall branches of forsythia under the portrait of Mrs Morgan-Gray scattered a shower of yellow flowers. He rolled cautiously to the window and observed that a big car was parked to the left of the gateway, under the trees. Yes, it was a station wagon, like his Dad's car, but darker. He considered opening the french windows and using his ramp to the garden. He saw himself charging up the path demanding explanations at the top of his voice: a cranky cripple, an inhabitant of Willow Cottage. Instead he switched off the nearest lamp, the tall vase, and sat in the dark, watching.

Mrs Hurst took down the Russian doll from a bookshelf and gave it to Liz. The Pet Shop Boys were singing on the radio. Meg and Harry were both dead to the world in the next room, asleep on the instant in Mrs Hurst's big soft bed.

"I don't know," said Liz.

She began to set out the dolls on the table of the sewing room: first the largest one, then the second largest, in a babushka of another colour.

"Daddy was upset..."

"Do you mean drunk?" enquired Fedora.

"Drunk and upset," said Liz. "He had had a terrible fight with Granny Rowe. Something about Dwayne, the chap who gives her golf lessons."

She took out the next doll, set it beside the others.

"Meg and Harry were picked up to go to the party. I went to get a choc ice. I thought everything was going to be all right. When I came back they were upstairs; Daddy was still upset. I went into my room and put on my headphones. I didn't hear anything, I didn't hear a car drive away. I was there in my room downstairs all afternoon. When I took off the headphones I heard our phone ringing like mad. It was Toby's mother saying we were going to pick up Meg and Harry. I said we were awfully sorry but Mummy was having trouble starting the Mini and we would be round soon. Daddy came downstairs as I hung up."

With clumsy fingers she took out the third Russian doll and placed it beside the others.

"He said that Mummy had driven off in a huff. He was trying to make a joke of it. Then he sat on the bottom step and sort of cried a bit. He pulled himself together and got Granny Rowe on the phone and told me to cut along and get my jacket. When I came back he saw me out of the front door; he told me to wait for Granny Rowe in the front garden. He was going to drive round and find Mummy..."

"In his car, the station wagon," said Mrs Hurst. "Were the cars parked in the back lane?"

"Mummy had put the Mini into the garage. Daddy's car was just parked in the lane. I saw him drive past the end of the street."

"You didn't go back into the house?" asked Mrs Hurst faintly.

"No," said Liz.

"What about the children's things? The overnight bag?"

"I found it," whispered Liz.

She opened up the third doll and took out the very tiny wooden baby doll, the size of a small thumb, and set the two smallest dolls apart from the rest.

"It was on the porch," she said. "Just standing there. My old Jumbo bag, with pyjamas and things, for Meg and Harry. So I thought Mummy really had made a dash for it."

"Where would she go?" asked Mrs Hurst.

"Here!" said Liz. "I was sure she would be here! I knew she would want us to come here if anything was wrong!"

"But surely your father sent you here... or Mrs Rowe?"

"No, it was me, me!" said Liz wildly. "I gave Granny Rowe a lot of instructions, as if they came from Daddy. Coming to Willow Cottage was all my idea. Of course Granny Rowe was rather glad. She is not so keen on having kids at the Mansions."

"Try not to worry," said Mrs Hurst. "Don't stay up too late."

She tucked in the faded afghan at the foot of the couch. She remembered the green wool from Laura's scarf and the silky yellow from Irene's baby leggings. She went to the big roll-top desk in one corner of the sewing room and found a packet of mints that she had put away. A photograph detached itself from the underside of a drawer; she made some sound of shock and desolation.

"Gran, what is it?"

"I thought it was a mouse," lied Mrs Hurst.

"May I see?" asked Liz.

There they all stood in the garden of the Rectory, a much larger house. Summer, the lawns were parched, the women wore soft, shapeless dresses and shady hats, two of the men wore white flannels. Laura wore jodhpurs, Fedora's frock had a Peter Pan collar, Irene was in a push-chair.

"Who is the man with the gun?" asked Liz.

"That is one of our father's friends," sighed Mrs Hurst. "We called him Old Neddy. He liked to hunt birds."

On such an afternoon as the one in the photograph young Fedora had struggled and cried out to be put down when good old Neddy lifted her up to sit on the wall. She remembered the innocent, pained face of her father, the Reverend Philip Chant; she could not explain her outburst, could not say "I didn't like the way he picked me up!" Sly, disgusting Old Neddy was the scourge of the housemaids; she remembered the time Laura caught him in the ankle with a croquet ball.

"Who is the big girl?" asked Liz. "The teenager?"

"That is your Great-Aunt Laura," said Mrs Hurst. "She was the eldest, she was nearly 14."

"How old were you, Gran?"

"I was nine," said Mrs Hurst. "Robbie was ten, he was away at school. Irene was three and a half."

She took back the photograph and slipped it absently into the pocket of her cardigan. She said good-night to Liz, looked in at the two younger children, then slipped away down the back stairs. She wandered out into the cool spring night like some poor ghost seeking lost companions. The woodshed, the chopping block under the bare walnut tree. *Janie, Janie...* The swing, the old cart settled in the long grass. No-one, the night was too cold, everyone had grown up and gone away. *Janie, come back, come in, come home, the children are all in bed.*

Before she knew it Fedora Hurst had come into the old spinney, the grove of trees thinning out with age, which lay between the cottage and the brook. The place was filled with gaps and tree-ghosts, the places where the last elms had stood, the hundred-year oak, the karaka which did not thrive. In a clearing there were a number of small graves, unmarked, they could be seen in certain lights as places where the turf had been disturbed. It was probable that these were the graves of the servant girls' children, stillborn or dead in early infancy.

In the middle of the spinney, there were large tree stumps and a grave with a small stone, very much weathered and marked with a cross. It was called the Lady's Grave: she remembered how grown-ups used to tease children with stories of the lady's ghost. She had no doubt that a lady's ghost might still walk, in the grounds of Willow Cottage, but the ancient grave held only the bones of a large cat, laid to rest in a wooden coffer. Laura had performed the exhumation very carefully and kept a few distinctive bones as scientific proof.

Even now she was unwilling to think of Laura, that wild girl, in exactly this spot. Late birds, probably starlings, were quarrelling in the tops of the beech trees, but the rookery was gone. The oak had fallen; Neddy Sinclair could no longer send the untidy rooks shrieking up in a dark cloud when he fired his trusty rook rifle. All his birds had flown.

Fedora had often been tempted to boast that she did not have a single gun in the place, but this was not true. She did keep a gun, very similar to one of Neddy's, in the long cupboard in the kitchen. Most people knew it was there; some disapproved. It was kept as a deterrent, like a cruise missile. She fired it off to make swarms of bees settle.

In an experiment worthy of Laura herself, the children, Janie and Bob, loosed it off along the banks of the stream in an effort to raise the carcass of a drowned sheep. It was the neighbours' pet lamb that had grown too big; it became a big cross sheep, patrolling the lawns, butting all the humans who came in its path.

What could have possessed them, Dan and Fedora, to let their children fire off the gun on that summer's day? Now it felt to her like acceptance. The gun exists, it is a remarkable mechanism; it is the duty of a parent to teach every boy, ha-ha, sorry Aunt Laura, every boy and girl, how to operate a gun.

Of course nothing happened; the carcass of poor Bunty surfaced naturally, downstream. Now the silly experiment was one of the noisier memories, the explosions that woke the quiet countryside and sent the frightened birds wheeling and circling, black against

the sky. *Janie, my girl, my beloved child, come home, reach out to me, you know how foolish I am...*

Mrs Hurst saw the willow trees at last and the glint of water. The moon had risen now, silvering the lawns, thickening the shadows around Willow Cottage. She saw a dark figure standing motionless upon the bridge.

Perry watched the parked car for at least 20 minutes. Then, just as the moon began to silver the tops of the trees, a car door slammed and a man walked briskly down the path. Perry moved away from his observation post just in time. The front door creaked, there was a moment's silence broken by the clock striking nine, which was more or less the right time. Rollo Rowe slipped into the room.

Perry saw that he was still good-looking, holding up well, although he must be 40. Rollo was well built though not exceptionally tall; he was very healthy looking with clear brown eyes and good teeth. His hair waved naturally and he took a good tan. He was a restless type, always on the go, always walking, springing up, almost dancing up and down the long room like an actor trying to use plenty of stage. Rollo had been drinking, of course, but Perry wondered if he was a bit squiffed like this every evening. He'd had a few and now they were wearing off.

"Hello there!" said Rollo softly. "I know who you are but I'm afraid I've forgotten your name..."

He came bounding over and shook Perry by the hand. His palm was cool and dry.

"Glover," said Perry. "Perry Glover..."

Rollo passed on down the room and began to laugh. He stood under the portrait of Mrs Morgan-Gray.

"God Almighty!" he said. "Milly Morgan-Gray keeps the babies away. Vesta Victoria made a remark about the old bag when she wheeled on a perambulator. I'll bet you're chocker with bloody Willow Cottage by this time, matey."

Perry could not help laughing. "Full of atmosphere..." he said.

"Foul sluts in dairies," said Rollo. "Old maids longing for a bit of ectoplasm. Damn!"

Perry moved his chair to see better. Rollo had tangled his feet in the cord of the porcelain lamp; as he got himself free Perry saw that he was wearing old jeans and a brand new sweatshirt with the label still hanging from the collar. His feet were bare; he had slipped off his tattered espadrilles and was wading about on the carpet. A pin and a thumb tack found their way under his skin.

"Always getting wounded in this hole," he mumbled.

The room was ominously still; Perry felt sorry for old Rollo and rather liked him.

"Look, if you'd like a drink..." he began.

Rollo gave him a vague, cold smile. "Not for me," he said. "Can I fetch you anything?"

"I was speaking on the phone," said Perry, "to your mother."

Rollo leaned against the mantelpiece and stared into the dying fire.

"She was worried," said Perry. "We couldn't raise anyone at your house."

"Female of the species," said Rollo. "Spiders. I'm not talking to you, Violetta. Janie's gone to the

Womens House. Best in the world. Yes, yes, that's what I meant to say..."

A shower of cinders leapt from the grate and sprinkled Rollo's bare feet. He leaped back with a cry of pain and turned angrily to Perry.

"No bloody good!" he said. "None of them any good. Dirty scrubbers the lot of them! Deserve everything they get and then some..."

The room was slowly raising the level of noise and interference: everything jingled, rattled and sang. Rollo was mad and bloody-minded and Perry was losing his nerve. He couldn't even look at the phone. He tried to remember the weight of the fire irons.

"On with the motley and all that," said Rollo Rowe, "I've come for the children."

He came closer to Perry's chair, leaned on the arms slightly, and looked into his face. His eyes were yellow brown and cold as brook water. He looked sober and completely insane. Instinctively Perry dropped his eyes, as if he were dealing with a wild beast.

"We should call Aunt Fedora," he said.

"Don't make trouble," said Rollo mildly. "You can't stop me. I could do something conclusive with your arms to match your legs."

Perry eased back a little, towards the fireplace, and heard the jingle of the Balinese dancer above his head. Fire kindled within him, he became slowly mad himself. He gulped and said in a trembling voice.

"Look, for God's sake Rollo! I'm not stopping you!"

Rollo drew back. "No," he breathed. "You're not. That's what I meant to say. It's this bloody house. It's a Women's House. Did you cotton on to that, old lad?"

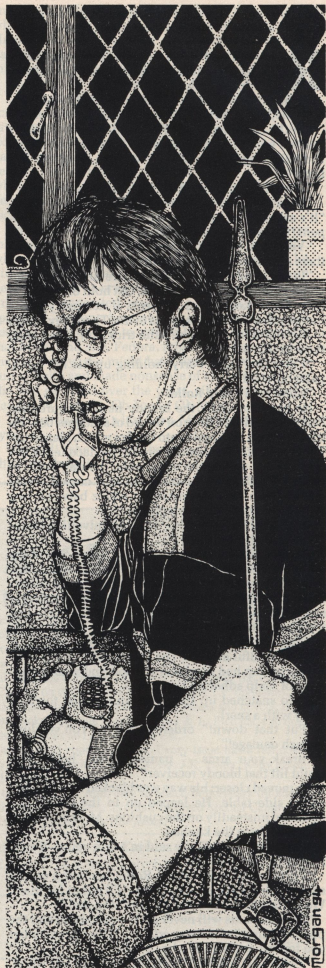
He went hopping across the treacherous carpet to the sideboard and poured brandy into two sherry glasses.

"Please," said Perry piteously. "Please, Rollo, put something on your feet. Here, take my slippers."

Then Rollo behaved exactly according to plan: he came over to the fireplace, put the glasses on the mantelpiece, and knelt down at Perry's feet. Yet Perry could not do it. He was strong enough, the scissors were within easy reach, but he could no more snatch them down and plunge them into Rollo's neck than he could fly to the moon. I can't, he said to the house. He's mad and he must not have the children but I can't stop him that way. Where is Aunt Fedora? Where is Janie?

Fedora took two steps out of the shadows into the moonlight. The dark figure turned towards her and her worst fears were justified. Janie walked down from the bridge with a shy, distinctive movement of her head and shoulders. She was wearing her favourite blue pullover which Mrs Hurst had long ago given to the needy. Her face and figure were very evenly lit, quite independent of the darkness or the moonlight. She stood still and her mother read in her face a kind of apology. Something quite simple and everyday. "Sorry, Mummy." This was the way the world ended. It took a tremendous effort of will but she managed some kind of answer, a few words. "Not your fault." Perhaps the name repeated, "Janie..." in farewell.

Then Fedora Hurst was alone in the moonlit garden with her loss, with the children's loss, with the horrors of death and retribution. Janie was gone. She dragged herself back to the house and found a key in



the front door. She saw the station wagon parked at the gate and heard voices in the sitting room.

Rollo put on Perry's slippers and scrambled to his feet. He leaned against the mantelpiece and drank his brandy.

"What the hell were we talking about?" he asked.

"Janie," said Perry. "Where did you say she was?"

"In the bedroom," said Rollo indistinctly. "I don't know. I'm not in a fit state, what I say doesn't count. Did that disgusting old bag, Violetta, ring the law firm?"

