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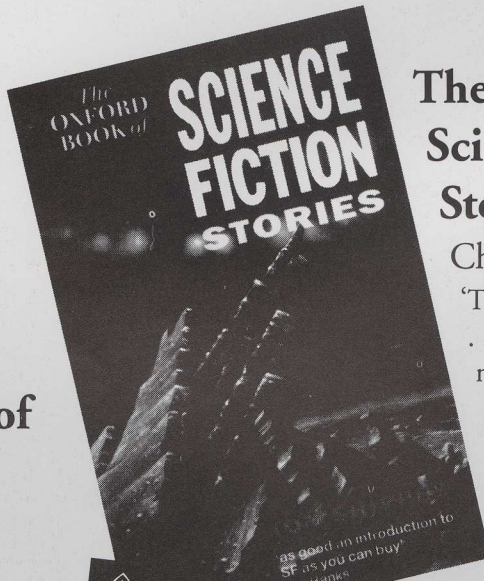
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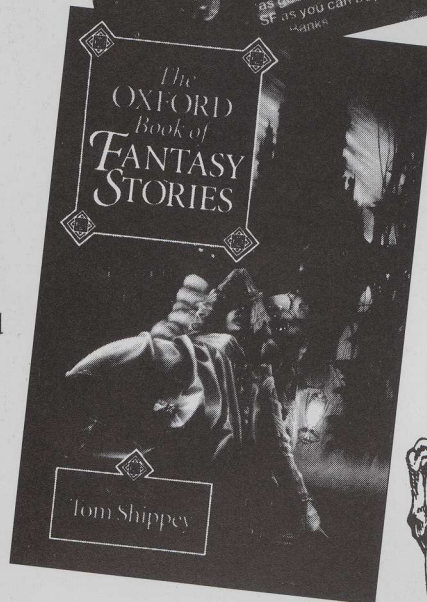
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April 1994

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Interaction

Dear Editors:

Just a quick note of admiration for your listing of SF/Horror/Fantasy film novelizations (*Interzone* 80). I had a similar list that has been in every-now-and-then preparation, so you've saved me months of research, for which I'll be eternally in debt. The only additional titles I have listed are:

A Guy Named Joe by James Cairns (1946) Scr. Dalton Trumbo; dir. Victor Fleming (1944); st. Spencer Tracy, Irene Dunne. Romantic fantasy in which a flier killed in service returns as a ghost to supervise his ex-girl's new romance.

Thunderbirds Are Go by Angus P. Allan (1966) Scr. Gerry & Sylvie Anderson; dir. David Lane. Based on the 1966 movie spin-off from the Supermarionation tv series.

I can't find any reference on a film *Plasmid* (adapted by "Robert Knight") and can only presume that it was never released. I believe that the "Robert Black" (i.e. Robert Holdstock) novel *The Satanists* (1977) was also a novelization of a film never released.

It also might be worth noting that some of the more popular titles had "junior novelizations"; as for instance, I have *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* by James Kahn in an abridged edition (1983).

I hope you'll be returning to this subject again, maybe a list of non-sf novelizations by recognized sf authors (Robert Holdstock's *The Emerald Forest* [1985] springs to mind), or spin-off novels from films (the endless *Star Wars* continuations, the recent *Aliens* books), and then there's always the tv spin-offs, the computer and role-playing game tie-ins to keep you busy...

Steve Holland
Colchester

Dear Editors:

A correction (to your film novelizations feature) – 2001: *A Space Odyssey* was not a "novelization." As I explained in *The Lost Worlds of 2001*, the novel was written to enable the movie – though the movie was already in production before the writing was finished.

Incidentally, I'm appalled to see that a Science Fiction Writers of America author was associated with (the novelization of) *Total Recall* – the unbelievable ending of which I've pleasure in rubbishing in the forthcoming *The Snows of Olympus* (just finished, hurrah, after almost three years, and literally thousands of hours computer time).

I'm feeling generous – herewith inspiration for other authors...

To: Russ [agent]
From: Arthur [Clarke]

The evaporation of the Amblin' deal has left me with an unexpected 312.5 hours of free keyboard time before Granite Productions arrives to start filming the 26 episodes of *Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious Universe*. As I need a bestseller urgently to pay for the 45-foot twin hydrojet dive boat we've just ordered, and I can't bear to send any of my Mercedes-Benzes to Sotheby's for auction, I've been looking at past hits in all media before deciding what to do next. Here's my current shortlist of possible titles. Any suggestions of additions appreciated.

Triassic Zoo
The Phantom of the Automat
Infibulator 2
The Godmother
Aspics of Love
Bride of Finkelstein
It Came from the IRS
Jonathan Livingstone Seagull
That, Son of It
Moby Duck
Catch 23
Apoplexy Now

Arthur C. Clarke
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Editor: I'm grateful to both Steve Holland and Arthur Clarke for their comments on my "Movie Novelizations" feature. (The latter, in particular, should be an inspiration to us all.) In answer to Steve's question, no, I don't intend to fill these pages with any more

lengthy lists, whether it be of non-sf film novelizations, spinoff novels or TV novelizations. Enough is enough. In reply to Arthur, I take his point about 2001 not being a novelization in the strict sense (i.e. it wasn't based on a pre-existing script); however, it was definitely a novel which was occasioned by a film, as he himself admits. If Messrs Kubrick and Clarke hadn't put their heads together to make an sf movie, then the book would not exist – certainly not in the form that we have it, at any rate. The fact is, 2001 was a novel based on a treatment (the treatment in this case being Arthur Clarke's provisional, unpublished "novel" which also formed the basis for the script) rather than on a screenplay. (The same point could be made about Graham Greene's "novelization," *The Third Man*.) I'm sorry that I wasn't able to go into such fine distinctions when preparing my article and bibliography; I nevertheless stand by my claim that 2001 is a "novelization" in the wide sense.

Dear Editors:

Thank you for issue 79 which I thoroughly enjoyed. The stories from Molly Brown, Leigh Kennedy and Kim Newman are very good indeed and I found Nicholas Royle's story enjoyably unusual. I like the change in cover format, and Jim Burns's picture is a good one without doubt, even if it is not relevant to the actual contents of the issue. The interview with him was very interesting and I suppose you could claim that the cover picture was relevant to the interview.

One big annoyance was John Clute's review of Greg Bear's *Moving Mars*. I had already read the book so knew what he was on about, but I put it to you that his views would be of little value to someone looking for a book to try, particularly if they were new to sf. I've been reading the stuff for more than two-thirds of my entire life and I didn't recognize some of his references; who is "Kinnison" for example? [E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Kimball Kinnison in the Lensman* books – Ed.]

He also indulges in some rather pompous prose; for example lymph does not "lurk" anywhere, it flows in a well-defined physical system. Thus his use of the word as a metaphor for some kind of background in-fill or fictional cement is rendered nonsensical.

He also appears to have fallen into the currently fashionable trap of misusing the word "paradigm." No doubt many readers will either recognize the word from previous exposure or work it out from the context, but what of the hapless

reader who looks it up in a typical household dictionary to find that it means "an example" or "a model" or perhaps even "a table of the inflexions of a word representative of a declension or conjugation"?

One can accept that the word has reasonably enough been adapted to mean something like "distillation of the essential pattern of current scientific thinking taken as a whole" but why try to be a poser and say things like "hero-driven paradigm shift" when "scientific advance" or "technical leap"

would be more appropriate and easily understood by anyone (e.g. me)?

A writer of a piece of non-fiction, even if it is only an opinion or observation on a topic, should recognize his responsibility to the potential reader and avoid confusing or irrelevant flourishes. Let us all say what we think in simple, elegant words. I think Mr Clute can surely do better than his contribution to issue 79.

Andrew Munley
Kilwinning, Scotland

Arthur C. Clarke Award Shortlist

I am delighted to announce an exceptionally strong shortlist for the eighth Arthur C. Clarke Award, for the best science fiction novel published in the UK in 1993. The shortlisted titles are, in alphabetical order of authors:

A Million Open Doors by John Barnes – Millennium (Orion)
Ammonite by Nicola Griffith – Grafton (HarperCollins)
Vurt by Jeff Noon – Ringpull
Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson – Roc (Penguin)
The Iron Dragon's Daughter by Michael Swanwick – (Millenium (Orion))
The Broken God by David Zindell – HarperCollins

The judges, who selected the shortlist from nearly 50 titles submitted by publishers, are Mark Plummer and Maureen Speller for the Science Fiction Foundation, Catie Cary and Chris Amies for the British Science Fiction Association, and Dr John Gribbin and Dr Jeff Kipling for the International Science Policy Foundation.

The judges will meet again to choose the winning title in late April 1994. The Arthur C. Clarke Award, consisting of an engraved bookend and a cheque for £1,000 generously donated by Arthur, will be presented by a guest celebrity and Fred Clarke, Arthur's brother, at a ceremony in London (further details nearer the time). You are warmly invited to attend this presentation.

Previous winners of this prestigious award (with the year of award, not of publication) are:

1993: *Body of Glass* by Marge Piercy (Michael Joseph)
1992: *Synners* by Pat Cadigan (HarperCollins)
1991: *Take Back Plenty* by Colin Greenland (Unwin Hyman)
1990: *The Child Garden* by Geoff Ryman (Unwin Hyman)
1989: *Unquenchable Fire* by Rachel Pollack (Century)
1988: *The Sea and Summer* by George Turner (Faber & Faber)
1987: *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (Jonathan Cape)

David V. Barrett
Administrator

SHARP

JOHN

Sharp was excited, almost dancing, as he walked along the wide avenue, conscious of Father's presence beside him. He stole a glance at Father: broad shouldered and square jawed, towering over most of the people thronging Mint City's thoroughfares. Very dark, with a craftsman's strong blunt fingers, an intellectual's deep amber eyes. Several wives on their way to market, robed in rich high-caste silks, looked longingly at Father's heavy black virile antlers, spreading broader than his shoulders. Sharp grew warm with mingled pride and embarrassment. He rubbed a hand across his own smooth forehead, imagining the day when he might have antlers of his own.

The market! Such a bustle of individuals, thousands of people from hundreds of castes thronging the temporary booths and tents in the square, milling around the permanent shops among the surrounding cloisters and colonnades. The scents and sights were overwhelming; there were so many people here, you could almost hear them.

People moved out of Father's way, automatically

deferential. Father was wearing his best white tunic, heavy with the gold brocade of the Geometers Caste, fastened with expensive brooches. Some passing Mint City Geometers, dressed less formally, hesitated. Father politely insisted that they precede him. Sharp felt proud. Correct manners always, even at moments of urgency.

Father's pace quickened as they entered a shaded alleyway. From a previous visit, last year, Sharp remembered that this was a short-cut to the Forum. He forced himself to match Father's pace. They did not want to be late for the ceremony.

Walking through the alleyway, Sharp caught a stale scent from a doorway. Last night, one of the house daughters had entertained an illicit visit from a young warrior, probably a proctor from the City Guard. Hot with embarrassment, he looked to see if Father had noticed. There was no sign that he had.

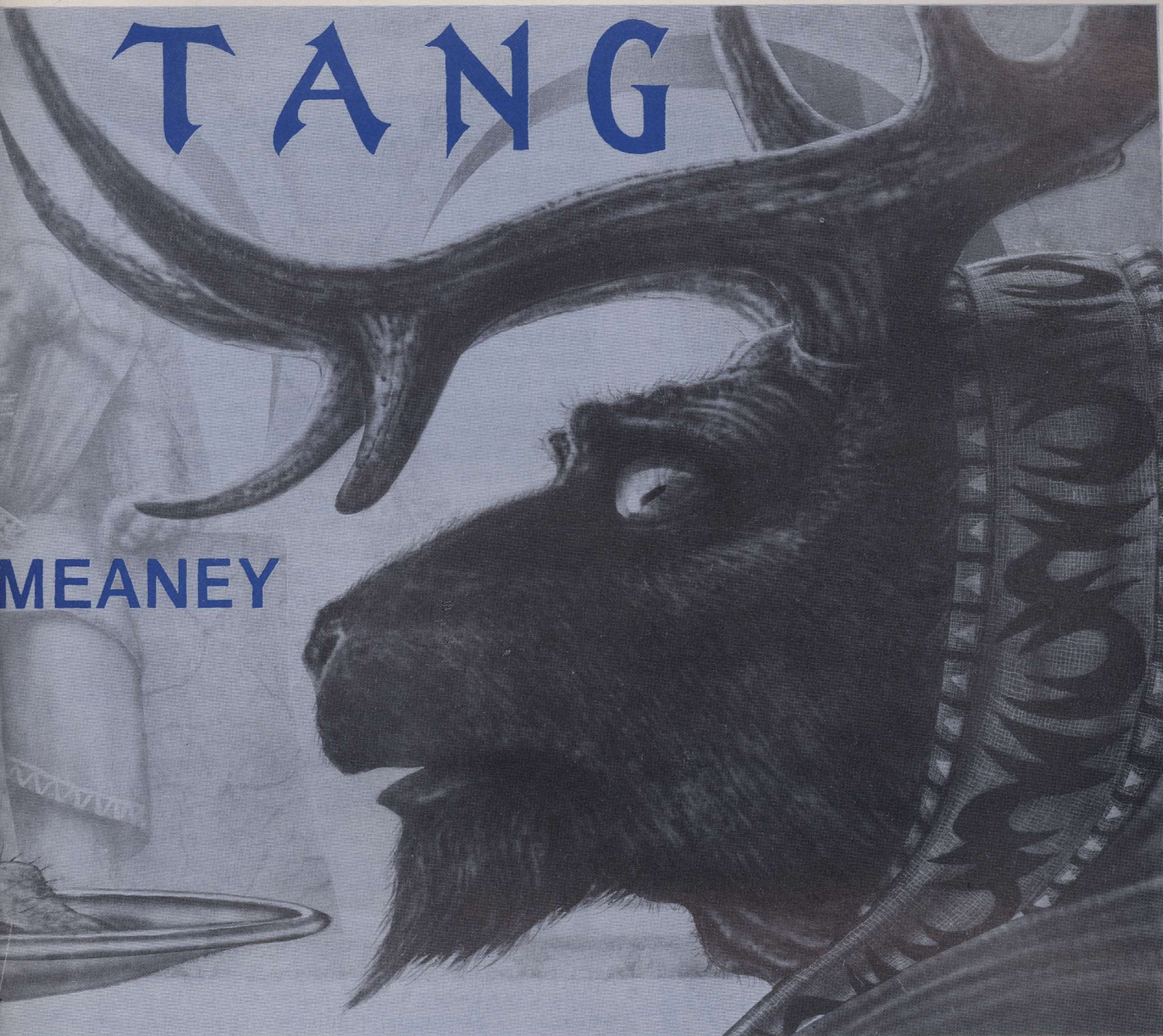
– Dad? he queried. You're not scared, are you?

The answering scent was reassuring. – Everything will be fine, son.

They walked out into the bright Central Plaza, a

TANG

MEANEY



Illustrations by Gerry Grace

vast circular paved area dotted with passers-by, as Sharp was analysing the aftertaste of Father's reply. The bitter hint of fear was unmistakable.

Sharp straightened his robe as they ascended the Forum's gleaming steps – flanked by two bannermen, their scarlet and gold standards fluttering in the breeze – and entered the shaded atrium. In dark alcoves draped with odour-absorbing ivy for privacy, lobbyists were discreetly cajoling or bribing their way through tangles of bureaucracy.

Sharp wanted to take Father's hand, but that would not be dignified. Patience. Two servants scurried past with covered pots. A hint of amusement from Father surprised Sharp, since Father never made fun of lower castes. Maybe it reminded him of yesterday morning.

Mother and Bittersweet had been with them on the family cart, drawn slowly by plodding draught beasts through the outlying settlements. In a village with open courtyards, in view of the city walls, a poor family had been eating their vegetables right out in the open, where anybody could see them feeding. Bitter-

sweet had jumped around hilariously, until Mother's disapproval had quelled her. Poverty was not funny.

Having a younger sister was a complete pain, but Sharp wished she were here, not back at the hostel. The Forum's atmosphere was too stuffy.

An unmistakable scent. Tang! Father was being summoned.

The Council Chamber was a hemisphere, decorated by the finest artists. Its central skylight admitted a pillar of sunlight, under which a white marble armchair shone brilliantly. In the surrounding gloom, three concentric circles of benches held only a handful of Council Elders, although in a full Council session they would be packed. Today's few attendees sat as far apart as possible. At least one of them was asleep.

Sharp watched Father walk slowly, dignified, along the blue strip of carpet leading to the chair. Sharp jumped at a touch on his shoulder. A servant was indicating a public gallery where Sharp could sit. As Sharp sat down on a low uncomfortable bench, he saw a delicate silver-furred maiden looking at him, nostrils wide. Demurely, she slipped her robe's cowl

forwards to hide her face. Sharp, entranced, forgot for a moment why he was here.

The Chief Librarian, trailed by four acolytes bearing silk-wrapped instruments, was already standing beside Father's chair. The slender Librarian looked distinguished, fur touched with white, once-heavy antlers hollowed and brittle with age. His sleeveless robe revealed long arms bearing complex whorls of scars, pale against his fur.

The Librarian launched upon a common-language sermon, designed to invoke racial memories of evolution from the pre-civilized plains. Sharp yawned. Couldn't they just get on with it? He thought he sensed the maiden watching him, but when he looked her cowl was pulled lower and her attention was on Father.

Sharp had often watched Architects and Engineers copying Father's designs in clay. And Father's intricate silver sculptures, his main hobby, were often exhibited in the Community Hall. In his sandpits, Father plotted the courses of the stars in the night-sky, analysing their movements. Among the people of their own settlement, descended from a dark northern tribe, Father was considered brilliant. Mature in his profession, Father was the first immigrant from their settlement to be invited to Share his knowledge in the city. When he was younger, Sharp used to have a fantasy of Father being uplifted to the Council Elders caste. He hadn't realized how stuffy and old the Elders would be.

Bronze glinted as the lead acolyte unwrapped the small sickle and handed it to the Chief Librarian with a bow. Father's face was impassive. This was it! The Chief Librarian's hand was raised high, then swept down swiftly, carving a slender slice from Father's shoulder. Did the Librarian wince? Then two acolytes rushed forward with goblet and platter. Father's face was tight with agony as they squeezed blood into the goblet, but not the slightest scent of pain escaped him.

Yes, Father! Sharp's chest filled with pride as the Librarian bore his offerings to the Prime Elder, ceremoniously extending the golden plate as the Elder picked up the offering between thumb and forefinger and raised it...

The Prime Elder spat Father's offering onto the floor, face twisted with revulsion. Numbness swept over Sharp. The red goblet was a stark accusation, glistening on the pristine floor.

They gave Father another chance. The Secondary Elder, trembling, also tried. The taste was too bitter and nothing passed his lips.

Father rose quietly, shoulders bowed. An awful aroma of disgust arose from the Elders and the public gallery. Sharp went helplessly to his Father's side.

As they left, Sharp saw the silver-furred maiden rubbing a disgusted hand across her nose. He hated Father then, hated his own dark fur, a damning genetic indictment. They were bitter immigrants, unable to share knowledge with the indigenous people of their new homeland.

It was evening when they reached the hostel on the outskirts of Mint City, near one of the many fragrant gardens which gave the city its name. Once inside the foyer, Sharp pretended an urgent need to go to the eating room. He didn't want to witness Father's explanations to Mother and Bittersweet.

Avoiding the hostel staff, Sharp took a flight of stairs up to the roof garden. It was almost deserted and, as night fell, the few remaining guests went down to their rooms. Sharp sat on the small lawn, drinking in the herbal border's scents. He began to shiver as the temperature dropped. In the clear night sky, stars twinkled, silver against black.

Suddenly, like an omen, a green light burst into being far away, out over distant hills. Something was falling – no, floating – down to the ground. It was like nothing he had ever seen or heard about.

Sharp scrambled to his feet, frightened. He went indoors, fumbled his way down dark stairs till he reached a corridor lit by sweet candles. Mother's and Father's room. There was no scent of conversation from inside. Asleep. He had to waken Father –

But who was Father to spread the knowledge of whatever Sharp had seen? Trembling with self-loathing, Sharp backed away. Careful not to betray any scent, he went to Bittersweet's door and looked in. His sister was sleeping, a faint trace of milk and blood staining her lips, from her evening lesson with Mother. Always a quick learner. Sharp looked at her fondly, forgiving her for being such a brat. Time to leave.

He took his warmest cloak and – trying to be practical, trying not to be embarrassed – a bag of vegetables from the discreet cupboard in his room. If necessary he could survive on vegetation growing wild in the hills. A nauseating thought.

He slipped out of the hostel. Unsure of his destination, certain only that he could not stay where he was, Sharp shrugged his cloak around his shoulders, and set off down the empty road which led out into the night.

Rekka Chandri felt sick with fear as she set up her camp. The first thing she unpacked was her set of microwards, and she set them in the ground, hands trembling, before turning her attention to the rest of the gear. The single heaviest item was the biofact, two metres long, its mass mostly in its protective casing. She tugged it onto a level patch of ground – covered in a close analogue of grass – in the centre of her campsite. Then she booted it up and invoked the build program for her beeswarm. Okay, she told herself, you can start relaxing now.

She couldn't, of course. A month ago she had been working in a warm biotech lab on the outskirts of chilly elegant Zurich, which itself was like a different world from the circumstances of her childhood. She spent her days sitting in front of a terminal, programming and testing, and loved it. But now she was alone on a new world. Some of her friends in grad school had been adrenaline junkies – a climber, two skydivers, a powerglide racer. But quiet unassuming home-loving Rekka had taken the biggest jump of all, snatching the unique opportunity when her employers won the UNSA contract and the bioanthropologist team-members had all, prosaically, contracted flu. (The anti-virus virus was as bad as leaving the flu untreated.) Management had asked, and she had accepted, shutting out her fear.

I've never even been on a camping trip, she thought. And now I'm alone for six months, on a world too new to be called anything other than "EM36."

A month ago, the *mu*-space ship which discovered this place had performed one orbit, spotted probable civilization – the twelfth such world, if true – then left immediately. Civilization meant low-key research, and Rekka, little Rekka Chandri, was the first human being to set foot upon this world.

In the pale glow of a small lamp, she opened a self-heating carton of vegetable curry. She had supplies for a week, but should be able to turn the biofact over to manufacturing food in a day or two. During her three weeks training at a UNSA flight centre, the rations had seemed inedible. Now, the same food tasted heavenly.

Meal over, she unshipped bed and tent from the small carrying-pack and unfolded them both. What else to do?

I've been fussing around inside the lamplight, she realized. As though I were in a room.

Taking a deep breath, she turned out the light.

Rekka gasped.

There were no eerie sounds, no eyes glinting in the surrounding darkness. Yet she felt stripped by the cool air, shaken by the steady ground. As her eyes adapted, the stars grew bright in a black sky which had never known pollution, the Milky Way arcing straight overhead. A deep realization: she was alien here.

She sat down on the ground beside the faintly humming biofact. Time for her routine. Rekka slowly twisted her body into the intricate postures of Hatha Yoga. Wherever she was, she carried this discipline inside her. Slowly, she relaxed.

Rekka crawled into her small tent, which she kept tuned to transparency. Nagging doubts returned. The microwards would function as alarms, but their ultrasonic defences might be useless. She wanted to go home. She had a fantasy, of the ship bursting through from *mu*-space in an explosion of light, coming to pick her up. But that was six months away. The contract said so.

She picked up a flat portable screen and scrolled through her document file, characters glowing strongly in the dark. She browsed through the Terms of Reference for her assignment. Biochemical, ecological research. Anthropological observation, from a distance. Her objectives were to produce overview reports in each of those three fields. Large expeditions had twice caused disaster on other worlds. Current procedures specified one person only, very low-key, with full project control. She lay back and wondered just what they thought one person on her own could accomplish.

Waking up was a surprise, because she had thought sleep would never come. She lay back looking at a spectacular dawn, pale lime and silver grey painting the sky. Her body tingled with anticipation. Her world!

When she sat up there was a sudden flurry of movement. Something large and dark shot into the purple undergrowth which surrounded her hillside camp. What was that? Just one impression endured: startling amber eyes, almost feline but slitted horizontally, profoundly curious. And intelligent.

Rekka began to shake.

Sharp did not retreat far. Sniffing the changing wind currents, he moved to a position that should remain downwind. Crouched within

fragrant bushes for further cover, he strained to track the creature's scent. It moved strange artefacts around its campsite. Though solitary and small, it bore objects as intricate and manufactured as Father's sculptures, and its hands were as agile as a person's, though having only one thumb apiece. Was it intelligent?

Its species was unknown to Sharp's race memory, so its habitat must be distant. Was it an outcast, casteless like him?

The thought crystallized. I am casteless, he realized, without friends or code of conduct. He felt childhood drop away from him, felt the instinctive adult strength of his northern nomadic ancestors well up inside him. Strangely without fear, he stepped out of cover and walked into the creature's camp.

It rose from its haunches, its head coming no higher than Sharp's mid-torso. Its coverings were definitely clothing. His interior ear detected a faint sound, not unpleasant. He half noticed a dozen or so black insects hovering above him, curiously scentless, tracking his movements.

Sharp broadcast a greeting. The slender creature stood straighter, muscles taut. Its answering scent was strangely flat, without overtones. Less than primitive.

Sharp named himself. The creature's response was to rush over to its burnished metal box, and stare at intricate patterns of light on its surface. Patience. He sniffed at the creature, trying to guess its scent range, trying to attune to its strange bodily chemistry.

Sharp! His own name came blasting back at him from the metal box.

Hearts thumping, Sharp emitted a wild uncontrolled blast of happiness. Aided by the creature's device, they could communicate! Sharp, casteless and untouchable, would yet taste knowledge beyond the imagination of the Council Elders.

The thought made him salivate profusely.

For Rekka, the creature's presence was a brooding shadow watching her with deep amber eyes. Hunkered down on its haunches, its ursine body was huge, visibly muscular beneath the dark fur. Its short sleeveless robe, hood thrown back, was fine and light, decorative more than protective. In that seated posture, its head was level with hers. It watched patiently as she moved about the camp. She had the sense that it was keeping still so as not to alarm her. Was her fear so evident?

A light rain began to fall, softer than tears. Rekka walked slowly up to the creature, wiping back the raindrops from her forehead, feeling shaky inside and hoping that it didn't show. Stopping in front of it, she reached out and touched its cheek. Soft fur over hard bone. Its face was long, almost baboon-like, but wide-jawed. Rekka swallowed as it took her hand in its own great double-thumbed mitt, its thick fingers like rope. It held her hand palm up, and licked it once, its pale brown tongue rasping gently. Rekka shivered. She closed her eyes. This close, the warm smell of its damp fur reminded her of her step-parents' dog shaking himself indoors after a rainy walk.

It released her, and she opened her eyes. Backing away carefully, she returned to her biofact in the centre of the campsite.

She felt light-headed. Alternating between elation and fear, Rekka tried to concentrate on reprogramming the biofact so it could broadcast to the creature. Twice she had to repeat commands because her voice was shaky. All the time she watched the alien – no, no, she was the alien – watched the native who, she arbitrarily decided, was probably male. She referred to him as Whiff in the journal entries which she dictated to the two bees who hovered over her, logging every move on video.

With this top-of-the-range biofact, she was able to set up three main processes running in parallel. The highest priority task was encoding/decoding simple commands and queries in Whiff's language. The second jobstream, using the same framework modules to analyse Whiff's biochemistry, was the evolution of killer bees which would protect her should Whiff's curiosity turn to rage.

The third task was considerably more speculative. The biofact was evolving nanospectrometers which would fit her bees. If it worked, she would have a way of eavesdropping on Whiff's fellows.

By the end of the day, unbelievably, she was able to carry out a conversation with her new friend, so long as they both stayed within about ten feet of the biofact.

"Whiff? Raise right hand." The biofact translated her voice command into odour. The first time it had succeeded in broadcasting a sentence, Whiff's nostrils had flared and his slitted amber eyes had widened to round black circles.

This time, Whiff calmly raised a powerful-looking arm. Though the rain had stopped some time ago, his fur still looked a little damp and stringy.

"Rekka? Sit." The biofact decoded Whiff's scent and voiced it neutrally. Rekka sat down obediently. The vocabulary of posture and body parts was as far as they'd got. But that little was a great deal, childish though their communication was.

She chuckled to herself, at the thought of replaying her bees' video log in six months time, back on Earth. Kindergarten for cuddly aliens.

Sitting down on the hard ground made her realize how tired she was. Running on adrenaline all day, she had not even eaten. Groaning, Rekka fetched two cartons of rations from the pack by her tent. Should she offer him food? She pressed the heating tag on one carton, waited 30 seconds, and opened it. Watching Whiff, she picked up a vegetable samosa with her fingers and bit into it.

Whiff turned and lurched out of the camp. A part of Rekka's mind noted that Whiff walked bipedally, though she had expected he might drop to all fours.

"Three bees – follow Whiff."

Would Whiff come back? She remembered her sudden intuition that his exotic fragrance, suddenly broadcast when they met, had not been accidental, but a form of communication. She replayed the moment several times in her mind, savouring it. Beautiful. She had been nobody's first choice for this project – would not even have picked herself – but she had succeeded. And if this turned into a programming assignment, well, she could practically make a biofact sit up and beg.

The fragrance of her meal was suddenly enticing. She tucked in ravenously.

Later that night, going through the video logs of her beeswarm, she watched the recorded image of Whiff munching raw vegetables, solitary in the undergrowth, his massively broad shoulders rounded, almost hunched. Almost furtive, though that might be taking common body language too far. The signs of parallel evolution were startling enough already: of the other inhabited worlds, only one other even held organisms which had evolved jointed limbs and endoskeletons.

Did Whiff need to eat alone? Were his reasons biological, religious, aesthetic? She resolved not to eat whenever he was near. If he returned.

That night her dreams were haunted by dark looming shapes. Broad shouldered and strong. Sometimes warm and protective, sometimes hard and dangerous. Vishnu or Shiva, preserver or destroyer, it was impossible to tell.

Once, when she woke in the dark with tears stinging her eyes, she thought she had dreamed of her biological mother. She had been weeping in her sleep. Unseen in the night, she knew, her tiny bees were hovering outside her transparent tent, logging everything. Let them. Let them all know how scared she was.

Sharp remembered his sister Bittersweet's antics when she had seen the untouchables eating vegetables in public. Think of the strange creature as intelligent but not civilized, he told himself. Deal with it.

The next day, he forced himself to return to the frail creature's camp. Thankfully, it didn't try to eat in front of him again. He did not think he would have been able to come back another time.

Conversation progressed a little. Again, Sharp spent the night in cold misery away from the camp. On the third night, he slept inside the camp perimeter, near the almost-clear sleeping-dwelling. Its heat source kept him comfortably warm.

Over the coming days, Sharp found the slender creature capable of understanding complex statements, including different tenses. Though small, it was very intelligent. Sharp also began to watch the insects closely.

At night, he would remember how alone he was, and long for his family, his caste fellows, the thousand and subtle hints that told him at any time of day what he ought to be doing, reminding him he was part of a community.

The pains of adulthood were running through his body as it changed. Triggered by the stress of running away? The child Sharp, who had been himself just days ago, seemed more and more a distant dream.

The creature's metal box, the one about the size of Father's tool chest, contained a crystal window holding blurred moving images. After the creature had examined Sharp's eyes with strange instruments, it adjusted the box so the pictures were clear. Somehow the box projected what the creature's trained insects saw!

Sharp spent time watching the images, sitting beside the creature. He had grown used to its scent, could smell some of its emotions even before it used the wonderful box to translate sound into common-

language. It was fascinated, like him, by the sights in the window.

Such sights! Scenes from Mint City, and other cities he did not recognize, with their own distinctive towers and domes. Scenes of nomadic life on the plains, invoking Sharp's ancestral memories. The first time they watched a Sharing, Sharp could not look away. The creature, though, trembled violently and emptied the contents of its stomach on the ground. Sharp puzzled over the significance of this.

For a while the insects mostly spied on Sharings, and on parents – faces etched with pain – teaching their voracious young. The creature seemed fascinated. Eventually, its box became capable of transmitting crude scents picked up by the roving insects, and Sharp could get a vague idea of a lesson's content.

One day, though, the insects observed a type of meeting which Sharp had not thought about before. It was a convocation of Librarians, in a vast gathering of tents on the plains. That was not unusual, for their unique caste depended on knowledge sharing, though they transmitted little of their own knowledge to other castes. But their furs! Though similarly robed, the Librarians had a vast range of fur coloration. Some were striped or dappled! How could such a mix of races possibly share anything?

When they began to use sandpits and clay tablets, Sharp turned away in boredom and began to poke about the camp. Everyone knew vaguely about the writing of Librarians, an arcane and useless skill. The creature, though, continued watching closely.

Sharp thought. Father was unpalatable in Mint City. But Librarians of different races needed more than the scents of common-language with which to share their knowledge. Limited and linear though this writing was, maybe the creature was right to be interested. He returned to the screen; and he and the creature watched together. Watched, and learned.

For days the images of blood and pain haunted Rekka's waking moments as well as her sleep. Her first sight of a Sharing was something that would live with her always. It was not until later, when she saw parents sacrificing parts of themselves for their otherwise vegetarian young to feed on, that she guessed the ceremony's function. Such love their parents must feel for their offspring! Dangerous to anthropomorphize again, but they seemed nobler in their pain than humans. She thought of her step-parents' kindness and warmth. Yet they had never made such sacrifices.

With an increasing number of observations, she noticed no cases where sharing took place beyond the bounds of close genetic relationships. She must be safe from Whiff. Nevertheless, she reprogrammed six of her most potent killer bees to follow closely, buzzing around her head, on guard at all times.

For exercise, as the weeks passed, they began to take long rambles around the picturesque hills, occasionally venturing close to villages and watching the inhabitants. Rekka trusted her friend to keep them downwind. She was becoming more aware of scent, and now referred to him as "Sharp" in her journal entries.

She stayed close to him on their excursions, admiring



his strong economic movements, the play of muscles beneath his dark fur. Sometimes the wind ruffled that fur, like ripples on wheatfields. Often unconsciously, she would stroke him as they walked. Small dark buds on his forehead, unnoticed when they had first met, now seemed to Rekka to be growing bigger by the day. Soon, she guessed, antlers would begin to sprout. She thought that puberty might be a very rapid process for Sharp's people.

On their return to camp, Rekka would always feel a renewed enthusiasm for the project, a spring of boundless energy within her. She worked hard on the biofact's AI interface, developing the thinkware to learn the Librarians' secret written language and teach it to Sharp. She was vaguely aware of neglecting the rest of her research, but this was of prime importance.

One afternoon, 40 days into the project, she found herself staring at Sharp's strong form and blushing. Warmth spread across her entire body. The local male and female forms were closely analogous to Earth genders, and her bees' logs had long since confirmed Sharp's maleness. Their reproductive processes were related, closely enough for some form of mutual gratification —

Whimpering, fighting her desire, Rekka retreated to her tent, crawled inside and sealed it tight behind her. With longing eyes, she watched Sharp continue at his lessons, pretending to be unaware of her.

The creature became less tractable over the coming days, but Sharp hardly cared. He became immersed in this new form of knowledge, swimming in writing like a fish. Fish were a newly unearthed ancestral memory.

The insects spied on hundreds of texts. To read about painting, say, was not to know how painting felt, or to absorb the physical technique. Yet there was much knowledge, of a sort.

The creature created a portable crystal window. Sharp could finger-trace writing on it, or the creature's box could cause writing to etch itself onto the window. Poorly, the mechanism could translate some simple common-language.

He learned that the frail creature was female. Through scent and script, they moved on to increasingly abstract conversations.

Months later, Sharp was seated on a small carbon-fibre camp-stool while Rekka, leaning against his massive furred shoulder, rubbed soothing cream around the roots of his antlers, obsidian fractals spreading proudly from his brow. The itchiness, currently intense, would pass in a few days. There was no denying it: he was an adult, in a community of only two. No matter. He squeezed his eyes shut in pleasure.

"That feels good." Sharp's synthesized voice came from his portable screen, lying on the ground at his feet. The system had evolved to full common-language voice translation.

"Okay. You're just about done." Rekka's words were translated into a mixture of scent, issued from transmitters on the portable screen, and characters displayed on its surface.

She wiped her hands on a small towel, then picked

up a brush to groom Sharp's fur. He held up a hand to stop her, thumbs spread wide.

"Your turn for pleasure," he said.

"OK."

She could imagine the laughter when sequences like this would be played back from her log, but she was past caring. She sat down on the ground in front of Sharp, and he began to give her a back and neck massage, expertly using his iron-hard fingers to dig into the knots of muscle tension. His grip was strong enough to snap her spine, if he so desired.

"The ship will be here in five days," said Sharp.

"That's right." Rekka closed her eyes and moaned in pleasure. She would have preferred to take her clothes off, but her bees were recording, as always. Maybe she did care what her employers would think.

"And you'll be going home. You'll see your parents."

"Yeah. Well...they're not my real, biological, parents. They adopted me."

Sharp paused in his massage. "Your real parents died?" He knew that humans died without leaving memories in their descendants, and felt profoundly sad for them.

"My real mother tried to kill me." Rekka leaned back against Sharp. "I was born in an area of Earth where mothers still try to murder their daughters, being worthless burdens who cannot earn their way."

"A waste," said Sharp, suppressing a shudder.

Rekka shrugged. "I went back once, to the village near the rescue mission, but I was a stranger there. There was no role for me to play."

"Like me," said Sharp. "Casteless."