"She said something about Saunders and Ingold..."

"Look, you can do something for me," said Rollo.

"It's asking a lot but you could do it. Whatever happens! Can you take a solemn oath, Perry?"

"Yes," said Perry, "if it's within my power. I mean, there are various things I couldn't do."

"In my study," said Rollo, "there are two photograph albums and a scrap book. Get hold of them and keep them. Keep them for years if necessary, quite independent of what happens to me. Then they can go to the children. And here's the tricky bit: don't keep them in this house."

"I promise," said Perry, holding up his left hand, palm outward.

"Good man!" said Rollo.

He began to drink the brandy he had poured for Perry and spilled a little on the lid of a lacquer box. He tried to brush the liquid into the fire which blazed up. There seemed to be a sticky pool of red lacquer on the mantelpiece among the ornaments; it stung Rollo or burned his fingers. He cried out and cursed. Perry made a dash for it, managed to whizz between two chairs, heading for the telephone.

"No!" said Rollo loudly. "No, you snivelling bitch! You are not hit seriously!"

He dragged a handkerchief out of the pocket of his jeans; it stuck at first and then came out with some violence, scattering its contents. Perry did not understand what they were, silken threads, bits of cotton or something, weighted at the end so that they flew like toy parachutes. He watched the strands of flaxen hair as they went whirling about and slowly settled. A double handful at least. The long strand that landed across his lap had blackening blood and a large fragment of scalp adhering to it.

Rollo snatched up the poker and turned towards Perry with a snarl.

"Put that down!" ordered Perry. "You've done enough damage!"

"Break your arms..." panted Rollo, "before you could lift that bloody receiver!"

He moved closer; his way was blocked by the couch and a side table. He leaped on to the couch and balanced unsteadily on the cushions. Mrs Hurst came in quietly from the kitchen.

"Get down, Rollo!" she said in a firm voice. "Perry, ring Sergeant Rawlings!"

"I'll take the kids!" cried Rollo, bouncing on the sofa cushions like a trampoline. "I'll shout for them. We'll drive to the coast. You can't stop me!"

"Then the kids will never get the scrapbook and the photo albums," said Perry crisply. "They'll remember you forever as the man who..."

"The man who killed their mother," said Mrs Hurst.

"Who says so?" paraded Rollo. "Janie bolted again, that's all."

"Janie is dead," announced Mrs Hurst firmly.

A wave of unrest seized the long room; Perry felt the floor heave under his wheels. The sofa made a bucking motion and flung Rollo Rowe off; he landed heavily and scrambled to his feet.

"Get out of this house, Rollo," said Mrs Hurst, "or you will be killed!"

Perry knew it was nonsense. She was simply being brave, whistling in the dark. Besides, it might all not be true. A man has just murdered some tart. Who had said that?

"Perry, help me!" demanded Rollo. "You were studying law. You're a man. You know about this bloody place. I'll never get a fair shake here, in Willow Cottage."

"None of us do, Rollo," said Perry, finding his voice. "Men or women. In Willow Cottage or anywhere else. You must give yourself up to the police."

Abruptly Rollo gave it away; he fumbled his naked feet back into Perry's slippers and ran out through the glass doors. They heard him run across the lawn, then up the path; the car door slammed. Almost shyly Fedora Hurst drew the double-barrelled shotgun from behind her back; she had been carrying it at the trail.

"Put that away, for God's sake!" said Perry. "Is it loaded? Aunt Fedora you couldn't possibly..."

"Oh yes," said Mrs Hurst.

She felt an immense weariness, overpowering everything, even her grief. The telephone, on Peregrine's lap, gave a long, soft wheezing ring. "It's Sergeant Rawlings," said Perry.

Mrs Hurst propped the shotgun beside the kitchen door and sat down in her own special chair to take the call. She remembered the tone of the Sergeant's voice on such occasions: He never turned up on the doorstep with bad news but phoned ahead, saying that he would drop round. For Irene and Graham it had been tea-time; for her brother Ron in Belfast it had been early morning. Out in the hall the foolish clock struck ten, which seemed about right.

"He's coming about Janie," she said wearily.

"Did he say?" asked Perry. "I mean, he shouldn't... break the news over the phone."

"Oh no," said Mrs Hurst. "He's very particular. Perry, please go into the kitchen and put on the kettle for tea."

They both heard the station wagon start up at last and drive away noisily. Perry concentrated on his manoeuvring; the room seemed to rearrange itself a little; a curtain unhooked itself from the tulip lamp and swung back into place.

Fedora Hurst shut her eyes and was returned to the sacred grove, the cold open place in the middle of the spinney. It had been a long, cool day at the end of summer: the three girls were alone at Willow Cottage with their dear Ellen keeping house for them. Mummy and Daddy were away, not even at the Rectory but at some meeting... a synod, perhaps. Horrible old Neddy Sinclair drove up, honking, in his shooting brake. Poor Ellen wept and hid herself. He had come for Ellen but young females generally were not safe from his molesting hands, his jolly, persuasive voice. More than once he had found Laura alone

in the schoolroom, and tried to get her into a corner. Getting to be such a big girl now...

The worst things was that all women, even Mummy, knew vaguely what he was like; they took precautions, they "avoided situations," but no-one really did anything. Was she quoting Laura? They treated Neddy as a sort of occupational hazard. Of course the greatest dangers were marriage and childbirth: and these were risks that a girl simply had to take. Childbirth was less dangerous now, and not so inevitable thanks to pioneers like Milly Morgan-Gray; but a husband might become dangerous...

When no-one answered his honking or his jolly shouts Neddy strode off into the spinney to shoot rooks - his pretext for being there anyway. Laura told her to come along. They left Irene taking her nap in the sewing room and Ellen locked in her back bedroom upstairs. They circled round the cottage and entered the spinney another way. Neddy was taking a few pot shots: the rooks rose up cawing and blackened the sky over the wood. He had laid his big gun, the shotgun, down on the stump of an oak. The ground was littered with dead and dying rooks.

Laura's coolness and efficiency seemed miraculous to Fedora, even now. She picked up the shotgun, took cartridges from Neddy's satchel, loaded both barrels, before he grasped what was going on.

If he had walked away, simply gone, when Laura ordered him off, he would have survived. But he would argue, in that jolly persuasive way of his, and say bad things about Ellen. Above all he told Laura she knew nothing about guns, for one thing, and for another he knew she could not do it. He came closer

and closer and Fedora knew, suddenly, that this was what Laura wanted. The barrels of the gun were almost touching his fawn sleeveless pullover; his hands, held up about shoulder level, were crooking into claws to make a swipe for the gun.

"Little bitch!" said Neddy.

Laura dropped to one knee and fired; Fedora screamed; the rooks rose up again, shrieking. Fedora saw the huge, red, spouting hole open up in the expanse of fawn wool; she was spattered with blood. Laura recovered from the recoil; she moved about gently; Fedora was too shocked to take in exactly what her sister did. The verdict of "shooting accident" was never questioned; even the angle was correct.

No-one else ever knew the truth. She had never told, never even thought of telling, until this night, when she began to tell Peregrine, poor boy, and let him speak first. The house knew, Willow Cottage, and here was the true crux of the matter. The power that this place generated was not a blessing. Laura, a splendid person, became an instrument of vengeance; she was lost to certain human feelings from that hour. And she, Fedora, might have been used in the same way; she might have fired off the wretched gun at Rollo and made nonsense of all the knowledge she had gathered over the years, since that dreadful day in the spinney. Oh Laura, Oh Janie.

The fire flared up a last time. Mrs Hurst opened her eyes.

"Be still!" she ordered the house, silently. "Let the children sleep!"

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Yesterday's Bestsellers, 18: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Brian Stableford

The years leading up to the end of the last century, which brought the Victorian era to a close, produced two literary characters whose names have become more famous than any others and whose careers have extended over the intervening century, quite unaffected by the fact that their creators killed them off and then died themselves. One of these characters was a perfect hero for his times: a master of deductive reasoning who applied his genius to the unravelling of mysteries and the frustration of evildoers. The other was an archetype of evil who, although he seemed at first glance to be an anachronism left over from an earlier time, might better be regarded as the perfect incarnation of a quintessentially Victorian paranoia. It is significant, however, that when these polar opposites were eventually brought together in one of the multitudinous exercises in pastiche which extended their adventures, they did not meet as enemies but as collaborators – and the scrupulous author of their joint enterprise took great care to point out that they were so similar in their physical descriptions as to be able to pass for close relatives. The two characters are, of course, Sherlock Holmes and Dracula, and the pastiche in question is *The Holmes-Dracula File* (1978) by Fred Saberhagen.

Unlike Holmes, who featured in four novels and dozens of short stories by his original creator, Dracula was initially featured in a single novel, published in 1897 (although a chapter dropped from the novel, in which the Count does not actually appear, was later published separately as "Dracula's Guest"). Holmes had the customary elasticity of a hero: he could always be provided with yet another challenge over which he would naturally triumph, and the record of his exploits was inherently endless. Dracula was not in such a fortunate position, for the usual expectation is that a plot should conclude with the villain's destruction; the extension of his adventures was bound to be a much more problematic business – but

where there's a will there's a way, and in this particular case the will was determined by Dracula's success in Hollywood. Interested film-makers had no difficulty at all in finding material for a multitude of Sherlock Holmes films, but they were forced to handle Dracula's cinematic career very differently. Necessity proved to be the mother of improvisation, and they did what they had to do in their own inimitable fashion.

There are, of course, several different cinema versions of *Dracula* itself. The four most important are F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1923), starring Max Schreck; Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), starring Bela Lugosi; Terence Fisher's *Horror of Dracula* (1958), starring Christopher Lee; and Francis Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993), starring Gary Oldman. All of these films, like the book, end with Dracula's destruction. Film-makers were not slow to notice, however, that the manner of his destruction already had an escape-clause built in: because the count was never really alive it was not inconceivable – nor did it seem particularly unsporting – that he might be restored to "undeath" by some arbitrary imaginative flourish, so that he might be destroyed all over again (and again, and again, and again...) Then again, given his nature and *modus operandi* he could easily be credited with a large family of literal and figurative blood relations, among whom were ultimately to be numbered *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Son of Dracula* (1943), *Brides of Dracula* (1960), *Countess Dracula* (1970) and *Dracula's Widow* (1989), not to mention *Blacula* (1972) and *Dracula's Dog* (1978; aka *Zoltan – Hound of Dracula*).

Not unnaturally, this promiscuous artistic licence quickly came to seem silly, and the ritualistic repetition of Dracula's rebirth and reconstruction contributed in no small measure to the fact that many of his later manifestations reduced the count to a kind of camp joke (a joke which reached its feeblest levels of parody in *The Munsters* and *Sesame Street*). Sufficient

charisma was attached to the role to secure Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee lifelong fame, but that same charisma made it terribly difficult for either of them to play any other character with authority – and although both actors played the part absolutely straight, with considerable conviction, they found themselves damned nevertheless by the camp jokes associated with other manifestations of the character.

In spite of his cinematic debasement, however, the character of Dracula has retained an earnest aspect. Later users of the figure have frequently attempted to cut through the veils of ludicrousness which have come to enshroud it, in order to rescue the emotional charge which still resides there. The incessant revitalization of Dracula is not, therefore, merely a matter of narrative convenience; it appears that the character of Dracula is strong enough to withstand any amount of ham-fisted treatment and not be irreversibly diminished. For this reason, Dracula continues to weather and transcend the crudity and caricature of much modern treatment, just as easily as he survived the slightly ham-fisted treatment he received from his original creator.

As with *Frankenstein* (see "Yesterday's Bestsellers 17") the seed of *Dracula* was sown by a dream. While he was alive Bram Stoker referred to this dream rather vaguely as a vision of a "King-Vampire" rising from his grave, and dismissively attributed it to the effect of having dined too well on dressed crab. His extensive working notes, however, make it clear that the scene in the book which is derived from the initial dream – and was the first to be written down – is that which concludes chapter III. Here, the appearance of the lordly male vampire is a climactic moment, which saves Jonathan Harker, in the nick of time, from the clutches of three female vampires. It is the most intensely erotic passage in the whole book – and not for lack of competition.

This revelation has, of course, been a boon to critics fond of dream-interpretation, some of whom have gone so far as to declare that Stoker's dream must have been a guilty transfiguration of an actual visit to a brothel, probably reflecting his awareness of the fact that some such visit had resulted in his infection with syphilis. This interpretation may be too fanciful (the conjecture that Stoker had syphilis is unsubstantiated by any hard evidence, although adherents of Freudian theory tend to think that the subject-matter and fevered manner of his last novel, *The Lair of the White Worm*, are proof enough) but there seems little doubt that the dream which Stoker had was powerfully erotic. It is understandable that he should have felt sufficiently uncomfortable about this to make light of it, but it is also understandable that he should attempt to preserve the experience, and expand upon it, in the relatively safe medium of fiction – in which a careful transmutation of the imagery could serve the censorial purpose that could only be served in conversation by omission.

The manner in which the dream-seed of *Dracula* is elaborated into a full-blown plot is, of course, rather evasive – the three female vampires who feature in this scene do not appear again until they are brusquely staked at the end – but its eroticism is nevertheless conserved. The role which the "King-Vampire" takes on in the novel is that of an evil force aimed directly at the sexual impulses of the other female characters in the book: Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray (who becomes Mina Harker in the course of the plot, but is not thereby immunized against the corruptive seductions of *Dracula*). The straightforwardly brutal threat which *Dracula* poses to the male members of the cast is a poor generator of horror by comparison with the threat he poses to the women they adore. The true horror is, of course, that he does not threaten them with death (which becomes, in the context of the plot, a merciful release devoutly to be wished) but with a metamorphic fate literally and metaphorically worse than death. The exact nature of this metamorphosis is very precisely described in chapter XVI, in which the heroes confront the undead Lucy:

"The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness... eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew... her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile..."

In brief, what has happened is that *Dracula*'s "kiss" (in Stoker, vampires do not bite, they kiss) has transformed Lucy from the Victorian ideal of womanhood into a sexual predator redolent with whorish glamour. The

fact that his subsequent attacks on Mina continue in spite of her marriage adds a further dimension of horror to this awful thought.

At this almost-explicit level of symbolism, the text of the novel becomes an agonized rhapsody on the subject of Victorian ideas of sexuality – and *Dracula*'s emergence from the Gothic mists becomes a horror-stricken recognition of the fact that Victorian morality, no matter how strict or how strenuous its denials might be, could not in the end abolish or contain the reality of female sexuality. Given this, it is hardly surprising that *Dracula* could not long be forced to remain in the grave before getting up again (and again, and again, and again...)

Bram Stoker researched the folkloric background of *Dracula* for seven years, and clearly took the business of nurturing and developing his dream-seed very seriously indeed – but the dream was not the actual point of origin of the project; like the dream which gave impetus to Mary Shelley's novel it was as much a consequence of a mundanely-inspired decision as a cause. The roots of his interest in the project went back a long way.

Stoker read J. Sheridan le Fanu's classic vampire novella "Carmilla" (1872) when he was 25. This was four years before his first meeting with Henry Irving and six years before he married Oscar Wilde's one-time sweetheart Florence Balcombe, mere days after agreeing to take over responsibility for the actor's business affairs. Six further years were to pass before he began to think seriously about the possibility of writing a vampire novel himself, but even so, it was "Carmilla" which shaped his idea of what a vampire story was and ought to be. The first of Stoker's published short stories had appeared in 1872; le Fanu had then been, and had remained, his most significant literary influence. The two had much in common – both were graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, and le Fanu was proprietor and editor of the *Dublin University Magazine* for many years (he died in 1873). Stoker must also have been familiar with John Polidori's "The Vampire" (1819) in which a prolific despoiler of young maidens, is revealed in the concluding line (surely to no one's surprise, given the title) to be "a VAMPYRE!" but it was "Carmilla" that he ardently desired to recapitulate. His decision became firmer when his memory of it was sharply jogged in 1890, by certain tales told by a Hungarian professor of languages, Arminius Vambrey, when he was a guest at the "Beefsteak Club" – a regular social gathering which Stoker ran in his capacity as Irving's factotum. This was the context in which Stoker was able to understand his dream, and these were the resources

he drew upon in developing it.

It was Vambrey who provided much of the folkloric background for Stoker's conceptualization of vampirism, and gave him an initial reading-list of research materials. Later, when Stoker discovered a 15th-century warlord on whom he decided to model his King-Vampire – a Voivode whose scribes signed his name in a variety of ways, including "Dracula," but who was better known to history as Vlad Tepes, "the Impaler," by virtue of his expertise in the art of deterrence, initially cultivated while driving out the Turkish invaders of his homeland – he immediately wrote to Vambrey for further assistance, which was provided.

This historical and anthropological dressing-up of the King-Vampire figure was, in a sense, a matter of disguising him. This was a necessary process in literary terms, and perhaps it was necessary in psychological terms too, if there is anything at all in the psychoanalytic truism that raw libidinous impulses must be decorously dressed in symbols before the conscious mind can bear to contemplate them. This process of scholarly sublimation still seems to be going on among those most intimately involved with *Dracula*. There is something slightly peculiar about the way in which assiduous researchers like Clive Leatherdale and Radu Florescu have repeated and extended the studies which Stoker carried out, and a suspiciously-inclined Freudian would probably claim that they manifest a degree of obsession beyond what would actually be necessary either to write or to understand the text of *Dracula* (but I shall not pursue this point, lest even I might come to seem guilty by association).

The most remarkable aspect of *Dracula*'s continued success as an image is the way that this disguise has held together in spite of every absurdity added to it by cinematic convention: the opera-cloak, the bloodshot eyes, and – of course – the ludicrous fangs. No matter how fancy the dress, the awareness remains that there is something lurking beneath that is dangerous. This is surely all the more remarkable when one recalls that the world has changed very considerably since Victorian times. In the late 20th century the Victorian attempt to portray female nature as something essentially angelic and asexual seems ridiculously stupid and utterly out-of-date... except, of course, that matters of sexuality are never quite as simple and straightforward as that.

The Victorians, were, of course, not short of conspicuous images of what Stoker called "wantonness" and "voluptuousness," although they might have balked at the temerity of one who dared to call herself Madonna. They

knew all along that such success as they dared to claim in binding sexuality to a fiercely-repressive morality was 90 per cent pretence. By the same token, we moderns are by no means short of imagery which overtly or covertly takes it for granted that women (unlike men) are – again using Stoker's terms – "sweet," "gentle" and "pure." We too have known all along that the supposed sexual liberation we achieved in the 1960s is 90 per cent pretence, especially in respect of female sexuality. Even feminists, in their laudable haste to occupy the moral high ground, sometimes seem to be crying out, in mocking parody of the saint of old: "Lord, give me unchastity, but please – not yet!"

The contemporary boom in vampire stories is to a large extent an exercise in revisionism, in which Dracula's status as an archetype of evil is defiantly challenged. In the most extreme cases, the vampire becomes a valiant hero, whose effect on his female victims is straightforwardly liberating.

Stoker's text is comprehensively turned on its head by Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975), where the count explains that all the notional authors of the original novel (which is, of course, presented as a series of documents, mostly penned by Jonathan Harker, Dr Seward and Mina) completely misunderstood what was happening. Here, Dracula claims that the man actually responsible for Lucy's death and Mina's illness was Professor van Helsing, who recklessly gave them transfusions without any regard for the niceties of blood-typing, and that his own actions were designed to save them. Saberhagen's story is ingenious both on the literal level, in that it provides an account of the events described in *Dracula* which makes more sense than Stoker's, and on the psychological level, in that it firmly links the psychological hang-ups of the Victorians to their hopeless ignorance of almost all aspects of human science.

Other heroic vampire stories elaborate this thesis extensively. In Pierre Kast's vividly erotic historical fantasy *The Vampires of Alfama* (1975; tr. 1976) the heroic vampire becomes an embodiment of all the ideals of the Enlightenment, ranged against the oppressive tyranny of Church and State. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's *Comte de Saint-Germain*, in the series of novels and stories begun with *Hotel Transylvania* (1978), is less concerned with matters of science and more Byronically romantic than frankly libertine, but he is just as squarely on the side of right. The second novel in the series, *The Palace* (1979), pits the count against the malevolent religious fundamentalism of Savonarola in

Renaissance Florence, while *Blood Games* (1979) recalls the days of Nero's Rome and *Tempting Fate* (1982) brings him into the 20th century to the world of the Russian revolution and the rise of Nazism.

It did not take long for the vampire to colonize other heroic roles. In the later novels in Saberhagen's series, following his fruitful meeting with his great contemporary, he becomes enmeshed in conventional thriller plots, and P.N. Elrod's "Vampire Files" (opened 1990) feature a hard-boiled vampire private-eye. In numerous stories of these kinds – most notably Freda Warrington's *A Taste of Blood Wine* (1992) – heroic vampires must face adversaries of their own kind, thus becoming doubly Byronic, in their defiant alienation as well as their seductive charm. But such works as these have not entirely displaced the traditional imagery. In Kim Newman's luridly extravagant *Anno Dracula* (1992) the melancholy nice vampires are completely overshadowed by the flamboyantly nasty ones, led by an uncompromisingly monstrous Dracula, now married to Queen Victoria (whom he keeps on a leash).

The most successful revisionist vampire stories of modern times are, of course, those of Anne Rice, begun with *Interview with a Vampire* (1976). These walk an anti-heroic tightrope between traditional and revisionist imagery, trading heavily on the moral uncertainties of their leading characters, who experience their own peculiar existential angst and worry endlessly about the dubious relevance to themselves of various moral philosophies. Similar issues are brought more tightly into focus by Suzy McKee Charnas's analytically-inclined fix-up novel *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980) but Rice's escalation of such hypothetical anxieties into fevered melodrama is perhaps more appropriate to the handling of materials which still retain their disguised emotional potency. My own vampire novels, *The Empire of Fear* (1988) and *Young Blood* (1992), attempt something similar.

The phenomenon constituted by this proliferation of vampires – all of which are parasitic upon the work done by Bram Stoker – is quite astonishing. Why these myriad hares should suddenly have started to run in the mid-1970s, and why their running should have inspired so very many exercises in imitation and extrapolation, is by no means clear, although this was certainly the period in which all manner of social accountants began adding up and evaluating the achievements of the sexually-liberating evolutions and revolutions of the 1960s. Although she was a decade ahead of her time, the real pioneer of vampire

revisionism was Jane Gaskell, in whose novel *The Shiny Narrow Grin* (1964) a conspicuously trendy heroine took a typically laid-back attitude to a vampire in modern dress. The moral ironies of Gaskell's novel contrast strikingly with the calculated confusions of Simon Raven's equally knowing but far more traditional *Doctors Wear Scarlet*, published four years earlier.

Raven's novel is one of the few 20th-century stories which attempt to rescue the pre-Stoker tradition of literary vampirism, which took its inspiration from Classical sources and which almost invariably featured female vampires who needed no King-Vampire to create and discipline them. The most famous English examples, apart from "Carmilla," are Coleridge's "Christabel" (1816) and Keats's "Lamia" (1820), but the German Romantic movement produced the earlier examples on which these are partly based, and 19th-century French literature is particularly rich in female vampires, the most familiar being Clarimonde in Gautier's "La morte amoureuse" (1836). The lush eroticism of these works bears equal homage, in its way, to the colourful paradoxicality of male sexual fantasy, but there is no doubt that *Dracula* somehow adds in an extra element which they lack. *Femmes fatales*, seen in isolation, are often tragic figures – Keats's "Lamia" brings sentimentality to the fore, and some such sympathy is usually latent in other works of this kind – but the evocation of the King-Vampire who manufactures them wholesale (and almost invariably abandons them to death or summary impalement) adds an extra turn of the screw by which the pathos of their fate only serves to generate further horror.

This observation raises again the question of what it is which lurks within Dracula's disguise. So far we have only answered this with an analysis of what he does, but to say that he symbolizes the force of female sexuality which threatens to transform innocent maidens into voluptuous wantons is at best only half an explanation. Connecting all the blood-imagery in vampire stories to the phenomenon of menstruation, as the editors of the recent Creation Press anthology *Blood and Roses* (1992) extravagantly do, adds one more facet, but can hardly be said to complete the task.

It is noticeable that both Dracula and his closest literary ancestor can be linked – tentatively, at least – with real people. Polidori's lurid depiction of Lord Ruthven clearly owes much to his temporary association with Lord Byron, and Stoker's image of Dracula surely draws on his relationship with Henry Irving, whose personality so overwhelmed him on the days follow-

ing their first meeting that he eventually made Irving's service his primary vocation. In this context the Count's jealous reaction to discovering Jonathan Harker with the three female vampires, at the end of the sequence based on Stoker's dream, is of some interest. "Never did I imagine such fury, even in the demons of the pit," Harker says – and yet, Dracula subsequently seems to lose all interest in him, facilitating his unlikely escape by careless neglect, and much prefers other prey when they eventually meet up again.

Some psychoanalytically-inclined commentators have interpreted the attitudes of both Polidori and Stoker in terms of repressed homosexuality, but a simpler explanation – and it is sometimes unwise to ignore the obvious in favour of the occult – is that they looked upon their idols with pure and simple envy. In the former instance at least, this interpretation is supported by a famous anecdote which relates how Polidori attempted to swallow poison after asking what Byron could do better than he and receiving a blunt and accurate answer.

If this is true, the mystery of Dracula's symbolism – and of his awesome, enduring power – is easy enough to unwrap. Dracula becomes, in this analysis, an embodiment of male fears of inadequacy, especially in the face of female sexuality. It is not simply the fact that Dracula can turn the most demure virgin into an avid sex maniac that is important, but the fact that *other men can't*. That, for the book's author and the vast majority of its readers, is the true horror – the ultimate horror – which can survive any amount of disguise and obfuscation. Is that why Dracula, in spite of all the ridicule that Hollywood and generations of (male) comedians heaped upon him, retains the power to disturb and remains a threat? Is it because, no matter how men strive to cover up their feelings of inadequacy with lewd jokes and lurid erotic obsessions, the gnawing anxiety will always remain? Perhaps, though, I ought not to pursue this point, lest even I should come to seem guilty by association...

(Brian Stableford)

The first 14 of Brian Stableford's essays on "Yesterday's Bestsellers" appeared in MILLION magazine. Numbers 15-17 appeared in *Interzone* issues 74, 76 and 78 (still available).

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No. 12: interviews – David Nobbs, Dinah Lampitt, etc; S.T. Joshi on Robert Aickman; *Saturday Evening Post* and Fay Weldon features; Brian Stableford on Robert Graves; etc.

No. 13: interviews – Clive Barker, Evelyn Anthony, Ed Gorman, etc; S.T. Joshi on Stephen King; *Dracula* and *Biggles* features; Brian Stableford on James Hilton; etc.

No. 14: interviews – Patricia Kennealy, etc; Ian R. MacLeod on Gerald Seymour; Gary Westfahl on *The Hardy Boys*; John D. MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers and Jack the Ripper features; Brian Stableford on W.H. Hudson; etc.

Spunk

John Clute

Three years ago, Brian Aldiss published a small book called *Bodily Functions* (Avernus, 1991), in an edition of 100. Released through the extremely small press which had been founded to promulgate his less commercial work, the book assembled four stories about sex, metamorphosis and defecation; a couple of poems; and a letter on the subject of bowel movements addressed to Sam J Lundwall, for whom the entire volume served as a 50th birthday present. Within this exculpatory frame, it was unduly easy to read stories like "Three Degrees Over" and "A Tupolev too Far" as jeux d'esprits; as clubbable jocosities hovering around subjects like the sex avens (in Aldiss's books, women pretty frequently find themselves opening like claims to Hell), the decay of the body (even though none of his male leads ever seems to have any trouble getting an erection, they are increasingly frazzled by the passing of the light), and a peculiar, wind-blistered self-contempt: the self-contempt, perhaps, of veterans in the life wars.