"Just like you, my friend." She leaned her head back against his heavy warm chest.

Friend. The concept of friendship included mutual tasting but, as with so much else, Sharp reminded himself that the scents were not literally true. Sharing ceremonies upset Rekka, he now understood, almost as much as Earth relationships upset him.

"Will you take me with you?" asked Sharp.

Rekka thought a long time before answering.

"Yes," she said.

Sharp's teeth closed gently on her shoulder. A brief warm lick, and then he released her.

The night before the ship was due to arrive, to take them to a world beyond the sky's black dome, Sharp jogged slowly away from the camp. A handful of Rekka's bees followed him. Rekka had not asked why he needed to go. He did not really know why.

The bees were more than spying devices. Rekka had recently used them to take tiny portions of people's bodies, a notion Sharp had found disquieting at first. Humans stored their memories in their bodies, in their brains, yet could not transmit them. Rekka was investigating the superior way in which Sharp's people remembered things.

He jogged for a long time, until he reached the settlement. Lungs burning, trying not to transmit scents of exhaustion, he walked slowly through the wide streets, past low huts and grand villas, to his parents' two-storied house.

He walked around to the small courtyard at the back, and saw Father's silhouette against the drapes, his shadow made huge by the candlelight.

Father! Sharp felt like a child again.

Afraid to go in, unable to retreat, Sharp froze. Then a sudden movement at a ground-level window brought him back to his senses.

– Sharp?

– Bittersweet!

– You're alive! Where have you been?

His sister's lithe form slipped over the windowsill and rushed into his arms. Sharp hugged her mightily.

– Mother and Father, how are they?

Bittersweet stepped back. – Father...has not worked much, since you ran away. We searched for ages...Are you back for always?

– Not yet, sweet sister. Soon I'll know enough, that they can never cast us out. I promise.

Bittersweet reached up to touch his antlers, gently.

– You've grown, big brother.

Sharp started to reply but stopped, raising his head and sniffing. Strangers, not from the settlement. Maybe a dozen of them, coming down the main street in the darkness.

Bittersweet grabbed his arm.

– Proctors from the city guard. There are patrols nowadays. Rumours of lights and strange creatures up in the hills.

Over the courtyard wall, faintly against the night sky, Sharp could see the bobbing outline of the tops of the standards carried by the troop's bannermen.

– Sharp? Don't go!

Sharp disengaged himself from her grip.

– I've learned much, little sister. We can think for ourselves, without people around us at every moment. Remember that. Tell Father...I don't hate him, though I thought so at first. Tell him, his dishonour will be forgotten. I swear it!

Then Sharp turned and slipped out through a narrow gap in the courtyard wall, into the street. An alarm scent carried on a draught. The proctors! Sharp dodged down the smallest alleyways, running hard, heading for the area where the settlement came right up to shoulder-high scrub growth, full of thorns and very fragrant.

He ran out into the thorny scrub, pushing hard, ignoring the pain, and disappeared into the night.

Rekka and Sharp stood in the centre of the campsite looking upwards, hand in hand, but not so close that their position could be mistaken for a struggle. A blaze of light, a crack of sound, and a huge *mu*-space ship was hanging over them like a great silver bird. A tiny automated shuttle slipped out of a hold and began its descent.

“There are two of us coming up,” said Rekka into her wrist comm.

“Really? That should be interesting.” The pilot's voice was dry. The wrist-comm screen remained blank, but she sounded about Rekka's age. “I think that contravenes the spirit of the regulations, if not the letter.”

“Nevertheless...” began Rekka.

“Please, no arguments from me. I could give a rat's ass what the bureaucrats think. If you're coming, better get in the shuttle quickly. You have an armed raiding party heading towards you.”

“I know.” Sentimentally, Rekka had recalled most of her beeswarm and packed them away for shipment.

A few, though, remained on sentry duty and would self-destruct after her departure. Some of those bees were transmitting pictures of a squad of proctors moving steadily through the undergrowth, less than two kilometres away.

Rekka and Sharp boarded the small shuttle. The biofact, which Sharp carried easily in one hand, was rapidly transmitting his physiological profile to the shuttle's medical systems. Rekka and Sharp strapped in. Though Sharp's seat attempted to adjust itself to his shape, it was still half the required size, and he shifted uncomfortably.

“Remember, we'll be asleep during the trip,” said Rekka, wincing as her chair inserted a hypodermic into her hand. “We can't survive the transition to *mu*-space otherwise.”

“What about the pilot?” asked Sharp. His portable screen, hanging by a cord round his neck, was still communicating via the biofact's translation program.

The pilot's voice broke in from a speaker. “We're not quite human any more. We find the real universe pretty uncomfortable, in fact.”

Sharp's reply was translated as “Oh.”

By the time the shuttle had completed docking in its hold, its two passengers were fast asleep.

Rekka's employers were delighted with their preliminary scan of her assignment logs. Less than pleased with her presumption in bringing back Sharp, nevertheless they acknowledged that she had more than met her objectives. Maybe Sharp's presence would speed up investigation of the memory mechanism.

On her first day out of quarantine, three of her bosses took her to dinner at an exclusive restaurant overlooking the placid mirror of Lake Geneva.

Rekka, in her new evening gown, examined the other diners as though they were another species. Some of them were eating meat. She had spent her early childhood in a culture where the number of meat-eaters was growing – as half the population attempted to throw off the traditions of Hinduist-Buddhist doctrine – in contrast to the rest of the world. She steeled herself when one of her own table companions ordered steak.

When the meal arrived, however, it was the sight of people eating vegetables in public which broke her. She rushed to the ladies' room and promptly threw up.

Several months later, Rekka's divisional director, a prematurely balding man called Simon Simmonds, called her into his office. His shaky voice seemed always on the verge of a stutter.

“We have an issue with UNSA regarding EM36. They haven't authorized payment of our latest invoice.”

“Oh. Why's that?” Rekka was learning the system here. Keep things impersonal, and blame the system rather than people when things broke down... at least in public. In the background, back-stabbing as usual.

“It seems Sharp is – causing some problems at their Education Centre,” said Simmonds.

“He looked okay to me last Thursday.” She tried to see him once or twice a week. The people who were both studying and teaching Sharp had gelled into a very happy team.

"The trouble is, everything's been too okay. Sharp has been allowed free access to any information on the Infonet, public domain or UNSA-confidential. They've fallen over backwards to satisfy its – his – every whim."

"Why is that our problem?"

"Because... Well, I'm not sure how to put this. They think that Sharp has been manipulating them with, um, pheromones." Simmonds looked uncomfortable.

"Right." Rekka reached into her pocket with a swiftness which made Simmonds jump. She dropped two small fibrous pellets on his desktop.

"What are those?"

"Nose filters. Very useful, if you don't want Sharp twisting you round his little finger."

Simmonds' face went blotchy. "You mean you knew this all the time?"

"After the first couple of weeks, when I began to feel – let's say, desires for him. I sealed myself in my tent till he was out of the way, then grew these in the biofact in about two minutes flat."

When Simmonds said nothing, Rekka added, "Sharp's natural behaviour is no reason not to pay our invoice, Simon. The standard terms and conditions give them full rights to the beeswarm logs and absolutely nothing else."

"We have a relationship to maintain, Rekka. UNSA could become our biggest client. Our bio-memory research has given us a great deal of kudos."

Rekka said nothing, giving Simmonds a chance to remember just who had performed "our" research.

"Anyway." Simmonds cleared his throat. "They've set up a return mission, to return him to his native habitat."

"And you want me to accompany him?" asked Rekka, scratching at a small spot on the back of her hand.

"No. Not at all. That's not, um, not what they..." His voice trailed off. There was a worried look in his eyes.

"Thank you, Simon," she said. "Shall we let them know now?"

She dictated a memo to UNSA on his terminal, and waited until he had confirmed and sent it.

Simmonds watched her with a bemused expression.

"I'd better get packed for good old EM36," said Rekka. "Poor name, really. Lacks romance. We could do with more romance, don't you think?"

"Ah –" Simmonds cleared his throat. "Rekka? I wondered if you were, ah, free tonight –"

"Sorry," she said gently. "I really do have to pack. I'll see you when I get back."

She left Simmonds' office and headed back to her lab, rubbing her hand as she walked. She felt both guilty and smug about her handling of Simmonds, and disturbed by both feelings. She rubbed her hand again. Now that the small adhesive patch was gone, the spot where her Simmonds-manipulating pheromones had been stored was itching like crazy.

As they were strapping themselves into the shuttle at Zurich, Sharp turned his large head carefully, making sure not to hit anything with his antlers. "A man called Simmonds gave me a message for you." The voice issued from a tiny speaker at his

throat, the latest upgrade to his translation system.

"What?" Rekka stiffened.

"You are not pleased?" said Sharp. "He said, the first human on a planet names it. UNSA standard terms and conditions."

"Really?"

"He also said, bring back some duty-free scent."

Rekka laughed. "Maybe I misjudged him."

"Humans," said Sharp, his upgraded speech system injecting wry overtones.

"So what do you – ouch – really think of Earth?" She laid her head back against the headrest as the tranquillizing injection took hold.

Sharp's eyes grew slitted, turning almost yellow. "Your Elders, like mine, taste the works of others for amusement, furnish their lives with artefacts they never make themselves."

Did he mean the rich? Politicians? Was this the same goofy young male she had befriended less than a year ago?

"Do you really think –?" Rekka closed her eyes as the cabin seemed to sway. It was a short step from there to drifting away entirely.

They were waiting in a small courtyard, with hanging plants bearing pale orange flowers, a tiny fountain tinkling in its centre. Outside, one of the great roads led to the plaza, maybe a kilometre away in the very centre of the city. Rekka was surrounded by huge muscular males in ornate robes, massive antlers sweeping the air as they looked around. She felt tiny and weak. Though they blocked her view, she could hear the shuffling footsteps of thousands of their people passing by on the road outside, the sense of their presence like a tangible weight upon her. She felt shaky with anticipation.

She tuned her wrist comm screen to her beeswarm's realtime video, flicking through the images from each bee in turn. Some images were jerking chaotically – turbulence round the great columns ringing the plaza – but the day was clear and sunny and most of her bees were transmitting perfect pictures.

The massed rows of scarlet and gold banners cracked like whips in the breeze, stretching across the vast width of Mint City's Central Plaza. Row upon row of Elders, from all the cities of the continent, sitting expectantly upon their velvet-cushioned seats, filled the plaza as though it were some gigantic stadium. There had not been such a gathering in a thousand years.

At each of the gateways which ringed the plaza, thronging crowds were milling, eager to get in. Ten thousand of them had already flooded through the archways. Proctors of the City Guard were now letting them through in a more controlled fashion, handing a flat crystalline plate to each spectator as they entered. Inside, it was hard to think in the mind-numbing complexity of scents.

An empty seat of honour was arranged on a wide dais facing the Elders. Opposite, in the first row of Prime Elders, were three empty stools. A narrow roadway of scarlet carpet ran from one gateway directly to the plaza's centre, past the front row of the most eminent Elders and terminating at the raised seat waiting for the guest of honour.

Along the red roadway came a glinting bronze wagon, drawn by a dozen draught beasts. It halted before the Elders, and a bewildered family of three were helped down by massive broad-shouldered proctors and led to the cushioned stools in the first row. Surrounded by Prime Elders, they scarcely dared to look around, almost too scared to breathe.

The scents of the crowd became cloyed with expectancy at the first signs of the formal procession. A long column of bannermen walked through an archway, followed by Librarians and other dignitaries in ornate robes. In their midst walked Sharp and Rekka, both visibly trembling.

Though Rekka could not decipher the crowd's scents directly, she felt powerfully uplifted as she walked by Sharp's side along the passageway through the vast crowd. It was headily unreal, a maelstrom of impressions: here a vast square-jawed wide-antlered head silhouetted against the sky, there a youngster's wide amber eyes, a blue brocaded robe, pelts of grey, of brown, of black, even something like a silver tabby. Rustling, shuffling natural sounds amplified ten-thousandfold. An uproar of scents instead of voices, keen and intoxicating, stinging her nose and clearing her head.

Suddenly Sharp turned, and looked at three individuals, plainly robed, out of place among this section of the crowd, where the rest were older males with dull grey antlers and white-tipped fur, with rich clothes covering their frail limbs. Rekka, in a moment of sudden intuition, knew she was looking at Sharp's abandoned family.

They had caught Sharp's scent as the procession drew near. Father's head was lifted proudly, amber eyes wide at his lost son's sudden preeminence. Mother and Bittersweet radiated love and welcome. Sharp felt their love flowing into him and sustaining him... Rekka knew this, could feel it as though she were one of Sharp's people. She knew, too, how scared he was. She touched Sharp's arm gently, feeling the trembling beneath his soft fur. He was depending on her, depending on his family, to support him. For he, the outcast, was going to address this great audience and, by extension, every civilized being upon this planet.

Sharp ascended to the chair of honour, flanked by the Chief Librarians of a dozen major cities. Rekka, light-headed, climbed the dais with difficulty and stood at Sharp's side.

- I return to you from a city beyond the sky.

Awe swept the crowds. Sharp's scents were reproduced by the crystal pads they were holding, simultaneously broadcasting to all of the thousands in the plaza. A tiny earplug provided a voice translation for Rekka, a pleasant baritone talking in her right ear.

- I bring knowledge of arts unknown to our peoples, from a species who can become our friends.

There were many Librarians scattered among the onlookers. As written script began to flow across the crystal screens, the Librarians translated, supplementing with common-language scents.

- The lights in the crystals are language. With them, we can talk to humans. And to each other.

Neophyte Librarians twitched nervously as their caste's knowledge was made public, but the Chief



Librarians, tall and dignified behind Sharp's chair on the dais, made no movement. They all knew Sharp's announcement in advance. Rekka gathered that the political intrigue had been complex, but she knew the vast majority supported this initiative.

Her vision stung; the image of the vast dark crowd, robed and antlered, was blurred with tears. Knowledge and civilization. Such a price Sharp's people had paid, a tithe of blood and pain, of suffering and sacrifice, for every advance. In her mind's eye she saw a tableau of grief stretching back through millions of years of evolutionary history. What a dream it was, to free them of such a burden!

Thinking this, she saw without comprehension the Chief Librarians fold back their robes and withdraw short bronze sickles. She felt Sharp's great paw take her hand, and raise it up to his mouth. His teeth closed gently round her hand.

"No!" she screamed.

Sharp released her.

"Rekka, stop!" The voice from his translation unit seemed subdued. "This is the only way to make my people learn."

Rekka looked into Sharp's amber eyes, full of fear, and froze.

"Please, Sharp—" She started to back off.

"Stay with me, Rekka. I'm scared."

Tears ran freely down her cheeks.

"I'll stay," she said.

She looked at Sharp's family. Their eyes were on their son, their bearing erect and proud.

Even before it started, she knew: this was no mere community sharing of a tiny slice. Sharp was to be honoured by an entire world. However awful the taste, his people needed this knowledge, and the Prime Elders would be forced to swallow it. There were hundreds of them here, thousands more of secondary Elders.

In her mind was one burning thought. Her beehive, poised above the plaza, could swoop and kill. She need only raise her wrist comm and speak a phrase, words loaded with certain death...

Rekka looked away. A procession of silver-furred maidens was approaching, delicate, elegant, strewing fragrant flower petals as Sharp's agony began. One of the maidens, seeing Sharp, seemed to falter, but recovered quickly. The dance-like movement continued. Curved lines of maidens, slowly crossing and re-crossing in intricate choreography, scattered blossoms from seemingly bottomless baskets, masking the pain. Throughout a ceremony that seemed to last a thousand years, petals fell like swirling snow.

Some unknown length of time later, Rekka was standing alone on a hillside overlooking the newly-renamed Sharp City. Its proud architecture was a monstrous joke, like the purple-flecked slope on which she stood and the beautifully clear sky above. Some things, she thought dully, were just too large to comprehend.

There was a clap like thunder high above her head, then the whining descent of the automatic shuttle. She should have been reluctant to leave, but she found herself at the small craft's hatch while it was still rocking on its landing gear.

She climbed in and strapped herself into the nearest

couch. She stared at the intricate console with unseeing eyes.

"Hello, Rekka." It was the same pilot's voice, coming from the intercom.

"Hello," she answered listlessly.

Acceleration pressed her into the couch as the shuttle rose.

"So what did you call her?" asked the pilot.

"Call? Who?"

"The planet. I heard your conversation on the trip out."

There was a pinprick of pain as the tranquillizer entered her hand.

"Name... Vijaya." There was a moment of clarity, when Rekka could see briefly beyond the pain. "Means... Victory."

Merciful sleep claimed her before the shuttle docked.

The great shining vessel made one complete orbit of Vijaya's blue and ochre sphere. For a moment it seemed to hang above it, like a vast gliding bird free of gravity's restraints. Then it disappeared into space, heading home.

John Meaney wrote "Spring Rain" (*Interzone* 61), "Sanctification" (issue 69) and "Timeslice" (issue 75). He lives in Kent.

FOR SALE

Interzone: The 2nd Anthology. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others – fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to IZ readers at just over half the original cover price – **£1.75** (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. (Now back in stock.) Copies are available from *Interzone* at **£3.50** each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

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Mittelwelt

Stephen Baxter

The antipodal bomber *Werde Was Du Bist* clung to its glittering launch rail. Oxygen vented angrily, and vapour drifted across the stark form of the Imperial German cross emblazoned on the volplane's gaudy hull.

To Michael Kilduff, the *Werde* looked like some grounded bird of prey.

High clouds coated an immense, domed sky. The wind cut through the woollen layers of Kilduff's flying suit, and made his bespectacled eyes water. *Christ. This is supposed to be July.* How long was he going to be kept waiting, before they let him board? He wrapped his arms around his body and tried not to shiver; German technicians watched him impassively.

The aerodrome was a splash of scorched concrete, here on the bare Baltic coast of northern Europe; the few buildings were squat and functional, and the bomber's two-mile launch rail was a shaft of silver pointing to the east, towards the old Prussian town of Stolp.

Kilduff was the only American at the 'drome. He felt utterly isolated, as if he were alone here at the huge, bleak heart of the *Mitteleuropa* of 1940.

"...Herr Kilduff."

The voice, from behind him, was female, precise. Kilduff turned.

"I am Oberstleutnant Guderian. Eva Guderian."

"Ah," he said. "The *Werde's* pilot. I've heard much about you, Oberstleutnant." He lifted his gloved hand tentatively, wondering whether to offer to shake.

Guderian watched his fumbling, making no effort to put him at his ease. Her face was square and stern, her eyes almost black, her hair invisible under her flight cap. Her flight coveralls were jet black, inscribed with the identity of her *Bombengeschwader* – the long-range bomber group to which she reported. "And I know of your reputation, and the engineering expertise you bring," Guderian said. Her intonation was clipped, economical. "As does the Kaiser, I might add."

"The Kaiser?" Kilduff glanced nervously around the aerodrome, at the parked fuel tankers, the observation bunkers, the little convoys of parked official vehicles. "Is the Kaiser here?"

Guderian smiled thinly, making Kilduff feel naive. *Of course he isn't here, Mike.* "Alas," Guderian said, "Kaiser Wilhelm is not as young as he was. He is sitting out our refreshing German summer at Bad Ischl, in the Salzkammergut. Perhaps you know it."

"I – ah –"

Guderian turned to one of the observation bunkers; it was a low blister in the concrete. "But your visit is not without interest."

Kilduff followed her gaze. His vision, despite his spectacles, wasn't all that sharp, but he could make out a small party of gaudily dressed men clambering down into the bunker. The figure at the centre of attention was short and plump, with a soft, almost girlish complexion; a white greatcoat covered a fat-swathed body.

The man looked pompous, almost comical. But on that broad chest, Kilduff saw, rested the Blue Max: an indelible token of the courage of a young flyer in the victorious *Kaiserskrieg*, 20 years ago.

The figure was quite unmistakable: Hermann Göring, Chancellor of Imperial Germany.

"I'm surprised the Chancellor has time to be here, Oberstleutnant."

"Yes. History crowds us, Herr Kilduff. The Japanese fleet is steaming towards Australia, and the Reichstag is in continuous session... But one must maintain business as normal. Yes?"

"I guess so."

"So," Guderian said, "give me your first impressions of our *grossflugzeug*, our new eagle."

Kilduff wondered what Guderian wanted to hear. He turned to gaze anew at the *Werde Was Du Bist*.

The craft, clinging to its launch rail, was heavily streamlined, shaped like a sharp-nosed fish. The underside was quite flat. Wedge-profile wings swept back from the midpoint of the ship's 90-foot length, and a gaunt tailplane jutted from the rear. Behind the volplane itself, the captive booster clung to the rail, nestling against the bomber. The booster too was streamlined, though it lacked the aerodynamic grace of the bomber; it was rather squat and fat – like some beetle, Kilduff thought, resentful of its imprisonment against the Earth. The nozzles of the booster's rockets gaped like mouths, preparing to exert their 600 tons' thrust.

"Look at the curve of those wings," Guderian murmured. "The *Werde* has what the old men of the *Kaiserskrieg* would once have described as a *taube*, a dove profile. Well, Herr Kilduff? Does this stir your soul, as it does mine?"

Of course it does. "I've waited ten years for a chance to climb inside a Sängler-Bredt volplane, Oberstleutnant. This is obviously a great technical achievement.

Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft have taken Dr Sanger's basic volplane design to extraordinary limits, and great strides have been made in high Mach number airframes, fuel and material research, combustion chamber development, trajectory theory –"

Guderian shook her head, a short, impatient gesture. "Technicalities are nothing. With the resources of Europe in our hands, and with Tojo's declaration of *Toa Shinchitsujo* ringing in our ears –"

"I'm sorry?"

"A 'New Order in Asia'." Guderian looked at him, reproof in her black eyes. "As all informed Americans should be aware. Well. Inspired by such a global challenge, we should expect nothing less than such a technical triumph from our engineers. If we are to fight a war of the hemispheres, we must have hemispheric tools – eh?"

"I'm just an engineer, Oberstleutnant," Kilduff said carefully. "Technicalities are my business."

"But I am not interested in your doltish engineering observations," Guderian snapped. "I want to see your heart, Herr Kilduff."

She glared at him. She was no more than 35, so hard and efficient she seemed like part of some machine herself. She made Kilduff – overweight and bespectacled – feel weak and decadent.

Shaken, he studied the volplane again.

The upper surface of the sleek, monocoque hull was painted a brooding forest-green, and the flat base a sky-blue; the green and blue were separated by an irregular curving line. Just before the imposing Imperial cross a huge brooding eye, a Gothic splash of white and black paint, scowled ferociously. At the hull's midpoint a bat was sketched: wings spread, the bat swooped on a kill from some lurid sky.

The looming images, the explosions of violent colour, were audacious, intimidating, disturbing. With these designs, the *Werde* proclaimed its identity as a warplane, loud and brutal.

Guderian was watching him.

"It is savage," Kilduff blurted. "Barbaric."

Guderian threw back her head and laughed. "Good, Herr Kilduff. Some passion, at last. Barbaric? Perhaps. But we are a barbaric species, Herr Kilduff."

"Are we?"

"*Werde Was Du Bist, Herr Kilduff. Nietzsche: we shall become what we must.*"

Now Goring's little party was climbing out of the bunker once more; aides fluttered around the Chancellor anxiously as he stalked away across the concrete.

"It looks as if the Chancellor won't be sticking around to watch us go after all," Kilduff said.

Guderian said drily, "He must busy himself with more barbarism, perhaps."

Kilduff faced her. "The *Kriegsgefahr*?"

Guderian's eyes narrowed. "The mobilization. Good, Herr Kilduff." Guderian stood before Kilduff, hands on hips. "And you Americans. Where will you stand, when the world erupts? At present we court you. Our engineers, from AEG and Dornier, exchange visits with yours – like you, from your Hughes Aircraft Company."

"That's corporation," Kilduff said mildly.

"Perhaps Tojo and his legions are also flattering you, with promises of trade across the Pacific, and

utterances of respect for your democracy." She pointed a gloved finger at Kilduff's chest. "The truth is, we are all barbarians – but now, barbarians competing for the resources of a planet. And soon you Americans must choose, not *whether* you will fight, but *with whom*." Guderian studied Kilduff's face, evaluating. "Enjoy our flight," she said. "And learn."

The *Werde*'s single cabin was barely ten feet long. Kilduff gazed around, rapt.

Oberstleutnant Guderian sat in an open cockpit crammed into the nose of the volplane, with her back to Kilduff and the fresh-faced navigator beside him. The Oberstleutnant worked briskly through an instrumentation checklist, her German clipped and precise. Many of the instruments, glinting behind their little discs of glass, seemed of familiar enough design; there was an aneroid, there a barograph, there an anemometer; the radio looked like a standard FuG VII.

And – in case, he thought wryly, he had been left in any doubt as to the true nature of this beautiful ship – there on the floor between Guderian's feet was a cannon breech.

There were no open ports, of course, at this moment of launch; the stressed-skin hull was smooth and seamless, the cabin enclosed. Steel longerons swept back from the pilot's seat, enclosing Kilduff within the belly of this metal bird. There was an earthy smell of wood, oil and leather. This *Werde* was founded on simple, effective engineering, he thought, impressed.

The navigator, beside Kilduff, held out his hand. "My name is Sperrle – Wolfram Sperrle, Leutnant. You are welcome on our mission today. You may call me Wolfram."

Kilduff shook his hand. "Michael."

"I saw you looking at the breech. The cannon is a 20-millimetre Mauser. A handsome weapon. But it isn't a great deal of use, you know." Relaxed in his bucket seat, his uniformed shoulder no more than an inch from Kilduff's, Sperrle looked around 25; blond hair, cropped short, sprouted from his skull.

"Why do you say that?"

"This is an antipodal bomber, not a fighter." His English was even and flatly accented. "For most of its flight the volplane is ballistic – falling like a hurled stone, with about as much manoeuvrability. This is no Eindecker, Herr Kilduff."

Kilduff smiled. An Eindecker had been Richthofen's plane, in the *Kaiserskrieg*. "Then why carry a cannon?"

"Ah." Sperrle touched his lips with a forefinger. "Vanity, Herr Kilduff. Sheer vanity."

Kilduff laughed out loud. He found himself taking a liking to this young Leutnant Sperrle; his irreverence was about the first touch of humanity Kilduff had encountered since crossing the English Channel and entering Reich-controlled territories, two days before. But he suspected, sadly, that Sperrle's intelligent cheek would not do him any favours in the Imperial Germany of 1940. And Kilduff couldn't help noticing the heavy pistol holstered at Sperrle's waist: no doubt Sperrle had strict instructions about what to do in the event that the volplane's American passenger became unruly.

Oberstleutnant Guderian turned in her seat, and

pulled her mouthpiece away from her chin. "Herr Kilduff."

It was the first time she'd acknowledged his presence since boarding the plane. "Yes, Oberstleutnant."

"In the greater world beyond our happy little ship, events are accelerating, it seems. I have been instructed to apprise you of the status of this flight."

"This is a low-altitude test flight. Isn't it?"

She smiled a wolf's smile. "At present. But our flight is due to last several minutes. That is a long time, when the world is unravelling."

He frowned. "What are you saying?"

"The *Werde Was Du Bist* is fully fuelled and loaded, Herr Kilduff. Its configuration is flexible."

He thought that through. "My God," he said. "Are you saying that we could become operational? But that's insane..."

"We are three minutes from launch. We can postpone – if you decide it would be better not to accompany us, this fine day." Her black eyes fixed him, coated with contempt.

He considered. He knew the international situation was grave; there were a dozen points of friction between the ambitions of Germany and Japan – Australia, Manchu Kuo, India – any of which could explode, to trigger a new war. And if any incident were to erupt, it surely wouldn't be politic for an American to be found in the cockpit of a German warplane.

Maybe he should get off the *Werde*. Yes, that's what he *should* do; no doubt about it...

But Kilduff had waited a long time to see the Reich's magical new volplane technology, so far ahead of anything managed by American manufacturers...

And, more than that, this was his chance to *touch* space.

Kilduff was 41 years old.

He shook his head sharply. "I've no concerns. Launch your *grossflugzeug*, Oberstleutnant."

She lifted her eyebrows, registering amused surprise. Then she turned to her instruments. "Two minutes 15," she snapped.

Kilduff took off his spectacles and folded them into their case; the cabin became an impressionistic blur of metal and glass.

"I hear you were in the *Kaiserskrieg*, Herr Kilduff," Sperrle said.

"That's right. You all seem to know a lot about me."

Sperrle grinned. "I was interested. The *Kaiserskrieg* is something of a fascination of mine."

"I was just an infantryman. I came across the Atlantic in 1918. But I didn't see any action, before the Allies accepted the terms of the August armistice."

"Ah. Then you just missed the *Kaiserschlacht* Ludendorff's great victory, in which he smashed his way between the British and French lines... After four years of trench war, it was a great breakthrough." Sperrle sounded proud.

"Maybe," Kilduff said. "But Ludendorff still needed a fair amount of incompetence from the Allies to achieve his goal."

"One minute," Guderian announced.

"I agree with you," Sperrle said, surprising Kilduff. "The French commandant, Petain, was much too

cautious. He was concerned with the defence of Paris, not with supporting the Allied operations." Sperrle grinned easily. "Who knows? If Petain had been overruled, perhaps the war would have ended in 1918 or '19, with the defeat of the Reich in the West."

"But as it turned out –"

"As it turned out, Petain did not in the end save his capital from the Kaiser's triumphal entry, in 1919. And the rapid victory in the West enabled us to return our attentions to the Bolsheviks in the East. Then, by 1925 –"

"By 1925," said Kilduff drily, "you had established your dreamed-of *Mittleuropa*."

Sperrle shrugged, good-natured. "There is a certain inevitability to history, do you not think?"

But now his voice was drowned out by a roar which overwhelmed Kilduff. The huge rockets of the captive booster had ignited, he realized; it was as if he had been transplanted into the chest of some bellowing giant. An invisible weight crushed him deep into his chair, and the cabin rattled around him, as if it would come apart. There was a surge forward, a feeling of plummeting, helplessly.

The *Werde Was Du Bist* was launched.

He knew what was happening here; he clung to his understanding, as if it were a spell which could deliver him from the noise and vibration penetrating the most private recesses of his skull.

The booster would burn for 22 seconds, hurling the volplane along its two-mile monorail. The acceleration felt enormous – rib-crushing, unbearable – but it was only, *only*, one and a half gravities, far less than he had endured in training centrifuges at the Hughes test sites in California.

There was a violent shudder, transmitted longitudinally along the volplane's creaking structure. That must be the *Werde's* traverse through the speed of sound...

And now his seat was tipped backwards, and the *Werde* leapt into the air like some metal gazelle.

For brief, miraculous heartbeats, the cabin was free of vibration. Kilduff gasped. He was as weightless as a stone inside a dropped tin can. He felt a surge of exhilaration; in that moment, he knew why he had come to the Reich, despite the reluctance of his Government and the fears of his wife.

But, even in this fragile moment, he was aware of the precise voice of Oberstleutnant Guderian as she spoke to her controllers on the ground.

And now a new roar erupted, even louder than before: this was the ignition of the volplane's own hundred-ton-thrust Daimler-Benz combustion chamber. Now, muscles of liquid oxygen and hydrogen would carry him to the fringe of space.

Kilduff closed his eyes. The renewed buffeting should last just a few seconds. This flight was a mere test hop over East Prussia, to try out a new dynamometer. He only had to wait, and endure.

The rockets burned.

A second can be a long time, he thought. Perhaps he should have started counting, or timing off on his watch...

There's something wrong.

He opened his eyes and tried to read the chronometer, the accelerometer. Without his glasses he was

unable to make out the small faces of the instruments.

He remembered the hurried departure of Göring, the visible tension of a country undergoing *Kriegsgefahr*. Was it true? Was the world really unravelling?

The rockets roared on, hurling the volplane ever further from the safe Earth.

At last the combustion chamber died. Again, the volplane hurtled through silence, and Kilduff was without weight.

Sperrle turned to him, his young face creased with concern. "Herr Kilduff, how do you feel? Are you nauseous?"

Actually, yes. Kilduff felt as if he were falling out of the sky; he fought an urge to grip the edges of his seat. He dug his spectacles out of their case and put them on, restoring the cabin to a harsh focus. He tried to find a smile. "Weightlessness is not going to be a picnic, I think. But I'm fine."

Oberstleutnant Guderian unclipped her harness. She twisted in the air, floating out of her bucket seat. "We have entered the ballistic part of our trajectory," she announced without ceremony. "We have been hurled by the rockets above the greater part of the atmosphere, and are heading for our apogee – our furthest point above the Earth."

"Oberstleutnant," Kilduff said, "what the hell happened? The rockets burned far longer than they were supposed to."

Guderian showed teeth, even and white. Then, with an unexpectedly theatrical flourish, she turned and pulled on a heavy lever, set in the upper canopy. Hydraulics hissed, and covers snapped off ports all around the cabin.

Light – blue and brown – flooded in, dimming the cabin's own electrical lighting.

Kilduff ducked his head to peer out of the main windscreen. Beneath the prow of the ship, the planet curved away, a cloud-laced patchwork of brown land and sombre blue ocean.

My God...

Guderian seemed triumphant, Kilduff thought: exultant, even. "It is *krieg*," she said. "The proclamation has come from the Kaiser in the last few minutes. The Reich will not any longer stand by and endure Hideki Tojo and his dreams of an Asia dominated by Japan. And –"

"Fighting has started?"

"In India," she said. "There has been an insurrection, easily throwing off the remnants of British rule. But this was inspired by the Japanese, who have already landed by sea. And so –"

"And so, German troops have entered as well."

"The first engagements are already under way," she said, rapt.

Wolfram Sperrle's face was expressionless. "And what of us, Oberstleutnant?"

"Ah, Sperrle," Guderian said, her eyes shining. "We have a special honour, you and I. A privilege."

"A privilege?"

"Our orders were amended even as the *Werde* hurtled along its track. The full *Kriegsgefahr* will take many days to complete. But we have the fortune – the honour – to serve as the Reich's first-mobilized strike force."

Kilduff pushed out of his seat; he floundered in the

air, trying to get closer to Guderian. "What the hell are you talking about?" he shouted. "What strike? I demand that you bring this damn volplane down."

She ignored him. "Kilduff, we will not land in East Prussia. We will go on. We will follow a great circle, passing over northern Eurasia: crossing the forested belt and skirting the ice itself –"

"For Christ's sake, where are we going?"

"Tokyo," she said.

"You can't do this."

She frowned. "You are being absurd. This is what the *Werde* was designed for."

"What if there's some mistake? What if you misheard your new orders? We were in the middle of a launch out of the atmosphere, for God's sake."

"You make so many appeals to God," Guderian observed mildly. "There is no mistake, Herr Kilduff."

Wolfram Sperrle came drifting out of his seat towards Kilduff. "You must calm yourself, my friend Michael," Sperrle said sadly.

Kilduff eyed the gun in Sperrle's holster. Aware of his own rapid breathing, he tried mentally to rehearse his next actions.

"I'm an American citizen, damn it. I won't let you involve me in this. I demand –"

Now she looked amused. "You demand? What? That we let you off?"

Sperrle touched his arm. "This is as we discussed, Herr Kilduff. We are embedded in history. The war is inevitable. We cannot –"

With a single motion Kilduff reached out and took Sperrle's revolver. It slid easily from its holster.

Kilduff snapped off the safety catch and pointed the weapon at Guderian.

Guderian studied the gun with mild irritation. "Oh, Sperrle," she said softly.

"I'm sorry, Oberstleutnant," Sperrle said, sounding confused. "I did not anticipate this."

"And I'm sorry too, Wolfram," Kilduff said sincerely. "This is going to get you into a hell of a lot of trouble. But I was desperate, frankly; I couldn't let this go on." He pointed the gun at Guderian, trying not to let his trembling show. "Now," he said. "Now we will talk."

Guderian did not reply immediately. For long seconds she studied the gun.

The intensity of the situation struck Kilduff with an almost physical force. He was aware of every detail of the cabin with a lucid clarity: the soft ticking of instruments, the airframe's creak, the scent of oil and leather, the hallucinatory feel of weightlessness. There were just three of them here, after all, stranded in this tiny bubble of air beyond the sky. And they might destroy each other in the next few seconds. He was struck by the power of weapons – like this revolver, this mute lump of oiled steel – to transform human situations. Maybe it was this power which was fundamental to the glamour of war, he thought.

At last Guderian spoke. "Listen carefully," she said to Kilduff. "A volplane passage to Tokyo is not simple. The flight will last three hours, and will involve several grazing entries into the atmosphere. I will be fully occupied from now on – as will Leutnant Sperrle, who must assist me with his navigation."

"She's telling the truth, Michael," Sperrle said.

"I am going to return to my position," Guderian said evenly. "And Sperrle will resume his."

"I told you," Kilduff said. "You're going to take this ship down, somewhere. Or —"

"Or what?" She studied him with a bleak pity. She seemed beyond contempt or mockery now; she had assessed his strength, he realized, and she believed she could overcome him. "Do you think that the revolver you wave in the air is a wand, capable of controlling others by some magic? A weapon is valuable only if used."

"I know that if I do use it, we'll all die." Kilduff dug into his soul, searching for conviction. "But that's not as important as stopping you."

"You will not use that weapon, because you have never killed," she said, still analytical. "You are weak, Herr Kilduff. You may sit in your seat and cling to your toy. Your presence in this cabin is not of importance for me."

Then, as if dismissing him, she turned to Sperrle and snapped instructions at him in rapid German. Sperrle acknowledged and began to unfurl charts.