Extracted from *Bodily Functions*, and inserted into the armoured array of stories which goes to make up the latest full-sized Aldiss collection, **A Tupolev too Far and Other Stories** (HarperCollins, 1993, £14.99), a tale like "Three Degrees Over" now seems less fun than before, and more formidable; weaker, and stronger. Alice Maynard, a fortysomething (we guess) Oxford academic returning to England from a fundraising mission, finds her First Class repose invaded by Felicity Paiva, a young female author of sex novels whose body reeks of eros. Alice soon finds herself introducing Felicity to her donnish husband, who responds to the woman with naked arousal. Herself aroused, Alice fucks her husband pretty thoroughly, but as night deepens discovers him and Felicity naked in the back garden, which has suddenly become tropical, doing it with each other and a cartoon plethora of priapic creatures, some human. The smell from between Felicity's legs, "like the mingled smell of laburnum honey and lobster thermidor," draws Alice down and in. The dance begins.

As a slingshot into metamorphosis, "Three Degrees Over" is slyly couched, and hurls us off the page just before reaching a line which might be un-

acceptable, like a javelin thrower. As a gesture, it is fine stuff, therefore; and devoid of the jocular frame of *Bodily Functions*, it has a shock effect not significantly vitiated by oddness of register and detail-work throughout. But they do exist. Aldiss (for instance) may have himself encountered someone just like the Alice Maynard we first meet; but the congeries of attributes he bestows upon her fail to carry much of the felt density of any original encounter. She is a Royal Doulton figurine with Reaganite views; a feminist who polishes her nails like a Chinese courtesan; a woman obsessed by trivial proprieties like some Nosy-Parker Neighbour out of the BBC comedy archives; an Emily Dickinson scholar. She may exist in the world, but she doesn't consort on the page.

The title story is an alternate-world fantasy too broken up by the verisimilitude of its savage premise – the nightmare world into which the protagonist falls is ours – to provide much in the way of theodicy balm, and so fails to soothe in the way we've come to expect our alternate-world tales to. "Ratbird" is a pretzelled story cycle and a comment on imperialism. "FOAM" is one of the great stories of the decade so far, a presentation of the Santayana dictum – "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it" – as metaphor, personal anguish, historical lesson of the sharpest sort. In "Summertime Was Nearly Over" the Frankenstein Monster is the positive pole in a parable of the death of Nature, and of language. "North of the Abyss" is a posthumous fantasy set in Egypt, and most excellently repeats the unhouseholding premise of "A Tupolev Too Far": for the Abyss of death into which North is relegated by Anubis is nothing more or less than the protagonist's old life, now properly understood.

All of which is to say that Brian W. Aldiss is a glaring failure as an author of genre fiction: because he can't keep still for it. Not even to obey the modest proprieties of genres that do the mimetic narrative trick can he stop itching his page, intruding himself into the narrative with testy coughs, shaking the story as though he were trying to arouse a bird of paradise through the bars of its cage. Maybe this is the case. *A Tupolev Too Far* is so astonishingly full of "mistakes," told by a narrative

voice that knows precisely what's going on, that one has to assume the best: that, unlike almost all of his compatriots in genre literature, Aldiss is a true defamiliarizer of the world, a shaker of the cages. It is a relief to note how persistently, in a career which has now lasted nearly 40 years, he fails to play the game of agenda sf; and to note that now – a quarter of a century since agenda fiction suffered its death blows – he seems younger and more dangerous than he mostly did in previous decades.

The shaggy exorbitance of his most dangerous work, the utter blackness of his message, and the breezy apocalyptic oneirism of his funnier stuff, all remind one of Continental writers between (say) 1900 and 1915: writers (that is) who looked back over a stable century, like climbers gazing back over reassuring couliesses of piedmont, and forward into asymptote, magma in the heavens, a War to End Wars. Brian Aldiss is the Karl Kraus of sf, reiterating *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* in a hundred versions of "FOAM." Things fall apart in his rough hands. But they become new.

Hot Sky at Midnight (Bantam, \$22.95) may be as important a book as Robert Silverberg cares to write, which may be a way of saying (as one has said so often before about his fiction) that it is a book which says something worth saying exactly as its author wishes to say it. There is nothing in the polished organon of this novel which did not hatch, fully fledged, out of the knowing hands of the master: no aleatory judder, no abyss. Diction, parabolas of event, exquisitely crafted dovetail plot, pace, message: it is all superb, balanced in the hand, stainless. Some of the old Silverberg tropes have been eschewed. No burnt-out case dominates the action; no culture-wide anomie serves as a self-forgiving analogue of the author's excessive control over the telling; no transcendence comes at the end to unstrut the ills of flesh. If *Hot Sky at Midnight* lacks any sense that its author has written a single sentence he had not previously memorized, or that (like Aldiss) he has any inclination to rattle the cage as art at its greatest (and at its silliest) must do, then that is the cost one pays. In this instance, the lack of liminal buzz hardly matters.

The world of *Hot Sky at Midnight* somewhat resembles that depicted in Poul Anderson's *Harvest of Stars* (1993; reviewed in *Interzone* 74), though without the politic inanities or cheapshot "discussions" between the immortal industrialist with libertarian views and half the money in the world and the love of all good women like John Wayne god till he was 75; and the pinkos who disagree with Poul; nor is a cyberpunk America run, for instance,

by a leftwing tyranny intent on turning everyone into victims of 1984; nor do the viewpoint characters necessarily make the right ethical decisions. The title conveys much of the premise: Midnight represents how close the World Clock has come to terminal narcosis; Hot Sky represents the orbitals around Earth, and the rapid heating up of the course of events. Two giant Japanese metacorporations offer competing escape routes from the hash humanity has made of the planet: Samurai Industries plumps for bioengineering, for a human species transformed so as to be able to breathe the shit; Kyocera-Merck looks to interstellar travel at FTL speeds. The various protagonists of the book act out their lives, discover stuff, win and lose, and in the web their intersections weave throughout the text provide an insect's-eye view of the turning world, the turn of event.

In the end, after scarfing vistas of loss, we are offered a genre-based escape, very neat, less than entirely worthy perhaps. The main viewpoint character, on being seconded to the starship abuilding, meets on the last page of the novel a character we had ourselves given up for dead 200 pages earlier. It works, tugs at the throat; but too neatly. One is more inclined to remember the astonishing trip the viewpoint character takes earlier from California to Chicago, via automobile, surviving the weather and the polizei and the plagues:

Carpenter could remember his grandfather's tales of growing up in an unfucked world – sentimental memories of the old Los Angeles of long ago – the late twentieth century, maybe? The early twenty-first? A lost paradise, so the old man had said, a place where the wind was fresh and clear off the ocean and days were mild and pleasant...: The beautiful unspoiled Los Angeles of the distant past, the remote and unattainable 1990s, say, before the iron sky had closed in on everything.

Like its title, Ian McDonald's *Scissors Cut Paper Wap Stone* (Bantam Spectra, \$3.99) goes in circles in the imperative voice. It is meant to. The protagonist, a burnt-out case recycling his guilt through imagined conversations with the girl who loves him, goes on a circular pilgrimage in 21st-century Japan, doing so on a bicycle, and everything turns out to connect in the end. The style invokes TechnoGoth brutalisms, sensorium burn, the sense of a world (cycles of worlds) accessed through VRs, simulacra, artifactual memories and visions. It is very good. The plot is perhaps overneat in a way that conflates too kindly with the author's need to make sense of all this stuff: each of the main protagonists has invented a world-shaking gizmo or two: and the central cyclist retains,

absolutely most improbably, sole access to his discovery of True Writing: "fracter" calligraphy which side-steps the filters which keep human consciousness from burning up at the sight of God, thus allowing him to utter absolute commands couched as words from the mouths of the ten Sefirot of the Hebrew Cabala. The idea is too big, of course, for the book, and burns it out when looked at (whenever I tried to understand what kind of book would be necessary to embody the concept, I felt like Semele). But the protagonist's cycle from burn-out to renewed love, and the guided tour of future Japan, both fit into the smaller book which is all we have, or should need.

There is a lot of sex in all of these books, fitting perhaps for sf texts written from the heart of the new miscegenate genre: sf spends most of its time nowadays trying to get fucked half to death. Exogamy, one should remember, is all about spunk. William Barton's *Yellow Matter* (TAL Publications, \$5.95 USA; \$7.00 foreign), a long short story, is a very pure (and rather attractive) marriage of genre sf tropes (FTL travel; galactic empires; colony planets; lots of aliens) and the newer tropes of cruising (humans are by no means dominant in the galaxy; the protagonist ends up selling his body to aliens for sex). This may all sound quite unpleasant, but *Yellow Matter*, in fact, a surprisingly warm story. Both the sexual nature of the connection between the protagonist and his alien partners, and the intricacies of his relationship with the first of these, are depicted in a calm black voice, without animus, and without any closing down of implications as the plot ties itself up to close down. Barton never makes articulate the analysis of human sexual politics which substrates the tale, and by resisting that temptation permits his story to bathe in meanings without drowning. Barton's last novel, *Dark Sky Legion: An Ahrimanic Novel* (1992; reviewed in *Interzone* 62) encumbered itself with huge complexities of *mise en scène*, and a protagonist we guessed perhaps too early was a victim of the Puppet Dark where the AIs pull the strings; *Yellow Matter* seems more relaxed, more comfortable in its control.

William Barton may dazzle us all soon.

(John Clute)

Back Issues

To order back issues of *Interzone*, please see details on page 3.

Singular Series Paul J. McAuley

Month after month, publishers churn out the latest episodes of generic trilogies and shared histories. They clunk along predetermined paths with a cargo of tropes worn smooth by communal handling, and are so undistinguished that it seems anyone could write them and no one would know the difference. Frequently, passels of sharecroppers do just that. And then there are trilogies (or tetralogies) and shared histories which no one but their authors could write. Here, in no particular order, are ongoing reports on three such.

At first glance, Gene Wolfe's new project, a tetralogy of which he has delivered the first two volumes, *Night-side the Long Sun* (NEL, £15.99) and *Lake of the Long Sun* (Tor, \$21.95), is but a shadow cast by the brilliance of his *The Book of the New Sun*. For here again, set in a distant future where technology is indistinguishable from magic, or is at least approached and appeased with the same rituals, is a world that is aged and dying, and a hero who is destined (he does not yet know it, but those around him do) for great things – and moreover, a hero who belongs to an order in which faith and obedience are of supreme importance. Furthermore, it is a text which, like *The Book of the New Sun*, relishes in the use of obscure or archaic words to accentuate its exoticism, and in which its hero depends on a cool and witty rationality to extricate himself from cliff-hanging endangerments that are intricately rendered, plausible homages to situations and tropes from the ur-sf of 1930s pulps. And yet.

And yet Wolfe is too canny and self-knowing to repeat himself without deliberation and purpose. The secret title of the new tetralogy is *Starcrosser's Planetfall*, and it is set not on a dying Earth (or Urth) but on an ancient colony starship modelled on a hollowed asteroid, with the eponymous Long Sun down its axis and the lands inhabited by its passengers (who have long forgotten the true nature of their world) on its inner skin, subjected to droughts and other climatic disturbances caused by a failing lifecosystem. It is so large that the far side (the *Night-side* of the first book's title) is only hazily glimpsed, and appears to be inaccessible and certainly unknown to the inhabitants of the little city where the hero of the narrative, Patera Silk, lives. And Patera Silk, who it seems is doomed to reveal or unriddle the world's true nature and so perhaps gain mastery over it and all who sail in it, is no torturer (and neither is he the narrator, although he is an executioner in that he officiates at ritual sacrifices),

but a priest who has, at the opening of the narrative, been burdened with enlightenment. It is the riddle of that enlightenment, gifted to Silk by the Outsider, one of a panoply of gods who once, but no longer, communicated with their subjects through computer screens, that is at the heart of Silk's quest.

The scenario of a multi-generation colony starship whose inhabitants have forgotten that their world is artificial is not, of course, original. Neither was the Dying Earth of *The Book of the New Sun*. But as in *The Book of the New Sun*, Wolfe redeems generic clichés with a fresh and vivid intelligence that lends them a specifically human dimension. Even a berserk robot guard has a measure of self-awareness, allowing it a tragic measure of dignity in death. And a good part of the enjoyment of the books is the shock of recognition of technologies which his characters view as something akin to magic ("They had scientists then..." is a telling phrase someone uses to describe the golden days of the past). The gods, for instance, appear to be computerized incarnations of the family of the builder of the ship. The inhabitants are divided into chems and bios - robots and humans. The chems are invariably old, for no one knows how to make new ones, or make anything but patch repairs on the old ones. And so on. The game of engaging the reader to riddle the full meaning of the text is one in which Wolfe excels.

Against this carefully realized and craftily revealed background, Wolfe spins a fast-paced narrative: the action of the two books spans only a few days, in which Silk is raised up from obscurity to leader of the little city where he lives. Blood, a roguish but powerful man, buys title to the impoverished temple of which Silk is augur (it is on Sun Street: the narrative is permeated with playful self-referential allusions). Silk determines to get it back, enters Blood's fortified house and falls into a complex plot involving spies from another city and the internal politics of his own, which for lack of a *caldé* is ruled by a corrupt council. Interwoven with this is Silk's realization that the gods have destined him for something: he has his theophany at the very start of the narrative, and during a funeral a god speaks to him through screens which have long been silent. In part because of this miracle, Silk is proclaimed *caldé* by the populace, but still must fight against those who ruled before him, and still must fulfil his greater destiny, which may already be revealed to us in the overall title.

We can guess, but we cannot be certain. Wolfe's deceptively clear style is deeper than can be guessed at a first or partial reading. But we can know that this is a major work by SF's premier fabulist.

Green Mars (HarperCollins, £14.99), is, of course, the sequel to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, and it more than repays the promise of that first volume in his trilogy about the colonization of Mars, which provided the grandest vision yet, not only of the early stages of human colonization, but of Mars itself. At the end of *Red Mars*, after a failed attempt to break free from Earth, rebel forces led by some of the First Hundred, members of the pioneering expedition to Mars, have scattered. At the beginning of *Green Mars*, they are part of a Martian underground, outlaws scattered amongst refuges of dozens of nationalities and creeds, hiding from the forces of the transnational corporations which are now reshaping Mars to their own ends.