Kilduff sank back into his seat, the revolver cold in his hands. Carefully, he put the safety back on.

Is she right? Am I really so ignorant of my own heart?

Beyond ports of armoured glass, the roof of Earth slid past.

The volplane's smooth arc took it 100 miles above northern Eurasia. Then it began its first dip back into the fringe of atmosphere, and there was a thin keening from the hull as air plucked at the streamlined monocoque.

There was a glow, roseate, from the lower half of the hull, like a fire banked beneath the still-opened ports; the temperature in the cabin began to rise, and Kilduff tugged open the collar of his flying suit.

He sat in his seat, the revolver still resting in his lap. The gun felt heavy, clumsy, useless: a tangible symbol of his indecision and weakness.

Guderian spoke softly into her radio. Kilduff wondered how much attention was focused, across a world girding itself for a new war, on this single, astonishing volplane, and the audacity of the attack it was carrying through. Perhaps his own government was trying to contact him, he wondered.

The buffeting grew severe, and Kilduff was jolted down, hard, into his seat. Then, gradually, the unevenness ceased, and once again the *Werde* was soaring free above the atmosphere.

When the skip was over, Wolfram Sperrle folded up his charts with a sigh. "Excuse me," he said to Kilduff. From a small compartment set in the hull, Sperrle withdrew a leather bottle; he unbuttoned his flies and, with a soft grunt of relief, filled the bottle. He stoppered it and stowed it away. He grimaced at Kilduff. "Primitive, but the best concession to the needs of the human our designers are prepared to make, I fear."

Kilduff, cradling the revolver, said nothing.

Sperrle opened out his charts once more. "So, Michael," he said, "now the *Werde* is operating as a volplane — a glider, yes? How are you finding your first experience of aerodonetics?"

Aerodonetics: soaring flight... Kilduff tried to think like an engineer. "It's smoother than I expected, I guess."

"And remarkably efficient. We are skipping like a stone across the atmosphere. And so, with virtually no further expenditure of fuel, we can cross the 5,000 miles to Tokyo in little more than three hours."

Kilduff grunted. "Just the right toy for the rulers of the planet," he said.

Sperrle gave him a reproving look. "Come now, Michael. There is no use denying the realities of *Weltpolitik*. Consider *Mittleuropa*: a single market, stretching from the Atlantic coast to beyond the Urals. Unified Europe is now self-sufficient in food, and the mines of France, Belgium and Rumania are working for wider markets than could have been dreamed possible, before the liberation of the *Kaiserskrieg*."

Kilduff felt claustrophobic, frustrated. "Look, Wolfram, nobody but a German is going to have a rosy view of your *Mittleuropa*. German control extends from the Atlantic to the Baltic, through Russian Poland as far as the Crimea. France has become a weakened rump, shorn of much of its resources. Luxembourg has been turned, by force, into a German federal state. Belgium and Holland have been compelled to put their ports at German disposal..." He became aware that he was raising his voice.

"But it is not so simple," Sperrle said. "We also pushed back the Slav — we freed millions of non-Russians from Moscow's dominance. Ask them their views on *Mittleuropa*. Why, if not for *Mittleuropa*, would the great Russian engineer Tsiolkovsky have had the opportunity to come to develop his rocket engine ideas with Daimler-Benz?"

The Oberstleutnant stretched luxuriously. She unfixed her clasps and came floating out of her seat once more. Guderian looked radiantly happy, Kilduff realized; she was nearing the apotheosis of her life.

"Sperrle is right," she said.

Kilduff waved his revolver at her. "You described to me how you are going to war with Tojo, for his schemes of *Toa Shinchitsujo*. But what difference is there between your two nations? Two absurd, antiquated militaristic traditions — you damnable Prussians, and the Japanese with their 1,000 years of Bushido..."

Guderian snorted. "Perhaps there is no difference. We share many facets of what the Japanese call their *kokutai* — their national character. This is no shame. This only demonstrates that we, and the Japanese, are wolves in a world of sheep.

"And now, we are ready for war over the greatest prize of all: the resources of a unified Asia. And I, I will launch the first strike in the history of this historic conflict."

Her eyes shone, like the painted eyes on the *Werde*'s hull.

Kilduff stared at her. For a moment he felt drawn to her vital intensity: to the deadly, seductive glamour of this warrior.

It would be so easy to believe...

No, damn it, he thought, with a last access of will.

Savagely, he snapped off the revolver's safety. He swung the weapon through the air and fired, twice, into the control bank in the volplane's nose.

Glass splintered; severed connections sparked across the panel, and the stink of scorching insulation filled the tiny cabin. Wolfram Sperrle grabbed a fire blanket; he pushed past Kilduff and smothered the instrument panel with the blanket.

Kilduff looked down at the gun in his hand. Smoke seeped from its barrel, and the metal felt hot, oily.

With a single kick against the back of her seat, Eva Guderian thrust herself at Kilduff. She slapped the revolver easily from his unresisting hands, and then her gloved fist slammed, unimaginably hard, into his temple.

His glasses buckled, and that single punch was enough to scramble his awareness. But still her fists came raining in, and now he could feel, remotely, the hard impact of boot-heels in his stomach and ribs.

He made no attempt to defend himself. He let his thoughts dissolve, welcoming the sweet oblivion of unconsciousness.

He woke to pain, and heat, and an unremitting shrieking.

He opened his eyes. They were crusted with sleep deposits, encrusted tears, and blood, but his vision – blurred without his lost spectacles – seemed unimpaired.

He was crammed, awkwardly, into his bucket seat. His head was a gourd of pain. He tried to straighten up, but there was a stabbing agony across his chest. He could scarcely move, in any case; his hands and legs were strapped to the frame of the chair by what felt like thick leather straps – uniform belts?

The shrieking, and the heat, were coming from beyond the hull, he realized. The ports had been closed, and the volplane buffeted violently, cramming him into his seat.

Guderian sat at her seat before him, hauling on her joystick. Wolfram Sperrle had folded his charts neatly away: the time for navigation was over, it seemed. The young German gripped the arms of his seat, and he was speaking under his breath – perhaps in prayer.

Kilduff opened his mouth to try to talk. “Wolfram,” he gasped. Pain lanced through the joint of his jaw, and he could taste blood and dried snot on his lips.

Sperrle turned to him, startled. “Michael. I didn’t think you would awaken again.”

“We’re... entering the atmosphere, aren’t we?”

“This is our final descent. We are somewhere over Mongolia; in a few moments we will approach the Sea of Japan.”

“Japan? But the shots – the instruments –”

“Oh, you did a great deal of damage, Michael.” Sperrle had to shout to make himself heard over the shrieking of the air. “You shattered the undercarriage indicator, the artificial horizon, the manifold pressure gauge, even the pilot seat height adjuster...”

“So I failed. I thought I might disable the ship.”

“In a sense, you did. The Oberstleutnant was most disappointed that you damaged the Lotfe.”

“The what?”

“The tachometric sight, which should have enabled us to make a precision bombing run over Tokyo.” Sperrle sighed. “But the fact is, Michael, in its volplane mode the *Werde* is very difficult to disable. It is only a glider, after all.”

“But without the tachometric sight –”

“Ah, the Lotfe. Well, the ingenious Oberstleutnant was able to devise an alternative stratagem, to ensure we deliver our gift to Tojo.” He grinned without humour; it was a skull-like grimace. “We will be visiting Tokyo ourselves, Michael. We should make quite a spectacle, as we come plummeting from the sky at near-orbital speed...”

Abruptly, the ports snapped open. Fire rimmed the armoured glass, and sparks and gobbets of flame swept across the view: these were fragments of the hull itself, ablating under the intense heat of reentry. It was as if the *Werde* was flying into hell; and perhaps it was, Kilduff thought. Beyond the vision of fire he could see glimpses of the Earth itself, blue and brown and white, reeling across Guderian’s windscreen.

So, he thought, *all I have done is to ensure our own deaths.*

“Before we lost radio contact with the Reich, we got a call from Kaiser Wilhelm himself,” Sperrle said. “He congratulated us on our courage. And he assured us that we would not be the last to die, in this war to end wars! How comforting... ach, *Gott*...” He closed his eyes, and Kilduff felt a stab of pain for him.

A war to end wars: well, perhaps it would be so. And, between the ancient fanaticism of the Bushido and the hard-eyed expansionists in Prussia, America would surely be crushed like an eggshell.

Eva Guderian half-turned. Kilduff could see Earth light reflected in her glowing black eyes.

This is a war for the *Mittelwelt*, he thought. Whoever won the coming struggle would control the planet, for 1,000 years: a true Axis World. And with space technology in the hands of the winners of this war to end wars, what could come next? A *Mittelkosmos*, perhaps?

In the windscreen, Kilduff could see the buildings of a city, sprawling innocently around a bay.

He closed his eyes and thought of his wife.

Stephen Baxter has now written four novels (see John Clute’s review of *Anti-Ice* in *IZ* 80 and Paul McAuley’s forthcoming review of *Flux* in *IZ* 83). He lives in Buckinghamshire and is currently working on a sequel to H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, to be published in that novel’s centenary year, 1995.

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Scouting Ahead

Ben Bova interviewed by Stan Nicholls

“The most interesting thing about science fiction now,” Ben Bova says, “is how it’s infiltrated, and is beginning to dominate, the rest of popular fiction. We’ve reached the point where the techniques, ideas and scenarios developed very laboriously by generations of science fiction writers are commonplace in popular fiction generally. You have people like Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum doing things that would have relegated them to the sf ghetto not that long ago. But the reading public has come to accept it as part of the natural landscape.”

Bova had no ambition other than to be a writer, and in the 1940s supported himself by working as a copyboy for Philadelphia’s leading daily newspaper, *The Enquirer*, while earning his college degree in Journalism. “One of the oldest editors on the paper took me out for a stroll around the neighbourhood one afternoon,” he recalls. “It was a working-class area, and people were sitting on the front steps of their houses reading the evening newspaper – not *The Enquirer*, our competition – and in many cases it seemed quite obvious they read with considerable difficulty. This editor said, ‘Do you see that? When you write for a newspaper your job is to take the most complicated things happening in the world and write about them in a way they can understand.’ That is the best lesson in writing I ever had.

“Writing fiction, or anything else, should not be a contest between the author and the reader. My job is to let you in on what I’m thinking as clearly and accurately as I can. I don’t want to dazzle you with how smart I am; I just want to share my thoughts with you. Clarity is extremely important.”

After college he was taken on as a reporter by a weekly newspaper. “I counted deeds, chased fire engines, tracked down murderers and all that. Then in 1956, when the US government announced it was going to put a satellite in orbit, I got a job with the company building the launching rocket.” He had been fascinated by space since he was 11 years old, when a visit to a planetarium sparked off a passion for astronomy. “So I had to get involved when the United States started this satellite programme, Vanguard;

and that was two years before the creation of NASA. I jumped from journalism to what in those days was called the Glen L. Martin Airplane Company. It’s now a giant corporation, but back then they built flying-boats. Beautiful things. I always said if I were to buy a houseboat that’s what I’d want!”

Bova’s lifelong interest in space exploration – the most recent expression of which is his novel *Mars* – meant he was naturally disappointed by NASA’s decision to put their Mars mission on hold. But not down-hearted. “I’m not really sure it’s an announcement that sticks. There’s a spacecraft on its way to Mars right now, and the Russians have probes planned for ’94 and ’96. The best thing you can say is we aren’t going to Mars in the next ten years. Which means no one’s going to get there for at least 20, because even the fastest programme you can imagine will take in the order of ten to 15 years from the time it started. So the prospects of people reaching Mars in my lifetime are getting dimmer and dimmer. But people will get there eventually. It’s part of a biological drive. Organisms expand to fill every available habitat, and we’re in the throes of learning how to make space available as a habitat.”

He links the announcement directly to the election of Bill Clinton. “The Clinton administration has no interest in space. I don’t think they’re smart enough to understand what space technology does for the country. Clinton is so narrowly focused on ground-based issues, like the economy and entitlements for every minority group he can invent.”

NASA’s schedule would never have been shelved by the Republicans, he believes. “Basically because George Bush is a lot smarter than Bill Clinton. But that’s a personal opinion.” No opinion is forthcoming on the awesome intellectual capacities of Bush’s predecessor, who mouthed support for space exploration while keeping the public purse buttoned. Bova prefers to point out the differences in emphasis of America’s two main political parties. “The Republicans in general are slightly more conservative than the

Democrats in general, and strangely enough it’s the conservatives who have pushed space in the United States rather than the liberals.

“It was a group of very liberal senators in the 1970s, working with a rather less than liberal Richard Nixon, who killed the Apollo programme. That liberal wing has been anti-space all along. They feel the money should be spent on Welfare, ignoring the fact that for every dollar we spent on space we’ve spent a hundred or more on Welfare. If you count since 1958, when NASA started, to now, you’ll see that all the money the Agency has received out of federal budgets is about half of one year’s defence budget. I’m not saying that to be disparaging about our defence budget or anything else; I’m just trying to point out that the space programme is very small. Yet it’s presented to the public as this enormous money pit, with everything costing hundred of millions of dollars. They spend that on paper clips in Washington.

“The only healthy, really competitive industry in the United States is aerospace. It has created God knows how many jobs, and we use space-derived technology every day of our lives. You go to a supermarket and they have laser checkout systems. If you’re unfortunate enough to be put into an intensive care unit in a hospital you’re using sensors and information systems first evolved to keep astronauts alive in space. Turn on the television, you see satellite photographs of the weather. These things we take totally for granted.”

How does he answer critics who say the money would be better spent on Earth’s problems? “The way to help the poor and disadvantaged is to make the economy stronger, and the way to make the economy stronger is to concentrate on the high-tech end of things. New wealth comes from the frontiers, whether they’re physical frontiers like space or intellectual frontiers like a research laboratory. Who would have thought 50 years ago that there would be a multi-trillion dollar global industry whose raw material is sand. I’m talking about silicon chips, of course.

"We're getting into what economists call the post-industrial society, where how much steel you make and how much oil you pump is not as important as the information you generate. Space has been very important in that regard. It's forced the development of small, very capable computers, and it's given us a glimpse of a bounty of energy and raw materials larger than we can produce on Earth. There is literally enough wealth in the solar system to make every human being a millionaire. Although how we go about getting it and then sharing it are the big questions."

We don't fairly share the resources we have now. Why should a new source of wealth alter that? "When I say share, I don't mean share exactly evenly. That just doesn't work out. But I think we've seen in the past that when an influx of new wealth comes into an economy, everybody gains. You'll still have people who are poorer than others, but everybody gets richer. The analogy I draw is when Europe began to develop and exploit the New World. Europe got incredibly wealthy. Even the poor people of Europe got wealthier. Today we have the opportunity to begin to utilize the wealth of space, and one immediate way to do it is to develop solar power satellites and beam that energy to Earth. You could then turn off the nuclear and fossil fuel power plants that are mucking up the atmosphere and endangering people daily."

Doesn't NASA itself bear some measure of responsibility for the current mess? "NASA has turned into a great bureaucracy, but that's largely because there's no political push to accomplish anything. When astronauts were walking on the Moon, NASA's leadership went to Nixon in the White House and said, 'Here are plans for the next steps. We want to build a space station in orbit around the Earth, and we'll need a vehicle to go back and forth.' Nixon said, 'That's going to cost too much money. We can only afford a third of what you're asking.' So NASA decided the most difficult part of this job would be to build the shuttle and decided to concentrate on that. But Nixon and the Congress kept whittling down the money and the shuttle got less and less capable. They eventually had to build a vehicle that can't lift itself off the ground without strapped-on solid boosters, which blew up and killed seven astronauts. I didn't see Ted Kennedy or Mondale or Nixon come out and say, 'It's my fault those astronauts died.' However the fact remains that if they had given NASA the funding they needed to build the vehicle correctly they wouldn't have had those strap-on boosters.

"Now the politicians are doing the same thing with the space station. 'Don't make it so expensive. Make it

smaller. Make it less capable.' Which translates as 'make it less safe'. And if there's another disaster, NASA's the scapegoat. They have some responsibility in the sense that they accept that role. You can always resign. Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, bemoaned the federal bureaucracy even then. He said, 'Few die, none resign.' Things haven't changed that much."

Is Bova as puzzled as I am by the recent upsurge of fictional interest in Mars? "Yes, I am. I've been working on my novel, *Mars*, for the better part of 20 years, off and on, and the actual detailed work on it began more than five years ago. So it's not as if suddenly a group of writers got together and all decided to produce books simultaneously. There is no Mars cabal. I've wanted to write the definitive novel about Mars practically since I began writing. I read Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, I read Arthur Clarke's *The Sands of Mars*, and I knew in both cases that this was not the way it's going to happen. I wanted to write a novel that would be very realistic, and accessible to people who don't read science fiction."

Edgar Rice Burroughs, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Leigh Brackett and all the other writers Bova enjoyed in his youth viewed Mars in an almost mythic way. But he doesn't think the more scientifically accurate way modern authors deal with the red planet invalidates the power of those earlier stories. "No, not at all. I mean, is *Nineteen Eighty-Four* still worth reading? Yes. And always will be.

"We knew so little about Mars that those books were sort of just wild alien landscapes, the way people used to write about 'darkest Africa' when we knew very little about Africa. What is sometimes called 'the pitiless advance of knowledge' has made it necessary, if you're going to do a wild alien landscape, to put it around some other star. You have to invent a planet that hasn't been discovered. With Mars, you can now write the way Jack London did; you know enough about it that you can write realistic fiction. That was something of a challenge for me. I wanted to present Mars as we know it, and ask why anyone would want to risk their necks, and take five years out of their lives, to spend a few weeks on a frozen desert 50 million miles from home, where if you got a bad toothache you'd be in trouble."

How would he answer that question himself? "It's for the same reason people crossed the Atlantic, and tried to reach the poles. I think we're explorers by nature. So it's 'because it's there'; but also because in the case of Mars there's this lingering hope that we'll find examples of life on another world. Very likely, from what we

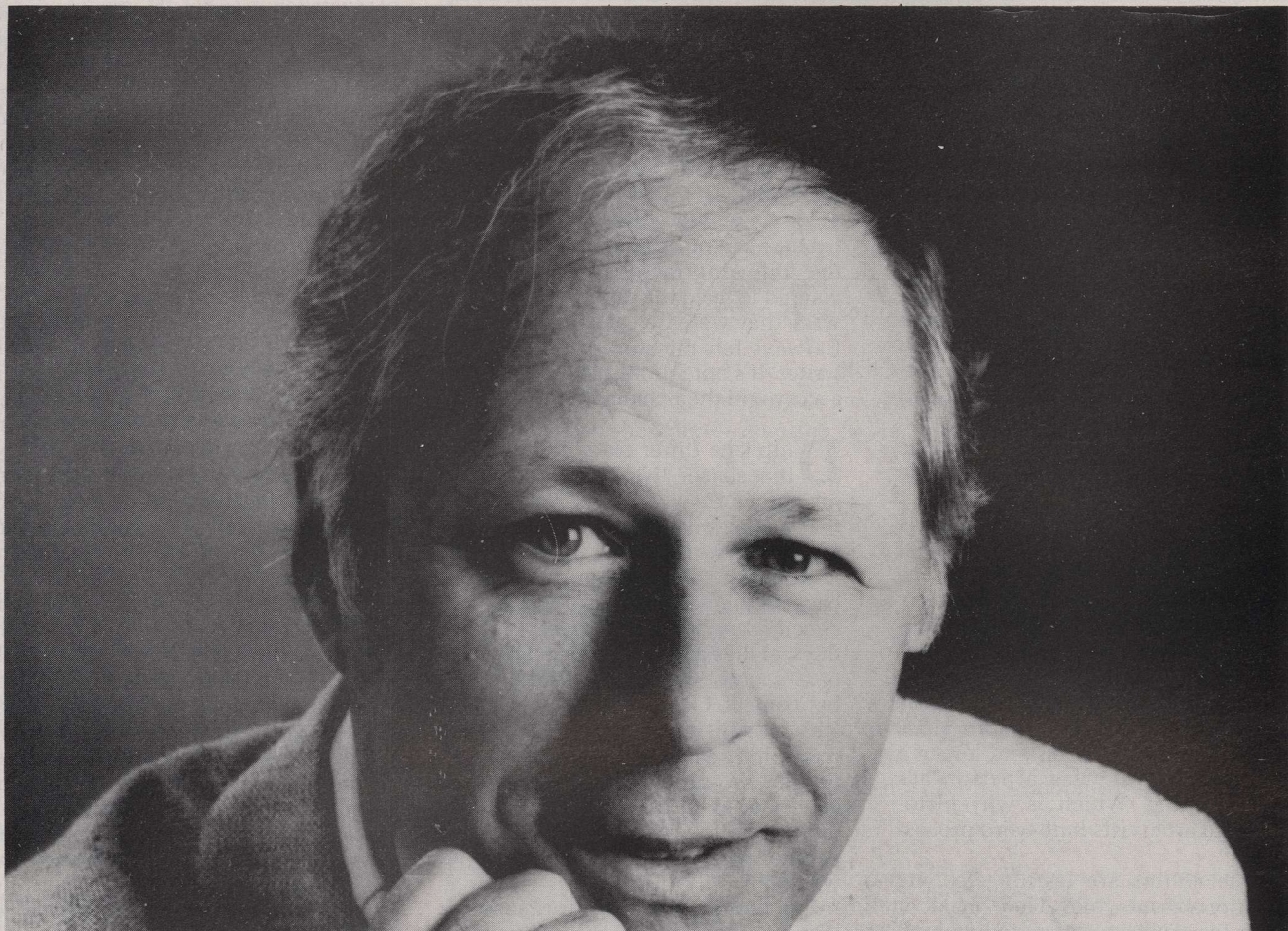
know of Mars today, there is no viable life. But there might have been in the past. So we could find fossils. Indeed the protagonist in the novel thinks he even sees something built by intelligent hands.

"You know, life was almost wiped out on our planet many times in the past, the most recent being 65 million years ago, give or take a week. The current thinking is that a large meteor or comet hit the Earth, causing an ecological catastrophe, and the dinosaurs and three-quarters of all the other species on land, sea and air were destroyed. Now, there's lots of craters on Mars, including one that's so big it's not called a crater, it's called the Plain of Helos. It's a circular formation, a thousand kilometres across. If something that large hit Mars it might very well have destroyed any life there by blowing away the atmosphere. Whatever hit Mars and made the Plain of Helos sent out a shock wave so powerful it liquefied the rock as it went through. Imagine sitting down to tea when that happened.

"I read a fascinating paper just recently about how the pole of Mars has apparently been swinging back and forth over the course of merely a few hundred thousand years, which would raise havoc with the Martian climate. We know from the way Mars looks that there must have been a very different climate some time in the past, but violent climate changes in very short times tell us it would have been very hard to establish life there. This has not happened on Earth; our pole wanders just a little bit, and the explanation is that Earth has a big fat moon that sort of tethers the pole and prevents it from wandering too far. So if we're hoping to find life in space we have to say, 'We know we should be looking for planets that have oxygen and water in the atmosphere. Now we have to add a large fat moon.'"

But, he admits, we could be wrong. Certainly science fiction's record is iffy when it comes to foreseeing scientific and social developments. Bova cites the timing and circumstances of the Moon landing, and personal computers, as prime examples. "Those are two of our glaring omissions. As far as personal computers are concerned, the nearest we got was a spate of stories in the '60s about sharing master computers, with everyone having a terminal. The idea of your own computer, isolated from all the others, was something of a surprise. It took kids in a garage in California to do that.

"Sf's not very good at prophecy. It just happens to be better than any other method. The reason is that science fiction prophecies are like shotgun blasts, and there's a lot of us firing those shotguns into the future. But I don't think that's the purpose of science



Ben Bova

fiction. What sf stories do is show various possibilities of the future. I've always regarded sf writers as the scouts who go out ahead of the wagon train and send back reports.

"Of course, once you've knocked away the props of prediction, you're into the argument that science fiction is only a branch of fantasy. While there may be some truth in that, I believe there are vital differences. It seems to me that an awful lot of fantasy is really regurgitating the myths of the past, and I don't read much of it, frankly, because I find that boring. One of the things that bothers me about it, and bores me, is that in chapter one they will invent this horrible menace, this supernatural force that can't be stopped, and in chapter two they introduce a magic ring that will stop it. There's no internal consistency. Whereas what we do in science fiction is play fair by the laws of the universe as we understand them. You can't admit the magic ring. You might invent something like a laser, which could provide your characters with a resolution, but it had better work properly. And if you're doing a good job in the writing you have to plant it early enough so the reader doesn't regard it as a *deus ex machina*.

"Faster-than-light drives, to take an example, are, as far as we know, a fantasy. But there's one little rule in sf that

says you're free to invent anything as long as no one can prove it's wrong. There are places in space where black holes have warped space and time, to such an extent that modern physics cannot predict what would happen if, say, a ship popped into the vortex created by one of them. If it wasn't destroyed, it could come out some place and some time else. It takes a leap of faith to say that what Nature can do in an uncontrolled way human beings will eventually understand and use for their own devices. Okay. So give it a few thousand years and maybe we'll have faster than light. My point is that to me it's always been more romantic to deal with the time differences in the universe as we know it, without adding fantasy. The universe is wild enough that you don't have to violate what we know to write wonderful stories.

"Mars is perceived as a hard sf novel, yet there's very few words about the technology. It's really a novel about politics, science and people. In fact, I don't even specify what kind of propellant I use on the spacecraft, for the deliberate reason that I didn't want to get people arguing over whether they should have used chemical rockets or nuclear. If I'd said one, the proponents of the other would have made *that* the point of the novel. So I just skipped over it, and no one seems

to have cared. The modern reader, I think, is willing to grant that whatever the writer can think of will work at some time in the future. You don't have to convince them by showing the inner workings. Which is just as well because your explanation's usually wrong anyway."

Mars is left open-ended, but not because he has plans to extend the story to further volumes. "I'd do that only if public demand is so great I can't say no. I wrote *Mars* as a complete story. It's open-ended because I want to engage the readers' imaginations. I don't like novels where on the last page all the puppets collapse. I want the readers to think these characters go on and the story continues.

"Anyway, there's an argument for saying sequels take away something from the original. Take a look at the difference between Arthur C. Clarke's novel *2001* and the motion picture. The motion picture was mysterious: the novel explained an awful lot and robbed the story of its power. But in the publishing business, if a book does as well as *2001* you write a sequel.

"I published a novel back in 1989 called *Cyberbooks*. It's a spoof on the New York book publishing business, and the excuse for the plot is that a brilliant young MIT engineer invents a hand-held electronic book, about the

size of a mass-market paperback, with a very high-definition TV screen. Of course the New York publishing industry, which is wedded to paper, does its best to destroy this idea. But there's a kind of serious point here, which is that the big problem with books is that they're printed on paper, and this is enormously expensive. It's one reason I think electronic books will eventually come about. The paper industry's pretty dirty, environmentally; and 90 percent of a publisher's costs consist of trucking large tonnages of paper around the countryside. Electrons are a lot lighter. An awful lot of writers are producing their work on computers; it seems logical that the books themselves should be accessible electronically.

"Many people talk about computers as 'labour-saving' devices. I look on computers as labour-enhancing devices. They don't save you any work, they just allow you to work harder. And a by-product of the word processor revolution is that the word 'draft' has lost all its meaning, because you're jiggering around with the prose all the time. There's less and less of a written record of what a person has been thinking. Which is why historians and archivists hate word processors."

Some editors are learning to hate word processors too. They make it easier for aspiring writers to bombard them with unusable manuscripts. Bova knows all about that from his editorship of *Analog* between 1971 and 1978. "Oh yes, indeed. I wound up writing a book, *Notes for Science Fiction Writers*, and the first line reads, 'This is being written in self-defence.' It's mostly about story construction, because the majority of bad manuscripts you see as an editor are unpublishable due to the writer not knowing how to construct a story. I said the art, the ideas, the soul of the story is up to you, nobody can teach you that, but I can teach you how to construct a story so it stands up to the scrutiny of an editor or a reading audience. The book was very successful and I'm doing another version of it now. The examples I use will be more up to date, and it's been expanded. I concentrated on short stories in the original, but this time I'm including some information about novels.

"I think a lot of that bad stuff is written by people who need to write for reasons other than publication. The person who says 'Here is my trilogy' is a person who hasn't done a lick of market research. This person is writing from a need, and whether he gets published or not is almost beside the point, because we're talking self-psychology. I remember John Campbell, who was my predecessor as editor of *Analog* of course, used to say, 'I've read more bad science fiction than

anybody in the history of the world. Because he read it all. And I kept that tradition going at *Analog*. We had one reader – the editor. Everything was very simple on the magazine. The editor read everything, you bought what you liked and you printed what you bought. If I saw a story that almost made it I would write back to the contributor saying, 'I'm not taking this for the following reasons.' Then if they wanted to heed the advice and do a rewrite they were free to submit it again. I always felt the story belongs to the writer. It's not fair for the editor to buy a story and then change it."

Didn't he differ from Campbell in that sense? "No. That was exactly his policy. He would send back letters that were longer than your story. I remember the first letter I ever got from John began, 'OK, wise guy.' When he became the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, as it was called in those days, at the age of 24, he asked his new boss a question. 'Sir,' he said, 'what happens if I don't get enough good stories to fill the magazine?' The boss fixed him with a steely gaze and replied, 'A good editor gets enough good stories to fill the magazine.' So John spent the rest of his life cajoling people into writing the stories he wanted."

But Campbell's been criticized for that. People saw it as writing by proxy. "Oh, sure. But it really wasn't that automatic. John was always broad-minded enough to publish good stories regardless of his feelings about the writer's politics or anything else. Harlan Ellison, a dear friend of mine, was convinced Campbell would never buy one of his stories because he's Jewish. John's reaction was, 'Yeah, that's why I never bought Asimov.'

"I must say I think the only joy an editor gets, at least the only joy I got, is to discover new writers and help them get started. I found Spider Robinson, Orson Scott Card, Vonda McIntyre, George R.R. Martin, among others. Joe Haldeman I managed to help, but he'd already started. That part of it was fun. Like finding nuggets of gold in a large pile of trash.

"But that pile must be bigger than ever now, when you consider how the market's grown in the last couple of decades. If you look at it objectively, there are more magazines being published in the States than any time in the past 25 years, and good rates are being paid. One measure is to look at *Locus*, the science fiction newsletter. It started as a single mimeographed sheet and now it looks like *Time* magazine with all that advertising. So there's money being made here. Another objective measurement is the attractiveness of the women who attend science fiction conventions."

And the way sf has come to permeate

advertising. "Yes, absolutely." And the film industry. "Yeah, although Hollywood has done more damage to science fiction than anything else, with popcorn movies based on comic strips which they call sf. Serious people look at these movies and say, 'If that's science fiction, I might as well read Barbara Cartland.'"

Are there any sf movies he likes? "Oh sure, sure. My favourite sf movie was made here in Britain in 1950. It starred Alec Guinness and was called *The Man in the White Suit*. It's a brilliant movie. It's truly science fiction in being about a scientist trying to change society, and the effect that has on his life and all the lives around him. No one thought of it as a sci-fi flick when they were making it. They looked for a good script, they got a good cast, they paid attention to all the details and they made a lovely, lovely film.

"2001 is a great film by any standards. If I had to draw up a list of the ten best films ever made, 2001 would certainly be there, along with *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca* and certain others. It was a great, great piece of work. Most sf motion pictures are developed for reasons very contrary to the aims and motivations of the literature. When you're investing 40 million dollars in a project, you understand that you have to sell a lot of tickets, so you're not going to do something that only appeals to the small percentage of human beings who enjoy thinking. You're going to make something for the largest audience possible and the lowest common denominator. That's why motion pictures in general, and science fiction pictures in particular, are so disappointing when you want something to tickle your intellect. 2001 was unusual in that respect. Of course space was very much in vogue in those days, it was perceived as exciting.

"One thing Kubrick did that I really liked, and it's sad to see how it's been thrown away, was to use the fact that you can't hear sounds in space to dramatic advantage. I am just so disgusted with movies where you have these...freight trains rumbling through space. And you talk to even someone who was as sensitive to sf as Gene Roddenberry, and you say, 'Gene, why do the spaceships all makes noises?' and he says, 'I know, but it's what's expected.'"

That's what George Lucas said about the *Star Wars* films. "George is dead from his neck. George is a child of the motion pictures; he's going through life re-making the serials he loved as a kid. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but don't expect any intellectual depth. I did the novelization of George's first movie, *THX 1138*, and he's a nice kid. He knew exactly what he was doing, he was very professional, but he held most of the story in his head and didn't bother to show it

on the screen. My job as novelist was to explain why these people were doing these things.

"My major irritation with the movies is that again and again and again in sf films the message given to the audience is that science is evil, that rational thought is bad. Thus the Force. These are messages meant for slaves. Even in as lovely a film as *Time Bandits*, God is a doddering old man who's interested in flowers; the Devil wants to know about computers and lasers. Terry Gilliam is a luddite, essentially, except he uses the technology to put over that message, which I think is incredibly cynical.

"I've just delivered a new novel to Hodder and Stoughton, and to Bantam in the States, called *Death Dream*, and it kind of touches on this. It's also a commentary, I guess, on what we're saying about science fiction finding its way into every level of popular culture. It's about a little group of engineers and entrepreneurs who want to build a virtual-reality theme park. Of course, Disney and the other big boys don't think much of the idea. I've set this one only slightly in the future. You know, just far enough that the kitchen appliances are voice-activated."

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The Story of Faith

Thomas M. Disch

One Sunday afternoon in heaven, just before the end of the world, the Father, who is, as we all know, omniscient, was looking down at the world he'd created and noticing everything in it: tankers in the Gulf of Oman; hosts of golden daffodils; people in London, where it was already evening, queuing up to see *Jurassic Park*; a Laplander herding reindeer; the ongoing fall of the Italian government, and of a sparrow. There was a lot to take in, but of everything he saw, one thing particularly got his goat. It was the sight of Faith Pattullo, in West Orange, New Jersey, playing Tetris on her computer. She'd reached Level 9 and had racked up a score already of 19,587. It wasn't her playing Tetris as such that made him wax wroth; it was the fact that she wasn't at church. And the reason for that was that she had lost her faith, which was ironic, when you considered that Faith was her first name. But more than ironic, it was sinful, and the Father, while he lets some sins go unpunished for a while, can be merciless about others. In that way he's unpredictable.

"Jesus!" he called out across the pastures of heaven. "Jesus, come here and look at this."

Jesus, who was in the midst of being adored by a large gathering of saints and angels, called back, "I can't now, I'm busy!"

"Jesus!" his Father insisted. "Get over here!"

Jesus heaved a sigh and went over to his Father's throne to see what he wanted.

"Look at that," said his Father, pointing down to Earth.

Jesus looked where his Father was pointing. "The adulteress down there?" he asked, his voice tender with compassion.

"No, no, what is it with you and adulteresses? There! In West Orange. That girl – Faith Pattullo."

"Oh, her. What about her?"

"Look at her soul. She's lost her faith!"

"Dear me, so she has. That's too bad."

"Too bad? Is that all you can say? It's wrong."

"Well, yes, I suppose it is. Maybe she'll find it again when she's older. She's only 15."

"She's not going to get older. By this time tomorrow she'll be dead."

"She will?" Jesus peeked ahead, using his special powers of foreknowledge, and saw Faith in the wreckage of a Chevrolet Lumina that had been totalled on Route 17, while exiting from Dunkin' Doughnuts. "Oh, the poor child. Well, it can't be helped."

The Father glowered at his only begotten son. He didn't have to spell it out what he was thinking. Faith Pattullo was going to go to hell.

"So what do you want me to do?" Jesus demanded a little impatiently. "Do you want me to appear to her? If she's actually lost her faith, which seems to be the case, then she can't receive an apparition. That's how it works – I didn't make the rules. Maybe, if she has a change of heart at the very last moment, when she's dying in the wreck, she might be more receptive. We'll have to wait and see."

"That's not good enough," said the Father.

"Nothing ever is good enough for you," Jesus said, with an understanding smile. In fact, he was just the same.

"Job believed," the Father pointed out gruffly. "Despite everything that was done to him, he never doubted me. Not once."

"Job was special," Jesus agreed. "But that was a long time ago. Things have changed."

"I haven't changed."

"No, you're unchangeable and everlasting."

The Father stroked his beard and said, in a mollified tone, "I am that I am."

"I can't gainsay that, Father. I'll tell you what. Why don't we have the Holy Ghost visit her? Maybe he'll be able to knock some sense into her head."

The Father thought about it, and nodded, and without having to say another word, it was accomplished.

The Holy Ghost, in the form of a white dove, fluttered down from heaven to the Pattullo residence in West Orange, New Jersey, and flew right through the window of Faith's bedroom and settled on top of her computer, which was the end of that game of Tetris.

"Faith Pattullo," said the Dove, "what are you doing playing with your computer on the Sabbath when the rest of your family is at church?"

"Oh, Jesus!" Faith said. "You scared the shit out of me."

"I'm not Jesus, I'm the Holy Ghost. There is a difference. And I don't like that kind of language."

"This is a dream, right?"

The Dove looked offended. "No, this is a vision. A beatific vision."

"I can't believe this."

"We're aware of that. That's why I'm here."

The screen of the computer announced that the game of Tetris was over and asked if she wanted to play another. She clicked the mouse on No, and the screen returned to the main Windows menu. All the while the Dove sat there, brooding, on top of her monitor.

"So what happens now?" she asked the Dove. "Don't tell me I'm pregnant."