The transnats want to exploit Mars's resources as they once exploited those of Earth, and also view Mars as a possible sanctuary from the imminent collapse of Earth's civilization. The Martians see Mars as something more. They understand that, as they shape Mars, so Mars shapes them. The greening of Mars is mirrored by the impact of Mars on human consciousness: the process of aeroformation works both ways.

The conflict between the aims of the transnats and the beliefs of the Martian underground forms the dialectic backbone of the novel, as the conflict between those who wanted to terraform Mars and those who wanted to preserve it formed the backbone of *Red Mars*. The gigantic Mars-scapes evoked in *Red Mars* are now littered with huge human artefacts and riven by technologies deployed by conflicting transnats. Meanwhile, the surviving First Hundred, now a century or more old thanks to longevity treatments, increasingly find themselves becoming mythical characters fixed in the dawn of Mars's human history. Hiroko Ai is the embodiment of the philosophy of greening, viriditas, Mother Goddess to the World, and mother to a new generation of ecogenic Martians (although with one exception they are mostly witnesses to the acts of their parent than fully realized actors). Sax Russell is the epitome of the power of scientific rationalization, his plans for a sustainably habitable Mars opposed by Ann Clayborne, the geologist who has become the figurehead of the Red Mars movement, which wants to preserve the planet from humanity's ravages. The stowaway of the first expedition, who calls himself Coyote after the trickster god of the Plains Indians, is given a plausible backhistory. Coyote plays an increasingly important role in resistance to the Transnats, and as mentor to Nirgal, an ecogene (and Coyote's son) who may be able to unite the conflicting factions of the Martian

underground in alliance with the only transnat to understand Mars's potential as a world rather than a vast open-cast mine.

The story, spanning some 40 years and as vast and intricate and capricious as real history, is handled with considerable dexterity, and Robinson's evocation of the stubborn fragile persistence and spread of the introduced ecosystems is beautifully done. He is, perhaps, the SF writer who has a paramount, scrupulous and microscopic concern with *haecceity*, the thinness of things. That concern is burnt into every page. Occasionally, his erudition is displayed with slightly too heavy a hand - a character spends a whole two pages musing about the colour the sky will be, and we suspect that his musings are Robinson's undigested thoughts - but that's a small price to pay for tours of the Martian landscape that are unrivalled in their accuracy and sense of place, as vivid as any panoramic postcards sent back from the planet itself could (or will) be.

The final assessment of this intricately wrought braiding of swelling echoes and allusions cannot be made until publication of the last part of the trilogy, *Blue Mars*. But this richly imaginative, dense and hyperintelligent work is certainly the best and most realistic treatment of the colonization of Mars ever written, and is shaping to be amongst the very best of the SF works of the last quarter of this century.

Deeper than a plummet sounds, Jack Womack's new book, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* (HarperCollins, £14.99), plumbs the chthonic depths of a near-future New York in which (pace another HarperCollins author, an irony of which Womack is no doubt deeply appreciative) there is no longer any such thing as society. Although it is his fifth novel, *Random Acts* is chronologically the first in Womack's *Ambient* sequence, and depicts through the diary of twelve-year-old Lola Hunt the germination of the horrific, ultraviolet future depicted in the preceding novels.

It is set only a few years from now. There is no technological fix: things have simply gotten worse. To begin with, Lola is insulated from the urban nightmare. Her parents are urban professionals who live in the Lower East Side of New York and send their children to a private school. But then Lola's scriptwriter father finds his work is no longer marketable and her mother loses her teaching job, and they must move across town to the Lower West Side, amongst the dispossessed. Their worsening private circumstances resonate with larger events. President after President dies in violent accident; overnight, the currency

becomes worthless; cities are racked with riots; the army polices the streets with unrestrained brutality.

Womack's depiction of the deepening chaos of America's third-worlding is entirely from the point of view of those private thoughts and fears that Lola chooses to confide to her diary (Lola calls her own diary Anne, in case we don't get the allusion to another helpless victim of history's jackbooted march). It is masterful not only in its mimesis of a young girl's clear unself-conscious consciousness, but in the gradual slippage of her language towards that of the streets, through which she runs with her new friend Isabel, who is the same Isabel Bonney who narrates (or will narrate; Womack's chronology invites such disjunctions) *Elvissey*.

Isabel is streetwise and tough, a survivor; Lola is on a fatal trajectory and is tragically aware of it. When Lola's father dies from a massive heart attack brought on by the strain of his new job of clerk in a bookstore run by a clinically psychotic manager, Lola's restraint is lost, and so is she. The revenge she takes is perhaps not ambiguous enough, for Womack loads the scales in her favour, and it is certainly neither senseless nor random, but it is nonetheless devastating. *Random Acts* is a vividly written, masterfully controlled tragedy that holds up a mirror to our own times, and redefines the hyperkinetic violence of the novels that preceded it. It is Womack's best book so far.

As bleak is Nicholas Royle's first novel, *Counterparts* (Barrington Books, £4.99), although it is the bleakness of British miserabilism: its soundtrack will well be half Siouxie and the Banshees, half the Smiths. Royle has earned a justifiable reputation as a horror writer with a plethora of stylish short stories, and the despairing bleakness that permeates *Counterparts* is redeemed by the remote, dryly ironic style he has perfected.

The narrative alternates between a tightrope walker who is haunted by vivid dreams of self-mutilation and who is slowly drawn towards the act itself, and an actor, down and out in London and Paris, who is haunted by the sense of loss of self, of another seeking to assume his identity. This internalized meditation on the fragility of selfhood, echoing Thomas M. Disch's "The Asian Shore," contains much to admire – for instance, its portrayal of Europe just before the fall of communism is acute and witty – although the interleaved ambiguities are sometimes too wilful. At times, it becomes a game played by the author which the reader has difficulty in sharing. Yet although the reader may not be able to untangle all the threads of the narration, Royle never falters. The

transcends the stock horror explanation trotted out by Gargin's girlfriend and escapes explication in final scenes resonant with a genuinely disturbing sense of gothic claustrophobia. Recommended.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Three to Watch Wendy Bradley

The third novel in Philip G. Williamson's "Firstworld Chronicles" is called *From Enchantery* (HarperCollins, £4.99) and in it he has overcome many of the problems of pace and viewpoint that slowed and marred the second. Dinbig of Kimmur's story starts to heat up as he and Shadd return separately from Enchantery. Shadd with the magic Gismo and Dinbig with the book's narrative eye. This is much more of a page-turner than volume two, with more action and less explanation, the narrative returning to more conventional lines. Can I venture to suggest, though, that, when trying to keep the Gismo That Everybody Wants from the hands of the fearsome enchanter who can appear in the guise of Absolutely Anyone, it is generally a good rule of thumb to suspect the person who (a) was out of sight for a couple of minutes and (b) has just taken the Gismo from you "for safe keeping." One of those novels that has a cracking climax, even if it is largely of the "behind you!" variety and a set up for at least another couple of volumes. I can live with that.

Paul Kearney lives up to the promise of his first novel (*The Way to Babylon*) with his second, *A Different Kingdom* (Gollancz, £8.99). This is quality writing, spiralling between the past and present so that we get glimpses of the hero as a shabby, alcoholic grown man, a veritable hero ending his failed quest, and as a carefree child gradually enchanted by the other world beside his own. It also passes effortlessly between a detailed evocation of a boyhood in rural Ireland early in the Troubles and a description of the primeval forest, the Wolfweald, which lies near or beside or behind the mundane world but into which the hero can, on occasion, pass. This is an utterly splendid piece apart from the ending – I thought for an awful moment that I had guessed how it would turn out and we were heading for cliché city. What in fact happens is something I hadn't foreseen but also something of an anticlimax, an unravelling rather than a resolution. If Kearney can just tighten up that last loose end of his plot construction I predict he will prove to be a major talent.

Finally, in *Cloud Castles* (Gollancz,

£8.99) Michael Scott Rohan brings Steve Fisher to the end of the *Chase the Morning/Gates of Noon* trilogy. *Chase the Morning* was something special, *Gates of Noon* perhaps less so, and *Cloud Castles* is – well, for me anyway – audacious but ultimately unsuccessful. Everyone tackles the Matter of Britain sooner or later and here we have the good old Grail/Graal and the good old Spear turning up as floating archetypes in an archetypal but otherworldly city beyond the clouds, reached by magic horse, airship and plain old helicopter. Fisher handles the spear in all innocence (yes, sorry, his name really is significant) and there is some villain/chase/fight/weird-science stuff to give us a plot. I am ashamed to say it took me to page 263 to work out what the maguffin computer message meant. No, I'm not going to tell you, but I bet it doesn't take you that long. Jyp, Mal and Katjka turn up again to help, and there is a marvellous sequence of Fisher wandering through a London docklands drifting between eras and crises as realities break apart – but unfortunately this is repeated, ludicrously, later on towards the climax of the book when they set off in an airship to gather a magnificent seven of helpers, dropping in here on the Roman Empire and there the Somme, rather in the manner of Bill and Ted. Fisher finally gets a girl too, and ultimately after resolving the plot decides on a dual career in mythological redeeming and European politics.

(Wendy Bradley)

What Might Have Been Stephen Baxter

What is the source of the enduring appeal of the scientific romance?

Even the phrase is evocative of a time and a place: *fin de siècle* Britain, a land of gaslit spaceships and Time Machines of brass and quartz, of enormous evolutionary and cosmological perspectives, all drenched by an eloquent pessimism about the dangerous future...

The term "scientific romance" itself goes back to the 1880s. Brian Stableford, more recently, revived the phrase to help analyse the distinct early traditions of UK/US sf. But "scientific romances" aren't just a layer of sf archaeology: the damn things keep on being written. In the last few years we've had (among others) Greenland's *Harm's Way*, *The Difference Engine* by Gibson and Sterling, the terrific "Inheritors of Earth" by Eric Brown in his *Time-Lapsed Man* collection, and my own *Anti-Ice*, set in an alternate 1870.

For me the appeal of working with the historical material of this period is the endless fascination of "what if" – or rather "what-might-have-been." The unrealized possibilities of steam-punk Britain seem endless. There were stunning, yet accessible, advances in science and engineering, and the widening, confident grasp of the British Empire. But beneath all this there were dark undercurrents – growing class divides, the culture-shock of Darwinism – which were, by the turn of the century, eventually to break open the complacent Victorian world, allowing noisy young Turks like Wells and Kipling to develop their own complex visions.

Thus it was a time of extraordinary possibilities, physically and spiritually. And they had gas-lamps and pocket-watches and steam trains...

Even the fiction of the period seems pregnant with unexplored possibilities. Wells, for instance, always seems to deal solely with the first impact of his wonderful creations on the staid world of the everyday. *But what would happen next? You can't uninvent Cavorite, for example. Picture this: Surrey, 1910, and a fleet of Cavorite-clad warships is leaving for Mars...*

In this spirit, Marcus Rowland brings us **Forgotten Futures I**, the first of a projected series of scientific romance "source packs." The material, Rowland says, should be of wide interest to sf fans and scholars, but don't expect too much analysis here: *Forgotten Futures* is pretty clearly aimed at users of table-top role-playing games.

The material arrives on a computer diskette: *Forgotten Futures* isn't a computer game, but Rowland, evidently in a labour of love, is using shareware computer distribution as an alternative to printed publication. (I found some niggles with this, incidentally: the routines provided to "unzip" Rowland's compressed files didn't always work, and, as an sf writer rather than a games-player, I don't have the software to view the graphic images provided.) The disk contains the text of two Kipling stories, game rules, a (long) description of an alternate history extrapolated (fairly loosely and wildly) from the Kipling texts, and a suggested adventure game based on a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

Of course the scientific romances themselves were intended to be rather more than sources of apparatus for mental adventure playgrounds. The two stories included on Rowland's diskette – "With the Night Mail: A Story of 2000 AD" (1905) and its sequel "As easy As A.B.C." (1912) – are perhaps Kipling's most notable pieces of sf. Both are about an Aerial Board of Control, or A.B.C., which rules the globe with fleets of dirigibles. The

A.B.C. world is a rather dystopian vision of centralized technocratic government, and seems something of a response to Wells, who was by comparison a technocracy fan, as expressed in works like *A Modern Utopia* (1905). (In turn, Wells may have been satirizing Kipling in *The Island of Dr Moreau* [1896], in which the pathetic Law of the Beast-Men reads like a parody of Kipling's *Jungle Book*. This implicit dialogue between the two giants led V.S. Pritchett to describe Wells and Kipling as "light and shadow to each other"...)

Which is all fascinating stuff, but you'll find none of these deeper levels of meaning in *Forgotten Futures*. Rowland's intention is to plunder Kipling's airship dystopia for imagination-sparking game props, and he's happy to throw in scenarios and suggestions based on non-Kipling material. Some of Rowland's suggestions are more than intriguing, though. What if Wells's Martians had won, driving the remnant of humanity underground? Imagine a Terminator scenario, set in the 1900s... Personally I'd be more interested in seeing Rowland develop this – or some other A.B.C.-world scenario – into genuine fiction (although mainly known for his games writing, Rowland is a published writer of short stories). But that's just my bias.

Rowland says that one of the aims of the *Forgotten Futures* project is to make some of the lost works of the past available to a wider audience. Good on him; certainly he's providing a highly accessible way to get to material which otherwise might slip away from us. He concedes that Kipling's stories may not have been the best starting-point for this project because they have recently been reprinted in the USA, in collections edited by John Brunner. This was bad luck, but the intention is honourable, and Rowland says he intends to persevere with future editions of this intriguing project, delving into the works of more obscure writers such as George Griffith.

There's nothing too deep here: in *Forgotten Futures*, the stuff of scientific romance is being mined for fun. But there's nothing wrong with that, and this imaginative labour of love deserves support. (*Forgotten Futures I* is available through shareware channels for a £5 registration fee [\$10 in the UK], or from Marcus Rowland, 22 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2 5EA.)

(Stephen Baxter)

Genuflect, Genuflect Andy Robertson

A right old mish-mash this time.

First, genuflect, genuflect: **The Rediscovery of Man** (NESFA Press, \$24.95) collects between one set of covers all the short fictions of the unmatchable, unthinkable, Cordwainer Smith. All are magnificently weird, most are plain magnificent, and one or two are the nearest thing to perfection that you or I will chance upon in our little lives. Let them sink down into your heart, and you will be ennobled. And if you read them long ago, buy this book, and read them all again. Real fans, note: "Himself in Anachron" has at last been pried free!

Over on the Dark Fantasy shelf we have **The Best of D.F. Lewis** (AE Press, \$7.00). Des Lewis, darling of the small press, is most definitely an acquired taste. I will say he has one of the strangest and most eccentric imaginations I've ever come across, but for me his stories rarely work. He pays no attention at all to plot, and it's just one damn icky ichorous thing after another. No one else can so successfully combine scatology and existential horror. But I did like some of this stuff: the one about the jack-in-the-box that reforms itself differently each time it pops out – and one day, pops out too soon – sticks in the mind.

A mess of graphic novels recently received from the USA publisher Dark Horse is very uneven. The most interesting thing is a compendium of 20 or so short pieces, **The Best of DHP** (Dark Horse, \$12.95). Four or five of these are really good: imaginative and powerful ideas, strong-boned by interdigitating text/graphics, the work of people who properly understand the medium and have a spark of the fantastic to follow. Frank Miller's **Hard Boiled** (Dark Horse, \$14.95) unfortunately does little to reassure readers worried about the slide that started with *Give Me Liberty*, though by no stretch of the imagination can it be called bad.

On to this month's factoid tome, Bart Kosko's **Fuzzy Thinking** (Hyperion, \$24.95; forthcoming in the UK from HarperCollins). The book is very, umm, Californian: it first hit the wall when I read about the Revelation in the Hot Tub After Working Out in the Gym, and it thumped the brickwork at regular intervals thereafter until I finished it. The basic idea is, like that Aristotelian binary true-or-not-true logic handicaps Western minds, and a better appreciation of the universe can be attained by embracing Eastern ideas of partial truth, partial falsehood,

multi-valued reasoning. Kosko makes a big thing about being non-Aristotelian (cue jokes about similarizing to 19 points and so on) but while this sort of spiel usually signals pure crap, the man has done real work on fuzzy logic, and is one of the people changing it into a scientific discipline and an exploitable technology. This fact—and his undoubted academic solidity—commands respect. He writes breathlessly and sometimes quite badly, but he does understand whereof he speaks.

Kosko presents fuzzy logic as a revolution: not just a way of making machines work better, but a conceptual overturn. The trouble is that this is just the opposite of the truth. I'll grant the possibility of a new industrial revolution—if it works—but the world is already cram full of fuzzy processors of unbelievable speed, complexity and competence. Undoubtedly the formalization of fuzzy logic is necessary before we can hope to build robots with real-world navigation abilities comparable to, say, a spider—but what will that change? Let me spell it out. Fuzzy thinking is the natural biological mode of information processing, the result of having a brain smaller than the universe it has to model. It is therefore *already* the near-universal mode of human thinking.

Fuzzy thought is the old, normal, ordinary, default, way of understanding things, and therefore Fuzzy Logic does not have the capacity to change human society much. There is nothing new or interesting or clever in saying that the Universe is too big and complex and messy to understand completely. That has always been known, and the "wisdom" that makes much of it is the wisdom of falling down on your arse more gracefully than anyone else. The revolution, the real astonishment—it is an utterly amazing thing—came with the discovery that simplicity everywhere underlies the complexity, and that that simplicity can be understood, can be won to, and known, by little soft animals like us. If we're talking about Aristotle, let me point out that this was first glimpsed through astronomy, the study of the one realm where, by a coincidence of scale and density, only a single mathematically simple force is important; and it was Aristotle's cislunar/translunar division which first codified this fact. He made many mistakes, but, despite the abuse he endures today, he was a scientist of great stature, and a man of real, not fake, wisdom.

(Andy Robertson)

Grand Opening! Pete Crowther

While the Harrow family of Skokie, Illinois, were all down on the floor in front of the linen closet, whooping and laughing, the man who had come to kill them was getting off a plane at O'Hare.

If it's true what they say about opening lines making or breaking a story, then surely the ones above, Charles King's opening paragraph for **Mama's Boy** (Pocket Books, \$5.50) will be considered as exemplary.

A former mathematician at the Harvard computation laboratory, a performer and writer for American network radio, and a creative director at a large New York ad agency, King has produced around 20 short stories but only now got around to putting out a novel-length piece. It's been well worth the wait. *Mama's Boy* is one of those books that pull publisher blurbs and author testimonials which include phrases such as "edge of the seat" and "rollercoaster ride." In this case, such plaudits would be perfectly justified.

The reason the Harrow family are on the floor in front of the linen closet is that they're trying to persuade their recently adopted Winston Churchill, a young Trinidadian boy left mute by the traumatic events of his earlier life, to come out and join in the fun of a family evening. That he won't—and that Jake, his wife and two children, don't force him—turns out to be a real stroke of luck. Because the Harrows are butchered by a coldly methodical killer who doesn't realize he is being watched. The killer, who employs a nice line in pre-slaughter audio surveillance, believes he has the full family: four voices on his tape, four bodies left behind. Neat and tidy, just the way he likes it.

But when NYPD Detective Roger Harrow is informed that his brother Jake just went berserk and carved up the whole family, he doesn't believe it. And he, of course, knows about Winston and his habit of hiding in the linen closet. The police go back to the house and find the boy, who is, understandably, not making too much progress in the way of de-traumatization.

Convinced that the killings were the work of an outside party, Roger and his wife take young Winston under their wing in an attempt to get at the truth. But their efforts in linking the Harrow deaths to other similar murders reveal to the killer that, somehow, he is doing something wrong. As a result, he goes to great lengths to find out just what the mistake is...until, at last, he learns about Winston. Then the tables turn and the hunters become the hunted.

At a time when the serial-killer

novel has just about had its day, *Mama's Boy* demonstrates that old themes in new hands can be every bit as powerful as they were when they were fresh. Artfully leaving much of the blood-letting to the reader's imagination, King combines CIA skull-duggery, *Thin Man*-type husband-and-wife investigating and truly psychopathic carnage to produce real edge-of-the-seat reading, ploughing his own individual furrow through the well-tilled field of procedural mystery fiction and doing it at a speed that makes most rollercoasters seem stationary. This is one ride you shouldn't miss...but don't forget to wear a seat-belt.

In the nine years or so since Charles L. Grant started his Greystone Bay anthology series with, naturally, *Greystone Bay* itself, we've seen a further two collections of stories—*Doom City* and *The SeaHarp Hotel*—by some of the best names in the field of horror fiction, each building on the character of this luckless town and, while retaining their own individual styles, managing to consolidate and promote an overall pervasive air of doom and gloom.

In *The Fog* (Tor, \$20.95), the fourth and final chronicle of Greystone Bay, surely the most bedevilled town on the New England coastline, maintains the spell marvellously. The trick is, I think, in restricting the contributors to producing pieces which are more vignettes than actual beginning/middle/ending-type stories, and in *The Fog* demonstrates the technique more effectively than ever before. Whether the kudos belong mainly to Grant's already well-documented excellent editorship or to the writers whose work interprets his guidelines is a moot point.

Only seven writers fill these 300 pages—that in itself another small departure from the earlier volumes of shorter pieces—and all but one succeed admirably in penning tales of desolation and coldness, and of those fog- and mist-shrouded New England nights—nights we know reasonably well from another source—when ghosts and other visitors drift into Greystone Bay for answers to long-pondered questions. Although Steve Rasnic Tem's 63-page "Ice House Pond" best captures the mood of the town and its swan-song, so, too, do Elizabeth Engstrom, Craig Shaw Gardner (and anyone who thinks Gardner can only write Terry Pratchett pastiches would do well to read "Warm" in this volume), Kathryn Ptacek, Nancy Holder and Grant himself turn in high-quality work, with only "Whiteface," Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's rambling saga of lycanthropy and travelling circuses, simply out-classed on the day by some frighteningly good opposition.

If anyone should know about psychopathic behaviour, then that person must surely be Robert Bloch. After all, Bloch gave us Norman Bates almost two-and-a-half decades before Hannibal Lecter, Freddie Kruger, Michael Myers, Jason *et al* came on the scene.

In the introduction to his new anthology, **Monsters In Our Midst** (Tor, \$20.95) – at one time due to be called *Psycho-Paths 2* following the success of his first anthology foray into this particular theme in 1991 – Bloch lays some eloquent ground-rules, rightly citing the infamous Ed Gein for his own creation, and advocating the questions *Why do these people exist?* and *What makes them tick?* as being infinitely more important than the one that simply goes *How will he kill someone this time?* Because psychotic behaviour isn't just about killing people, as this book goes on to show.

In fact, of the 17 stories here, the most succinct treatises on the condition under scrutiny are the ones where no deaths occur as a direct result of the antagonist: John Coyne's "Snow Man," for example, in which a Peace Corps teacher in war-torn Ethiopia victimizes his young charges; Jonathan Carroll's "The Lick Of Time," and its compulsive heroine and her need to talk to someone; the ultimate voyeur in Richard Christian Matheson's "The Edge"; and, my own favourite, Chet Williamson's masterful "The Moment The Face Falls," which, though lighter in tone in terms of consequence, perhaps features the most coldly sadistic of all the strange folk on display here.

There are more strange folk on display in David Hartwell's **Christmas Forever** (Tor, \$24.95), a mostly delightful, if occasionally obtuse anthology of fantastic fables for the festive fireside from 29 of the best writers in the field of fantasy and science fiction.

Hartwell is no stranger to either anthologies or Christmas, having already steered three similar collections – *Christmas Ghosts* (Arbor House, 1987), *Spirits of Christmas* (Wynwood Press, 1989), and *Christmas Stars* (Tor, 1989) – to the finishing post, and, for the most part, *Christmas Forever* is sufficiently cracker-like to ensure you feel you've made a good purchase.

And while, particularly in such a big collection, it's always difficult to grade individual stories there are several beauties here that are well worth mentioning. Dave Wolverton's tale of a time-travelling ghost – "My Favourite Christmas"; the always dependable Charles de Lint who, with "Pal O' Mine," packs a powerfully gentle punch; and Paul Tumeys's spooky "Toy Chest River"; plus Patricia McKillip's

"Xmas Cruise"; Sara Smith's "Christmas At The Edge" and Janet Kagan's "Christmas Winding," which features surely the most desirable tree decorations ever. There are also appearances from Joan Aiken, Gene Wolfe, Roger Zelazny, Damon Knight, David Langford, Rudy Rucker, Alan Dean Foster, Brian Stableford, Robert Shekley, Michael Bishop plus a rare collaboration from James P. Blaylock and Tim Powers.

The term an important book invariably sends bolts of annoyance through me when used to hype a new work. It's a tired and rarely accurate phrase – particularly these days, when the inverted pyramid representing the sum total of all published works seems to allow no room for innovation and offer no area untrod by at least one pair of literary feet.

Like any reader, I have my own ideas of books that have been important. They may be important to me because of the time in which I read them; I may regard them as important because they proved to be seminal works, hugely influential to later writers; or, what the hell, they may be important to me because of the person that gave them to me or suggested I read them. Like most qualitative statements, important is hellishly subjective. Thus I rarely recommend a book to somebody by prefacing my enthusiasm with the bold and bald statement, *You really should read it: it's important.*

But if I did, then I would probably say it about Nicholas Royle's long-awaited debut novel, **Counterparts** (Barrington Books, £4.99). To say that Royle's now considerable canon of published short stories – most of which can, arguably, be pigeon-holed in the catch-all *Horror* – are entertaining would not be completely accurate. Similarly, it would be quite wrong to describe them as scary. And, certainly, they are not gratuitous – particularly when one considers some of the excesses for which the genre is frequently berated – in either content or language. So what are they?

Singularly bleak, painfully evocative of loss and despair and uncertainty, remarkably literate and wholly – even annoyingly – readable. This applies doubly to *Counterparts*.

Through the cold and lonely streets of London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and even small-town Yugoslavia, *Counterparts* tackles the difficult subject of the alienation of a young man and his efforts to belong somewhere – or, at least, to be comfortable in simply existing – through his subconscious tendency towards self-mutilation. Alternating between reality and an even more sombre dreamworld, the book's protagonist stumbles towards the full horrors of realization and the first steps back up the ladder to nor-

malcy. That the book's finale, amidst the symbolic destruction of the Berlin Wall and the re-unification of that divided city, is so (albeit cautiously) optimistic is further evidence of Royle's talent.

Engrossing without being gross – a neat trick given the subject matter – this is nevertheless not what one might call a fun read. Maybe that's why Royle was unable to gain mainstream publisher backing although, happily, he was able to interest the independent publisher Barrington Books. It was only there that the merits of the work and the need for it to be published were fully recognized.

Dizzily ambitious, flawlessly plotted and impeccably written – both in terms of story progression and characterization – *Counterparts* may one day be regarded a *Catcher In The Rye* for the new millenium. But important? Well, if it isn't, they don't come much closer.

(Pete Crowther)

Books Received

November-December 1993

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Asimov, Isaac. **The Complete Stories, Volume II**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224150-1, ix+550pp, hardcover, £16.99. (SF collection, first published in the USA, 1992.) 20th January 1994.

Baxter, Stephen. **Flux**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224025-4, 366pp, hardcover, £15.99. (SF novel, first edition; Baxter's fourth novel, a follow-up to *Timelike Infinity* in the "Xeelee" sequence.) 6th December 1993.

Baxter, Stephen. **Timelike Infinity**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647618-X, 253pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Mary Geth in *Interzone* 68.) 29th November 1993.

Bear, Greg. **Moving Mars**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-926121-9, 452pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1993; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 79.) 18th November 1993.