"You should live so long," the Dove replied enigmatically.

"You're going to take me on board a UFO and examine me?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Do I look like an alien? Anyhow, aliens don't exist. They're figments of overstimulated imaginations, when they're not simply made out of whole cloth."

"And you're something else?"

"I'm God."

"I can't believe I'm taking this so calmly," Faith said, resting her head against the back of her chair.

"That's the special quality of a visionary experience. It's preternaturally lucid. While it lasts."

"And then?"

"Visions are fleeting. The memory of it will fade away, rather quickly."

"Like a dream?"

"If you want to think of this as a dream, that's all right with me. Call it a dream."

"So, why are you here?"

"To show you that I exist, that there is a God, that you should believe in me."

"Oh, now I know why this is happening. It's the argument I had yesterday with Vinny Coller. All his stuff about the universe is like a watch so there's got to be someone who put it together. So – you're the watchmaker?"

"I didn't come here to explain the mysteries of creation to you, Miss Pattullo. They are unfathomable, in any case, and quite beyond the comprehension of a 15-year-old girl in West Orange, New Jersey."

"You don't need to rub it in. I tried to read that book by Steven Hawkins and got nowhere."

"You're beginning to admit your limitations," the Dove noted approvingly. "Now the next step is simple: kneel down and adore me."

"You sound just like Vinny, if you don't mind my saying so."

"You'll feel better if you do," the Dove said, in a tone that was not without a hint of menace.

"You are Vinny! Jesus, my shrink will flip when I tell her about this."

The Dove ruffled its feathers. "If you ever get the chance, Miss Smartypants."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"All men are mortal, sweetheart, and your number's just about up. I was sent here, by Our Father in heaven, to give you one last chance to prepare your soul for eternity."

"I'm going to die? When? How?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out."

"And I'm going to go to hell if I don't get on my knees and adore you, right now?"

"That's the general idea," said the Dove.

"You know what this is like? This is like a confession obtained under torture."

"Whatever it takes," the Dove said. "Well? I'm waiting."

"Tell you what. Let's make a deal. If I get down on my knees, I don't have to die. Or anything else terrible. Deal?"

"I'm afraid not. It's already set down in the Book of Fate – tomorrow at a little after three p.m., on Route 17, in a Chevrolet Lumina, exiting from Dunkin Doughnuts."

"I'm going to die for the sake of doughnut? My shrink would love that. She already thinks I'm a potential anorexic. Don't I just wish."

"Your time's running out," said the Dove. "You've got to make a choice. You don't even have to kneel down if you don't want to. That's just a formality. The important thing is for you to make a confession of faith. Just say you believe in the Triune God, Father, Son, and yours sincerely."

"If I say it, and I don't believe it, what difference would it make?"

"That can be worked out at the last judgement. Lots of souls find themselves in that situation. It will all depend on your judge."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I'm just not going to say I believe in something I don't believe in. It's not as though you're short of people who still believe almost anything you tell them to. Somebody sees the Virgin Mary in their back yard, and my mother's there before the TV news crews."

"Would you like to see the Virgin Mary? Would that help?"

"I don't think so. I know there's some women who object to having a God who's a He, but I don't think it would make any difference to me what sex someone is if they don't exist. What sex are you, by the way?"

The Dove looked offended. "I'm male, naturally. What did you think?"

"I couldn't tell. I don't know that much about pigeons."

"I'm not a pigeon. I'm the Holy Ghost. And you, young lady, are a dead duck. Good-bye."

The Dove disappeared in a burst of radiance. Then, just as the Holy Ghost had foretold, the vision faded, and Faith shook her head and looked at the Windows menu in front of her with a peculiar feeling that there was something she should remember, but she couldn't think what. Then even that feeling faded away.

Just as the Father had foreknown, the next day Vinny Coller took Faith to Dunkin Doughnuts on Route 17, where she had a cup of coffee and two of their new miniature eclairs. They were her last earthly pleasure.

While the Holy Trinity looked down from heaven, the Lumina moved out from the parking lot and into the exit lane.

"Here it comes," said the Father, referring to the semi that had gone out of control in the middle lane and was heading straight into the side of the Lumina.

"The poor creature," said Jesus, with a sigh of compassion.

"Don't waste your pity," said the Holy Ghost. "You didn't have to deal with her. Irreverent? You can't begin to imagine."

Faith died at the moment of impact, and then something funny happened in heaven. It began to grow dark. The music that was always thrumming in the air fell still. The three members of the Trinity looked at each other with alarm, and then, ineluctably, without the faith that had sustained them, as the stars fade from the sky when the sun rises, one by one, they flickered out of existence, first the Father, then the Son, and finally the Holy Ghost.

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

This may come up on quiz night, so brainy caps on, puzzlers! There was, against all likelihood, a British sf feature film released in late 1993. It was set in England, filmed at Pine-wood and on location with an all-British cast, made entirely with UK money, and released theatrically in 45 prints nationwide. It disdained all American accents, international stars, and pitifully inept emulation of Hollywood style and genres, using instead a backdrop of classical sf motifs to explore uniquely British subjects for a purely domestic audience. It was not made by sad young people with pony-tails who feel it's time for the British film establishment to move aside and make way for a new generation of asskicking, jivetalking funsters who are sick to the gills of Branagh bloody Ivory and want to make hard, speedy, badly-written films about stuff that kids today can really relate to, with influences ranging from Quentin to *er Mean Streets* and um back again. Yet it was a film that did genuinely original things with old sf ideas, dealing directly and provocatively with cultural attitudes to sexuality, the body, and correct thinking.

The answer will be coming up on your page shortly, but it may help to say it was a space comedy, it was released the week before Christmas, and that you almost certainly didn't see it and don't know anyone who did, especially if you live in or around London – where even at West End prices it took a grim £648, and was prematurely whipped off after a week and replaced by *Jurassic Park*. Six million punters in the naked city, and only a hundred of them could be bothered with a new British movie that tried to reclaim the interplanetary romp for the homeland. In its birthday suit, that certainly looks like a chilling statistic.

But by now, of course, your peripheral vision has picked up the bold type, and you know that I'm actually talking about *UFO – The Movie*. Before we go on, you might like to reflect for a moment on why that should make a difference, and what assumptions you may be making about "real" sf, "real" movies (*UFO* was made with video money), and the proper relationship between standup

(it's the new rock'n'roll!) and cinema (er, it's the new rock'n'roll too! and so is home entertainment consoles! and manga video! and, hang on, I've dropped the list in my noodles). While you get in touch with your feelings on this one, I'll refresh: *UFO* is an interstellar vehicle for Middlesbrough's late and somewhat distorted answer to Andrew Dice Clay, the rude and northern Roy "Chubby" Brown, whose live show and video are known for their untransmittable vocabulary, aggressively gynaecological imagery, and insistently incorrect sexual politics. Its aim, evidently, is to devise a mass-audience exposure for the touring funnyman that can break free of the concert-video format while bypassing the well-trodden, but in this case plainly inaccessible, path that runs through national broadcast media; and the solution, familiarly enough, is a loose narrative dramatizing or incorporating routines from the live shows, and centred on the comedian "as himself" (that is, in his stage persona) with frequent asides to camera and similar standup equivalents.

In this case, our Chubby ("the most foulmouthed, sexist little shit in history") is abducted from the stage of his Blackpool show by spacetravelling feminists from the future who are collecting "notorious exponents of male subjugation" to be tried for offences against the Gender Supremacy Act of 2890, and upon conviction to be humanely corrected by severe chemical castration or, in Chubby's case, impregnated and stuffed with implants to force him to bear a child every year for the next three decades. Aimed, presumably, in large part at the Chubby virgin, it makes a reasonably spirited go of introducing the 90s Benny Hill to a sceptical national audience, locating him in a recognizable comedic tradition, and playing the alternate game of offence and disarmament to induct the viewer into the appeal of the live performer. An illuminating glimpse of his stage act is included ("Fuck off!" he opens, and the audience dissolves in mirth; a joke about his wife's ugliness cuts to an audience shot of same wife laughing good-humouredly along, and indeed all the most misogynistic material is intercut with careful reaction shots of

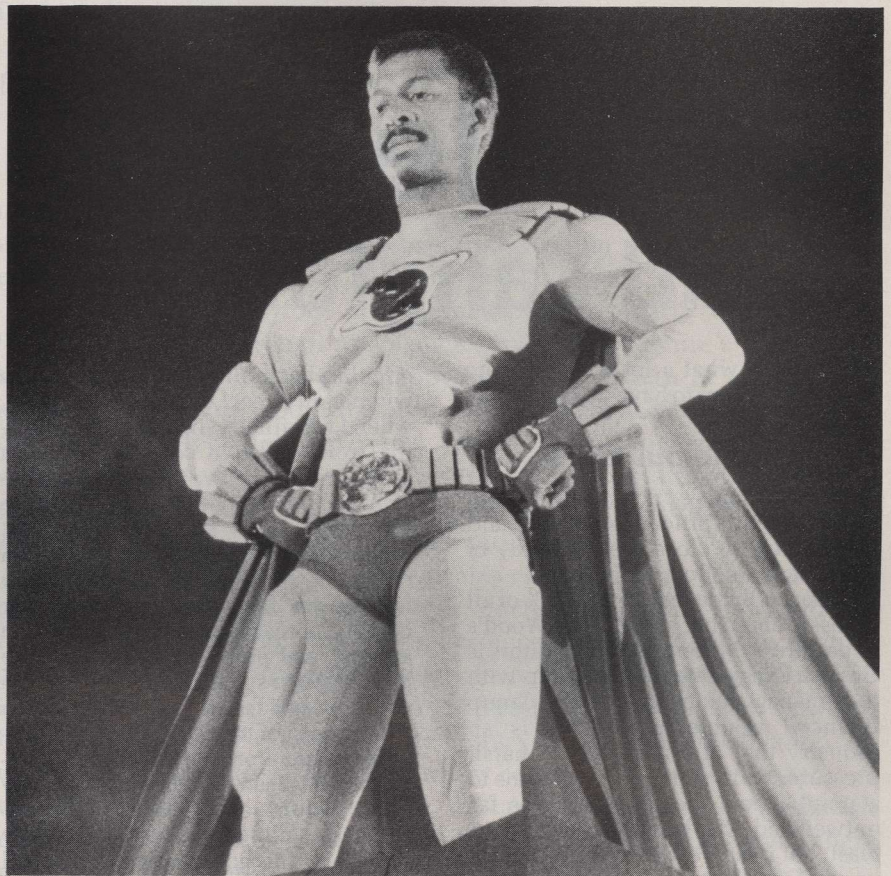
escorted female spectators sportingly enjoying the joke), as are a suite of mostly dire musical numbers, and all the Klingon and Uranus jokes you could wish for, plus rather a lot more.

Unassuming stuff, for sure; and for the most part disappointingly inoffensive, despite liberal disparaging references to women's parts and a few intermittently-nasty slag gags. There's scant attempt at titillation, only one rather mild racial joke, and Chubby's experience of childbirth does indeed result in a mellower, more understanding fat git. The whole thing seems more nostalgic than dangerous, a lot closer to Donald McGill than to *Oleanna*; most of the jokes that do tweak a grin (and it's got to be said there are many, many that don't) do so for largely metacomical reasons of sheer chronicness. "I demand a second opinion!" says the pregnant Chubby to his GP ("Dr Richard Head"). "If you insist," quips the Dr: "you're an ugly bastard as well." There are jokes in this film that awaken primeval race memories of punchlines that cheered our habiline ancestors as they flaked their handaxes round the waterhole at sunset ("There's nothing wrong with me, mate – you're the one that's showing all the dirty pictures!"), and double entendres that evoke warm childhood memories of camp in the timeless *Carry On* vein ("I don't care who you are, it's 50p to come in my entrance," &c.). Even as a piece of cinematic narrative, it shows a striking indifference to orthodox canons of Hollywood structure – the jokes, the plot, and the budget alike getting ever thinner and more desultory until they simply vanish in midair with what must be the cheapest dinosaur effect in all the annals of entertainment. Yet though many of its sf trappings are simple vernacularisms culled from, and usually feebly parodic of, TV shows, the central joke – a grotesque and systematic parody of the classical Whitley Strieber abduction experience – is refreshingly new and on the button; and seen back-to-back with *Demolition Man*, of which it often seems a hideously deformed thematic cousin, it does make you wonder whether some concepts don't actually come over better for being cheap, low-denominated, and largely unwatched.

The other unassuming snuckpast of Christmas 93 was one-man African-American cottage industry Robert Townsend's second feature **Meteor Man**, a rather gentle satire about a gormless teacher in a troubled DC neighbourhood who acquires old-fashioned comicbook superpowers from an old-fashioned comicbook meteorite, only to find himself caught between the simplicities of traditional costume vigilantism and the complexities of actual community politics in the Crime Capital. So well-intentioned it's painful, *Meteor Man* mixes slapstick, sentiment, and consciousness-raising in a sweet-flavoured, vitamin-rich, but ultimately not terribly filling Slimfast movie on the roots of street crime and the possibility of effective response. On the former, Townsend's careful portait is often quite thoughtful and convincing, painting a streetscape in which government is indifferent, police largely ineffectual and irrelevant, and the (white-led) drug rings allowed more or less to run neighbourhoods on terror, recruiting from junior street gangs and confident that the citizens are too cowed, fragmented, and disempowered to organize resistance to their rule.

Where he's less effective is in the exploration of solutions. Needless to say, *Meteor Man* quickly discovers that even a neighbourhood superhero can't be everywhere at once, and that his presence in the power equation merely destabilizes the balance further; but it's hard to feel much more faith in the community alternative proposed in the finale, where *Meteor Man*'s failing struggle catalyses the neighbours into collective action to whip the bad guys' asses themselves, and those same juve gangs that the cracksters sought to recruit stand suddenly forth as the true saviours of the streets. Sadly, this is just as much a movie fantasy as the comicbook stuff. "Gangs only take over because you let them," explains a speaker at a neighbourhood meeting; "if we were to stand up to them they'd think twice." Well, no, actually: gangs take over because they're heavily resourced and armed, and if you were to stand up to them they'd put six rounds in your head, dump the body on your mother's doorstep, and ring the bell before they drove off giggling.

In the other scale, though, *Meteor Man* has a fair share of quite sharp comic observation, a staggering cast of black Hollywood legends in support, and a fair tankful of pure unleaded daftness; the rest of the audience (all black, interestingly enough) were often in utter hysterics. It has an awfully slow labour setting things up and a couple too many endings, and it's annoyingly sloppy over precisely the bits of superhero mythos-making –



Robert Townsend in 'Meteor Man' (MGM)

specifying the powers, sorting out the secret-identity rationale – that comics take painfully seriously. But then, like *UFO*, it's not really interested in the sf elements for their own sake, but as deliberately corny and threadbare clichés whose combination of familiarity with absurdity is what makes them useful to the film's quite different politico-comedic agenda; which in both these cases is the defiant celebration of minority values in a largely

hostile and indifferent supercultural landscape. It just happens that the one centres on crack wars in Washington and black stars in space underwear, and the other on crack jokes in Blackpool and space tarts in black netwear. The construction of comparative value judgments is left as an exercise for the reader.

(Nick Lowe)

Thomas M. Disch (see "The Story of Faith," page 28) last contributed to *Interzone* with "Celebrity Love" (issue 35). His latest novel, *The Priest: A Gothic Romance*, will appear in the summer of 1994. Relatively inactive in the sf/fantasy field in recent years, he has been writing theatre criticism for *The Nation* and the *New York Daily News*. He is also a poet and playwright. He has now got himself a country place in Barryville, New York State, "which is two hours and a bit out of the city, in the woody slopes of the Delaware River, not far from fabled Milford." He has no pets but is "an active bird feeder" and enjoys "regular visits from deer and groundhogs." Perhaps he will turn to pastoral sf, à la Clifford D. Simak...? Whatever, we hope to publish more by him in the near future.

Ansible Link

David Langford



Oh dear, what a lot of depressing news I seem to have this month...

The Odious Ones

Douglas Adams's nickname among members of his official fan club is said to be based on close literary study of his autograph: 'Bop Ad.'

Deborah Beale insists that 99% of all sf gossip about her and Charon Wood's departure as Millennium's sf editors is Greatly Exaggerated. No bust-up with the management, no Orion Group financial trouble, etc. "This is an industry that puts particularly harsh pressures on its staff... We just came to a point where the disadvantages far outweighed the benefits. We had a blast, but it isn't a career that can offer us what we want any more."

Pat Murphy was injured in a tragic car crash in Nepal while returning from a 36-day expedition to the Everest base camp; a younger author, Claire Parman Brown, was killed in the same accident. She was 29 and had completed one novel, *Vengeful Souls*.

Caroline Oakley is now sf editorial supremo at Millennium. "Couldn't happen to a nicer person or better editor," said one fawning author...

Terry Pratchett visited South Africa: "Signed a lot of books for a lot of fans of various shades who were buying as if there was no tomorrow, which many seem to feel is the case. There's a lot of surface optimism around but you can hear the mighty creak of fingers being crossed. In Johannesburg there's areas that look like Cheltenham but with razor wire on the (high) garden walls, or electric fences, or 'Armed Response' notices – but most noticeable are the walls that have had a few feet of extra blocks recently added..."

Christopher Priest's name is getting around, according to DC Comics' freelance newsletter *Shop Talk* – which weirdly announces the "...new Ray writer, CHRISTOPHER PRIEST. Actually Priest isn't the new writer of *The Ray*. Christopher Priest will become the new name of former DC Editor, JIM OWLSEY. Jim, who has 'been feeling a lot more spiritual lately,' is talking about taking a new name in conjunction with his new company..." Puzzling.

Keith Roberts seemed to bid friends farewell in a truly horrifying Christmas

circular, beginning: "This is to advise you that in effect I died in March 1990, when I was finally diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis. As you will perhaps know, this is a progressive and basically mysterious disease for which there is no known cure. Since then, developments have been rapid. I have been reduced from my former six feet plus to wheelchair height; increased spasticity has made artwork and production things of the past, while a so far unexplained complication has led to me contributing a major piece of my anatomy to the hospital incinerator. I'm therefore a one-legged hasbeen at the age of fifty eight." After various jobs at rumour-mongers, publishers, critics, library suppliers, the government, God, and rehabilitation staff who with black irony suggested a creative writing course, the letter mentions his horror of being forced into a residential home and indicates that by way of alternative he has a sufficient stock of painkillers "to solve my problems several times over." It seems particularly awful that such a finely talented author should be in this plight: one recalls Alfred Bester's lonely end and...well...can only hope that something will turn up.

George Turner, whose stroke was reported here last year, is now well but feels unable to write any more. The Turner articles in the recent issue of Bruce Gillespie's fine Australian magazine *SF Commentary* may thus be his last ever.

Infinitely Improbable

Serious Scientific Sponsorship. Dr Dave Clements gloats over bagging a £750 grant from the government Office of Science & Technology's programme to "improve public understanding of science" – here by luring professional scientists to sf conventions. This, the smallest grant of OST's kitty, was 100% of the sum requested and received some 85% of the excitable *Daily Telegraph* coverage...the remaining £149,250 of grants being mentioned only briefly at the end of their article.

Galaxy magazine was to be relaunched in January 1994, edited by E.J. Gold (son of founding editor H.L. Gold) and opening with an unpublished Gold story plus a new Robert

Sheckley novel. It should appear bimonthly: all enquiries to PO Box 370, Nevada City, CA 95959, USA.

"**Victims of Ellison**" is a deplorable jape, an alleged support group for unfortunates "who have been named as enemies by Mr Ellison, and have been maligned, harassed, or assaulted" by the great man. What can this mean? Insiders point to old adversary Charles Platt... (Enquiries c/o Interactive Systems, PO Box 595, Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10113.) Harlan Ellison himself remains controversial, as evidenced by his mordant wit in a recent speech: "[William Shatner] would screw a sheep in the window of Bloomingdale if you gave him the chance," while "Gene Roddenberry was a lying sack of shit... a scum bag," and "If you can't kick cripples, who can you kick? I mean, that's the whole point of cripples..." All from a report in *The Comics Journal* – which also notes Ellison's enthusiastic praise for comics folk Dave (*Cerebus*) Sim and Britain's very own Neil (*Sandman*) Gaiman, "the best writer in America today."

Tremble, John Major! First I heard that The National Student SF Association planned to bring the government to its knees with a gigantic London demonstration to protest the ruling that sf is not a "core activity" for a students' union (i.e. no more funding). Shortly after, I was told that the NSSFA no longer exists, so perhaps Downing Street can rest easy after all...

L. Ron Hubbard goes on forever. His Church of Spiritual Technology "has designed gas-filled, titanium time capsules to hold Hubbard's teachings, and plans to place 10,500 of the capsules in three vaults, two built to resist earthquakes or nuclear attack... Hubbard's writings will be preserved on 1.8 million stainless steel plates and his lectures on 187,000 nickel records that could be played back with a stylus as crude as a thorn in the event of some future cataclysm... [CST] also plans to place large, indestructible obelisks around the world covered with photographs explaining Scientology 'so that even a wandering savage will be able to understand and apply these principles.'" Next, *Mission Earth* will reappear as the first sf "megalithology" published on one million obelisks, with terrifying implications for the future of remaindering.

ISSUE FOUR

SF/FANTASY
PREVIEW

SPRING 1994

GOLLANCZ

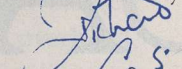
Dear reader,

This spring we will be publishing two authors who are becoming increasingly known to enthusiastic readers of SF and fantasy. Paul McAuley and Simon Green, whose new books are excerpted in the next few pages, are writers we, as publishers, are strongly committed to. Both of them have been greatly praised in the specialist press, but as with most SF and fantasy, widespread newspaper review coverage has escaped them.

At the moment, only one national newspaper regularly reviews science fiction or fantasy. Through a Gollancz survey of the genre's readers, we know that a lot of you are unhappy about the dearth of information available in the press about this new fiction, and that is why we have felt the need to offer alternative ways, like the following sampler of new novels, of bringing writers of great potential to your attention. Without reviews in the national papers, it is now incredibly difficult to bring a skilled writer of these genres to a wider audience.

We believe many of you may resent this exclusion in the media of such a large part of contemporary fiction as much as we do and we would like to spearhead a campaign to see that science fiction and fantasy writing gets fair treatment in the press. Letters from the book-reading public are likely to have a lot more effect than publishers' complaints so we're hoping some of you will write to the literary editors care of Gollancz. We will copy the letters to each of the literary editors of the major newspapers to register your feelings on this issue. We can't promise that the media will change their 'no SF or fantasy' policies, but it will certainly make them more aware of the problem.

Yours sincerely

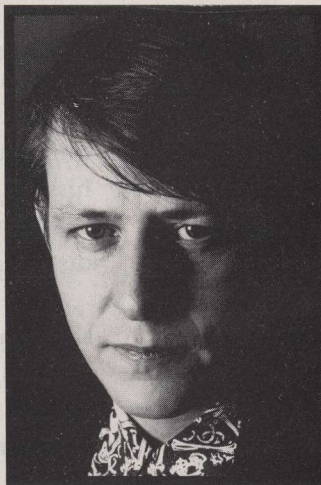


Richard Evans
Publishing Director

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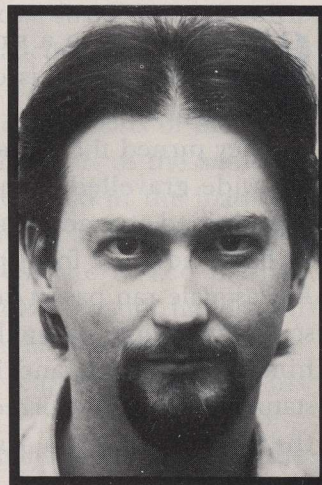
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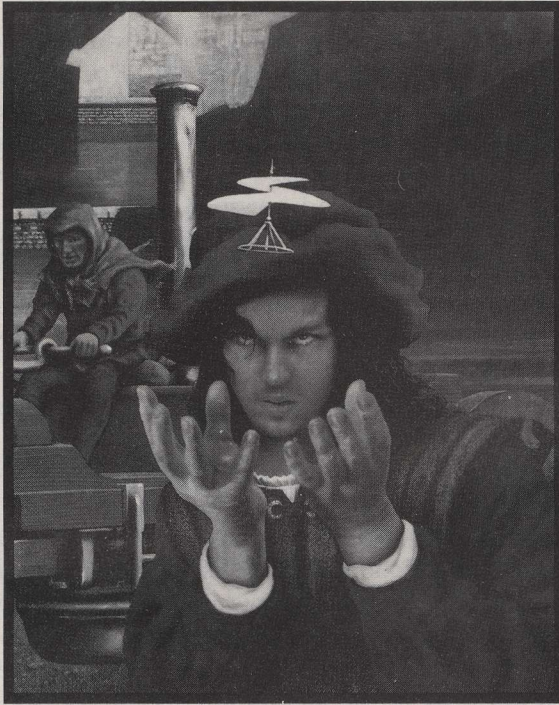
PAUL
MCAULEY



photograph by Sean Earnshaw

SIMON
GREEN





Florence, in the year 1518. The most powerful of the Italian city states, transformed by the devices of the Great Engineer, da Vinci. Steamships, factories, submarines and poison gas have transformed the world.

But intrigue is everywhere and after the brutal killing of one of the artist Raphael's entourage in a locked tower room, a young painter, Pasquale, and the cynical, hard-drinking journalist, Niccolò Machiavegli, begin an investigation. Travelling in a steam-powered *vaporetto* they follow a possible suspect to a villa on the outskirts of the city. There they witness a murder – and are soon under hot pursuit...

PASQUALE'S ANGEL

Shouts, and then a single pistol-shot. Niccolò said, 'One thing is clear. We cannot stay a moment longer.'

They turned the corner of the villa, ran down the wide gravelled path towards the gate. The path divided around a statue of a griffin sitting on its haunches, one front paw supporting a shield. As Pasquale ran past it, ahead of Niccolò, he felt something tug at his ankles. He stumbled, caught himself on hands and knees. Above him, the statue of the griffin stirred. It shook at every joint, then reared up on its hind legs. Pasquale crouched beneath it in terror and amazement. The shield fell with a wooden clatter. Steam

burst from the griffin's mouth and it made a tremendous grinding roar as its head turned to and fro. Its eyes were red lamps. All down the long path to the gate great flares burst into flame, hissing and sizzling and throwing up thick smoke that glowed whitely in the moonlight. Somewhere distant a brazen gong clanged and clanged.

Then Niccolò was pulling at Pasquale, shouting that it was only a mechanical device, a festival trick. Pasquale got to his feet, feeling foolish. The griffin's movements were already subsiding. Niccolò was right; it was a mechanical device of the sort constructed by artists or artificers as centre pieces for those great

public spectacles so loved by Florentines. No magic – or not yet.

Niccolò flourished a pistol, an odd weapon with a kind of notched wheel over its stock. 'Have a brave heart,' he said. He face was alive: Pasquale realized that this was what he lived for, desperate moments where courage and luck determined whether you lived or died.

They ran on, and as they neared the gate its guard took a wild shot at them. Niccolò fired back as he ran, fired and fired again without reloading, the wheel of the pistol ratcheting around with each shot. The guard fled through the open gate, and a moment later Pasquale and Niccolò gained the dusty country road and saw the *vaporetto* jolting towards them at top speed, fast as a galloping horse, and wreathed in vast plumes of steam.

They waved at it, and had to jump aside as it slewed to a halt, wheels spinning in the road's soft rutted dirt. The driver shouted that they must climb in and released the brake at the same moment, so that Pasquale had to jump on to the load-bed and haul Niccolò after him, his arms almost starting from their sockets with the effort.

There were pistol-shots as the *vaporetto* banged down the steep road. Something burst overhead, a bright glare that grew and grew until it outshone the full moon. By this floating magical light Pasquale saw that a carriage, perhaps the same one that had delivered poor Francesco to the magician's lair, was chasing them at full tilt. Niccolò saw it too, and calmly told the driver to go faster. When the man started to argue, Pasquale took the florin from his scrip and held it over the driver's shoulder. Without looking, the driver reached up and plucked the coin like a grape. The *vaporetto* leapt forward, throwing Pasquale and Niccolò backwards on to the load-bed's rough planking.

Niccolò rolled over on his belly, making a kind of choked laughter. 'Did you see how that guard ran? I would have killed him if I could. I shot to kill. My blood was up.'

'From your talk it still is,' Pasquale said, feeling his bruises. He tried to sit up and a great jolt as the *vaporetto* shot over a hummock in the ill-made road knocked him back down again. He swore and said, 'We still aren't free yet.'

'I have my pistol. The self-loading wheel does little for its accuracy, but rapid fire is certainly discouraging to those who face it. Did you see

the guard? He ran like a Spaniard.'

'This isn't a war.'

'Any kind of combat makes beasts of men. They revert to their base nature.'

'You may have another chance to enjoy your base nature very soon,' Pasquale said, squinting past the tattered clouds of the *vaporetto*'s exhaust into the night behind them. The black carriage had fallen far behind, for its horse could not keep up with the *vaporetto*'s breakneck downhill speed, but he was certain that it would not give up the chase.

The slope of the road flattened out, houses crowding now on either side, and the *vaporetto* began to slow. The driver shouted that water in the boiler was low, that he would have to stop soon and refill it.

'Go on as best you can,' Niccolò told him.

'If the tubes boil empty over the burners, they'll blow,' the driver said. 'There's an end to it.'

Pasquale said, 'I think you will need your pistol, Niccolò. They are gaining on us.'

As he spoke, crossbow-quarrels flew out of the darkness with shocking suddenness. Most missed the *vaporetto*, but two thumped into the load-bed and promptly began to give off acrid white smoke. Pasquale wrestled one from the plank in which it had embedded itself. Its shaft was almost too hot to hold, and its point was hollow and fretted with slots from which the smoke poured. Pasquale threw the quarrel over the side, but burnt his hand when he tried to pull out the second. Then more quarrels whistled past and he ducked down. One thumped into the splintered planks a hand's breadth from his face, burying itself up to its flight feathers; an ordinary quarrel, but still deadly. The new crossbows fired quarrels with such force that even a glancing blow could kill a man.

Niccolò clutched one of the posts of the load-bed, waving his pistol. The shaft of the smoking quarrel that was still embedded in the load-bed suddenly started to burn. In a moment, bright blue flames spread across the tarred planks. Niccolò steadied his pistol with both hands and fired back at the carriage, laughing wildly all the while, so that Pasquale feared he had lost his reason.

The *vaporetto* made a sharp right turn on to the Borgo San Jacopo and was suddenly amongst a crowd of workers. Workmen flung themselves

to either side as the *vaporetto* ploughed into their midst. They were the *ciompi*, shift-workers of the sleepless manufactories. They were dressed in shabby patched tunics girdled with rope, shod in wooden clogs, and wore shapeless felt hats on their heads to keep off the night's cold. Many were shaven-headed, as a result of a scheme of the artificers to eliminate lice. They shouted and jeered as the *vaporetto* sped past. The carriage was very close now; Pasquale could see the driver standing on his bench, his arm rising and falling as he whipped the horse on.

The driver of the *vaporetto* looked over his shoulder, his face white and his eyes reflecting the flames leaping up from the load-bed. He uttered a wordless cry and threw himself from his bench into the crowd. The *vaporetto*, rudderless, slewed and slowed, and ran into the wall of one of the houses that fronted the river. Its boiler-tubes split open and vented live steam; the burner-pan broke loose and spilled burning coals that set fire to the undercarriage.

Pasquale jumped down at once, but Niccolò stayed defiantly atop the burning vehicle. He emptied his pistol at the carriage, which had pulled to a halt, its terrified horse rearing in its traces. Here was a picture for the broadsheet, Niccolò raving and firing his pistol through flames, the crowd backing away, the black carriage and its plunging black horse. It burned itself in Pasquale's brain.

Then Niccolò threw away his pistol and jumped down. Pasquale grabbed him and they ran. *Ciompi* parted before them like the Red Sea before the Israelites. More shots from the carriage. Pasquale saw a man in a hemp jerkin struck in the teeth by a pistol-ball; he collapsed spouting blood from his ruined mouth.

Niccolò was out of breath, and Pasquale had to haul him along by main force. He was after all an old man of fifty, and for all his wiry frame not fit to run this race. Suddenly, he staggered and swore and clutched at this thigh. Blood welled over his hand. 'I'm hit!' he shouted, and seemed strangely exhilarated.

Pasquale hauled him on, daring to look back and seeing the carriage stranded amongst the angry mob. The Ponte Vecchio was ahead. Its angle-tower loomed over the heads of the crowd. Pasquale and Niccolò limped on, dodging through streams of *ciompi* shuffling wearily towards their shanty-town hovels at shift's

end, or marching in resignation towards that night's work. From a view point high above Florence, from the top of the Great Tower perhaps, there were no individuals visible in the gaslit crowd. Two men escaping with their lives were less disturbance than a pebble thrown in the river. Along the Borgo San Jacopo, there was a disturbance around a burning *vaporetto*, and a carriage was surrounded by an angry mob, which suddenly drew back as the carriage was enveloped in a spurt of flame and coloured smokes, which blew away to reveal it empty. But this was only a temporary disturbance. All disturbances in the calm unfolding of the city's routines were temporary, no more than an incalculably minute faltering, as of a speck of grit caught and crushed in a gear-train, in its remorseless mechanisms.



Paul J McAuley won the Philip K Dick Award for his first novel, *Four Hundred Billion Stars*. His subsequent novels are *Secret Harmonies*, *Eternal Light* (shortlisted for the Arthur C Clarke Award) and *Red Dust*, published in paperback simultaneously with *Pasquale's Angel*. His short stories have appeared frequently in *Interzone* and are collected in *King of the Hill*. He lives in Scotland.

**• MEET PAUL MCAULEY AT THE
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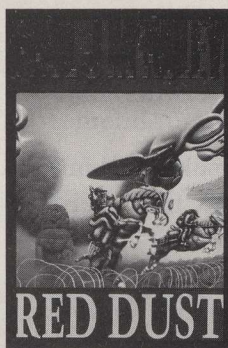
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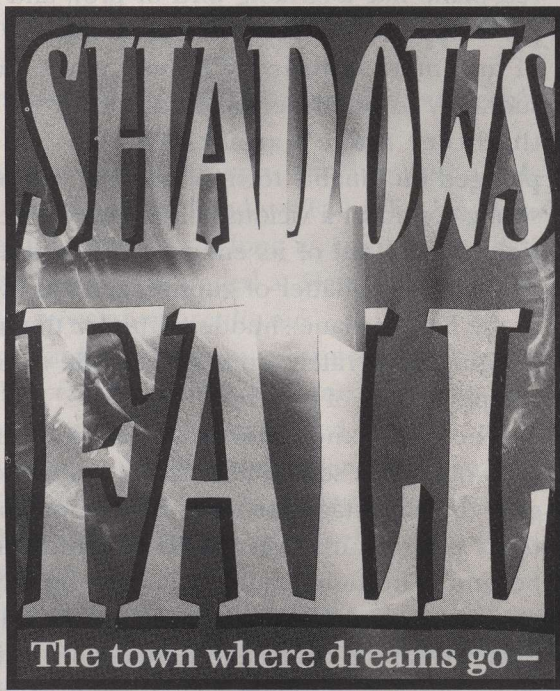
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SIMON GREEN



Shadows Fall is the town where dreams go to die. You won't find it on any map, but it will be there for you if you need it badly enough. It's a place where all stories find their ending, all quests are concluded and every lost soul finds its way home at last. Strange people and stranger creatures walk the sprawling streets and there are doors that can take you anywhere, to lands that no longer exist and worlds that someday might.

But now Shadows Fall is under double threat – from a killer who strikes at random and from a group of fanatics who want this elephants' graveyard of the supernatural wiped out.

Which is when James Hart, who grew up in Shadows Fall but remembers nothing of it, arrives back...

SHADOWS FALL

He stood there, a man alone in the middle of nowhere, and wondered uneasily if he really wanted to take this last final step of his journey. Whatever it was that had scared his parents into leaving Shadows Fall twenty-five years earlier, it had been so bad it kept them silent for the rest of their lives. It was only sensible that he should have strong reservations about walking blindly into possible enemy territory. But the bottom line was, there was a great gaping hole in his life, and he needed to know what he'd lost. Part of what made him tick, a central formative period of his life, was a mystery, and he had to try and solve it if he was ever to be at peace with himself. Anything would be better than the endless horror of not knowing who and what he really was. Anything.

He sighed and shrugged and scuffed his shoes on the ground, and wondered what to do next. The map had brought him this far, but it ended at the crossroads. And the final instructions in the letter made no sense at all. According to his

grandfather, all he had to do now was call to the town, and it would do the rest. He looked carefully about him, but the world stretched away alone and empty for as far as he could see.

This is crazy. Grandfather was crazy. There's no town here.

He shrugged again. What the hell. He'd come this far, he might as well go the whole hog. Arise ye prisoners of reality; you have nothing to lose but your marbles. He carefully refolded the letter, tucked it back into his wallet, and put it away. He cleared his throat uneasily.

'Shadows Fall? Hello, Shadows Fall! Can you hear me? Can anybody hear me?'

Nothing. No response. The wind murmured to itself.

'Dammit, I've come a long way to be here, so show yourself! My name is James Hart, and I have a right to be here!'