Brosnan, John. **The Opononax Invasion**. Gollancz/VG/SF, ISBN 0-575-05199-X, 223pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (SF novel, first edition; it appears to be humorous cyberpunk.) 25th November 1993.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **The Spirit Ring**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32884-7, 369pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 3rd December 1993.

Bull, Emma. **Finder**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85418-8, 317pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as an "explosive urban fantasy thriller," and it's by the

author whose first novel, *War for the Oaks* [1986], helped create the vogue for what some people are now calling "Elfpunk.") *February 1994*.

Cadnum, Michael. *Ghostwright*. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0048-3, 382pp, paperback, \$5.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 15th December 1993.

Calvino, Italo. *Time and the Hunter*. Translated by William Weaver. Picador, ISBN 0-330-31909-4, 152pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF/fantasy collection, first published in Italy, 1967; this translation first appeared in America in 1969 and has been reprinted many times, although this seems to be the first Pan/Picador edition; scientifically-based literary fantasies by a major European writer who died in 1985; recommended.) 3rd December 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey, ed. *Uncanny Banquet*. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0704-0, 338pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1992; it contains comparatively little-known tales by such masters of the form as Robert Aickman, Walter de la Mare, Russell Kirk, Fritz Leiber and Donald Wandrei, plus, in its entirety, the rare 1914 novel *The Hole of the Pit* by Adrian Ross.) 25th November 1993.

Chalker, Jack L. *Shadow of the Well of Souls: A Well World Novel*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-36202-0, xii+365pp, trade paperback, \$10. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; the second part of a belated follow-up to his original five-volume "Well World" series of the 1970s, it follows on from the recent *Echoes of the Well of Souls*.) *February 1994*.

Cochran, Molly, and Warren Murphy. *The Forever King*. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-094-8, 401pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 69.) 16th December 1993.

Cross, Ronald Anthony. *The Fourth Guardian*. "Book One of The Eternal Guardians." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85634-2, 444pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) March 1994.

Crowther, Peter, ed. *Touch Wood: Narrow Houses, Volume 2*. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-116-90732-4, x+372pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains all-original stories by John Brunner, Charles de Lint, Christopher Evans, Neil Gaiman, Charles L. Grant, Colin Greenland, Simon Ings, Gary Kilworth, Spider Robinson, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Karl Edward Wagner and others.) 9th December 1993.

De Lint, Charles. *Moonheart*. Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89004-4, 447pp, hardcover, \$12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984; proof copy received; the back-cover blurb on this proof states: "An international cult classic returns to print in North America at last.") March 1994.

Dexter, Susan. *The Prince of Ill Luck*. "Book One of The Warhose of Esdrong." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38065-7, vi+249pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) March 1994.

Dickson, Gordon R. *The Dragon at War*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21469-0, 375pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; fourth in Dickson's "Dragon" series.) 13th December 1993.

Donaldson, Stephen. *The Gap Into Power: A Dark and Hungry God Arises*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647021-1, 654pp, paperback, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 67.) 29th November 1993.

Dowling, Terry, and Van Ikin, eds. *Mortal Fire: Best Australian SF*. Hodder & Stoughton Australia/Coronet, ISBN 0-340-60854-4, xviii+334pp, paperback, A\$12.95. (SF anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories by John Baxter, Damien Broderick, Greg Egan, David Lake, Rosaleen Love, Sean McCullen, Lucy Sussex, George Turner, Cheryl Wilder and all the other well-known names of antipodean SF - including a few from the mainstream, such as Peter Carey and David Ireland.) 12th November 1993.

Dozoi, Gardner, ed. *Modern Classic Short Novels of Science Fiction*. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10504-5, xiv+657pp, hardcover, \$28.95. (SF anthology, first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to the same editor's earlier *Modern Classics of Science Fiction* [1991], this contains reprint novellas by Brian Aldiss, Paul Anderson, Samuel R. Delany, Frederik Pohl, Cordwainer Smith, Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe and others.) February 1994.

Eddings, David. *High Hunt*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224281-8, 340pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Novel/fantasy novel, by a leading fantasy writer; first published in 1973; this outdoor thriller was in fact Eddings' first published novel.) 6th December 1993.

Egan, Greg. *Quarantine*. Legend, ISBN 0-09-915381-5, 248pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Pat McAuley in *Interzone* 69.) 2nd December 1993.

Feist, Raymond E. *The King's Buccaneer*. "A novel of the Riftwar Cycle." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-20322-2, 623pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 68.) 13th December 1993.

Fowler, Christopher. *Sharper Knives*. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0766-0, 263pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first published in 1992.) 6th January 1994.

Frezza, Robert. *Fire in a Faraway Place*. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38724-4, xii+307pp, paperback, \$4.99. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's billed as "the exciting sequel to *A Small Colonial War* by the author of *McLendon's Syndrome*.") March 1994.

Gay, Anne. *Dancing on the Volcano*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-131-7, 410pp, paperback, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in 1993.) 9th December 1993.

Gear, W. Michael, and Kathleen O'Neal Gear. *People of the Wolf*. "The Prehistoric America Series." Pan/Tor, ISBN 0-330-33452-2, 435pp, paperback, £4.99. (Prehistoric SF, first published in the USA, 1990; first in a series about the post-Ice Age peopling of America some 12,000 years ago.) 28th January 1994.

Greene, Kirby. *Brotherhood of the Stars*. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29635-3, paperback, \$4.99. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's dedicated "In memory of Leigh Brackett.") April 1994.

Grundy, Stephan. *Rhinegold*. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-09545-5, 720pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this debut novel by an American writer who lives in Britain is dedicated to J.R.R. Tolkien and Richard Wagner, among others; it's blurred as follows: "What *The Mists of Avalon* did for Celtic culture, *Rhinegold* does magnificently for its Nordic counterpart"; the British publishing house Michael Joseph has advised us that they are publishing this book in simultaneous hardcover and trade paperback on 31st March 1994, but they haven't sent us a review copy.) 15th March 1994.

Guillemette, Aurel. *The Best in Science Fiction: Winners and Nominees of the Major Awards in Science Fiction*. Scolar Press, ISBN 1-85928-005-6, x+379pp, hardcover, £25. (Lists of award-nominated SF and fantasy, first edition; the advantages of this book over Darryl F. Mallett's and Robert Reginald's similar volume, *Reginald's Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards, 2nd Edition* [1991], are that it lists all nominees in every category, along with the winners, and that it's two years more up to date; the disadvantages are that it covers fewer awards [although all the major ones, such as Hugo, Nebula and John W. Campbell Memorial Award, are here] and that its information is sometimes unreliable, particularly with British awards [for instance, Clarke Award-winning titles by Geoff Ryan and Colin Greenland are mis-cited]; on balance, though, a useful work.) 29th November 1993.

Harman, Andrew. *The Frogs of War*. Legend, ISBN 0-09-928481-2, 295pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 20th January 1994.

Harrison, Harry. *The Stainless Steel Rat Sings the Blues*. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09612-5, hardcover, \$19.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th March 1994.

Herbert, James. *James Herbert's Dark Places: Locations and Legends*. Photographs by Paul Barkshire. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-255496-8, 168pp, hardcover, £18.99. (Photo-visual album with text by the bestselling horror novelist; first edition.) 18th November 1993.

Hewlett, Jamie, and Alan Martin. *Tank Girl*. Dark Horse Comics, ISBN 1-878574-51-5, unpaginated (circa 140pp), trade paperback, \$14.95. (SF graphic collection, first edition; the various strips were probably first published in Australian magazines, from 1988 onwards.) *Late entry: October publication, received in November 1993*.

Holt, Tom. *Graillblazers*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-192-9, 298pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 20th January 1994.

Hubbard, L. Ron. *Old Doc Methuselah*. Introduction by Robert Silverberg. New Era, ISBN 0-88404-653-2, xvi+270pp, hardcover, £14.99. (SF fix-up novel, first published in the USA, 1970; consisting of stories first published in *Astounding* in 1947-1950, it's "Hubbard's most genial book," according to Silverberg; this is the American [Bridge Publications] edition of 1992, which presumably will carry a British price sticker - though there is no sticker on the copy we have been sent.) 9th December 1993.

Hutson, Shaun. *White Ghost*. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90798-7, 345pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 17th March 1994.

Ing, Dean. *Butcher Bird*. Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85397-1, 348pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Technothriller, first edition; it's about a miniature pilotless aircraft which carries out political assassinations.) 10th November 1993.

Irwin, Robert. *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, ISBN 0-713-99105-4, 344pp, hardcover, £20. (Critical companion to the classic Middle-Eastern collection of fantasy stories; first edition; Irwin is himself a considerable fantasy novelist, and a volume like this has long been needed; according to the publicity, "Irwin's book is a mine of information on such recondite matters as the religion of the jinn, the activities of lesbian witches,

professional farting, Indian vampires, Arabian werewolves, the Baghdadi guild of gate-crashers, the mystical use of drugs and the medieval origins of science fiction"; highly recommended.) 27th January 1994.

Janes, Phil. **Fission Impossible**. "Round Two of The Galaxy Game." Millennium. ISBN 1-85798-060-3, 250pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 16th December 1993.

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Hexwood**. Methuen. ISBN 0-416-18846-X, 288pp, hardcover, £11.99. (Juvenile sf/fantasy novel, first edition.) Late entry: October publication, received in December 1993.

Jordan, Robert. **The Fires of Heaven: Book Five of The Wheel of Time**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-190-2, 786pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; a lavish volume with coloured endpapers.) 11th November 1993.

Jordan, Robert. **The Shadow Rising: Book Four of The Wheel of Time**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-121-X, 1031pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 69.) 11th November 1993.

Joyce, Graham. **House of Lost Dreams**. Headline. ISBN 0-7472-4248-8, 402pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 77.) 13th January 1994.

Kelly, James Patrick. **Wildlife**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85578-8, 299pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; parts of this book first appeared as stories in *Asimov's SF Magazine*.) February 1994.

Kilworth, Garry. **Frost Dancers**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21463-1, 381pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 67.) 29th November 1993.

Koja, Kath. **Bad Brains**. Millennium. ISBN 1-85798-129-4, 367pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 9th December 1993.

Koja, Kath. **Skin**. Millennium. ISBN 1-85798-128-6, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 9th December 1993.

Koontz, Dean. **Dragon Tears**. Headline. ISBN 0-7472-4167-8, 503pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 9th December 1993.

Land, Jon. **Day of the Delphi**. "A Blaine McCracken novel." Tor, ISBN 0-812-53434-4, 405pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Near-future thriller, first edition; the author is a prolific American writer of thrillers with such science-fictional-sounding titles as *The Doomsday Spiral*, *The Omega Command* and *The Omicron Legion*.) November 1993.

Lee, Tanith. **Elephantasm**. Headline. ISBN 0-7472-4106-6, 310pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993.) 6th May 1993.

Le Guin, Ursula. **Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-023079-3, 204pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Paul J. McAuley in *Interzone* 45.) 25th November 1993.

Lewis, Paul, and Steve Lockley, eds. **Cold Cuts**. "Tales of Terror." Introduction by Phil Rickman. Alun Books [2nd Floor, Royal Buildings, Talbot Rd., Port Talbot, West Glamorgan SA13 1DN], ISBN 0-907117-63-5, 147pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains original stories, mainly Welsh in flavour, by Ramsey Campbell, Christopher Evans,

D.F. Lewis, Mike O'Driscoll, Guy N. Smith, Jack Wainer and a raft of lesser-knowns.) No date shown: November 1993?

MacAvoy, R.A. **Winter of the Wolf**. Headline. ISBN 0-7472-4095-7, 185pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; third in the trilogy which began with the highly praised *Lens of the World*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 78.) 9th December 1993.

McCarthy, Helen. **Animel: A Beginner's Guide to Japanese Animation**. Titan. ISBN 1-85286-492-3, 64pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Illustrated guide to the type of Japanese animated films, mostly released on video, which "blend science fiction and cyberpunk with cops and robbers, female warriors and Japanese folklore"; first edition.) 25th November 1993.

Miller, Graham. **Beyond the Barrier**. The Book Guild, ISBN 0-86332-888-1, 266pp, hardcover, £14.95. (SF novel, first edition; the author is an Australian medical man who works in Saudi Arabia.) 9th December 1993.

Modestiti, L.E., Jr. **The Magic Engineer**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85570-2, 508pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; third in the series which began with *The Magic of Recluce*.) March 1994.

Morwood, Peter. **The Golden Horde**. Legend. ISBN 0-09-989840-3, 312pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993; third in the "Prince Ivan" series.) 2nd December 1993.

Murphy-Gibb, Dwina. **Cormac: The King Making**. "Book 2 in the spellbinding Celtic saga." Pan, ISBN 0-330-32326-8, 275pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition.) 28th January 1994.

Murphy-Gibb, Dwina. **Cormac: The Seers**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32723-2, 328pp, paperback, £4.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) 28th January 1994.

Newman, Kim. **The Quorum**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71852-5, 311pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 7th March 1994.

Nisbet, Colin F. **Suzerains**. The Book Guild, ISBN 0-86332-877-6, 192pp, hardcover, £11.95. (SF novel, first edition; the author is British.) 11th November 1993.

Niven, Larry, and Steven Barnes. **Achilles' Choice**. Illustrated by Boris Vallejo. Pan, ISBN 0-330-33104-3, 214pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novella, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 71.) 3rd December 1993.

Potter, J.K. **Horripollations: The Art of J.K. Potter**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Introduction by Stephen King. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-255-2, 128pp, trade paperback, £12.95. (Art collection by a leading sf/fantasy/horror illustrator; first edition; a beautiful book by a major talent; recommended.) November 1993.

Powers, Tim. **Last Call**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21452-6, 638pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 64.) 13th December 1993.

Pritchard, John. **Night Sisters**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21769-X, 346pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new British writer [born 1964].) 13th December 1993.

Robinson, Spider. **Off the Wall at Callahans**. Illustrated by Phil Foglio. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85661-X, 160pp, trade paperback, \$9.95. (Humorous of sampler, first edition; proof copy received; best of the blurb describe what this peculiar book consists

of: "Here, for the first time, is the collected irreverence and mirth of all Spider Robinson's wildly popular Callahan series - from the one-liners to the all-purpose toasts to the puns that groans are made of, including some never-before-seen bon mots.") February 1994.