The town was all around him. There was no fanfare of trumpets, no sudden rush of vertigo or swimming senses. Just one minute there was

nothing, and then Shadows Fall was there, looking real and concrete and inflexible, as though it had always been there. He was standing in the outskirts of the town, and the streets and houses spread out before him, open and pleasant and indisputably real. There was even a charming little sign, saying *Welcome to Shadows Fall. Please drive carefully.* He wasn't sure exactly what he'd been expecting, but this ordinary everyday location wasn't it. He looked behind him, and wasn't at all surprised to find the crossroads had vanished, replaced by rolling grassy fields and low hills.

He walked unhurriedly down the street and into the town. It looked open, warm, even friendly. Nice houses, neat lawns, clean streets. There weren't many people about, but they nodded pleasantly enough to him as he passed. A few even smiled. To look at, Shadows Fall could have been any town, anywhere; but Hart didn't think so. A feeling, then a certainty grew in him as he made his way through the town, heading for the centre as though by instinct. This was a place of possibilities. He could sense it, feel it in his bones and in his water. He had a sudden strong feeling of *déjà vu*, of having walked this street before. Perhaps he had, when he'd been younger. He tried to hang on to the memory, but it slipped away and was gone in a moment. It didn't bother him. It was a good sign, and he had no doubt the memory would return when it was ready. Perhaps it would bring a few friends back with it. Probably felt lonely out on its own.

A steady putt-putting sound nagged at his attention, and he looked round vaguely, trying to place it. It sounded like one of those old-fashioned lawnmowers that produce far more noise than its work can ever justify. He finally noticed a handful of people looking up at the sky, and he tilted his head back to see what they were looking at. And there, hanging high above them, was the source of the noise, a First World War biplane, pattering through the cloudless sky. The plane was bright crimson in colour, and it moved lazily, effortlessly along, its short stubby wings held together by thin metal struts and good faith. Hart grinned up at the plane. He wanted to wave at it, but was worried the other would look at him, so he didn't.

And then another biplane appeared out of nowhere, a faded khaki colour with British markings. It plummeted down towards the

red plane like a striking bird of prey, and Hart's jaw dropped as he heard the unmistakable sound of automatic gunfire. The red plane banked suddenly to one side, sweeping out from under the other plane's attack. The British plane plunged on, unable to stop, and the red biplane swung round in a viciously tight curve that put it right on the tail of its enemy. Once again there was the harsh chatter of gunfire, and Hart winced as the British plane shuddered under the impact, dodging desperately from side to side to try and escape the hail of bullets.

The two planes swooped and dived around each other like squabbling hawks, neither able to gain the advantage for long, both pilots pushing their planes and their skills to the limit and beyond. The fight could only have lasted a few minutes, but to Hart it seemed like hours, both planes escaping death and destruction by inches again and again. They flew at each other like Japanese fighting fish, all fury and aggression, attacking and retaliating, swooping together and roaring apart while Hart watched, entranced. And then suddenly smoke billowed from the British plane, thick and black and shot with flying sparks. The nose dropped and the plane fell like a stone, flames leaping up around the engine casing.

Hart watched the plane fall, his hands clenched into fists, silently willing the pilot to bail out while there was still time. But there was no sign of the pilot anywhere. Hart looked at the small crowd of people watching with him.

'Why doesn't he jump? If he doesn't jump soon there won't be time for his parachute to open!'

An old man looked at him sympathetically, and when he spoke his voice was calm and kind and utterly resigned. 'He can't jump, son. That's a First World War plane. Pilots didn't have parachutes then. Wasn't enough room in the cockpit for a pilot and a parachute.'

Hart gaped at him. 'You mean he's...'

'Yes, son. He's going to die.'

The plane smashed into a low hill some distance outside the town, and exploded in a rush of flames. Hart watched numbly as shrapnel from the explosion pattered down like hail stones. Black smoke rose up in billowing clouds, and high above the red biplane soared on, alone and supreme and unchallenged. The old man patted Hart reassuringly on the shoulder.

'Don't take it so hard. This time tomorrow



they'll be up there fighting again, and maybe then the British plane will win. He does sometimes.'

Hart looked at him. 'You mean that wasn't real?'

'Oh, it was real enough. But life and death aren't that simple in Shadows Fall. They've been fighting that duel for as long as I can remember. God knows why.' He smiled at Hart, not unkindly. 'You're a newcomer, aren't you?'

'Yes,' said Hart, making himself look away from the crashed plane and concentrate on the old man. 'Yes, I've only just arrived.'

'Thought so. You'll see stranger than this after you've been here a while. Don't let any of it worry you. Things happen here. That's the way it is, in Shadows Fall.'

He nodded a goodbye, and then continued on his way. The rest of the small crowd was already dispersing. They went on about their business, chatting quietly as though this was just another day. Hart looked up at the cloudless sky, but there was no sign of the red biplane anywhere. He moved slowly away, his racing heart only now beginning to slow.

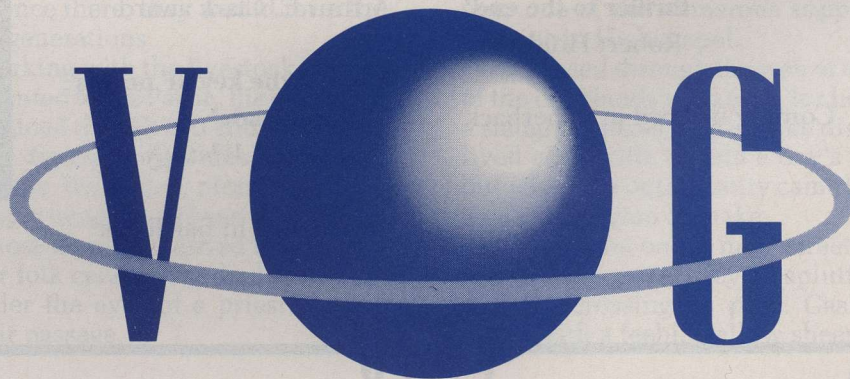
He turned a sudden corner, and found himself walking down a Paris street. He recognized the style and the language and the sidewalk cafés. No one paid him any attention, though he gawked shamelessly like the most obvious tourist. He turned another corner and found himself in what appeared to be Europe in the Dark Ages. The road was a dirt track, and people and animals milled this way and that, all talking at once so that the air was full of sound. He didn't recognize any of the languages. A few people glared suspiciously at Hart as he passed, but most just nodded politely. He trudged on through the thick mud and soon left the past behind him.

He passed through a dozen moments of history, different places with different styles and languages, from day to night and back again, and everywhere he went people smiled at him as though to say, *Isn't this fun? Isn't this marvellous?* and Hart smiled and nodded back, *Yes, it is marvellous. Yes it is.* And just as suddenly he was back where he belonged, in the familiar world of cars and traffic lights and rock-and-roll blasting from a teenager's ghetto blaster. He walked on, and the street stayed the same, and he didn't know whether to feel relieved or disappointed.

He came to a park and sat down on a wooden bench, to rest his mind as much as his feet. Two children in Ninja Turtles T-shirts were throwing a ball for their dog, a great shaggy beast of indeterminate breed, which seemed to be having some difficulty following the rules of the game. Sometimes it would chase after the ball, and other times it would just sit there and look at the boys, as if to say, *You threw the ball, you go and fetch it.* The dog looked across at Hart with bright, laughing eyes, its tongue lolling out of the side of its mouth. Hart decided he identified with the dog. Shadows Fall was playing a game with him, and he wasn't sure if he wanted to play or not.



Simon R Green began his writing career with the Hawk and Fisher fantasy thrillers. Subsequently he has written large-scale fantasies including *Blue Moon Rising*, *Blood and Honour* and *Down Among the Dead Men*, science fiction novels including *Mistworld* and *Ghostworld* and the best-selling novelization of *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*. He has also worked as an actor and bookseller but now writes full-time. He lives in Wiltshire.



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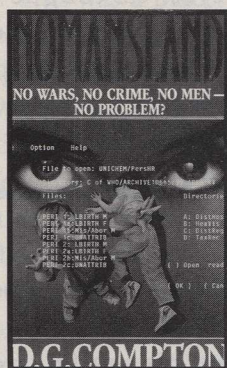
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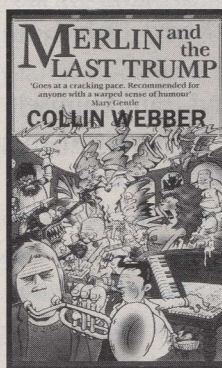
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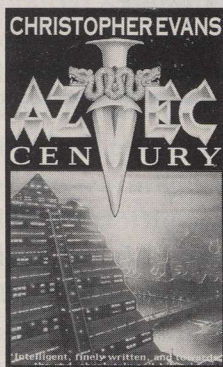
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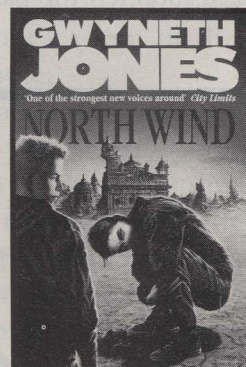
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North Wind



Westward

Keith Brooke

The *Westward* was no ship: it was a city. A city with water beneath, and sky above.

Jessop had waited since midnight to secure his place at the rails on Two Deck. Now, as dawn silvered the sky, the weight of the crowd crushed his chest against the double band of steel and he wished he had stayed inside.

The ship's siren interrupted his thoughts and suddenly there was a roar from those around, and from those on the levels below and above. Half a mile away, another crowd roared from the harbourside. Balloons and streamers filled the air, firecrackers tapped, boats large and small sounded their hooters and bells. The *Westward* had started its journey into the unknown.

After an hour the gap between ship and shore had barely grown. After another, the combined efforts of the *Westward's* engines and its fleet of tugs had made a more noticeable difference. By nightfall the coast would have fallen a mere six or seven miles back.

Jessop did not understand why everyone was so jubilant. After ten years of construction – in the open sea, for no harbour was wide enough or deep enough – the *Westward* was embarking on its first and only voyage. In about 90 days the emigrants would have travelled farther west than any human being before them, all in the hope – the *expectation* – that new lands would be found. What if there was only water? What if they came to that boundary rejected by modern science: the edge of the world? What of the 50,000 souls aboard then?

He broke free of the crowd and entered a gloomy passageway, lit by lightstrips and the occasional oil lamp. It was in this dark labyrinth that the ordinary people lived. The upper levels were devoted to horticulture and officers, the lowest to the thousands upon thousands of cattle, pigs, horses, sheep and fowl the emigrants had brought with them. The beasts would no doubt be blind through lack of light by the end of the voyage, but in the meantime they would feed the people and, once there, they would form the bloodstock for future generations.

Jessop would be working with the livestock later in the day, but first he wanted to see Patria, his new wife. They had been introduced a week ago and were married on the day before departure in a mass ceremony on the open deck of the *Westward*, along with 400 other couples. No single people had been allowed on this voyage – even those already married by a magus in one of the popular folk ceremonies had to be officially remarried under the eyes of a priest, if they wished to secure their passage.

He found her in her workplace at a medical point. Their eyes met and he felt a surge of passion and he believed then that the workings of chance may have gone in his favour this time. Their bond was yet to be consummated, but there would be plenty of time in the weeks ahead. She came to him, grinning, and then self-consciousness stole over the two as they kissed briefly, nose and chin. Jessop looked away, struggling to contain himself. Now, as he tried to work out when they would next be together, he found it inconceivable that he had spent the previous evening ashore, searching the streets of Highchapel for his first wife, Catherin.

The memory of that afternoon's ceremony had been fresh in his mind. Four hundred couples, smiling and glum, excited and nervous, had gathered on the rear deck in the aisles between glass expanses of horticultural frame. It was the largest open space on the ship, but still the marriages had been carried out, morning and afternoon, for three days. The race arena in Highchapel would have held a greater number of couples, but the ship had been deemed more appropriate.

A trio of priests had given perfunctory blessing, their voices amplified and distorted. The couples had stood, kneeled, sang, as commanded, and all the time a steady drizzle fell. When Jessop filed out, clutching the hand of his new wife, he felt little for her apart from a vague curiosity. He knew that the disenchantment which had bothered him all day was not her fault: it had been a response to the indecent scale and anonymity of the wedding itself. Later, he would also reflect that it had been a manifestation of his fear of the unknown: his pre-departure nerves.

It was this fear, he felt sure, which had driven him ashore that evening, as Patria returned to her work. Jessop should have been working, too, but in all the last-minute chaos and confusion it was easy to slip onto one of the numerous supply vessels for a final evening in Highchapel.

He passed through the web of alleyways at the heart of the docklands with ease, for he had once worked in a slaughterhouse in this same district. He had, in fact, lived all his life within a day's travel of Highchapel but when the opportunity came to escape, it had been an easy decision to make.

He came out onto a main street and stumbled on the cobbles as a motortricycle spluttered past, hooting at him for crossing its path. Gaslights illumined the street with a feeble yellow sheen, and the clatter of a

piano spilled out from a nearby bar. Tricycles, motorcars, horse-drawn carts and bicycles passed before him in a steady stream. Men, women and children walked on either side of the road, or stood to sell their wares or their bodies.

Jessop hurried on. Now that he was here, he realized why he had come: to find Catherin, to persuade her to come aboard with him. He did not know if it was the right thing to do, but he did not know that it was wrong, either.

They had met when he was 18 and she was 20. It was at a party in a storeroom at the slaughterhouse. Dance music had come from a wind-up gramophone and there was a half-barrel of punch to dip, and another in the chill. Sawdust had filled the air as dancing feet kicked, scuffed, stomped. Catherin had given the little half-smile that he came quickly to adore and then slumped against him, toppled by the punch and the exertion. After that they spent much of the party lying together, clinging to each other, as headless pigs hung above them and sawdust and blood mingled on the floor.

A year later they were married and a year after that they had parted. There had been no one else involved, no rows or violence or lack of love. "Sometimes you can love another too much," Catherin had tried to explain, on the last occasion they were together. "So much that every tiny imperfection is magnified, every little hurt made more intense. Sometimes it can all be too much to bear." The lack of tears following that statement had been worse than her crying would have been: it indicated a finality Jessop had denied until then. He did not understand. He would never understand. He went back to the butcher's shop where he had found work and he managed to live his life, but still he could not understand, and until he understood he could never forgive.

And yet on his last night in Albany he walked the streets of Highchapel trying to find her. "Catherin. My ... wife. Have you seen her?" But in the bar that had been their local, in their church and their park and the school where they would have sent their children, no one knew for certain what had become of her. "I fear she may have married again," said the preacher who had once been a close friend of Jessop. "She dresses in widow grey and teaches in the poor-house," said another former friend. "She died of the pox," was the worst. And all wished him well on his voyage.

Finally – by chance or design he did not know – he found himself in the narrow street where they had made their home together. He walked slowly until he stood before the white-edged step separating street from house. He knocked and then almost ran when the bolt slid and the door swung inwards. A middle-aged woman looked out at him and demanded to know what he wanted. He stammered and hesitated and, before he could ask what this stranger was doing in the house he had once rented, the door had been slammed in his face.

But as he rode out to the *Westward* again, midnight approaching and sleep an impossibility, his dejection was transformed into a new sense of purpose. The ship was a black wedge against the night. A yellow glow spilled over from the upper decks and spots of light from portholes speckled its surface, more real than the stars above and their jumping reflections in

the sea. And Jessop felt something he had not felt in many years: hope.

On the third day of the voyage – a grey strip of land was still visible by field-glass – Jessop and Patria consummated their marriage. It was an abrupt and self-conscious coupling, sandwiched between shifts and exhaustion. The next day they had more time together, and so they had their first row.

The lovemaking – and the arguments – became more skilful with familiarity, and Jessop vowed that he would work at this relationship until it was right. He sensed a similar determination in Patria and so, despite the rows, he felt a sense of achievement in his new marriage. He had never felt like this with Catherin, when it had all seemed so easy.

The days turned into weeks, and then one month, two months, three. When the *Westward* passed the point beyond which no man had travelled there was a day of celebration. It was a day when priests and street magi alike gave their blessings and drank each other's toasts. Jessop slaughtered a dozen pigs specially for his deck-sector and they were roasted for most of the day over open charcoal braziers. Rationing was forgotten as drink and food appeared from a variety of illicit sources, and at the end of it all Jessop and Patria fell into their bed happier than they had been in many days.

The next morning, Jessop sensed that something was wrong even as he descended the levels into the poorly-lit depths of Eleven Deck. "They've got the shakes," said Cole, as soon as Jessop arrived. Cole was an ex-convict from the Dry Lands by Tyndeford who boasted about lying his way onto the *Westward*, but he was a true stockman and he would not say something like that unless he was certain.

"How many? How long?"

"Two definite," said Cole, leading Jessop along the narrow aisle between packed livestock pens. "Ten maybes."

The heat and stench were stifling, as always, and Jessop tried to convince himself that it was only in his imagination that he could detect the sweet-diarrhoea smell of bovine neural influenza, or "the shakes," as Cole had called it.

The ten maybes were all definite, and by the time an isolation bay had been established there were another dozen or more possible cases of the disease. Quarantine precautions had been stringent for all livestock brought onto the ship but, as Cole kept pointing out, "All it takes is one."

Jessop did not argue with Patria for a week, because during that time he worked, ate and – during occasional lulls – slept in the livestock levels. Eventually the outbreak was contained, but it was to be the first of many such incidents. "You're not alone," Patria told him, as they lay together after his return to their tiny room. "The growers are struggling with the gales and salt-spray, up above. We've been treating a cropsman who was struck by a sheet of glass which just lifted up in the winds. They're not meant to let on what a hard time they're having, but he still told us. We'll be living on fish before we're through."

Rationing became more harsh as livestock, crops and emigrants alike suffered illness and accident.

Patria's medical post was kept busy with increasing incidences of consumption and dysentery and, eventually, the first cases of malnutrition.

As conditions grew harder a subtle revolution spread through the great ship. There were no uprisings or riots, it was more insidious than that. Gradually the priests and the officers came to realize that their authority – unquestionable at one point – had simply evaporated. Life continued, in a more or less orderly manner, but not at the behest of those in power. People persevered because they had no alternative.

Rumours spread, unchecked. A scout ship had found land, people said, or the fleet had found a rich shoal of fish to trawl. Once it was said that the ship had reached the edge of the world and was endlessly falling, and from his place in the bowels of the Westward, Jessop could have believed that to be true.

As the priests and officers lost their influence, so those figures of the anti-culture, the magi and the itinerant street-preachers, rose in prominence. Perhaps it was their influence which subdued the hostility, preventing the uprisings and riots which at one time seemed inevitable.

And so it was that, upon finishing his shift one night, Jessop went with Cole and some others to a dimly-lit room somewhere in the mid-levels, instead of returning to his exhausted and irritable wife. The walls of the room had been daubed in red, green and gold, and a single cast-iron brazier gave off acrid smoke which clung to the high ceiling. The magus sat at the centre of the room, puffing at a herb-pipe and chuckling amiably at the chatter of a small group gathered around him. By the door a man sold beer at the extraordinary prices which had become commonplace in the latter weeks of the voyage. Jessop sipped slowly and settled himself wearily on crossed legs.

They talked and argued for a time, and Jessop soon grew bored. Dancing broke out sporadically and, at one point, a brief fist fight. Then, "Can we play the game?" asked Cole, as the evening grew old.

The magus wore a studiously innocent look.

"The game," urged Cole. "The Calling of Futures." To Jessop he added, "We always end up with the game. If we didn't it'd be like church with no prayers."

Still the magus looked uneasy, but as others joined Cole's plea he rose and silenced the gathering with a gesture. "It is no game," he said, in a soft voice that would carry forever. "It is the expression of the Gods, no less. And also, it is Their gift."

"He'll play, he'll play!" hissed Cole, under his breath.

The magus looked around the room. "When the futures are called," he said, "the Gods may choose to grant the wish of one who is here tonight."

"He means you'll get laid," translated Cole.

"He who harbours the strongest desire will be the winner, and have his wish met," continued the magus, and Jessop thought of landfall, of new beginnings, of the good times he had shared with Patria. "But we must remember that others may share the burden of that desire: a price must be paid."

"So do we start?" yelled a raucous woman from the back.

The magus smiled. "We start," he said, "and only the Gods can finish."

A circle formed, and within its boundary the magus started to hop and pace, squatting occasionally to make chalk markings on the greasy floor. Cole sat in the circle and Jessop sat at his shoulder, remembering the street Callings of his childhood for which he had always been punished severely.

Eventually, the magus started to work his way around the room, gathering bets which he chalked on the floor. Then he resumed his pacing and hopping, chanting quietly in the Ancient Voice. After a time in which many side-bets were laid, he delved into a calfskin bag at his waist and straightened suddenly, so that his hands were flung upwards and a shower of bones and stones and other assorted artefacts went up in the air, clattered against the iron ceiling, and scattered across the floor.

The magus scurried around, totting up the clusters and orientations of the objects. Most had landed in the chalked segment nearest to Cole and Jessop, and all of the bones in this area lay with their painted ends pointing towards the two men. The magus glanced across at them and Cole cursed quietly. As the magus collected up his artefacts and handed out the winnings, Cole explained that it was good because they were ahead on the first throw, and so the Gods favoured them, but bad because he had placed his bets on a woman in the neighbouring segment who he was sure the magus planned to seduce. "The Gods is good," he said. "But it's the money that matters."

After the third throw the Calling of Futures had to be abandoned because everyone was betting on the segment in front of Jessop. It was as if the bones had his name on them. After the first throw the magus had moved people away so that only Cole and Jessop remained in that part of the circle. After the second there was only Jessop. And as the magus jerked upright for the third time it was as if those artefacts which would not naturally have landed in that segment were now falling in a curved path, drawn there by magnetism or some local distortion of gravity.

"We have a winner," said the magus, as he squatted before Jessop. "And so quickly..."

Jessop did not know what to make of it. He felt that he should have left, or that he should never have come here with Cole and his fellow stockmen. He felt that it must be some kind of joke, or a dream, or worse.

"You must want something very badly indeed," said the magus, in a conversational tone. Around them, the party had returned to the drinking and flirting and argument of any Westward gathering.

"My marriage has flaws," said Jessop, struggling to think. The colours of the room seemed to be swirling now, muddying his mind. "Sometimes we're both too weak. But it can be so good... When we land, and start to build... there's so much that I want!"

When we land. He saw the understanding in the magus' expression and then he seized on the possibility that there could sometimes be an element of truth to this Calling ritual. Perhaps he had acted as a channel for the desperation of the 50,000 souls on the Westward: when we land – the desire of the masses.

Following the Calling of Futures, he had, for a time, believed that things would improve. For a few days his new belief had revitalized his marriage and Patria even appeared pleased to see him when their shifts allowed them time together. But soon reality overcame his false hopes and the rows returned with a new ferocity. When Patria became violent he at last gave up hope and removed his few possessions from their room. After a night in a corridor he took to sleeping in one of the informal dormitories that had become established for the victims of failed *Westward* marriages, despite the disapproval of the priests and the officers.

It was then that a new obsession consumed him for three painful weeks. Perhaps the Calling had been true, but his greatest desire had been hidden even from himself! He had believed that he had put Catherin behind him, along with the rest of his past in Albany. But the more he thought of it, the more convinced he became that this was the desire that had so influenced the bones and stones and patches of animal hide of the magus: the wish that Catherin should be with him on the *Westward*, that the new beginning he would make after landfall should be with his first and – he now saw – only love. He wondered if somehow the magus' manipulations had worked backwards in time so that when he had searched the streets of Highchapel on the night before departure Catherin had already been aboard.

He began to look for her. At first his search was chaotic – from market hall to tiny chapel, from the stinking passageways of Twelve to the wind- and rain-swept upper deck – but after a few days he learnt to pace himself, to use his sense of logic. He tried the administrative nexi of each deck in succession, firstly because her clerical experience would make these likely workplaces, and then because an appropriate offer of black market meat bought him a search of every register on the ship.

He began his quest with great optimism, convinced of his interpretation of the night his future was called. Eventually he resigned himself to a long search. Catherin's name was not on any of the registers but then it was said that the ship's population had been swollen by as many as 10,000 stowaways. He was not deterred. The magus had said that people must pay for the granting of his wish: now was the time for Jessop to pay in labour and lost sleep, and also the time for others to pay as he set them on fruitless quests through files and ledgers and eventually physically searching the corridors of the *Westward*.

His face became known throughout the great ship, his story often repeated. "You're the one they tell about?" asked an excited woman somewhere in the heart of Seven Deck. "The Seeker of Catherin?" She was the first of many. But, unable to help, she had returned to her task of scraping algae from the ceiling and collecting it in her cooking pot.

And still, Catherin was not found.

"You need some help," Cole told him at one stage, tapping the side of his head. Jessop seized on that. He needed guidance. He took a day off from his search for Catherin to seek out the magus. He took another day to look for the room where the Calling had taken place: Cole was no use but surely someone must recognize

his description... But his efforts met only with failure and pity.

And then one night, Jessop found himself crouching in a crowded, bustling passageway, almost asleep on his feet. He would find her. He *had* to find her.

It took some time for the excitement to break through, and the chaos around him to make sense.

"We've – !" But the woman's words were smothered by the roar of the *Westward's* siren, the first time it had been sounded since leaving Highchapel.

And then, in response to Jessop's blank look, she repeated her words. "We've found land! We've reached the new landfall!"

It took the *Westward* and all its tugs nearly two days to come to a halt. In that time two things became apparent. Firstly, it was no mere atoll the scout ships had found: it was a continent, maybe even as big as the one they had left behind.

The second discovery was that the continent was already settled.

On the afternoon before the great ship finally came to a halt, the first envoys came out from the new land. With little ceremony they were hustled aboard for long deliberations in the top deck quarters of the officers and senior priesthood.

Those who saw the foreign envoys reported favourably that they were human beings just like the emigrants, that they wore clothes remarkably similar to the fashions of Albany, that they even spoke in a compatible language.

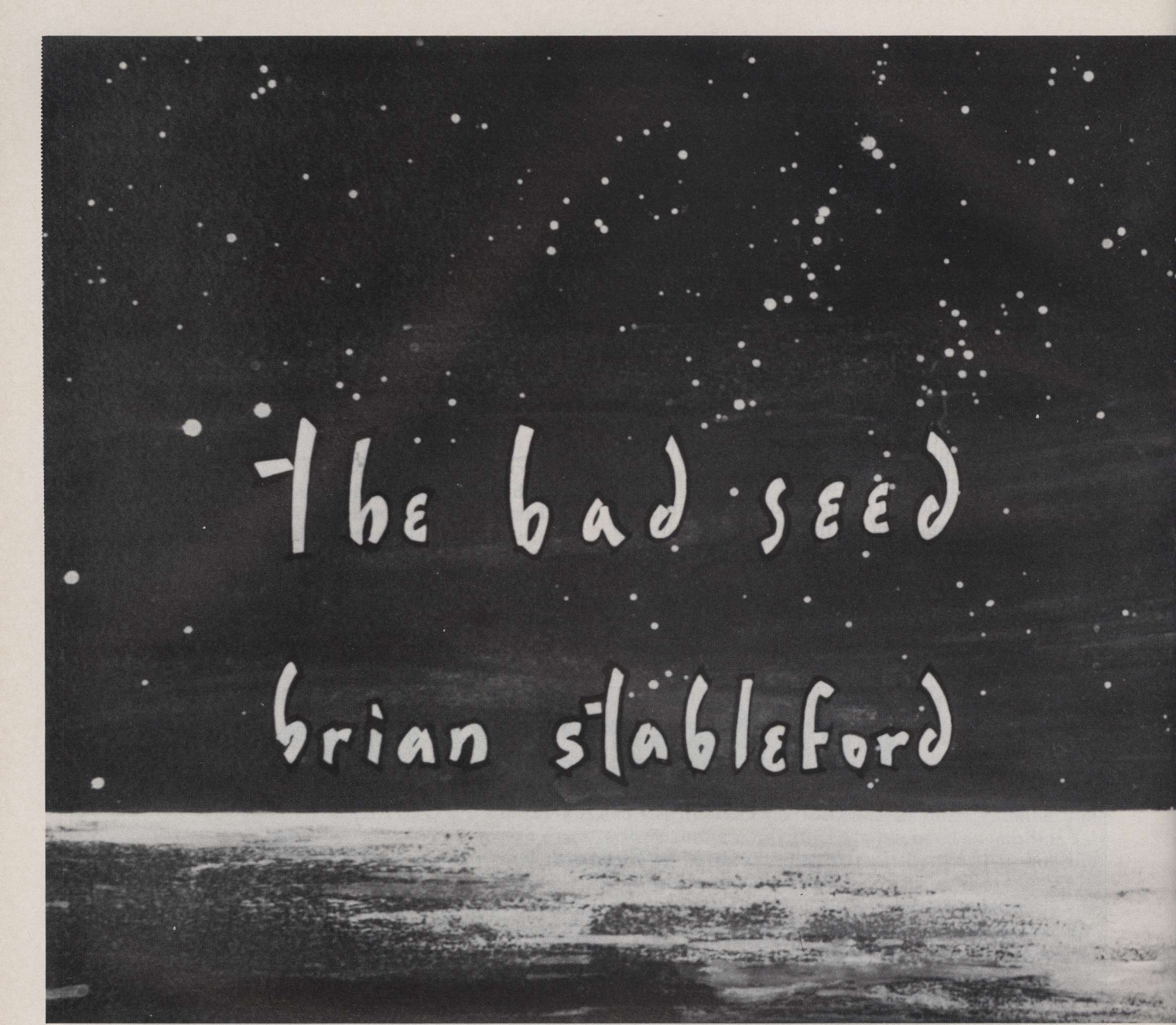
And naturally rumours were propagated and spread at the greatest speed. Surveillance of the distant skyline through field-glasses merely fuelled the gossip: though indistinct, it all looked so familiar.

"They're saying the world's not flat!" said Cole, as he and Jessop led one of the surviving cows to slaughter. "Not flat, I'm telling you!" Indeed they were: some said the world was a great cylinder and they had sailed all the way round. Others spoke of parallel evolution towards the optimum societal form. The religious spoke of parallel Creations.

But Jessop knew these rumours to be false. If the *Westward* had chased its own tail, as heretics claimed, then it would have come to the cotton and spice ports of the Orient and the foreign envoys would have skins the colour of soil and a native tongue that was indecipherable. And even the most basic understanding of evolution ruled out any such precise parallels in far-apart continents.

He thought, at first, that the officers had tricked them and turned the ship back at the first signs of mutiny. But he knew people who worked in the horticultural levels, who had spent every night since departure out under the stars, and they swore that the ship had never erred by more than a few degrees from a steady westward course.

And yet they had arrived at what appeared to be an Alban port, or a facsimile of one, at least. When he bought a look through a set of field-glasses, Jessop could see the port clearly, the skyline broken in the southern half by a great cathedral spire. And then he recognized it and he understood.



The bad seed

brian stableford

Meg came round, after a fashion, while they were lifting her into the ambulance, but she couldn't quite get a grip on reality. It was as if her mind had gone limp, relaxing into an exhausted passivity and refusing to take up any but the most elementary responsibilities of consciousness. She was aware of pain but it didn't seem to be particularly terrible, and she didn't give it any further thought. She couldn't seem to further her thoughts at all.

"Hello," said the ambulance-man who had sat down beside her. "Can you tell me your name?"

"Meg," she said, without hesitation.

"Good," he said. "That's good. You're going to be all right, Meg." She felt a sudden surge of pain as he pronounced the words *all right*, and it made her gasp, but she still felt strangely detached, as though the pain wasn't really hers. He placed something over her right eye, very gently. It wasn't the pain of the contact which surprised her but the fact that the point of contact seemed to be so far away, as if her face were no longer where – or perhaps what – it had been before.

"What's your full name, Meg?" he asked, when he'd

fastened the dressing. His face seemed to be floating in mid-air at an odd angle. It was red and round. His hair had receded a very long way, almost as far as the tide went out in Swansea Bay, and what was left was dappled grey.

"Hughes," she said. "Margaret Leonie Hughes." It was hard to formulate the syllables, and she realized that her lips were swollen and bleeding, and that her front teeth weren't all there.

"Good. That's great. Address?"

"One-one-five Belmoredean Road." The ambulance was pulling away now, juddering over the rough ground.

"Good. Very good. Age?"

"Twenty-one," she said, wondering what was so good about anything and everything she said. The ambulance jolted one last time as it went over the pavement and on to the road.

"Great. Rest now. Just rest. We'll have you in hospital in no time. You'll be fine. I'll just put this over your mouth to help you breathe. Just a precaution. You'll be fine."



The oxygen-jet was cold. She didn't think she needed it. She let herself relax completely, listening to the throaty roar of the engine and the plaintive wail of the siren. The combination of sounds was strangely absorbing and strangely comforting.

It wasn't until the ambulance was drawing up at the hospital that she suddenly realized that she wasn't 21 at all. She was 22, and had been for at least a month. She had forgotten how old she was!

Hell's bells, she thought, *I've got amnesia!* That was when it finally came home to her that she'd been hurt, perhaps badly, and that they were taking her to hospital in an ambulance because she was injured, and that the reason everything she said was good was that it was an achievement on her part to be able to say anything at all. She suddenly began to pay attention to the pain, to recognize it as her own, and to tick off its sources one by one.

Head. Eyebrow. Cheek. Mouth. Ribs. Oh shit. Oh shit...

She blacked out while they were hurrying the stretcher from the back of the vehicle, while she was

still trying to remember what day it was and why she had been lying in the bushes: lying on the moist black soil whose earthy odour still clung to her hair and her naked, bloody legs.

Meg didn't have amnesia. *It would have been better if I had*, she thought, savagely when she finally had the opportunity to organize her thoughts and get the narrative of her life under way again. *The more the better. Not just this but all of it. Far, far better if I could start over with a clean sheet ...and maybe get it right this time.*

She knew, of course, that she'd handled the rape all wrong, and was *still* handling it all wrong, but she didn't seem able to do anything about it. She'd always been conscious of the danger – how could one not be conscious of such dangers nowadays? – and she'd always told herself that if ever it happened to her, she'd get it right. She'd scream and she'd scream as loudly as she could, and she'd go for his eyes with her fingernails if she couldn't reach his balls, and if the worst came to the worst because he was too big and

too well-armed and there was no help near, she'd just grit her teeth and bear it and come out the other side and tell herself that it was no big deal and just get on with her life...

But she hadn't managed to do any of that. Not one damn thing. There was no excuse, not even the fact that he'd hit her far too hard far too quickly, more than once and more than he really needed to, for purely practical purposes. She hadn't done *anything*, because she wasn't the person she'd always tried to be, the person she'd always wanted to be, the person she'd determined to be in spite of everything...in spite of her failures, in spite of her incompetence, in spite of all the faults which her over-solicitous mother had always been so over-ambitious to correct by means of judicious over-criticism.

Even before it happened, she'd had the sense of only just hanging on to her self-respect by her fingernails, never quite being able to pull herself up and away from the brink of the abyss. Now...

Now, in spite of all she'd resolved to do and be, she was in free fall into the darkness and the cold. Her brittle fingernails had shattered, and left her nothing to hang on with, and now her mind had collapsed, and life itself had become too much for her. She wanted to die. She wanted to be dead already. She wanted to be left alone, so that she could fall forever in peace, and vanish unmourned into the void.

Naturally enough, that wasn't allowed. Nowadays you couldn't just be raped, you had to be a *victim*, and you had to follow the script that had been written in blood by doctors and feminists, policemen and psychiatrists, mothers and ladies from Victim Support. You couldn't even play dead, because every time you so much as twitched an eyebrow somebody would be saying "Good, that's good," as if the concept of badness had been banished beyond some invisible *cordon sanitaire* drawn around your bed. It was only to be expected. They weren't going to let her get away with lying down and dying, any more than they'd let her get away with all her other sins and all her other failures. You couldn't ask to start over just because you'd fouled things up, could you? Life wasn't like that. You had to take it as it came and live with all your mistakes. Nobody got second chances.

Mother had always told her all of that. Mother had always been very free with that sort of advice. Mother had always been a great one for picking at old saws and making them bleed. Not that she ever meant to be unkind – not even when she turned up at the hospital while Meg was still spaced out, and lectured her at some length on the subject of pulling herself together, telling her that for once in her life she had to be tough, for everybody's sake.

"Everybody" presumably meant Emily, but Mother wouldn't bring Emily in to see her.

Actually, Meg thought she'd always been tough, until now. Tough-minded, anyway – you couldn't really be tough in other ways when you were so small and thin. She had always been one of those people who told herself that it was better to know the truth, however horrible, than not to know. She had always been proud of being that sort of person, proud of her conviction that ignorance was anything but bliss. Until now...

Now, she found it quite impossible to be tough –

especially when Mother explained, in the nicest possible way, that she hadn't brought Emily to see Meg because it would upset Emily too much to see Meg lying there all messed up. That was particularly bad because Meg thought that Emily was the one person who might be able to bring her back from the void, the one person who might be able to ameliorate her misery. After all Emily was the one real reason she had for not wanting to start over, for not wanting to have forgotten *everything*, for not wanting to be dead. It was okay to forget your parents, especially when their love was so cloying, so wounding, so prolific in the misery it caused, but you couldn't want to forget your own kid. It simply wasn't on, even for a complete failure like Meg. But they wouldn't let Emily see her. Instead, she was confronted with an endless series of monstrous comforters, every one as motherly as the next: the lady doctor, the lady from Victim Support, Mother herself...

Even the police, doubtless leaning over backwards to be sympathetic and diplomatic, sent a female officer to interrogate her, as soon as she could make a statement. The policewoman, whose name was WPC Lowther, told her she'd done very well indeed before recapitulating the description, checking off every single detail with the careful relish of a predator who already had the sense that this one wasn't going to get away.

"Five foot six or seven. Stocky build. Fair hair; a two-month-old razor cut growing out. Nose crooked, probably broken at some time in the past. Pale skin; lots of acne scars; right cheek scratched. Pale blue eyes. About 18, no more than 20. Black t-shirt with a silver motif half-flaked away, possibly a five-pointed star inside a circle with lettering underneath, too broken up to be legible. Blue jeans, black trainers. Is that everything?"

"That's everything," said Meg, more faintly and far less distinctly than she would have liked. She hadn't yet been down to the orthodontist, and now that the stitched-up wounds around her eye had become infected that appointment was likely to be postponed for several more days.

"It's good," said the policewoman. "Very good."

"Did you get any blood from under my fingernails?" Meg asked, lifting her hand so she could look at her newly-clipped and neatly-filed nails. Manicurists were not inconvenienced by infected facial wounds.

"I think the doctors got more than enough tissue samples to get a DNA-fingerprint," WPC Lowther confirmed. "We also have a witness who saw him running away. We have a very good chance of tracking him down. These types that go berserk are the ones we almost invariably do catch – they don't plan things, you see, and they don't cover their tracks very well. Nothing's certain, but he'll need a miracle to slip through the net, and I don't think he's a likely candidate for one of those."

The last remark didn't make Meg feel as good as WPC Lowther had intended. Meg didn't feel like a likely candidate for a miracle either. Mother, who still clung to the vestiges of her religion, had often pointed out to her that she couldn't expect any favours from God, all things considered.

"In court..." Meg began, doubtfully. She stopped

abruptly. The possibility of going to court was so remote as to be almost meaningless, and yet...

The WPC must have been used to dealing with this kind of case. "It's okay, Meg," she said, swiftly. "That's a long way off yet. Don't think about it. Let's catch him first." Her voice had a hint of unease about it, and she was quick to add: "You mustn't worry about the court. He isn't going to be able to say that you let him do it, is he? Thirteen stitches around your eye, three broken teeth and two broken ribs can hardly be the result of a misunderstanding, can it? We've got photographs of everything. If we catch him, he'll go away. No doubt about that. Anyway, you'll be a great witness. There aren't many people who could have given me all this."

She raised her notebook triumphantly.

"But they'll ask... they'll ask about... other things." Meg's voice had shrunk to an awkward whisper, which sounded despicably feeble.

"About your sexual history?" The WPC shook her head vigorously. "Not relevant. Don't believe what the tabloids say about the worst part of any rape case being the trial. The judge won't let defending counsel take a line like that, given the violence that was used. The fact that you're a single mother won't make a shred of difference. Quite frankly, it wouldn't matter if you were on the game..." Meg watched the WPC hesitate as doubt momentarily shadowed her thoughts, but she picked up the thread effortlessly enough. "It won't be pleasant, of course, but compared to the rape itself it'll be no sort of ordeal at all. You can stand in the witness-box and tell the absolute truth, knowing that every word you say will paint the bastard blacker. If the defence has any sense at all they'll want you off the stage as soon as possible. They probably won't cross-examine you at all. You mustn't be afraid. You have to concentrate all your energy on getting better. That's all that matters. You have to get your life back. You have to think positively. I think you're tough enough to do it. I know you are."

"I've always been tough," Meg said weakly, wishing the WPC wasn't such an exact clone of her mother. "Five foot nothing and thin as a rake, but tough. Always." She couldn't convince herself. *If I were tough, she told herself sternly, I'd have handled it better. I'd be handling it better now. If I were tough, I wouldn't feel that I'd be better off dead.*

"That's right," said the WPC, dutifully responding to the spoken word rather than the treasonous thought which it surely couldn't have concealed. "You might have lost a battle, but you can win the war. Don't worry about your little girl – your mother's looking after her and everything's fine. You've got to get past this for her sake as well as your own, and you can. You can put it behind you and start going forwards again."

If only it were that easy, Meg thought. If only I'd been going forwards before.

Meg knew the news was bad because her mother and the lady from Victim Support were moved carefully into place before the doctor arrived. She didn't like to be so crowded. She felt embarrassed because the massive doses of antibiotic they were drip-feeding her to clear up the infection in the wounds around her eye had given her

terrible diarrhoea. It was nightmarish enough to have diarrhoea while she was hooked up to a drip feed without being surrounded by people who weren't nurses and weren't immunized by experience against the effects of close proximity to the horrid and the degrading. Just as the infection was an obvious symbol of her failure to do things right and her failure to cope with having done things wrong, the diarrhoea was a symbol of her inability to avoid giving offence to others, especially those who loved her most. Except, of course, that the infection would clear up, in time, and the diarrhoea wouldn't last forever...

"Emily's perfectly fine," her mother assured her, while they were waiting. "She's longing to come to see you, but I knew you'd want to wait until you looked a little bit less like the Phantom of the Opera. She's such a sensitive child, isn't she?" *Not like you, she implied effortlessly, in spite of her sugar-sweet smile.*

The doctor seemed uncomfortable, as if she too would have preferred to speak in private, without the crowd. Who, Meg wondered, had actually decided that her mother and the lady from Victim Support should be present? Who had the power to organize and orchestrate such things? Or did they just happen by coincidence, as a result of the unfortunate accumulation of a pathological superabundance of good will?

At least the doctor didn't beat around the bush. She wanted to get it over with. "The test results have all come in now," she said. "The ones we did here, that is – the police surgeon had the tissue-samples sent away. Everything's satisfactory... except that you're pregnant. I'm sorry."

The doctor went on, but Meg didn't hear what she said. She didn't hear what anybody said for two full minutes. She just chewed her new teeth furiously, wishing they didn't taste like something alien, something that didn't belong inside her mouth. All of a sudden she seemed to be full of things that didn't belong. She'd been invaded. This whole affair was an alien invasion; she was surrounded by body-snatchers, inside and out.

When Meg finally got around to paying attention again, the lady from Victim Support was talking to Mother about the abortion. "Of course it's not a trivial matter," she was saying. "No abortion ever is. But in cases like this, where it's obviously for the best, there's very little danger of long-term trauma."

Her mother was nodding, in that worldly-wise and sensitive manner she had refined by long practice.

Meg didn't want to talk shop with the lady from Victim Support. She didn't want counselling, and she didn't want reassurances about lack of long-term trauma. She just wanted to know when the alien invasion would be over, so she could have her own body back – so she could go back to being an ordinary common-or-garden human alien moving through the uncaring hostility of everyday society, instead of a victim and a host who had somehow begun to attract rapists and cuckoos and all manner of hateful monsters.

Some people, she knew, would have taken all of it in their stride. Some people would even have found things to like about it. Some people would have been glad of the attention, glad about all the worry being expended on their behalf, flattered by all the kindness

and all the planning. If only she'd been someone else, she realized, this might have been a turning-point in her life. All her life she'd felt like an outsider, an also-ran in the human race, a *bad girl*, an incompetent in the everyday business of living, a person incapable of maintaining any normal or rewarding social relationship – but now, if only she'd had the right attitude, and the wit and determination to seize the opportunity, she could have put all that right. Being a victim could have been a way back in, a way of building bridges. But she wasn't someone else. She was Meg, and for her the worst thing about being a victim was Victim Support – not the charity *per se* but everything the charity stood for.

If he'd only hit me a little bit harder, she thought, if my skull had been just a little thinner, I'd never have recovered consciousness, and I'd never have known anything about it. Perhaps that's what really did happen, and all this is just a dream, a fantasy exploding in my head at the moment of death. Or maybe this is Hell. Maybe this is what I get for being a bad girl, for never being what Mum wanted me to be, for getting pregnant at school and having to leave, for going out dancing and drinking and taking drugs, for not being a good mother, for getting raped...

"You mustn't worry," the doctor told her, with a careful kindness that seemed almost macabre. "Everything will be all right. In ten days or so you'll be able to have the abortion. After that, if there are no further complications, you can go home – to your mother, and your little girl. Just concentrate on getting back to normal. You're doing very well. It'll all be okay."

"That's right," her mother said. "Once we get you home again we'll soon have you back on your feet. You'll feel better once you're back where you belong. Everything will be fine."

These are the fictions people live by, Meg thought. This is the way the world works. This is what I can't do, and will never be able to. It must be me that's odd, me that's mad, me that's bad, because they aren't, are they?

"Thanks," she said, out loud. "I'll be okay. I really will."

"By the way," her mother said. "They've caught him. That nice WPC told me to pass the message on. They haven't charged him yet because they're waiting for the DNA-fingerprinting tests to be completed, but it's definitely him."

"Oh," said Meg, helplessly. "Good. That's good." And she wondered why she was such an unnatural creature that the only thing she felt was sick.

At first, when Miss Tomlinson introduced herself and sat down beside the bed, Meg didn't think there could be anything to worry about – nothing serious, at any rate. After all, her mother wasn't there, and the lady from Victim Support wasn't there, and even the doctor wasn't there. It only took her a few minutes, though, to realize that these might be indications that matters had reached a whole new level of seriousness, and that this might well be the point in time at which she realized the error of her assumption that things couldn't get any worse.

"I'm afraid this is going to be difficult," Miss Tomlinson said, ominously. "Very difficult indeed."

At least she was making no attempt to be kind. She had the grace to look stern and stiff-lipped. She was about Mother's age, but slightly better-preserved. Her hair was black and her eyes were very dark. She looked as if she could be quite fearsome if she got angry, but she wasn't angry now. She explained, quickly and efficiently, what she wanted Meg to do.

"You want to transfer me to a private clinic?" Meg repeated, tackling the easy one first. "Two hundred miles away, in Sussex?"

"That's right," Miss Tomlinson said. "I know it's asking a lot, but I have to ask. I have to ask you to trust us, completely – and I don't have any way to demonstrate to you that we're trustworthy. All I can tell you for the moment is that it's very, very important."

"I can't," Meg said flatly. "Do you have any idea what my mother would say if I told her I was going to a private clinic in Sussex? I've got to go home as soon as possible, for Emily's sake."

"We can work out a way of bringing your daughter along," Miss Tomlinson said. "Emily's not a problem. But everyone else – not just your mother but the doctors here, and the police – have to be kept out of it. The police are easy to deal with because they know how to follow orders without asking questions or making a fuss but the others might have to be handled more delicately if we're to avoid awkward publicity. We'll figure out a convincing pack of lies – but you'll have to be party to it. You have to be inside the curtain of secrecy. We'll need your full cooperation."

"Who exactly are you?" Meg asked, wondering if someone whose face was as badly puffed up as hers still was could contrive to incorporate astonishment and suspicion into her expression.

"I work for the Home Office," Miss Tomlinson told her, blandly. *A civil serpent*, Meg thought. Her father always called civil servants "civil serpents." It was his idea of a joke.

"This is crazy," Meg said. "It's like something out of Kafka." Meg had never read *The Trial* but she'd seen the Orson Welles film on TV, with Anthony Perkins pretending not to be *Psycho*. She'd watched a lot of films on TV since Emily had tied her to the house, forcing her to abandon her older and wilder ways.

Miss Tomlinson nodded. It was just a straightforward nod, without frills. "I'm sorry," she said. "But we really don't mean you any harm. If it would help at all, we're perfectly happy to offer you money. I can guarantee that all your needs will be more than adequately met for the foreseeable future. You can have anything you want, within reason, if you'll cooperate with us."

"How long is the foreseeable future?" Meg wanted to know.

"A long time," Miss Tomlinson told her frankly. "This is going to be a long-term thing, I'm afraid. Months, at the very least. Perhaps years, if the situation warrants it and you decide you want to stay with it. It won't be easy."

Meg looked the older woman in the face, marveling at her laconic manner. Miss Tomlinson was so straightforward she seemed positively surreal. It was all surreal – as if the reality she'd only just got a grip on again was dissolving into a nightmare. She just begun to get the hang of being a victim, and now the Home Office wanted her to become... what, exactly?

Oddly enough, though, the unknown didn't seem quite as terrifying as it was cracked up to be.

"They're not going to charge him, are they?" Meg said, knowing that she was guessing but knowing that there wasn't much else that could necessitate forcing the police to follow orders whether they liked it or not. "You want to get me out of the way to make sure that the whole thing will die down and be forgotten. Why?"

Miss Tomlinson didn't even raise an eyebrow. "That's only part of the reason," she said. "I'm sorry, but it's necessary."

"Who is he? Somebody's son? Somebody's spy?" Meg knew as she said it that there must be more to it. If it were just something like that, they wouldn't have cancelled the abortion which had been scheduled for the following week. If it were something as banal as that, they'd surely have rushed the abortion through.

The civil serpent shook her head soberly. Meg was glad that the black-haired woman didn't laugh at her, or try in any way to suggest that what she'd said was ridiculous.

"It's more complicated than that," Miss Tomlinson said. "Much more important. I'll explain just as soon as I can, but in the meantime I can only give you my word that it's important."

"You're not going to charge the rapist," Meg said, still trying to make sense of it, "and you want me to have the baby. You really want me to have it, in spite of everything." *It's not enough to have been invaded, she thought. It's not even enough to have been invaded twice. It's not enough to have your life laid waste, to have your last illusions shattered. Oh no... that's not enough for Meg – not for little Nutmeg, the runt of the litter, who never got anything right.*

"That's right," said Miss Tomlinson. "I really am sorry."

"Suppose I say no," Meg said, wishing that she could inject some venom into the words as she shaped them with her alien teeth and her still-rubbery lips. "Suppose I say go to hell, that I want the abortion and if the bastard isn't charged I'll squeal to the papers – and if the papers won't listen, to the BBC or S4C or Amnesty International or MI5 or anyone at all who'll take notice?"

"We'd very much rather you didn't," said Miss Tomlinson mildly. "And I'm afraid that we'd stop you if you tried. I really am sorry, but that's the way it is." If repetition meant anything, she really was sorry.

"They sent you because they thought I'd take it better from a woman, didn't they?" Meg said, trying her level best to sound vituperative. "In fact, they didn't dare to send a man, did they? Because what you're saying is that you're going to rape me all over again, and the only fucking thing I can do is lie back and let it happen."

Miss Tomlinson condescended to look faintly surprised, although it wasn't altogether clear whether she was startled by Meg's calculated rudeness or by her perspicacity. "No it isn't," she countered, smoothly. "You do have a choice – as much choice as we can give you. We don't expect you to like it, and we're prepared to compensate you as best we can. This really is an unprecedented matter, you know. If you wanted to, you could look at it as a ticket to adventure." She pronounced the word *adventure* without any hint of



embarrassment – which, Meg thought, was quite a feat in this day and age.

“Adventure!” Meg echoed, wondering why the syllables didn’t sound quite as contemptuous as she’d imagined or intended. “You must think...”

She stopped, realizing that she really didn’t know what they must think, and that the fact that she didn’t know, and couldn’t guess, was evidence that something was going on that really was very odd, and that maybe – just maybe – the situation might not be quite as horrid as it seemed.

After a long pause, Meg said: “What am I supposed to tell my mother?” It wasn’t until she had said it that she realized what a revealing question it was, and how much it said about her.

“Medical complications,” Miss Tomlinson said, as quick as a flash. “I think we can swing that with the doctor, without having to be too specific. We can tell her that the tests carried out at the police forensic labs turned up something puzzling and worrying – which indeed they did, or I wouldn’t be here. Without telling any outright lies we’d probably want to drop a hint or two about AIDS – which, I can assure you, is definitely not a problem. The same hints will excuse our taking the man who raped you out of police custody. These days, people are only too anxious to see the back of someone who might be carrying that kind of taint. You might want to be a little vaguer or a little more reassuring when you tell your mother, so as to save her any undue alarm.”

Might I? Meg thought, When was the last time she spared me any undue alarm? But that wasn’t fair, and she immediately felt guilty about it, as she’d been carefully trained to do. This is crazy, she thought, instead. Completely crazy. I’m the victim here. People are supposed to be helping me, not compounding the crime.

“This is crazy,” she said, aloud. “Completely crazy. Like something out of a horror film.”

“Yes it is,” Miss Tomlinson admitted. “But it’s intriguing, isn’t it? Mysteries are so fascinating – all the more so if they have just a little suspicion of the horrific about them.”

When the lady from the Home Office said that, Meg realized how cleverly she’d been weighed up, how competently she’d been judged, how safely she’d been hooked. Miss Tomlinson had known that she’d play along obediently, that she was as weak as that, as gullible as that, as habitually compliant as that – but Miss Tomlinson hadn’t once tried to tell her that everything would be all right, when it patently wasn’t and wouldn’t be, and Miss Tomlinson hadn’t once said “Good” or “That’s great.” On the other hand, she had said sorry.

I’m not going to get angry, Meg thought. I’m not going to be indignant. I’m not going to be terrified. For once in my life, I’m not going to behave like some TV cliché. I don’t have to do that, and the civil serpent not only doesn’t expect me to, she actually expects me not to. It’s not an insult. It’s not another rape. It really is something important.

“What do I have to do?” she said.

As things turned out, it wasn’t so hard to tell her mother, partly because her mother made the mistake of bringing Emily along with her

– thus forsaking any chance of a narrow and intense confrontation – and partly because Meg was able to capitalize on her reputation for being stubborn, disputatious and downright perverse. This was one situation in which Mother couldn’t win.

“Well, if you absolutely insist on going,” her mother was eventually reduced to saying, “then I’m coming with you.”

“You can’t,” Meg told her defiantly, while keeping her eyes focussed on Emily – who was sitting on the bed, as good as gold. “It’ll be difficult enough finding accommodation for Emily. It’s not the kind of place where mothers can come too. Anyway, I’m 22 years old. I’m an adult.”

“Then I’ll stay in a hotel in Lewes – in Brighton, if I have to.”

“There’s no need,” Meg said. With calculated brutality she added: “You’d just be in the way.”

“I can look after Emily. You can’t – not properly, not while you’re ill. Anyway, she’s supposed to be starting primary school in less than three weeks.”

“I might be back by then,” Meg said, although she had a very strong suspicion that she wouldn’t be. “And I can look after her perfectly well. I’m much better now that I’m finally off the antibiotics.”

Mrs Hughes changed tack. “I don’t understand this at all,” she said, in the kind of aggrieved tone of one who felt that the right to understand was just as sacred as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of middle-class respectability. “I can’t get any sense out of the doctors. That monster still hasn’t been charged, you know. That WPC who was so helpful to begin with has gone all tight-lipped. She says that there are problems with the medical reports. I suppose he’s going to get off by claiming to be schizophrenic or something – as if that were some kind of excuse.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Meg said, playing with Emily’s fingers and smiling.

“Of course it matters! It matters that people don’t believe in evil any more – that everything is some kind of illness, so nobody has to take responsibility, as if everything were just chemistry and whatever people do they couldn’t help it. Time was when people knew that if they broke the law they’d be punished. Nowadays every evil-minded swine knows that the nastier they are the easier it is to plead insanity. It makes me sick.”

Once upon a time such tirades had fallen upon Meg’s head like showers of sharp stones, making her flinch and duck, but over the years she’d built up a shell. Now, the ideas didn’t even rattle as they bounced off.

“I thought you believed in the *bad seed*,” Meg said, maliciously. “I thought you believed that some people just went wrong, in spite of everything their long-suffering parents could do, that there was just something inside them that made them wicked and perverse.”

“I never said that,” her mother said, lying in her teeth. “Yes, of course some people have a perverse streak that always makes them want to do the opposite of what they’re told, of course some people are just naturally contrary, but that doesn’t mean they’re not responsible. It doesn’t mean they *can’t help it*.”

“Are we talking about the rapist or me?” Meg inquired, knowing perfectly well that she would get a dishonest answer.

"Don't try to be clever, Meg," Mrs Hughes retorted. "I don't know how you can sit there, looking like that, with some..." – she hesitated, mindful of Emily's inhibiting presence, but plugged on gamely – "...some you know what inside you, just trying to make more trouble. You want to go to this place in Sussex, don't you? You don't even care enough about yourself to ask what these people are doing and why. You're so selfish."

Meg knew better than to charge her mother with inconsistency. "Sussex isn't the other side of the world, Mum," she said. "I'll phone you. I'll tell you what's happening when I can. I'll be fine. Everything will be all right."

Well, why not? she thought to herself. Everybody does it. Why the hell not?

"I don't like it," her mother said, bitterly, speaking the plain and simple truth for once. "I don't like any of it. I don't know what the world's coming to." But she finally calmed down, and hugged her daughter and her grand-daughter to remind them that she loved them very dearly, and only had their best interests at heart – which was true enough, in a way. In her perverse and contrary fashion, she really wanted nothing but the best for both of them.

Meg studied herself in the hand-mirror. The last of the swelling had almost disappeared from the flesh around her eye. The stitches were long-gone and it was almost impossible to see where they had been. Her chest didn't hurt much any more, although the damaged ribs were still bandaged and still let her know it if she breathed too deeply. She was almost back to normal – outwardly. As to what was happening *inside*, that was something Miss Tomlinson had yet to explain.

In preparation for their scheduled meeting Meg had run through all the possible options. Perhaps she really was carrying some new venereal disease, even more exotic than AIDS. Perhaps, in spite of Miss Tomlinson's continued denials, the rapist really did have influential relatives – important enough to require the whole thing to be hushed up and important in some strange way that required her to have the baby instead of getting rid of it. She often thought, even now – but had never begun to believe – that it was all just a continuation of some morbid fantasy which was unwinding in her brain as she lay comatose in the bushes where her attacker had dragged her, while her life slowly leaked away.

Meg dismissed all of these theories, on the grounds that they were either too simple or too fanciful. It had to be something more peculiar than any of them. She had begun to want it to be something so peculiar as to be hardly imaginable. What else could possibly justify and redeem everything that she'd been through, not just since the rape but since the moment she'd been born.

"We've done a few more tests," Miss Tomlinson said, demonstrating that even she was not beyond the reach of tedious cliché, "and we've chased several other lines of enquiry to their conclusions. We have a better idea now what it's all about."

"It's *Rosemary's Baby*, isn't it?" Meg said.

One of the older woman's jet-black eyebrows twitched. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Not in the sense that it's the devil's only-begotten son, of course," Meg said, as casually as she could. "Just in the sense that you're going to ask me to carry it, and give birth to it, and maybe even love it, in spite of the fact that there's something seriously odd about it."

Miss Tomlinson nodded, conceding the obvious.

"Okay," Meg said, proud of her self-possession and her self-control. "So tell me – what's so special about it? What's it got that your average common-or-garden rapist's brat hasn't?"

"The rapist's name is Gary Cordling," Miss Tomlinson said, in a level tone. Meg didn't mind that her question wasn't being answered directly. She figured that the civil serpent would get there in the end, as all civil serpents invariably did. "He's 16 years old," Miss Tomlinson continued, "although he looks older. He's been in trouble before – quite often, as a matter of fact. He's been in care since he was five. His mother just couldn't handle him, even at that age. She said at the time that she'd tried her best, but that nothing seemed to be good enough."

Meg felt slightly uncomfortable. Her own mother had told her a thousand times that she'd done her best. She didn't want to have any aspects of her own situation linked to that of the man – the boy – who'd raped her. She didn't want to be invited to sympathize, or to understand. She had a five-year-old child of her own, after all, and she would never have put her into care, however perverse and wicked she seemed.

"His mother was unmarried, of course," Miss Tomlinson went on. "Her social worker at the time wasn't surprised that she couldn't cope – according to the reports on file, the only surprise was that she lasted so long before giving up on him. The social worker she had when the child was born had already registered a prediction that it wasn't going to work out, on the basis of the mother's unrelenting insistence that Gary didn't have a father – that the conception had been some kind of freak, some kind of unnatural event. Gary's mother never suggested that the devil might have sired him, but she always called him *unnatural*. The social worker interpreted this as a neurotic attempt to disclaim responsibility – but even he recorded a comment that the mother was so very insistent on this point that some people might actually have believed her, if only the baby hadn't turned out to be a boy. Do you understand why that ruled out the possibility of a virgin birth?"

Meg had sat GCSE Biology while she was pregnant. She had intended to do A level, maybe even a degree. "Boys have Y chromosomes," she said. "Y chromosomes have to come from fathers. If virgin births ever happen, which they probably don't, the babies would have to be girls."

"Right. Except that Gary Cordling hasn't got a Y chromosome," Miss Tomlinson said. "The mother was right. He really was unnatural – not conventionally natural, anyhow. But nobody knew that until the police forensic lab had to produce a DNA-analysis of his blood and semen, in order to compare it with the samples they obtained from you after the rape."

"I don't understand," Meg said, more by way of punctuation than anything else.

"Nor do we. There are people, apparently, who are

born with an unpaired X chromosome; it's called Turner's syndrome. Almost all the reported cases are outwardly female but there are one or two on record who had male sexual organs – non-functional, of course. But Gary doesn't have Turner's syndrome. His case is spectacularly different."

"How?"

"Every single one of Gary's chromosome-pairs is aberrant, and he has four additional unpaired chromosomes which don't correspond to any of the familiar ones. There's no way he ought to be alive, let alone reproductively-functional. Ordinarily, it only requires a single breakage in a chromosome, or a pairing error, to foul up the entire process of embryonic development. Gary Cordling was no ordinary freak – if you'll pardon the expression. The baby you're carrying is proof of that, if any more were needed. There's nothing supernatural about it, but it's something that will take some explaining. In terms of the calculus of probabilities, what's happened here is some kind of miracle."

"WPC Lowther didn't think he was a likely candidate for one of those," Meg observed, although she knew that Miss Tomlinson hadn't meant the word to carry any religious connotations.

"It might not be as rare as we suppose, of course," Miss Tomlinson said, "given that we've only just started doing these kinds of tests, but even if it's not unique it's the first time anything like this has ever been identified. So you see, Gary Cordling is a very interesting specimen – and so is his child."

"He's still a rapist," Meg pointed out, "and the child is the product of a violent crime – something that was forced on me against my will."

"I'm not offering any excuses for him," Miss Tomlinson told her. "I haven't the slightest idea whether his behavioural problems have anything to do with his abnormal genetic make-up, or whether he'd have been as nice as pie if his mother hadn't been so convinced of his unnaturalness. Nor am I saying that the fact that he may be genetically unique puts him above the law. But this is something *important* – a problem which requires a unique solution. If we're to investigate this properly we need you, not just as a specimen but as a collaborator. It's a hell of a way to get recruited, I know, but it happened. If you absolutely insist that you don't want anything to do with it, we'll understand – in which case we'll transplant the foetus – but we really don't want to take that risk unless we have to. We'd rather you carried it to term, and to be perfectly honest we'd like you to stick with us beyond that point... maybe for life."

Meg looked at the woman from the Home Office very carefully. "I don't suppose Gary will get much choice about helping you out," she said.

"No, he won't. But for that very reason, he might not be as helpful as you. His mother might be difficult too. But you're brighter than they are, and tougher too. You can understand what's at stake."

Flattery, Meg thought, *will get you almost anywhere. So it's said.* "What about Emily?" she asked.

"We're not planning to separate you," Miss Tomlinson said. "You'll raise her just as you would whatever job you were doing."

"But she'll be part of it, won't she?" Meg pointed out. "Whatever I'm mother to, she'll be sister to. She'll be involved, almost as intimately as me."

I can see why they don't want me to tell my mother, she thought. *By the way, Mum, I've taken this job in Dr Frankenstein's laboratory, and your next grandchild is going to be a lovely little monster. Won't that be fun? Even at her calmest, even at her most supremely reasonable, her mother would surely say: "They can't do this to you. It isn't fair." And she'd be right. It wouldn't be fair. The main difference between Meg and her mother was that Meg knew far better than to expect fairness, in people or in the wayward works of time and chance.*

I've always been a bad girl, Meg reminded herself, always a misfit, always a failure as a respectable human being. Who could be better qualified to raise an alien child, and to love it cleverly and conscientiously, no matter where it came from?

"You mentioned compensation before," Meg said, pleased with the evenness of her tone. "Anything within reason."

"Yes I did," Miss Tomlinson said, just as evenly. "You can name your price – anything within reason."

Meg laughed briefly. "The policewoman said that this case was so straightforward it wouldn't fall apart even if I were on the game," she told the civil servant. "Looks like she was wrong about that too, doesn't it?"

"It's not like that," the black-haired woman said, just a trifle primly.

"No," said Meg, "it never is. It's more like *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers*, isn't it? The rape of all mankind, of the earth itself, of the holy empire of Gaia. Was Gary Cordling's mother abducted by a flying saucer, do you think? They say it happens all the time."

"No, she wasn't," said Miss Tomlinson. "As far as we can ascertain, she just liked swimming a lot. At present, we think that whatever got into her was probably in the sea... that's our best guess, anyhow. Maybe it fell into the sea from above, maybe it came up from below – but we fear that whatever it was and wherever it came from it had been carefully designed by natural selection to do exactly what it did: latch on to the egg-cell of a totally unrelated species, and reproduce itself by causing the egg-cell to develop. One of our scientific advisers described it as a kind of super-virus, another as the ultimate venereal disease."

So all my guesses were right, Meg thought, except the one about it all being a dream. And it really might be something incredibly odd, something from outside, from another planet, something authentically alien. I couldn't just get raped, could I? Oh no. I had to go the whole hog... one small step for a girl, one giant leap for life on earth. Sod Kafka, this is...

But she couldn't think of anything to compare it to.

Miss Tomlinson was still talking, sounding more ordinary and more conventional with every well-worn phrase she uttered. "We may never be sure about its origins," she said, beginning to carve out her clichés on a wholesale basis, "but it's the future that concerns us now. It's what happens next that's important. This is just the beginning."

"You'd better ban swimming in Swansea Bay," Meg advised, "in case it happens again. Maybe you could

arrange for an oil spillage or something, to poison the entire coastline. Obviously the raw sewage isn't an adequate deterrent." *That's the whole trouble*, she added silently. *We live in an age of inadequate deterrents*. She was glad that she wasn't mindlessly scared by the thought that there was something unnatural inside her, something perverse and maybe wicked: a bad seed. She was proud of herself for having that kind of courage.

Miss Tomlinson shook her head. "I know it all sounds like some bad B-movie," she said, "but it isn't really. It's not *Rosemary's Baby* and it's not *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* or *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. As I said before, it's better regarded as a kind of miracle: something rare and strange and infinitely precious. It may have taken a rape to reveal it, but that was just bad luck. We shouldn't think of this as a violation of our precious species by some monstrous thing. We have to see it as an opportunity: a chance to learn, and a chance to discover something new."

"That's not how a lot of people would see it," Meg pointed out. "Even if it didn't actually drop out of the sky – even if it's a product of some incredible mutational freak here at the surface – Cordling's mother was right to call it unnatural, and calling it a supervirus or the ultimate venereal disease isn't going to help its PR any. And it is an insidious predator of sorts. It's something which can take over the genetic complement of a human egg-cell – maybe any kind of egg-cell – and produce a viable organism which looks like others of its kind but isn't really. Whatever the calculus of probability says, paranoia will say that it really did come from outside – that it's some kind of spore adapted to the task of world-colonization. And paranoia will tell us that we don't know how far it's already spread. We may know about Cordling but we don't know how many more like him there are, and we don't know about the fish that aren't really fish and the crabs that aren't really crabs...in fact, the only thing we know for sure is that even poisoning the Bristol Channel might be locking the stable door long after most of the horses have bolted. You can practice your uplifting speeches all you want, but you aren't ever going to convince people like my mother to be glad that this thing's popped up out of nowhere."

"You might be right," Miss Tomlinson agreed, uneasily – and not without a trace of admiration in the expression of her dark eyes, which Meg gladly drank in – "but you and I know that the paranoid way of looking at things isn't the only way. You and I know that there are other analogies to be drawn, apart from invasions and takeovers and rapes. For the moment, at least, we have the choice of treating this as a miracle – and, if it really is a visitor from elsewhere, as an honoured guest, extending the hand of friendship across the void – or as the basis of a whole new branch of biotechnology: a whole new set of biological systems to explore and domesticate and turn to our advantage."

"So we do," Meg said lukewarmly. All of that, she realized, had been put together with the immediate aim of persuading her to play her part willingly – but in time, the world at large would have to be persuaded too. She knew that if she did play her part, if she *did* throw in with Miss Tomlinson, she would have to



stay with it for a long time. She would have to be more than tough. But she could see that even if Miss Tomlinson's optimistic reassurances were just so much hot air and this really were phase one of the body-snatcher invasion – especially if this were phase one of the body-snatcher invasion – it had to be studied as carefully and as cleverly as possible.

Through the window of her nicely-decorated sick-room, Meg could see Emily poking around in the flower-beds with a stick, concentrating fiercely on whatever she was stirring up. Emily, at least, was taking everything in her stride – as she always did. Emily was not yet old enough to be afraid of rape, to be afraid of life collapsing around her, to be afraid of life itself.

Serene, Meg thought. *That's what she is. Did I do that, or was it just the lottery of fate? Can I take the credit for her, or was she just thrown up haphazardly by life's unfolding pattern? How will she turn out, when she's got an alien for a brother – and would she turn out any different if we went back to Swansea, so that Mum could breathe down our necks all the time, hanging over us like some awful black shadow, trying to stifle us with tender loving care and her mistaken sense of certainty?*

All of a sudden, despite the cloying warmth of the September afternoon, she shivered. She regretted having agreed to come here, having half-agreed to become a part of all this. She should have known that there would be no comforting revelation to be

obtained here, no healing abreaction. There were no final explanations here, no promises that everything was going to be all right, or even that she was doing *really well*. There was nothing here but brutally honest uncertainty, and something strange, something alien.

She raised a hand to touch the eyebrow which hid a faint but all-too-tangible scar.

"I bet she didn't feel a thing," she said, meaning Gary Cordling's mother. "She wasn't *that* unlucky."

"But she couldn't cope," said Miss Tomlinson, who was very quick on the uptake. "You can. At the end of the day, it's better to know the truth than to be ignorant, and better to be tough than to be lucky."

"The trouble is," Meg said, "nobody actually has the choice."

But her mind was made up. She was in, entirely and wholeheartedly – not necessarily for life, but for anything within reason.

Brian Stableford recently completed *The Carnival of Destruction*, the third novel in his metaphysical fantasy trilogy which began with *The Werewolves of London* and *The Angel of Pain* (all published in the UK by Simon & Schuster). Busy as usual, he is now engaged on a further trilogy for a different publisher. His output of stimulating non-fiction seems as copious as ever, and he tells us: "I've now sold five stories on the trot to Asimov's (including two that you rejected)." Brian lives in Reading.

1993 Hugo Award Winner!

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Michael Bishop

An Annotated Bibliography

Andrew Tidmarsh

Long-time readers of this magazine may remember Michael Bishop's story "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software & Satori Support Services Consortium Ltd" in *IZ* issue 12. Others may be unfamiliar with his work: to date, not one of his five short-story collections has been published in the UK; nor has his most recent novel, *Count Geiger's Blues*.

Bishop was born in 1945. His first story, "Pinon Fall," appeared in 1970 and his first novel, *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire*, in 1975. His novella "Death and Designation Among the Asadi" (1973) was a Hugo and Nebula award nominee and his novella "The Quickening" (1981) and his novel *No Enemy but Time* (1982) were Nebula award winners.

According to Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, writing in *Trillion Year Spree*, "from the first (Bishop's) aliens made other aliens seem homely, familiar, and utterly predictable." It is this engagement with the "other" that makes his fiction attractive. But, to my mind, his novels are overly ambitious and he oft-times loses control of them. His shorter works are more successful and I would draw particular attention to the collections *Blooded on Arachne* (1982) and *Close Encounters with the Deity* (1986) in which Bishop deals repeatedly with the themes of religion and deity. He can be read, merely, for his exotic colouring and occasional witty aside or on a deeper, theological level and compared, on the one hand, with Ian Watson (with whom he has collaborated) and, on the other, with R.A. Lafferty. His delightful pastiche "Of Crystalline Labyrinths and the New Creation" (1979) is an exquisite summary of all things characteristic of Lafferty.

Bishop may, however, have become disenchanted with the genre, writing in the introduction to his collection *Emphatically Not SF, Almost* that "I'm not among those sf advocates who appear to believe, because they aggressively argue, that sf is the one true voice – the only pertinent literature – of our time." He may, on the other hand, have become disenchanted with the written word. Read him while you can.

A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire (1975)

Novel. An impressive debut, "the strength of which," according to Messrs Aldiss and Wingrove, "lies in Bishop's ability to convince us of the reality of his alien culture." Two human brothers are required to move an alien culture to another planet. The author was less impressed, subsequently revising the novel under the title *Eyes of Fire* (1980). The revised edition is to be preferred.

And Strange at Ectaban the Trees (aka *Beneath the Shattered Moons*) (1976)

Novel. "Amidst harrowing dangers of sea battles and land invasions, Bishop explores the transformation of Ingram Marley," a man caught between two genetically altered groups on the planet Mansuecaria. This novel has been compared to the lean, early novels of Jack Vance.

Stolen Faces (1977)

Novel. A starship engineer, Lucian Yeardance, is exiled to the planet Tezcatl – a contraction of the Aztec name "Tezcatlipoca," smoking mirror – to govern a remote colony whose residents suffer from the hideously disfiguring disease, muphormosy. But all is not what it seems. A dark gem. Recommended.

A Little Knowledge (1977)

Novel, connected to the series of stories – later collected in *Catacomb Years* – about Atlanta. An alien visitor to the domed city of Atlanta, acknowledging Christ to be his personal saviour, destabilizes a society dominated by the Orth-Urban Church.