Scott, Michael. **Imp**. Warner, ISBN 0-7151-0156-5, 315pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 9th December 1993.

Sheckley, Robert. **The Status Civilization/Mindswap**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-91921-1, 296pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF omnibus, first edition; the two novels date from 1960 and 1966.) 2nd December 1993.

Shepard, Leslie, ed. **The Dracula Book of Classic Vampire Stories**. Hale, ISBN 0-7090-5273-1, 248pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1977; it contains all the obvious choices such as Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" and Bram Stoker's "Dracula's Guest.") 30th November 1993.

Simak, Clifford D. **All Flesh is Grass**. "Masters of Science Fiction." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0045-9, 255pp, paperback, \$4.95. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1965; a fine example of the "mysterious invisible barrier" story; recommended.) 15th December 1993.

Simmons, Dan. **Lovedeath: Five Tales of Love and Death**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7866-0, 306pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1993; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 11th November 1993.

Singer, Marilyn. **Horsemaster**. Pan/Piper, ISBN 0-330-32801-8, 179pp, paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 14th January 1994.

Starbuck, Kathryn S. **India's Story**. "A virtual reality psychic sf thriller!" HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21768-1, 338pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first edition; although the author is American, this is described on the back cover as a "world first publication.") 29th November 1993.

Stasheff, Christopher. **The Witch Doctor**. "Book III of A Wizard in Rhyme." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37584-X, 405pp, hardcover, \$20. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) February 1994.

Steverson, Caroline. **A College of Magics**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85689-X, 360pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; we hadn't heard of this author, but apparently she has published several earlier novels such as *The Serpent's Egg* [1988] and *River Rats* [1992]; Ellen Kushner and others commend her.) March 1994.

Stockbridge, Grant. **The Spider, Master of Men #8**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0040-8, 316pp, paperback, \$5.95. (Fantasy/adventure omnibus, first edition; contains two short novels, "The Devil's Paymaster" and "Legions of the Accursed Light," first published in *The Spider pulp* magazine in 1941 and 1938; "Grant Stockbridge" was a house pseudonym used mainly by Norvell Page.) 15th December 1993.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. **Out of This World**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37245-X, xii+307pp, hardcover, \$20. (SF/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; first in a new trilogy.) March 1994.

Wylie, Jonathan. **Echoes of Flame: Island and Empire**. Book Two. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13979-3, 432pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "Jonathan Wylie" is a pseudonym of Mark and Julia Smith.) 20th January 1994.

Yolen, Jane. **Briar Rose**. "The Fairy Tale Series." Introduction by Terri Windling. Pan/Tor, ISBN 0-330-33447-6, 208pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 65.) 28th January 1994.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

This is a list of all books received which fall into the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc).

Abbott, Michelle, ed. **Out of This World**. Anchor Books [1-2 Wainman Rd., Woodstock, Peterborough PE2 7BU], ISBN 1-85930-179-7, 175pp, hardcover, £10.99. (SF poetry anthology, first edition; its editor describes it as a volume of "poetical musings about the celebrated science fiction programmes that appear on our screens"; indeed, most of these mainly light verses appear to be about *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, *Blake's 7*, etc.: apart from Steve Bowkett, Steve Sneyd and *Who* novelist Paul Cornell, none of the numerous contributors are familiar to us.) No date shown: December 1993?

Altman, Mark A., and David Ian Solter. **Exploring Deep Space and Beyond**. Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-571-0, 126pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (SF television-series illustrated companion, first published in the USA, 1993; it's an "unofficial" publication which gives an account of three similar American TV series, *Deep Space Nine*, *Babylon 5* and *Space Rangers*.) 4th November 1993.

Anderson, Kevin J. **Jedi Sneyd: The Jedi Academy Trilogy, Volume 1**. "Star Wars." Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29798-8, paperback, \$5.99. (SF movie spinoff novel, first edition; proof copy received.) March 1994.

Arcudi, John. **RoboCop: Prime Suspect**. Illustrated by John Paul Leon and Jeff Albrecht. Dark Horse Comics, ISBN 1-878574-87-6, unpaginated [circa 120pp], trade paperback, \$13.95. (SF movie spinoff graphic novel, first edition.) Late entry: October publication, received in November 1993.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Garden of Rama**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-021-3, 593pp, paperback, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1991; second of a sharecropped trilogy [mainly by Gentry Lee] based on Clarke's original novel *Rendezvous with Rama*; third Orbit printing.) 9th December 1993.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Rama Revealed**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-09536-6, 466pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1993; proof copy received; third of a sharecropped trilogy [mainly by Gentry Lee] based on Clarke's original novel *Rendezvous with Rama*.) 15th February 1994.

Cockburn, Paul. **Jedi Dawn**. "Star Wars. Lost Jedi Adventure Game Books, 1." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-808-6, 256pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF film-spinoff gamebook, first published in the USA [?], 1992.) 18th November 1993.

De Lint, Charles. **The Wild Wood**. "Brian Froud's Faerielands." Introduction and illustrations by Brian Froud. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09630-3, hardcover, \$19.95. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; inspired by

Froud's artwork, and packaged by Byron Preiss Visual Publications, it's announced as the first of a series to be written by various hands.) 15th February 1994.

Duane, Diane. **Dark Mirror**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71853-3, 337pp, hardcover, £9.99. (SF TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; this is the American, Pocket Books, first edition with a British dustjacket.) 9th December 1993.

Duane, Diane, and Peter Morwood. **Sea-Quest DSV: The Novel**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-183-9, 200pp, hardcover, £9.99. (SF TV-series novelization, first published in the USA [?], 1993; it's based on a script by Rockne S.-O'Banion and Tommy Thompson.) 9th December 1993.

Farrand, Phil. **The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Trekkers**. "Six Seasons of Bloopers, Flubs, Technical Screw-ups and Plot Discrepancies..." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-513-X, 433pp, paperback, £7.99. (Irreverent guide to the errors and inconsistencies in the SF TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; first published in the USA, 1993; it looks like fun - perhaps there should be more TV-and-film spinoffs of this sort.) 13th January 1994.

Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Handbook. The Sixth Doctor**. Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20400-X, 250pp, paperback, £4.99. (Companion to the *Doctor Who* television series which starred Colin Baker [1983-1985]; first edition.) 18th November 1993.

Kubasik, Christopher. **The Longing Ring**. "Earth Dawn, 1." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-023354-7, 314pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world game-based fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's copyright "FASA.") 25th November 1993.

McConnell, Ashley. **Quantum Leap: The Wall**. Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-881-7, 274pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 19th November 1993.

Orman, Kate. **The Left-Handed Hummingbird**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20404-2, 264pp, paperback, £4.50. (SF television-series spinoff novel, first edition; the author is Australian; according to the blurb, this is "a triple first: Kate's first novel, the first *New Adventures* written by a woman, and the first written by an Antipodean.") 2nd December 1993.

Osborne, Richard. **Demolition Man**. Penguin/Signet, ISBN 0-45-118079-8, 229pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF film novelization, first published in the USA, 1993; based on the screenplay by Daniel Waters, Robert Reneau and Peter M. Lenkov; "Richard Osborne" is a pseudonym of Robert Tine.) 25th November 1993.

Peel, John. **Here There Be Dragons**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation, 28." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-503-2, 275pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; the author [born 1954], who has no entry in the new edition of *The Encyclopedia of SF*, has the distinction - so far as we are aware - of being the only person who has written novels for the two major SF shared universes of our time, namely "Star Trek" and "Doctor Who.") 9th December 1993.

Perry, Steve. **Earth Hive: Aliens, Book One**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-139-1, 278pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's actually based on a graphic novel by Mark Verheiden and Mark A. Nelson, which in turn was based on the *Aliens* films and the

designs by artist H.R. Giger.) 16th December 1993.

Puckett, Kelley, and Martin Pasko. **Batman: The Collected Adventures, Volume 1**. Illustrated by Ty Templeton, Brad Rader and others. Introduction by Paul Dini. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-521-0, 144pp, trade paperback, £3.99. (SF fantasy graphic collection, first edition; it consists of issues 1-6 of the *Batman Adventures* comic book, published in the USA by DC Comics, 1992-1993; it's based on an animated television series, which in turn was based on the long-running comic book originated by Bob Kane and others.) 9th December 1993.

Rawolinski, Leah. **Star Wreck V: The Undiscovered Nursing Home**. Illustrated by Harry Trombore. "An unauthorised parody." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-597-4, 149pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF television-series parody, first published in the USA, 1993; further adventures of Captain James T. Smirk and Mr Smock aboard the starship *Endocrine*.) 4th November 1993.

Rice, Peter L. **Far Country**. "Battletech." Pegginn/Roc, ISBN 0-14-023347-4, 363pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world game-based SF novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's copyright "FASA.") 6th January 1994.

Rogers, Dave, John Marriotti, Chris Drake and Graeme Bassett. **Supermarionation Classics: Stingray, Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet and the Mysterions**. Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-900-7, 304pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Illustrated companion to the Gerry Anderson juvenile SF TV series of the 1960s and 70s; first edition.) 9th December 1993.

Smith, David Alexander, ed. **Future Boston: The History of a City, 1990-2100**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85589-3, 384pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Shared-world SF anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains new stories by Alexander Jablakov, Geoffery A. Landis, Steven Popkes and others, all tied into David Alexander Smith's "Future Boston" scenario - previously used in his novel *In the Cube* [1993].) January 1994.

Stackpole, Michael A. **Assumption of Risk**. "Battletech." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-023346-6, 370pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world game-based SF novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's copyright "FASA.") 25th November 1993.

Tyers, Kathy. **The Truce at Bakura**. "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03564-X, 311pp, hardcover, £9.99. (SF movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993 [?]; the fourth of the new "Star Wars" novels, following Timothy Zahn's books but preceding them in internal chronology.) 6th January 1994.

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Bennett, E.A. *Fame and Fiction: An Enquiry Into Certain Popularities*. 1901.

Ellis, Stewart Marsh. *Mainly Victorian*. 1925.

Henkin, Leo J. *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910*. 1940.

Leisy, Ernest F. *The American Historical Novel*. 1950.

Penzoldt, Peter. *The Supernatural in Fiction*. 1952.

Reynolds, Quentin James. *The Fiction Factory: or, From Pulp Row to Quality Street; the Story of 100 Years of Publishing at Street and Smith*. 1955.

Papashvily, Helen Waite. *All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America, the Women Who Wrote It, the Women Who Read It, in the Nineteenth Century*. 1956.

Dalziel, Margaret. *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago*. 1957.

Dickinson, A.T., Jr. *American Historical Fiction*. 1958.

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Spatz, Jonas. *Hollywood in Fiction*. 1969.

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Petaja, Emil. *Photoplay Edition*. 1975.

Wagner, Geoffrey. *The Novel and the Cinema*. 1975.

Irwin, W.R. *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. 1976.

Rabkin, Eric S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. 1976.

Smith, Myron J., and Robert C. Weller. *Sea Fiction Guide*. 1976.

Hackett, Alice P., and J.H. Burke. *80 Years of Best Sellers*. 1977 (or any later edition).

Barclay, Glen St. John. *Anatomy of Horror: The Masters of Occult Fiction*. 1978.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840-1880*. 1978.

Sullivan, Jack. *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood*. 1978.

Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. 1979.

Rose, Willie Lee. *Race and Religion in American Historical Fiction: Four Episodes in Popular Culture*. 1979.

Wolfe, Gary. *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction*. 1979.

Attebury, Brian. *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. 1980.

Lascelles, Mary. *The Story-Teller Retrieves the Past: Historical Fiction and Fictitious History in the Art of Scott, Stevenson, Kipling and Some Others*. 1980.

Marill, Alvin H. *Movies Made for Television*. 1980 (or any Later edition).

Smith, Herbert F. *The Popular American Novel, 1865-1920*. 1980.

Smith, Myron J. *War Story Guide: An Annotated Bibliography of Military Fiction*. 1980.

Hicken, Marilyn E., ed. *Sequels. Vol 1: Adult Books*. 1982 (or any later edition).

Husband, Janet. *Sequels: An Annotated Guide to Novels in Sequence*. 1982 (or any later edition).

Wagar, W. Warren. *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things*. 1982.

Wu, William F. *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940*. 1982.

Bleiler, Everett F., ed. *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction*. 1983.

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Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. 1984.

Bleiler, Everett F., ed. *Supernatural Fiction Writers: Fantasy and Horror*. 2 vols. 1985.

Alkon, Paul K. *Origins of Futuristic Fiction*. 1987.

Bargainnier, Earl F., ed. *Comic Crime*. 1987.

Sobchack, Vivian. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 1987.

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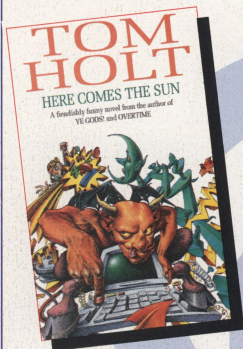
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Breen, Jon L., and Martin Harry Greenberg, eds. *Murder Off the Rack: Critical Studies of Ten Paperback Masters*. 1989.

Nash, Walter. *Language in Popular Fiction*. 1990.

Foot, Bud. *The Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travel to the Past in Science Fiction*. 1991.

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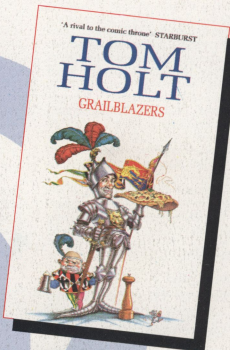
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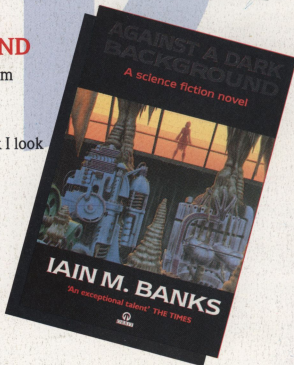
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