Catacomb Years (1979)

Collection of stories – represented as a novel – about Atlanta. Contains: "If a Flower Could Eclipse," "Old Folks at Home," "The Windows in Dante's Hell," "The Samurai and the the Willows," "Allegiances," "At the Dixie-Apple with the Shoofly-Pie Kid: A Story by Julian Kosturko-Cawthorn," and "Death Rehearsals." Individual stories can be admired but the novel, taken as a whole, is incoherent.

Transfigurations (1980)

Novel. Incorporates (as its first part) the novella "Death and Designation Among the Asadi" (1973). In the novella, Chaney – a "xenologist" – attempts to solve the mysteries of an enigmatic alien race; and fails. The novel rather too clearly answers many of his questions and, for that reason, is less pleasing. Nevertheless: recommended.

Under Heaven's Bridge (1981)

Novel written with Ian Watson. The authors have interests in common – alien languages and anthropologies, for example – but the novel cannot be counted among their most successful.

No Enemy But Time (1982)

Novel. A Nebula award winner. Bishop's protagonist,

Joshua Kampa, aka Monegal, has a gift for dreaming and (in some not wholly explicable way) dreams himself back two million years amidst a tribe of early hominids. He marries a female, Helen; she bears him a child before dying; and he, during an inferno, returns with the child to the present. An immensely ambitious novel of somewhat uneven quality. Highly recommended.

Blooded on Arachne (1982)

Collection, containing "Among the Hominids at Olduvai" (a poem), "Blooded on Arachne," "Cathadonian Odyssey," "Effigies," "The House of Compassionate Sharers," "In Chinistrex Fortronza the People are Machines," "Leaps of Faith," "On the Street of the Serpents," "Pinon Fall," "Rogue Tomato," "Space-men and Gypsies," "The White Otters of Childhood," and "For the Lady of a Physicist" (a poem).

Who Made Stevie Cry?: A Novel of the American South (1984)

Incorporates the novelette "The Monkey's Bride" (1983) that also appears in the collection *One Winter in Eden*. According to the Arkham House first edition, "in this unforgettable tale of a young woman harassed by demons from hell, Michael Bishop has created a masterpiece of occult fiction – a bloodcurdling novel of satanism, illicit lust, and supernatural horror." Powerful.

One Winter in Eden (1984)

Collection, containing "One Winter in Eden," "Seasons of Belief," "Cold War Orphans," "The Yukio Mishima Cultural Association of Kudzu Valley, Georgia," "Out of the Mouths of Olympus," "Patriots," "Collaborating," "Within the Walls of Tyre," "The Monkey's Bride," "Vernalst Morning," "Saving Face," and "The Quickening."

Ancient of Days (1985)

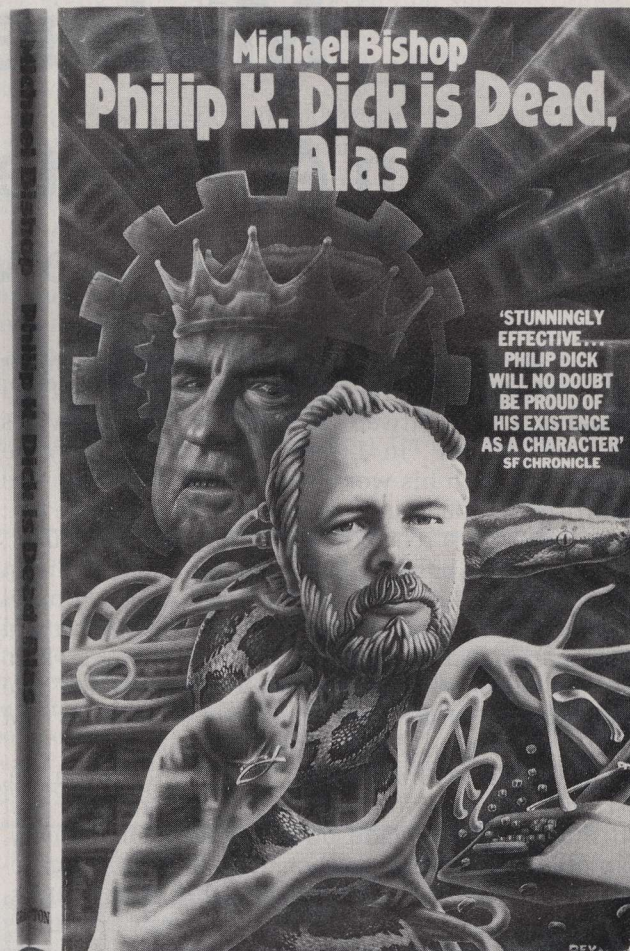
Novel. An expansion of the novella "Her Habiline Husband" (1983). A habiline survives into the present day and scandalously marries a young divorcee. A comedy of manners set in a small town in Georgia. Recommended.

Close Encounters with the Deity (1986)

Collection, containing "Close Encounters With the Deity," "Voices," "A Spy in the Domain of Arnheim," "Love's Heresy," "Storming the Bijou, Mon Amour," "Dogs' Lives," "A Gift From the Graylanders," "A Short History of the Bicycle: 401 BC to 2677 AD," "Diary of a Dead Man," "Scrimptalon's Test," "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software & Satori Support Services Consortium, Ltd.," "Alien Graffiti," "And the Marlin Spoke," and "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis; Or, the Astrogator's Testimony." Highly recommended.

The Secret Ascension (aka *Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas*) (1987)

Novel. Philip K. Dick is the hero on an alternate Earth where Richard Nixon is still US President. (Bishop has also written about PKD in the story "Rogue Tomato" [1975].) Recommended (though I am a fan of PKD!).



Unicorn Mountain (1988)

Novel. According to Michael Swanwick, this "is a fantasy for adults, full of the dangerous stuff of life, death, and love." On the other hand, this may be an overly long novel about AIDS and unicorns (not necessarily in that order).

Apartheid, Superstrings, and Mordecai Thubana (1989)

Novella, published by the small Axolotl Press.

Emphatically Not SF, Almost (1990)

Collection, containing "Unlikely Friends," "Wished-For Belongings," "Dear Bill," "A Father's Secret," "Give a Little Whistle," "The Egret," "Tears," "Patriots," and "Taccati's Tomorrow."

The Quickening (1991)

First separate publication of a Nebula-winning novelette from 1981 which also appears in the collection *One Winter in Eden*.

Count Geiger's Blues: A Comedy (1992)

Novel. Mary Gentle, reviewing this novel for *Interzone*, suggested that it "does smack more than somewhat of James Branch Cabell and Kurt Vonnegut" but that the "two strands... sit slightly uneasily together."

There are things one can call it. In *Celebration of Writing* (1993), an anthology put together to honour the three *Washington Post* writers who'd just won Pulitzer Prizes, Michael Dirda reprints his review of Lawrence Norfolk's *Lempriere's Dictionary* (1991), and calls it an "antiquarian romance," citing as further examples of the category A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, John Crowley's *Ægypt*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Robertson Davies's *What's Bred in the Bone*, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, Katherine Neville's *The Eight*, Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* and Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. These novels, he goes on to suggest,

tend to juxtapose the present and the past, disclose awesome, frequently game-like conspiracies at work in history, draw heavily on some branch of arcane learning (chess, Renaissance hermeticism), provide a trail of scholarly "documents," pastiche earlier styles of speech, offer "intellectual" conversation, and emphasize a Gothicky atmosphere of mystery and foreboding.

Most of these novels are fantasies with sf tropes cross-hatched into the stew, and in a review of John Whitbourn's *Popes and Phantoms* a few months ago (in *Interzone* 79), I described this kind of book as a Fantasy of History. It is, in other words, a fantasy which lays claim (as sf must) to the world-line. To Dirda's list I'd be inclined to add Crowley's *Little, Big*, Hercules Mulloy's *Oedipus in Disneyland*, Charles Portis's *Masters of Atlantis*, David Pownall's *The White Cutter*, almost everything Thomas Pynchon has ever published, Dan Simmons's *Carrion Comfort*, absolutely everything Robert Anton Wilson has ever let out of his bag, and others; and to his suggested features I'd add a Secret Master or Guardian; a Labyrinth; the Near Future as part-venue; one or several Alternate Histories; Angels fucking; the Music of the Spheres; a Rune; a Book; the Beginning and the Navel and the End of the World.

Any Fantasy of History which makes use of any reasonable sorting of these icons and routines has some chance of being a text of real interest, and may well strike the reader as reflecting some hint of the dangerousness to the human spirit of human life as we live it in these days, in the chaos of ends we control but do not taste, so that there seems no story out there to salute. Normalization is the death of story. (So are sequels.) Fantasies of History, properly told, constitute reinstatements of story: lifelines to the world we know too much about to remember the mystery of, around the fire. There is, therefore, something very thrilling about the thought of a

The Dang Wildwood

John Clute

Fantasy of History. Which is why, one supposes, Ronald Anthony Cross's second novel, **The Eternal Guardians, Book One: The Fourth Guardian** (Tor, \$14.95), strikes fire in the mind before it is fairly opened.

Afterwards, one must admit, the tale lessens sadly in the mind's eye. *The Fourth Guardian* is an astonishingly wasteful book, reducing (because the jokiness is not carried off very well) to farce the fragile lunacies of conspiracy fiction, *normalizing* the fantasy that we can tell the story of the world. As we begin – indeed, as we read the dustwrapper copy, which not wisely but too well trumps the book inside by telling all the good bits in 300 words – it looks complicated enough to carry its bulk (450 big pages), but the impression of carrying power fades, very rapidly, into action static. There are, for instance, three Preludes, heavily loaded with premonitions of a complex action. Cross has numbered them.

(One): A citizen of ancient Rome named Marcus is initiated into an organization called The Knights of the New Dawn. From the dustwrapper we already know that the Knights must be dominated by the four Romans who have discovered the Four Stones of Power and who intend to rule the world as Immortals (as the surtitle tells us) secretly (as the dustwrapper makes clear) bugging up human history to their own advantage. (Two): Elena, a young Mexican woman of the 20th century who serves as apprentice to (as the dustwrapper makes clear) the only one of the Four Immortals certain not to be the secret villain who is trying to gain all the stones for himself (or herself), almost misses out on a turning point which may be "the turning point of the whole world." (Three): also in the 20th century, young Brice O'Conner vies with his elder brother Conal O'Conner, little knowing that Conal is a kind of samurai who hires himself out to Guardians. And we're off.

There is a long action episode set in Mexico, and Conal keeps the Ring which he got from Elena who was given it by the Guardian. There is a long action episode set in Blaylock, California, and the Secret Twins survive the attempts of the mysterious enemy to import were-creatures from another dimension to eat them up. There is a climax in Hawaii, and one or another of the Four Guardians turns

out to want to rule the roost, but is thwarted. Unusually, there have been a lot of deaths. Conal is long gone. The good Guardian buys it. Lots of other characters come and go. Occasional throwaway lines indicate that, over the centuries, the Guardians have been doing to the world what the dustwrapper implied the book would concern itself with explaining: I seem to remember that the Black Death is caused by the female Guardian: ah yes (I seem to remember her musing, though I have mislaid my marked copy of the book, and cannot quote for sure) "that was one of hers." But it's all dong dang and dither. There is no fascination with the world apparent on any page, no thesis, no dream, no apprehension, no scheme. Except for the exceedingly numerous deaths (of the sort you expect to find in pilot episodes to tv, where they get rid of the expensive help before starting the actual series), *The Fourth Guardian* reads like a template for something interminable. I would be very glad to be wrong, because some of the characters were very deftly drawn, and the last scene (where Elena finds herself alone at last and pregnant with a highly significant birth in the offspring) had some bite; but if I had to bet, I'd bet on dong, I'd bet on dang, I'd bet on dither.

From a book drained of meaning to one so saturated with attempted connectivities and significance that it cannot be read with an entirely straight face. **Robin Hood: Green Lord of the Wildwood** (Gothic Image Publications, circa £12) by John Matthews is, perhaps, utter nonsense; or, perhaps, it is not. It is non-fiction, ostensibly, and there are some conventionally sensible passages. Early on, for instance, Matthews suggests that the various candidates for the historical Robin Hood may well all have (one) existed and (two) themselves mark historical moments of allegiance to pre-Christian ritual and myth organized around the passage of the seasons.

But then, finger aside his nose, he takes off. The figure of Robin Hood (we learn) is an embodiment of the Green Man of the Wildwood, or more fully is "really a Springtime aspect of the Green Man... There is a vestigial pattern of forms through which Robin passes – from Green King in Winter to the Green Jack in Spring, to the Puck in

Summer and Robin Goodfellow in Autumn." A diagram follows, almost the last of several. Then Maid Marian gets a similar circular litanization, and a final chart. It is all, quite probably, very silly: because Matthews' scholarship is nothing much more than scholarship by correspondence: one thing reminds him of another. Some of these associations – to the Green Man, to various Jacks-in-the-Green, to the Year King, the Foliage Head, Gawain, Morris Dancers, etc – are aesthetically tantalizing, and feel absolutely right at the level at which, say, Robert Holdstock's Mythagoes feel absolutely right. They make you wish you were not on the wrong side of the portal into Never-Never Land. They make you wish you could inhabit a book. They make you feel the hugeness of the sense of loss of Eden that any contemporary person must acknowledge, though few contemporary scholars would suggest that Eden was ever anything but lost. But they do not compute.

It may be a bad world which can find that *Robin Hood* does not add up in its terms. It is not a world which makes much sense to the heartbeat, which we know. So we go to John Matthews, and ask him (he obliges) to nudge us dreamwards, into the New Age Sward, with a ditty and a wink and a couple of DIY rituals thrown in as appendices. Good. Let us go then, you and I. Before we wake.

Omnibest Science Fiction Three (Omni Books, \$10) is edited by Ellen Datlow, who is *Omni Magazine's* fiction editor. All but one of the stories are original; almost all of them are very good indeed; and the selection has been carefully worked through so that each tale feeds naturally into its successor. One might guess that the contents of the volume represent stories that could not fit into the magazine itself, but it would be unsafe to assume that they are therefore inferior. Because of its extremely high rates of pay, and because of its prestige (a prestige for which Datlow can take a fair credit), *Omni* is a magnet for writers, while at the same time having relatively limited space to publish them; the result (I'd guess) is a throughput of material far in excess of what can fit. Hence, it may be, this anthology. No problem.

The most perfect and perhaps the most powerful story in volume three is "Exogamy" by John Crowley, whose *Love and Sleep* is due this year, the second volume of the great four-part novel which began with *Aegypt* (1987). The tale is very short, pellucid, comprehensive. It tells us (it certainly told me) more or less everything one needs to remember about the first testing decades as lived by most humans of normal span. The longest story,

"Virus Dreams" by Scott Baker, marries the myth of the Triple Goddess in her incarnation as Hathor to a Virtual Reality tale of considerable sophistication; the portrait of the computer entrepreneur – who is hired to programme the re-enactment of a complex rite involving Hathor and cow/human metamorphic sex – is consistently realistic, and very telling. There is strong work by Pat Cadigan Doing Tall Tale, Simon Ings Doing Entropy Without Saying "Entropy"; and others. A coat of many colours, neatly stitched. Wear it home.

(John Clute)

Read Any Dutch Fantasy Lately? Chris Gilmore

Writers generally strive to reach the widest possible audience, which presents a problem if your mother tongue is obscure. Most educated members of linguistic minorities solve it by growing up at least bi-lingual and become fluent in the current *lingua franca*, at present standard English. Thus Abba wrote and recorded in English rather than Swedish, and even such "professional Welsh/Irishmen" as Dylan Thomas and Yeats wrote nothing of moment in Cymric/Gaelic.

This is what kills a literary tradition, a process about which I'm in two minds. The *lingua franca* is enriched by brilliant individuals from outside, while humanity as a whole is impoverished; yet who would condemn a brilliant individual to the impoverishment of monoglot obscurity for the sake of so abstract an entity as the world's stock of literary traditions? **The Dedalus Book of Dutch Fantasy** ed. & trans. Richard Huijing (Dedalus, £9.99) may well represent the last generations of writing in Dutch by Dutchmen (only three women are represented) of any stature who, through choice or lack of fluency, write in their mother tongue. Thereafter we may expect only the bogus, the bureaucratic and the nastier sort of nationalism, as exemplified by Bardic flummery in Llangollen, Reservation Indian epics and the Irish Language Club of H Block.

Huijing has pretensions as an English stylist in his own right, which cuts both ways; few passages show the awkwardness of over-literal translation, though one occasionally encounters what looks like excessive reverence for the original syntax:

Who cared whether it was being played to mock them now; not by the musicians: they simply had to and, who knows,

perhaps they were making an extra effort in fact: to do them a last kindness.

There are also occasional misuses of colloquialism; whatever a young couple might feel like doing in a newly aired bed, I can't see many of them calling it "a right old cuddle." More subtle is the loss of individuality. The stories vary too widely in mood and competence to be the work of a single writer, but one gets the impression that everyone's been to the same school. These avoidable defects come of false economy; a translator should not have to serve as his own editor.

None of the 32 stories is genre fantasy, though some are reminiscent of Marcel Aymé tall stories, or Fritz Leiber's later mood pieces. Their tone is more often dark than light, the first, "In the Dark," being a powerful evocation of depression while the second, "Breakfast," which owes much to Kafka's "Metamorphosis," is a commentary on the vileness of life in an old folks' home. The third, "The Secret of Dr Raoul Sarrazin," is an Aymé-style tall story, and that defines the mix fairly well, though not all the contents measure up to these three, and some have the look of religious exercises.

"Souls Errant" is an exercise in extreme preciousness, while "The Gospel According to Chabot" takes 19 pages of magic realism to make the unremarkable point that though God may move in a mysterious way, He could make it a whole lot more mysterious and arbitrary if He had a mind to; "The Sacred Butterfly" is such a saccharine exercise in devotionism as would make St Teresa of Avila blush, though in fairness it should be mentioned that it's an item of posthumously published juvenilia, the author having neglected to burn it; at the opposite pole of religiosity, "Concerning the Experiences of Hélénus Marie Gollesco" is an exercise in Huysmanesque diabolism.

To me, without expert knowledge, the tone is only recognizably Dutch in some of the background details, but it's certainly as removed from English "literary" fantasy as it is from genre work. There are echoes of Poe and Wilde, but none of John Collier, Gerald Kersh, Robert Aickman or Angela Carter. The one story which strikes a strong contemporary chord without being derivative, "Werther Neiland," is strongly reminiscent of *The Wasp Factory*, though dated 1949. This is what I mean by a distinct literary tradition; it's difficult to imagine a young English writer setting out on a career in literary fantasy without recalling at least one of those four, if only at second hand, while if Iain Banks had known "WN," TWF would have had to be written differently.

The death of that tradition is also heralded, particularly in "Dumping

Ground" and "Pompeii Funebri," which derive respectively from the clichés of Third World angst and those of gay drug-culture (pre-AIDS); both could just have well have been written in San Francisco. Altogether, a very varied collection but a book worth reading for the experience. Get your library to stock it.

The idea that items may sometimes stray out of dreams to invade our daily lives recurs constantly, for there's some part of us which insists that it ought to be possible. It was the origin of *Flook*, and Stanislaw Lem invented a dream poison so powerful that it burned a hole clear through to reality, but to the best of my knowledge *Vurt* by Jeff Noon (Ringpull, £5.99) is the first book based on the notion of such intrusions becoming ubiquitous. The postulate is pure fantasy, but the frenetically paranoid atmosphere, moral and physical squalor and sense of a world that has lost identity and control, are more like cyberpunk.

It's all the fault of *Vurt* feathers, a commercial drug which allows you to play pre-programmed, multiple-choice adventure games inside your skull, with or without companions. Inevitably all sorts of dangerous variants are pirated to the reckless, and these cause the trouble. As the story opens four spaced-out hippies in near-future Manchester are lumbered with a speechless alien from a meta-dimension "swapped" for Desdemona, their fifth member, who was so foolhardy as to ingest a yellow feather (the most potently illegal kind) while inside a shared dream. Despite its harmless demeanour the alien is bad news; the local drug bandits want it to break up and sell in joints, while the cops want to impound it and bust them for possession. They themselves recognize that their only chance of getting Desdemona back is to lug it back into the same dream and effect a reverse swap.

Thus a quest story is set inside an allegory of software viruses, AIDS, virtual reality and all the bad-trip fables of the sixties, baroquely decorated with dreamsnakes, a form of psycho-physical vermin which, to satisfy some analogy of the conservation laws, emerge to plague those who absent-mindedly drop litter or lose items of minor value in their dreamscapes without a formal swap. As a crowning touch, lesser characters may be the result of matings between humans and genetically engineered dogs and/or vurt entities; telepathic mutants; partially cyborged; any combination thereof. Such a *mise en scène* allows plenty of scope for incidental detail, of which Noon takes full advantage. Tristan and Suze, lovers who have linked themselves by semi-sentient

nanotech hair so that they need never be more than six feet apart, are an especially fine touch. It's a romp, in fact, but a romp which shows its depth when Suze falls to a stray bullet.

Scribble, the viewpoint character, is Desdemona's brother and incestuously fixated upon her. He's also very young and thoroughly ineffectual, and knows it. This allows a strong side-interest to develop: will Scribble achieve manhood, maturity and perhaps even a sexual relationship with someone from outside the family? That plus Noon's talent for ornamentation is more than sufficient to sustain interest throughout what is really rather a thin story with a thoroughly contrived ending. The author is helped no little by Ringpull, who have paid for a decent typesetter and brought it out in generous B-format for £4 less than Dedalus feel they need (though the paper is cheap).

After such an exotic, David Gemmell's *Druss the Legend* (Legend, £14.99) is reassuringly familiar. All is as it should be in the world of the Drenai: the empire of Greater Ventria is beset by war and like to fall, while in the Vagrian marches marauders sack a peaceful village and convey the nubile women, including Rowena (who has occult powers), to the nearest slave market. They are hotly pursued by her husband (and our hero), Druss, a man as unlike Scribble as can well be imagined though their quests are similar. The massive, short-tempered, dour, upright and uncouth grandson of a mad axeman, Druss is a typical Gemmell hero, but on this occasion he is shortly joined by Sieben – poet, wit, con-man and breaker of hearts. If this sounds just a tiny bit like Lankmar, the differences are more instructive than the similarities. Fritz Leiber wrote entertainments for an audience of some sophistication, and humour was never far below the surface; Gemmell is to an extent that precludes humour committed to his moral purpose, which is to honour the heroic code which governs life in an heroic age.

For the edification of young Druss this code is forthrightly expressed by the older and wiser of his characters, when time can be spared from slaying and evading pursuit, but the effect is less laudable than one might expect. Gemmell is a supremely serious writer, and since his style never lets him down the effect is at worst a touch heavy-handed. Hardly a scene passes without death or maiming, Druss generally taking the active role, but as it's always in the cause of peace, justice and the protection of the innocent one can't really complain. Moreover, though the accounts of Druss's prowess strain belief even given an enchanted axe, he's no mere Rambo

clone; the book's outlook is too tragic. Gemmell takes pains to emphasize the potential good in all his villains, and its corruption is as much to be mourned as the suffering of their victims or the wasted virtues of the lesser heroes who die along the way.

He also demonstrates the process in the career of the Emperor Gorben. As the book opens Gorben is a monument to the kingly virtues; by the end he has degenerated into a parody of Nero, and dies Nero's death. Why? He wanted the extra security of an enchanted sword – which is to say, one bonded to a demon. Druss, who rejected the same demon, ends the book as honourably as he began.

Those who enjoyed the earlier Drenai books will want this one, and those who take to this one will want the others, not least because they're interlinked. Vitnar of the Thirty puts in a brief appearance, which I would have found puzzling if I had not encountered him before in *Legend* (1983), which may be why *Legend* has launched *Legend*, text by Stan Nicholls, illustrations by Fangorn (£9.99), as a companion piece.

It's a graphic novel based on and following very closely the original book. Both might be sub-titled "Druss's Last Stand," and there could be no clearer demonstration why the graphic novel is one of those good ideas that don't really work: it contrives to be the poor relation of two major arts. Reading it, I was constantly reminded how much better the book was – inside my head there are far superior scenery, sets and sfx, the transitions are less jerky and my casting and wardrobe departments have bigger budgets as well. For a cinema-goer much the same observations would apply. A strip cartoon is very closely akin to a story-board, and though early story-boards have become collectable, they're no substitute for a night at the flicks.

I was also sorry to note that the story hadn't been tidied up. Gemmell committed the gross lapse of letting one of his heroines get killed and then bringing her back to life by arbitrary means – with no thought for any of the other good guys of both sexes who might have relished a second bite. It was a piece of self-indulgence that he had grown out of by the time of *DtL*, but he has passed his own chance of a second bite here.

The best sort of family to belong to is a large one, with old money and plenty of blots on the 'scutcheon. Ensure that family qualities include brains, beauty, sensuality, gallantry and panache; inbreed (sometimes within the prohibited degrees) to stabilize; then, if you really want to have fun, pre-empt the role of black sheep. If your parents are the two family drunks they will be the less able to

exert authority over you, while at the same time ensuring that you receive maximum sympathy. Such is the formula chosen by Mona Mayfair, 13-year-old heroine of *Lasher* by Anne Rice (Chatto, £15.99). Even by Mayfair standards, she's a bit of a handful; her Aunt Gifford sadly wishes she "would go for boys her own age, and care a little about clothes, and stop this obsession with family, and computers, and race cars, and guns." In fact Gifford is only half right: before page 50 Mona has seduced relations aged 80 and 15, as well as a handsome mature uncle by marriage; and she dresses below her age, to maximize the enticement of her precocious bosom.

However, this is no mere A.N. Roquelaure chronicle of jailbait jollies. Among the family secrets is Lasher, a male demon, who has become incarnate as the child of Mona's Cousin Rowan, who happens to be designee of the huge family estate and its symbolic emerald. Having been born, Lasher immediately grows to full man size, attacks his father (leaving him for dead in the swimming pool) and takes off with Rowan to see the world. Lasher reinforces the qualities of demon, child-in-arms and *Homo Superior* with the wisdom born of the many generations he has spent observing life through various members of the Mayfair family (especially those who were witches), great personal and physical force and no more empathy or restraint than any other new infant – "Kwisatz Haderach," do I hear you mutter? The parallels are there, and reinforced by an atmosphere even more incestuous than that of *Dune*.

But Lasher is no Paul Atreides; he stands among the most repulsive monsters of fiction, especially when he simultaneously penetrates and suckles from his wretched mother (bestowing simultaneous orgasms through both zones). He knows that he is ruining her health, but justifies everything, including beating her up and tying her down, with mawkish simultaneous appeals to love (filial and sexual) and trust. (With his great height and such a flexible backbone he is presumably capable of auto-fellation, but too selfish to think of it.) Rice's symbol of his character is the bed to which he had lashed and on which he had coupled with Rowan, thick with urine and faeces but overlain with a clean sheet and garnished with cut flowers.

Lasher has twice the usual amount of DNA, a detail which strikes rather a jarring note given the modern gothic ambience, as Rice is well enough aware. A character calls it a "grotesque clash" at one point, but she retains it anyway for its use as a plot-mechanism in a tale of pursuit, as the Mayfairs struggle to recover Rowan and protect themselves from Lasher's attempts to

impregnate his other female relations, whether they like it or not (they generally do, in a masochistic way, but it tends to be fatal). Other interested parties include the Talamasca Order, a centuries-old but somewhat ineffective secret society which has observed the "Mayfair witches" for many generations, and the ghost of Uncle Julien, Mona's four- and six-times great grandfather.

The story is told in a leisurely fashion, with heavy use of flashback and from many viewpoints (the autobiography of Uncle Julien, as vouchsafed by his ghost, would make a respectable novella), so that Mona fades into the background for much of the book. Rice scores heavily for drama, characterization, atmosphere and background, but though the climax is all one could ask for, construction has never been her strong point. Nor has historical accuracy; someone at Chatto should surely have noticed that the writ of the Tudors never ran in Scotland, and that Neale's translation of *Veni Emmanuel* wasn't made until the 19th century. It's also a bit of a struggle to remember precisely how who is related to whom in the sprawling Mayfair clan. Rice has no excuse whatever for not providing a genealogy, as Mona has actually built one up on her computer – proving to her own satisfaction that she herself is the most potently descended of the current generation (Lasher makes his own, even more comprehensive version, based on ancestral memories of unrecorded bastardy as well as public records). It was to present such data that front and back endpapers were invented – and if they aren't big enough, a folded paste-in, like the maps in *The Lord of the Rings*, would serve as well. Anne Rice is hot property and Chatto is a flagship imprint, both of which Random House would have done well to remember.

(Chris Gilmore)

Okie Dokie Graham Andrews

A Work of Art and Other Stories (Severn House, £13.99) is a timely introduction to the more artful works of James Blish (1921-75). The editor, Francis Lyall, has already played sympathetic Griswold to Clifford D. Simak's short fiction: *The Marathon Photograph*; *Brother*; *Off-Planet*; *The Autumn Land*; *Immigrant*. From the cheap seats: "But James Blish doesn't need an introduction! Didn't he write all those *Star Trek* storyizations – not to mention that unforgettable Hugo-winning novel? *A Case of...*" How soon they forget!

It's easy to be sarcastic, which is probably just as well: I like making life

easy for myself. But the thing of it is that Blish's posthumous reputation has suffered from the Dennis Wheatley syndrome. At one time, Wheatley's bestselling historical/satanist/war/fantasy novels took up yard upon yard of bookshop shelving. But, after his death in 1977, the books soon went out of print. See "Whatever Happened to Dennis Wheatley?" by Stan Nicholls (first issue of *Million*). Much the same thing happened to Fredric Brown, John Dickson Carr, W. Dingwall Fordeyce...

Blish's *Star Trek* thingies have gone into their umpteenth printings (et *pourquoi pas?*) but how many Trekkies know/care about *A Case of Conscience* and *The Seedling Stars*? The "Okie" books were blockbusted as *Cities in Flight*; ditto his thematic tetralogy, *After Such Knowledge*.

That might even be for the best. Blish was the literary equivalent of a sprinter: he tended to run himself out over long distances. His better novels (*Conscience/Seedling/Earthman, Come Home*) were fix-ups. His very best novel, *Doctor Mirabilis*, wasn't a fix-up. "The exception proves the rule" – that's my story, and I'm sticking to it. The best/near-best/least-worst of Blish's stories can be found in these collections: *Galactic Cluster* (1958); *So Close to Home* (1961); *Best Science Fiction Stories of...* (1970; revised 1973; as *The Testament of Andros*, 1977); *Anywhen* (1970); *The Best of...* (1979).

If you can find them... The above-listed volumes have been out of print for some not-so-little time. Publishers don't go in much for single-author collections. And – truth be told – even the *Best ofs* feature work that Robert Moore Williams (author of that neglected classic, *The Day They H-Bombed Los Angeles*) would have tossed into the Chinese File. Damon Knight opined that *Galactic Cluster* "...contains eight stories, of which six are...frankly commercial pieces. Except for isolated scenes that show Blish's real talent...these stories are not about people but about gadgets...full of ingenuity and technical language, but largely empty of everything else that makes a story worth writing" (*In Search of Wonder*, p.150).

Lyall has Done the Decent Thing by reprinting the two great stories from *Galactic Cluster* – "Common Time" and "A Work of Art." Come back, Damon: "Pure feeling is distilled by each of these works: in the first, aching and nameless regret; in the second, a triumph that rises out of resignation" (*ibid.*, p.157).

"Common Time" (*Science Fiction Quarterly*, August 1953) is a story that sticks in the mind. First line: *Don't move*. Lone spaceman Garrard is trapped aboard the Centaurus-bound DFC-3, an experimental craft. Ship-time has

just about stopped relative to Garrard's awareness. He calculates – ingeniously – that the journey will take ten months for the DFC-3 but 6,000 years for him (his skeleton, rather). Fortunately, ship-time picks up until it once again equals Garrard's subjective time: Garrard goes into “pseudo-death” mode. He awakens to normality near Alpha Centauri. Normality...? Along comes a hive-creature calling itself the “clinesteron beademung.” A.E. van Vogt meets Professor Stanley Unwin – not for the first time. Knight subjected “Common Time” to a thorough sym-bological analysis. For example: “Clearly Garrard is inside one of the organs engaged in copulation: sometimes he seems to visualize himself as an unborn child, sometimes as a kind of analogue to the penis” (*ibid.*, p.271). Eat your egos out, Freud/Jung/Fromm.

“A Work of Art” (*Original*, July 1956, as “Art Work”) is a more linear story than “Common Time” – though not in the same way that *Tarzan of the Apes* is more linear than *Naked Lunch*. Blish never made more telling use of his musical knowledge. A 20th-century composer is recalled to life in a new-and-better body 200 years after his death. He firmly believes himself to be Richard (2001: *A Space Odyssey*) Strauss. Is he or isn't he? And does it matter, either way?... “Give us a tune, Dick!”

“Ostensibly this is a story about the future of serious music (by which adjective I mean to exclude dance music both good – Ellington and the Strausses – and bad – Beatles and other coleoptera), but actually it proposes no novelties in that field. Its real subject is the creative process itself” (from *New Dreams This Morning*, 1966, p.34).

Blish was equally frank about the multi-level “Testament of Andros” (*Future*, January 1953): “...the story involves successive stages in the disintegration of a paranoid schizophrenic, from the first delusions of reference to the infantile moment before he becomes lost to all human control... But my imaginary patient was a science-fiction fan in his formative years, so his delusions take on a science-fictional coloration...” (from *Best...*, 1977 edition, p.60).

Blish claimed that the symbol systems Knight detected in “Common Time” and an earlier story, “Solar Plexus” (*Astonishing*, September 1941) were entirely unconscious. For Knight's first *Orbit* anthology (1966), he wrote “How Beautiful with Banners” – a story redolent with conscious symbolism. Dr Ulla Hillstrom unwittingly brings heterosexuality to the “flying cloak” life-forms which inhabit the methane air-soup of Titan.

The only remaining story, here, of classic status is “There Shall Be No Darkness” (*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, April 1950). Werewolf stories tend to

be either funny ha-ha or barking mad – but not this one. Blish wrote two versions of “Darkness”: (a) scientific, positing genetic manipulation; (b) supernatural, wolfbane blooms, etc. (published in *Witches Three*, 1952). Lyall has plumped for (a) but (b) is worth seeking out. A three-star (Martin's *Movie and Video-Guide*) film adaptation appeared in 1975 – *The Beast Must Die* – with Peter Cushing and Charles Gray (video retitling: *Black Werewolf*).

Lyall could have beefed things up by including stories-later-turned-into-novels: “A Case of Conscience”; “Beanstalk” / *Titan's Daughter*; “Bridge”/*Cities in Flight*; “Surface Tension”/*The Seedling Stars*; “Beep”/*The Quincunx of Time*. To his credit, however, he has gone with the following less-familiar pieces: “The Art of the Sneeze” (*F&SF*, November 1982); “Statistician's Day” (*Science Against Man*, 1970); “Who's in Charge Here?” (*F&SF*, May 1962, as “None So Blind”: also in *Anywhen*); “This Earth of Hours” (*F&SF*, June 1959; also in *Galactic Cluster*).

In his introduction, Lyall explains that *A Work of Art and Other Stories* is aimed at those people for whom reading and re-reading is a major occupation: “SF has attracted writers who care about telling a story...well enough to stand up to any amount of scrutiny and [whose] stories...reflect the concerns of our age in imagery brimming with vitality... There is now little excuse for the easy dismissal of a story on the sole ground that it has been read before” (pp.1-2). It's a fine idea in principle. The best short fiction of James Blish deserves to be rescued from semi-obscurity. But – will it work in practice?

In the first place, potential readers will have one-hell-of-a-time finding *A Work of Art*. Severn House volumes rarely appear in a bookshop near you, me, or anybody else. I've seen *Work* listed in a catalogue from Ken (Fantast) Slater. And there's the friendly neighbourhood public library – if it can afford to order any new stock, these days.

In the second place, the book-as-a-book doesn't lend itself to frenzied cries of “Gimme!” The paper is durable, the type-face clear. But the dust-jacket design is one of those Fossilized jobs that would look better on a Lego ad. Sloppy editing: Lyall's fore-name is given as Frances on the cover and front flap (though the correct spelling appears inside). The flap-notes have been roughly hewn out of Lyall's introduction, e.g. “‘Testament of Andros’ is a curious and disturbing tale. It may be about the end of the world?... ‘How Beautiful With Banners’ is taken from Ch. 6:4 of the Song of Solomon.”

Mustn't neglect the *real* introduction

...Lyall praises the Blishian critiques as by “William Atheling, Jr.” (*The Issue at Hand, More Issues at Hand*). Among other things, beyond mention here. He concludes: “I hope that the stories in this book will encourage you to seek out other of Blish's works as they become available once again. Enjoy them” (p.8). Hear, hear. It is also to be hoped that *Work* will have been granted a mass-market paperback edition before this review sees print. And here's my prime nomination for any follow-up Blish collection: “Mistake Inside” (*Startling Stories*, March 1948).

(Graham Andrews)

Bitter Sweets Pete Crowther

Although it bears no connection nor even resemblance to the 1949 weepie of the same name, in which a besotted composer (Michael Dennison) returns to post-war Italy to find the woman who sheltered him after his plane was shot down, Leonard Wolf's *The Glass Mountain* (Overlook Press, \$19.95) has a similar feel of mounting intensity and profound hopelessness.

The tale – a surreal semi-saga of lust and obsession, liberally coated in myth and obscurity – concerns two pairs of brothers, one of each blessed with beauty and grace while their siblings are cursed with deformity; two mothers – one the cold ruler of an equally frigid kingdom, the other a gentle woman obsessed by her collection of birds; two riddles woven in carpet-like complexity by a mysterious Persian; and the Princess Amalassuntha, whose father has placed her at the top of a mountain of glass in order to protect her from the desires of all men...including himself. Bitter sweets indeed.

Reminiscent in part of Iain Banks's *Walking On Glass*, with its bizarre mixture of alienness and familiarity, *The Glass Mountain* might well have been the outcome of a collaboration between Angela Carter and Carlos Castaneda. The prose is at once crystal clear and dizzily obtuse, the characters larger than life, and the story, with its psychological undertones, a haunting fable of incest and transformation. A goodie.

But they're not all that good. Each of the *Drabble* volumes – of which *Drabble Who* (Beccon, £8.99) is the third – comprise one hundred so-called stories, each containing exactly one hundred words. It's a concept whose cuteness has now worn perilously thin and which recalls the “because it's there” mentality of those

who elect to leap-frog up Everest or swim the Atlantic carrying the complete works of Shakespeare.

The new book, edited by David J. Howe and David B. Wake, concerns *Doctor Who* and marks the 30th anniversary of the television show which boasts a level of fannish adulation second only, perhaps, to the likes of *Star Trek* and *The Prisoner*. Containing pieces from Mark Morris, Nick Royle and Steve Gallagher, plus questionable appearances from assorted fans, scriptwriters and even past *Doctor Whos* themselves, the contributions are, for the most part, concoctions comprising varying degrees of obscurity and banality. "But it's all just a bit of fun," the inevitable beanie-bedecked Dalek fan will opine – well, fun it may be – depending on how generous your definition is – but it's hard to reconcile the recession with this level of self-indulgence. The contributors are undoubtedly having a good time: what you must decide is whether you feel like forking out £9 to watch them having it.

(It's also interesting, on reading one contributor's tiresome back-to-front contribution, to recall "The End," the great Fredric Brown's 105-word saga from the 1950s. Just goes to show – there really is nothing new under the sun.)

On the anthology front, the closing months of 1993 were something of a treasure trove for fans of multi-author short story collections. Several have already been reviewed in greater depth, but here are a few that slipped the net.

With its fifth volume, David Sutton's and Stephen Jones's *Dark Voices* series continues to deliver all that is expected of it... plus a little bit more. Aside from the ubiquitous and always-dependable Nick Royle, equally noteworthy contributions come from Robert Holdstock, Michael Marshall Smith, Melanie Tem and Peter Valentine Timlett. Bearing in mind the editors' insistence that stories should be at the cutting edge of horror, **Dark Voices 5** (Pan, £4.99) is most assuredly not a collection for the squeamish.

Terror Australis, edited by Leigh Blackmore, and **Mortal Fire**, edited by Terry Dowling and Van Ikin (both Coronet [Australia], \$[Aus]12.95), are two anthologies gathering, respectively, the best Australian short fiction in the horror and science-fiction fields.

It's difficult to discern a singularly Antipodean flavour or voice to the stories, though the horror tales in particular display their wares in a more overt and visceral tone than the more subtle and often surreal stories currently finding increasing favour both here and in the U.S. However, one voice – that of Terry Dowling – featured in

both books, does shine through by virtue of a singularly impressive mixture of poetical imagery, creativity and sheer storytelling power.

His "Shatterwrack At Breaklight" – featured in *Mortal Fire* – kicks off his own collection, his third, entitled **Twilight Beach** (Aphelion Publications, \$[Aus]12.95) and sets the scene for more of Dowling's intoxicating stories concerning the nomadic Tom Rynosseros and his journeys across a futuristic Australia searching for his own identity.

There is a wind that comes to the coasts of Australia, a wind that blows from the heart of the land, hot and filled with dust, that is called the larrikin wind.

The larrikins come with the larrikin wind, with the stinging red sand and the wrack, leaving their camels and sand-skiffs at the town's edge, moving along the streets in their djellabas and burn-houses like so many closed flowers. They are the children of the wind, some of them Arabs and Afghans, some of them Egyptians, outcast Ab'Os, Nationals or itinerants from other lands, Americans, Japanese, Fijians, Spaniards – children of the wind and detritus of the world. (from "Larrikin Wind")

Owing a clear and, indeed, acknowledged debt to Ellison, Vance, Bradbury and the great Cordwainer Smith, Dowling weaves strange and beautiful tales of almost mythical and fairy-like quality. Highly recommended.

Michael Moorcock called Stan Nicholls "one of the best interviewers in the business." Certainly, he's had a lot of practice. Like America's own resident Stan (namely the writer/interviewer Stanley Wiater), Nicholls knows both the backgrounds of his subjects and (which is equally if not more important) the means of getting it out of them. **Word-smiths of Wonder** (Orbit, £8.99), his collection of essay-interviews with 50 masters of the field, is a riveting read.

Horror-mongers such as Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell and James Herbert come under his intelligent and always entertaining questioning, along with the likes of fantasists Ray Bradbury, Tanith Lee and Terry Brooks, and science-fictioners such as Robert Sheckley, Joe Haldeman and Frederik Pohl. In fact, the full listing is pretty long and pretty comprehensive. Definitely one to dip into for a long time to come.

December '93 saw the release of **Dead Man Upright** (Little, Brown, £15.99), Derek Raymond's fifth novel in his highly acclaimed *Factory* series – a television adaptation of which, incidentally, is already in pre-production at the BBC. The book, typically bleak, atmospheric and subversive, revolves around an investigation conducted by Raymond's nameless

detective – not to be confused with Bill Pronzini's similarly anonymous character – and ex-Detective Sergeant Firth, a former colleague busted from the *Factory* for alcoholism. As the tale progresses, the two men unravel the complex activities of a horrific multiple murderer who has been killing women with impunity for 20 years. Interestingly, the killer is caught around two-thirds of the way through, with the final section of the book being devoted to an analysis of motives and personality.

Little, Brown is in the process of re-issuing all the other *Factory* novels – with matching covers – at the same time. (Incidentally, Raymond has just handed in the manuscript for his next book, a non-*Factory* novel entitled *Not Till the Red Fog Rises*.)

Almost last but by no means least... It's easy to equate looking down the contents listing of **Nightmares and Dreamscapes** (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), Stephen King's latest short story behemoth, with scanning the television guide for the coming week: some of the entries sound as if they're going to be good; some sound like out-and-out clunkers; and some you've come across before. (The latter section invariably contains at least one entry you remember fondly and look forward to experiencing again.)

Of course, just like the television programmes themselves, King's stories have a propensity for surprising you. Thus, some of the eagerly-anticipated doozies turn out to be literary ether-fillers while some of the ones you didn't fancy but accidentally tuned into provide the most enjoyment.

Which are which, you'll have to decide for yourselves... but here are just a few of them.

"Chattering Teeth," sounds suitably menacing but is, in fact, the improbable story of a haunted jokeshop-novelty-item that actually eats people; "Dolan's Cadillac" is a fine *bete-noir* item concerning one man's all-encompassing determination to avenge his wife's murder by trapping her killer – still in his car – beneath a one-man roadworks; "You Know They Got a Hell of a Band" finds an argumentative couple travelling the minor roads until they're lost... and then coming up on a small town called Rock and Roll Heaven – and you should see who's working in the diner!; "The Ten O'Clock People," a paranoid's delight of a tale concerning alien world-takeover disguised as just another cigarette break, is one of those stories that you wish had been around when Rod Serling was trawling for scripts for the old *Twilight Zone* television show.

In addition there are vampires, ghosts – one of which appears seated in a toilet-stall, glimpsed only beneath

the door as a pair of old sneakers surrounded by dead flies – toads, a finger poking out of a sink drainhole, a poem about baseball, and a hotel maid with a ghoulish predilection for the stains left on the bed by one of the hotel guests.

With such a treasure trove of writing and ideas – some wonderful, some a little wacky – it would be churlish indeed to give King anything less than full marks for this, his third collection of shorter works. He may occasionally fail to deliver the full promise we all know he is capable of, but he's never anything less than entertaining.

And absolutely last... There's a knack to the art of the short-short story. Fredric Brown had it. D.F. Lewis has it. And Glen Ashley Johnson has it.

In *Angel Kagoule* (Carphology Collective, £3.99), his delightfully intriguing and immensely satisfying collection of offbeat poems and tiny stories, Johnson also demonstrates another knack: the great beginning. Let the man sell himself:

I am upside down in a waste paper bin. I do not know why I am. The reason is irrelevant. My future almost certainly lies outside of this location.

("The Malkovich Cloud")

There are photographs of babies at the centre of these crosses. Babies who only lived for a week or a day or less. Babies who smelt the air once before dying. All of these babies have names. Some of the babies' eyes in the photographs have been burnt out by cigarettes.

("Look at the Sky")

Carl Murderhouse is running across the length of Arizona for charity. He's got The Leaving Trains on his walkman and they're shitting out some stupid guitar solo when he falls over a tripwire. Carl slams his head against a rock and dies in a second.

("Carl Murderhouse Gets On TV")

I opened the door of the shack to find the ghost of Jean Rhys standing there, big smile leaking across her face. In her outstretched hands was a painted blue basket of soft plums.

("Sad Cocktails")

In the cold, in the snow, far from here and far from the war, they found a group of strange ladies walking to and fro beside a warm barn.

("Dealt to the Dawn Farmers")

I used to wake up just because I knew you used to wake up.

("The Bell-Shaped Boy")

The most gratifying of all enjoyable reads is surely the one you least expect to deliver the magic; because that's when the magic is at its most potent.

Johnson's unassuming book – just 112 pages containing 11 stories and 40 poems (one of the many wonderful ones being "Robin Hood Bay," a simple and poignant two-stanza epic which could almost be turned into a television play by Mike Leigh) –

gathered as it is behind a suitably obtuse two-tone, soft-card cover depicting two bathing-belle dolls from a bygone age plummeting through the clouds, is a pure joy from beginning to end. Unreservedly recommended as a compulsory read. Send now for your copy to Carphology Collective, 220 Alfreton Road, Nottingham, NG7 3PE – or give them a ring on (0602) 783466. This man and this company deserve support!

(Pete Crowther)

British Magazine Reviews

John Duffield

Peeping Tom has won the British Fantasy Society best zine award for the second year on the trot. It's a somewhat scrubby typewritten A5 small-press mag with rather poor illustrations. But who judges a book by its cover? Huh. Read on...

Issue 12 kicks off with a story by Joel Lane about a bedsitterland girl moving on now because Ian's dead. Ian was her brother who slashed his wrists years ago when they were 14, because they got caught playing Doctors & Nurses by their Mum. The tale is all mean streets, slow in the telling, and dull as ditch-water. A disappointing start, not quite the fantasy trip I was expecting.

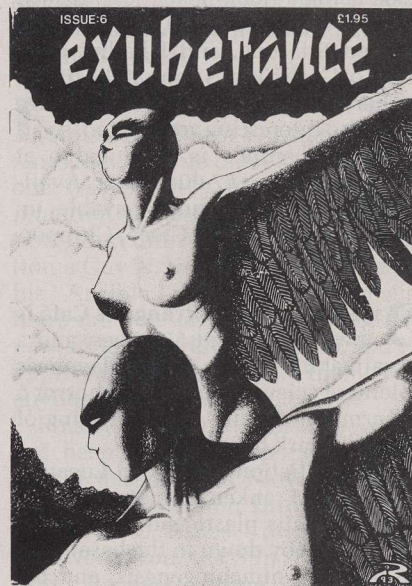
Next comes "Smack" by Martin Feekins, about a young girl and her younger brother talking about their single-parent mother. It seems the latter has been naughty, since Daddy won't come home. So the girl decides Mummy needs a smack. Over the head, with a cricket bat. About 200 times, crack crack crack crunch crunch squish, whilst her younger brother looks on all too helplessly. I found dislike welling.

Then there's the one about a mind-controlling telepath who enjoys commanding people to suicide whilst he savours the second-hand experience of their death. Only something goes badly wrong and he ends up cracked and broken on the rug, just like the girl on the pavement 15 floors below. Get this: "His left femur had burst clean out of its wrapping of flesh like a gruesome javelin, and his torso had cleaved itself, cracked open like rotten fruit, casting his lifeblood over a wide area and exposing the glistening bubbly texture of his lungs." This one is called "Jumpers," written by Antony Bennet, who needs help. But not as much as G.M. Neary, author of "Baby in a Bag," which ends up rotting because the nailed it to the wall. Oh boy.

There's more of this sort of stuff,

plus there's "Red Christmas" by Nicholas Royle. It's about a guy who gets fired because of a scheming rival at work, the rival being a woman. He gets pissed and goes home on the tube but odd things start happening. He meets a drunk who knows everything about all his problems. He keeps nodding off and missing his stop, going back and forth. When he gets home everything's backwards, as in a mirror, and the bitch from work is there in his flat. So it all boils over and he stabs her with a knife. Only next morning he wakes up in the flat next door, next to his cold-white-marble neighbour who only looked like Ms JoAnn Seely. Yup, this is a story that works, the emotion builds up to a "worthy" violence you can really feel, and the true horror is that maybe you could inflict it too.

Despite the last story, overall I have to say if *Peeping Tom* wins British Fantasy Society awards, the British Fantasy Society is in a bad way. And I disliked the way bad things always seem to happen to women. This cannot be healthy. *Peeping Tom* is £1.95 per issue or £7.25 for a four-issue sub. Bad Shit for sad little Horror wankers. I ain't telling you where to get it.



Exuberance is still going strong. Issue 6 is an A4 72-page whopper with top-notch illustrations and a nice glossy cover. There are some good stories too, delivered in a nice mix of sf and dark fantasy. Best story in the issue is "Versions" by Paul Beardsley, about a guy who finds himself in possession of an amulet that allows him to travel back in time to relive his own youth and bed his adolescent sweethearts with all the cunning of a thirty-something. He doesn't consider this as unfaithfulness or even adultery, since he's only spicing up the happenings of yesteryear. But of course it all ends in tears as his happy marriage evaporates into a lovelessness that's lasted for donkeys. Excellent.

"Traffic" by Elliot Smith is about a family living their lives in their car stuck in an eternal traffic jam on the road to nowhere searching for the mythical promised land. Not bad. I wasn't keen however on "Birds of prey" by Gavin Williams because it is a kind of second-hand Alien Predator Thing where the main players even decide to split up to search for the monster, and hey, get picked off one by one.

"Phantom Pain" is rather nice though. Scientist dude invents drug that takes you back to relive past experiences. Only they turn out to be more than just experience, because you find out the objective truth about what happened, and it's sometimes very painful. Very thought-provoking, academically realistic, and quite spellbinding. Roderick MacDonald wrote it. Another nice read is Stuart Palmer's "The Golden Vessel." It's about a telepath who accidentally kills people and doesn't realize who's making people stumbled down dead with a nosebleed. Not until the end anyway, when we're all well into his shoes and rooting for him anyhow. Last comes Robert Campbell's "Superstar," about Jesus being a hook-nosed Jew instead of the WASP desired by CNN. I enjoyed this one, and I hadn't even heard of Gore Vidal's book at the time.

There's a scrapping fun letters page and some interesting articles too, so all in all *Exuberance* is good value at £1.95 per issue or £7.00 for four. Available from, and cheques payable to, *Exuberance*, 34 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts, WD4 9PA.

Dreams from the Stranger's Café is new. It's A5 and 52 pages, and a bargain at £1.45. The overall flavour is a blend of science fantasy and horror à la *Terminator*, with a fat buttering of delicious dark humour.

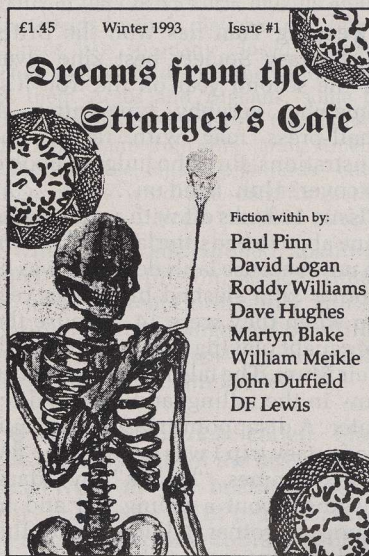
"Reconciliation" by David Logan is a Fun-with-Franken-stein story, about a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon with a sideline hobby down in the basement. He calls it Animabiogenesis, and his wife has blonde hair and Nordic features, oriental hands, a Caribbean torso, one negro leg, etc etc, plus a voice like a foghorn and a brain like a damaged three-year-old. This story was badly sick. But I loved every minute of it.

"Precious" by William Miekle is about a cop who meets a girl in danger from a serial killer who's searching for a ring. The maniac is in fact called Smee, and he isn't pleasant at all, no sirree. He kills people very badly with a sword. Shudder, verily. And the great black eye is searching still. Evocative. *Blade Runner* meets *Lord of the Rings*. Good one.

"The Atomic Lightbulb" is about an inventor who seeks to do his bit for the lukewarm heat of British Technology

— via said invention that'll have the Electricity Board paying you instead of you paying them. The story also features experimental puppies, a nurse with no teeth and hence excellent at certain jobs in pub car parks after closing time, and fissile products. Weird but enjoyable, if I say so myself (clue).

There's more, including stories from the, er, popular D.F. Lewis, Paul Pinn, and Dave W. Hughes, plus Martyn Blake and Roddy Williams. I can't tell you about them all, just trust me when I tell you this mag is well strange, and that if you've got any more than a trilobite sense of humour, you'll love it. *Dreams from the Stranger's Café* is available from John Gaunt at 15 Clifton Grove, Clifton, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 2AZ. £1.45 per or £5.00 for a four-issue sub.



I just want to mention *Matrix* and *Vector*, two A4 paper magazines issued every couple of months by the British Science Fiction Association. They give a dense wealth of information including news, views, reviews and contacts, and are available as a by-product of BSFA membership. This provides other benefits such as discounts on certain purchases, plus get-togethers, and is well worth £15 for a year's sub from the BSFA, care of Alison Cook, 27 Albemarle Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon, OX12 0NB. Alternatively the individual magazines are priced at £1.25 each, but please be generous and make it say £1.75 to cover postage and envelopes. *Matrix* is the news, *Vector* is mainly reviews, but both feature articles, competitions etc on science fiction and fantasy as well. Give it a whirl.

(John Duffield)

Theme-Zines and Author-Zines

David Pringle

John Duffield has reviewed a number of small-press fiction magazines in the preceding column, and he has also made mention of such traditional sf fanzines as the BSFA's *Vector*. I'd like to use the remaining space to draw attention to some other sf-related publications of interest, all of which fall into an apparently growing category of what I call "specialist" fanzines."

The latest, and one of the most impressive, of these is *Alternate Worlds* edited by Michael Morton, 19 Bruce Street, Rodbourne, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 2EL. Issue no. 1, January 1994, is A4-size, 48 pages in extent, and nicely printed in black and white throughout. It's a "theme-zine," its focus entirely on the subject of alternative-timeline fiction. There's a six-page introduction by Brian Stabelford, written in his usual scholarly fashion, a very impressive 17-page "Alternate History Divergence" timeline by R.B. Schmunk and Evelyn C. Leeper, a review of Harry Turtle-dove's novel *The Guns of the South*, and various maps and other shorter items. If alternative-world scenarios intrigue you — and they do seem to be a sub-genre of ever-growing popularity, both within mainline sf and in the wider field of bestsellerdom (as witness the recent success of Robert Harris's *Fatherland*) — then this magazine is a must. It's announced as a quarterly, and the next issue will concentrate on the theme of the Nazi invasion of Britain. Subscriptions are £10 for four issues inland (\$18, USA). Single copies are £3 (\$5), cheques payable to *Alternate Worlds* at the above address.

A longer established theme-zine of similar quality is *Futures Past: A Visual Guidebook to Science Fiction History*, edited by Jim Emerson, PO Box 610, Convoy, OH 45832, USA. This is American quarto size, up to 64 pages in extent and quite heavily illustrated in black and white. The "theme" here is of course the history of genre sf, on a year-by-year basis from 1926 to the present. I've seen only the first three issues, all published in 1992, but presumably there have been more since then. The third, covering the year 1928, has a birth-and-death chronology of the year, an annotated list of all major sf/fantasy books published in that twelvemonth (surprisingly numerous, considering it was such an early date), full details of films released, a profile and bibliography of Edgar Rice Burroughs, sf magazine

contents-listings for the year (with covers and other art-work reproduced), an interview with Jack Williamson (whose first story appeared that year – and he's still writing!), bio-bibliographies of various more obscure authors of the time, and so on and on. A wealth of matter, all pretty reliably presented. *Futures Past* is available for \$5 per issue or \$20 for six, from the address above (persons outside the USA should add \$8 per subscription).

If you enjoy chronologies or annotated lists of books, authors, films, genres, sub-genres and fictional topics (as I do – see the late *MILLION* magazine) then both the above magazines are well worth purchasing. I hope they both succeed.

The other type of specialist fanzine that I've seen more of in recent times is the "single-author-zine," the small-press publication devoted entirely to the life and works of one writer. I'm beginning to think that the only true indication of an author's cult status lies in whether or not they have inspired one of these little magazines or newsletters. The best of them, of course, was the now-defunct **Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter**, produced with great love by Paul Williams (who has now gone off to edit a multi-volume edition of the stories of another deceased author, Theodore Sturgeon). The PKDS newsletter has been replaced by a new publication which I haven't actually seen: **Radio Free P.K.D.**, available from Noel Publications, 27068, S. La Paz #430, Aliso Viejo, CA 92656, USA. Dick fans should write for information.

Other deceased writers, associated with sf and fantasy, who have inspired similar author-zines (or, in some cases, "scholarly journals") include:

L. Frank Baum: **The Baum Bugle** ed. Michael Gessel, International Wizard of Oz Club, PO Box 748, Arlington VA 22216, USA.

Edgar Rice Burroughs: **Burroughs Bulletin** and **The Gridley Wave** ed. George T. McWhorter, Chicago Press Corporation, 1112 North Homan Ave., Chicago, IL 60651, USA.

Robert E. Howard: **The Dark Man: The Journal of Robert E. Howard Studies** from Necronomicon Press, 101 Lockwood St., West Warwick, RI 02893, USA.

H.P. Lovecraft: **Lovecraft Studies** ed. S.T. Joshi, Necronomicon Press, 101 Lockwood St., West Warwick, RI 02893, USA; and **Crypt of Cthulhu** ed. Robert M. Price, from the same address.

Mervyn Peake: **Peake Studies** ed. G. Peter Winnington, Les 3 Chasseurs, 1413 Orzens, Vaud, Switzerland.

Edgar Allan Poe: **Poe Studies** ed. Alex Hammond, Washington State University Press, Pullman, WA 99164, USA.

H.G. Wells: **The Wellsian: The Journal of the H.G. Wells Society** ed. Dr Sylvia Hardy, English Dept., Nene

College, Moulton Park, Northampton NN2 7AL.

I'm sure there must be a J.R.R. Tolkien magazine too, but at present I can't find trace of one. (And has no one started a Robert A. Heinlein journal?) Of the publications listed above, the two that I have been sent copies of fairly regularly and can vouch for personally are *Peake Studies* and *The Wellsian* (thanks, good people – and please keep them coming).



A newer development, however, is the fanzine devoted to a liking of fantasy author. I know of two that have begun in Britain in the past year or so: **The Time Centre Times**, which is a publication of the "International Michael Moorcock Appreciation Society," edited by John Davey and others, available from D.J. Rowe, 18 Laurel Bank, Truss Hill Rd., South Ascot, Berks. SL5 9AL; and **The Wizard's Knob: The Terry Pratchett Magazine** edited by John Penney and David Baxter, available from TWK Subscriptions, Spinneys, Post Office Rd., Woodham Mortimer, Maldon, Essex CM9 6SX. And I have perpetrated one such newsletter myself, which I'll tell you about later. Here are minimal details of others that I've not seen (some of this information is gleaned from *Locus*):

Douglas Adams: **ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha**, a publication of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society, from Claire Brialey, 17 Guildford St., Brighton BN1 3LA.

Piers Anthony: **Piers Anthony Personal Newsletter**, a self-produced author-zine (apparently), from Valet Publishing Co., Box 1990, Clayton, CA 30525, USA.

Robert L. Asprin: **MythInformation**, the Fanzine of The MythAdventures Fan Club, from Box 95, Sutter, CA 95982, USA.

Clive Barker: **Dread: The Official Clive Barker Magazine**, from Phantom Press, 180 Woodward Ave., Staten Island, NY 10314, USA.

Marion Zimmer Bradley: **Darkover Newsletter**, another self-produced author-zine (apparently), from Marion Zimmer Bradley, PO Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701, USA.

Lois McMaster Bujold: **Samizdat Barryar** ed. Patricia Matthews, 2800 Vail Ave. SE, #143, Albuquerque, NM 87106, USA.

Tanya Huff: **Nine Above!**, "a quarterly newsletter for readers of Tanya Huff," ed. A.J. Potter, PO Box 204, Brattleboro, VT 05302-0204, USA.

Stephen King: **Castle Rock Newsletter**, about which I have no information, but it's mentioned in King's collection, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* (1993), and it stands to reason that there must be King fanzines (probably lots of them).

Robert R. McCammon: **Lights Out! The Robert R. McCammon Newsletter** ed. Hunter Goatley(?), PO Box 9609, Bowling Green, KY 42102, USA (possibly now defunct).

Mike Resnick: **Zineth** ed. Doug Roemer, 674 Newbridge Ct., Arnold, MD 21012, USA.

Gene Wolfe: **The Book of Gold** ed. Jeremy Crampton, 302 Walker Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA (I did see the first couple of issues, some five years ago, but no more since; it may be defunct).

I've also heard rumours of Brian Aldiss and Storm Constantine fanzines, but have no details. (The Aldiss one was possibly just an expressed intention which has not come to fruition.) And didn't Dave Langford mention a Guy N. Smith fanzine in one of his "Ansible Link" columns? I'm sure there must be other examples of this new art form lurking out there, and I'd appreciate hearing about them from anyone who knows.

Finally, my own author-zine, which has been appearing sporadically for over a decade: **JGB News** ed. David Pringle, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL. 17 issues – originally entitled *News from the Sun* (For J.G. Ballard's Readers) – from 1981 to 1987; revived in 1992 with issue 18; current issue no. 22, February 1994. This is simply a photocopied newsletter, usually about 16 A4 pages, full of bibliographical minutiae, news of forthcoming books, and speculative comment on Ballard's oeuvre. It's not really available on subscription (though £2, payable to *Interzone*, will buy you a sample) but it exists primarily for those people who respond by sending information, cuttings, comment, etc. Needless to say, you have to be passionate about the subject-author's works in order to find it of any conceivable interest – and this remark also applies, I'm sure, to all the other author-zines listed above.

(David Pringle)

Books Received

January 1994

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. **Greybeard**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017354-4, 207pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1964; this edition, which appeared in hardcover from Severn House last year [not seen], is slightly revised; significantly, it has a recent quote from P.D. James on the back cover: "Mr Aldiss's powerful novel is suffused with grief at the loss of children... He uses the genre novel to explore themes of importance to him.") 27th January 1994.

Banks, Iain M. **Against a Dark Background**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-185-6, 487pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 73.) 20th January 1994.

Belle, Pamela. **The Silver City**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32876-X, 496pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; advertised as the first of a trilogy, it represents the debut in the heroic fantasy field of a British author who has already written eight historical romances.) 11th February 1994.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **The Firebrand**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-017720-5, 560pp, paperback, £5.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 3rd February 1994.

Brust, Steven. **Five Hundred Years After**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85179-0, 445pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *The Phoenix Guards*; it's a swashbuckler, which, as the title suggests, leans on the "Three Musketeers" novels of Alexandre Dumas.) April 1994.

Carver, Jeffrey A. **Neptune Crossing: Volume One of The Chaos Chronicles**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85640-7, 381pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; despite the unfortunate subtitle, this appears to be hard sf, not fantasy, and it has a commendation from Gregory Benford.) April 1994.

Compton, D.G. **Nomansland**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05714-9, 286pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 68.) 17th February 1994.

Daniel, Tony. **Warpath**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-154-5, 295pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 71.) 3rd February 1994.

Dean, Pamela. **The Dubious Hills**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85442-0, 316pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; in the copyright statement the author's name is given as Pamela Dyer-Bennett; the accompanying publicity compares her writing style to those of Peter Beagle and Patricia McKillip.) April 1994.

Derrett, Andrew. **Black Angels**. Janus Publishing [Duke House, 37 Duke St., London W1M 5DF], ISBN 1-85756-064-7, 108pp, paperback, £4.95. (Horror collection, first edition; the author is Australian, born in Britain in 1966, and this appears to be his debut book.) 17th February 1994.

Dery, Mark, ed. **Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture**. Duke University Press [distributed in UK by Academic & University Publishers Group, 1 Gower St., London WC1E 6HA], ISBN 0-8223-6400-X, 309pp, trade paperback, £8.50. (Collection of critical essays on sf, first edition; this also doubles as a special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 92, no. 4, Fall 1993; it contains pieces by Scott Bukatman, Pat Cadigan, Marc Laidlaw, Mark Pauline, Vivian Sobchak and others on the avant-garde, post-modernist aspects of sf and film.) January 1994.

Duncan, Dave. **The Living God: Part Four of A Handful of Men**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37899-7, 386pp, hardcover, \$20. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) April 1994.

Eddings, David. **High Hunt**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647593-0, 340pp, paperback, £4.99. (Non-fantasy novel by a leading fantasy author, first published in the USA, 1973; this "tale of mountain adventure" was Eddings's debut book.) 24th January 1994.

Eddings, David. **The Shining Ones: The Tamuli, Book Two**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224323-7, 472pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 7th February 1994.

Friesner, Esther M. **Yesterday We Saw Mermaids**. Pan/Tor, ISBN 0-330-33450-6, 157pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical fantasy novella, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 67.) 25th February 1994.

Gaiman, Neil. **The Sandman: Fables and Reflections**. Illustrated by Bryan Talbot and many others. Introduction by Gene Wolfe. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-497-4, 264pp, trade paperback, £12.50. (Fantasy graphic-story collection, first edition; originally published in comic-book parts in the USA, 1991-93; the credits are almost completely illegible on this book's cover [by Dave McKean], but no doubt that's all part of the mystique...) 10th February 1994.

Gilluly, Sheila. **The Emperor of Earth-Above**. "The Third Book of the Painter." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4277-1, 314pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993.) 13th January 1994.

Goldstein, Lisa. **Summer King, Winter Fool**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85632-6, 287pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) May 1994.

Greenberg, Martin H., Bill Munster and Ed Gorman, eds. **The Dean Koontz Companion**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0830-1, 314pp, hardcover, £18.99. (Companion to the life and works of a leading horror/thriller writer who began his career in genre sf; first edition; it contains a 50-page interview with Koontz conducted by Ed Gorman, critiques by Matt Costello, Charles de Lint and David B. Silva, various short articles and pieces of fiction by Koontz, and a bibliography [this last could have been more detailed, and would have benefited from chronological rather than alphabetical arrangement]; an interesting and useful volume overall.) 6th January 1994.

Hampton, Alexandra. **The Experience Buyer**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-33087-X, 323pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror [?] novel, first edition; it's by a British writer, new to us, who has previously written six novels [presumably romances?] under the name "Alexandra Connor"; it's not marketed as horror but concerns the paranormal and is described as taking the reader into "a surreal and threatening world populated by grotesques.") 25th February 1994.

Harrison, Harry. **Galactic Dreams**. Illustrated by Bryn Barnard. Tor, ISBN 0-312-

85246-0, 222pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; another Harrison sampler, similar in style to last year's *Stainless Steel Visions*; it contains a number of older stories plus the new "Bill, the Galactic Hero's Happy Holiday.") April 1994.

Holt, Tom. **Here Comes the Sun**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-187-2, 282pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 73.) 20th January 1994.

Joshi, S.T., and Darrell Schweitzer. **Lord Dunsany: A Bibliography**. "Scarecrow Author Bibliographies, No. 90." Scarecrow Press [distributed in Britain by Shelving Ltd, 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL], ISBN 0-8108-2714-X, 365pp, hardcover, £42.50. (Fantasy author bibliography, first published in the USA, 1993; this is of course the US edition [published at \$42.50] with a rather high British price; a scrupulous bibliography, by two well-known critics who separately have written much on Dunsany elsewhere; recommended.) 24th February 1994.

King, Stephen. **Nightmares and Dreamscapes**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-59282-6, 593pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1993.) Late entry: November [?] 1993 publication, received in January 1994.

Koontz, Dean. **Winter Moon**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0910-3, 345pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf/horror novel, first edition [?]; it's actually a completely rewritten and greatly expanded version of the sf novel *Invasion*, first published in 1974 by Laser Books, Toronto, under the pseudonym "Aaron Wolfe"; at one time this was rumoured to be a pseudonymous work by Stephen King, but it turns out to have been a Dean Koontz novel all along.) 6th January 1994.

Laymon, Richard. **Alarums**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4130-9, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1993.) 13th January 1994.

Ligotti, Thomas. **Noctuary**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-233-8, xiii+194pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror collection, first edition.) 17th January 1994.

Ligotti, Thomas. **Noctuary**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0003-3, xiii+194pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror collection, first published in the UK, 1994.) February 1994.

Little, Bentley. **The Mailman**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0890-5, 314pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 3rd February 1994.

Llywelyn, Morgan. **Finn MacCool**. Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85476-5, 400pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) March 1994.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Damia's Children**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13912-2, 335pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; sequel to *The Rowan and Damia*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 76.) 3rd February 1994.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Lyon's Pride**. "Volume 4 in *The Tower and the Hive* series." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02652-7, 316pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994; sequel to *The Rowan, Damia and Damia's Children* [note that these books have now sprouted a series title which they didn't have before].) 3rd February 1994.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Wrecks of Time**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-017349-8, 192pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1967; previous British editions have appeared under the title *The Rituals of Infinity*.) 27th January 1994.

Ouellette, Pierre. **The Deus Machine: A Novel.** Random House/Villard, ISBN 0-679-42407-5, 446pp, hardcover, \$22.50. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a near-future thriller about an intelligent computer, described as introducing "a fiction talent with the imagination of a Michael Crichton, the breakneck pace of a Tom Clancy, and the humanity of a Dean Koontz"; alas, this is probably the only way to sell sf to the mass audience these days – exploit an old theme, avoid the "sf" label at all costs, and compare your product to existing best-sellers who have also eschewed the label; the French-named author is in fact American and lives in Oregon; this copy of the American proof has been sent to us by Hodder & Stoughton, who are planning a British edition in April.) *January 1994.*

Reichert, Mickey Zucker. **Child of Thunder.** "Volume Three of the fantasy epic *The Last of the Renshai*." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-126-X, 497pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) *17th February 1994.*

Rohan, Michael Scott, and Allan Scott. **The Ice King.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-088-4, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published under the pseudonym "Michael Scot" in 1986.) *20th January 1994.*

Ruddick, Nicholas. **Ultimate Island: On the Nature of British Science Fiction.** "Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 55." Greenwood Press [88 Post Rd. West, Westport, CT 06881, USA], ISBN 0-313-27373-1, xi+202pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Critical study of sf, first edition; this is a fascinating book, on a subject which is obviously close to our hearts; Greenwood Press books are damnably expensive and difficult to get hold of [generally, they don't send out review copies] but all those who are seriously interested in the academic study of British sf are recommended to try to obtain a copy, through interlibrary loan or whatever.) *Late entry: Spring [?] 1993 publication, kindly sent to us by the author; received in January 1994.*

Ryman, Geoff. **Unconquered Countries: Four Novellas.** Introduction by Samuel R. Delany. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-09929-0, xii+275pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; it consists of three stories first published by *Interzone* – "The Unconquered Country" [1984], "O Happy Day" [1985] and "Fan" [1994] – plus a hitherto unpublished novella called "A Fall of Angels"; recommended.) *April 1994.*

Shepard, Lucius. **The Ends of the Earth.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-114-6, 484pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1991.) *17th February 1994.*

Shepard, Lucius. **The Golden.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-111-1, 216pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 75.) *3rd February 1994.*

Smith, Michael Marshall. **Only Forward.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21774-6, 451pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new British writer who has been building a reputation for his short stories.) *7th April 1994.*

Sterling, Bruce. **The Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-017734-5, xiv+328pp, paperback, £6.99. (Non-fiction study of computer hacking in America; first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by

Andy Robertson in *Interzone* 66.) *27th January 1994.*

Swanwick, Michael. **The Iron Dragon's Daughter.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-081-6, 343pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *17th February 1994.*

Tarr, Judith. **Throne of Isis.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85363-7, 349pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is the tale of Anthony and Cleopatra retold.) *April 1994.*

Taylor, Bernard. **Evil Intent.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0874-3, 248pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) *6th January 1994.*

Varley, John. **Steel Beach.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647726-7, 567pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 81.) *24th January 1994.*

Wagner, Matt. **Grendel: War Child.** Illustrated by Patrick McEown and others. Dark Horse, ISBN 1-878574-89-2, unpaginated [over 200pp], trade paperback, \$18.95. (Sf graphic novel, first edition.) *Late entry: 16th December 1993 publication, received in January 1994.*

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Hand of Chaos.** "The Death Gate Cycle, Volume V." Corgi, ISBN 0-553-40377-X, xxv+464pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *3rd February 1994.*

Wolfe, Gene. **Nightside the Long Sun: The First Volume of The Book of the Long Sun.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-59763-6, 333pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 81.) *January 1994?*

Zelazny, Roger, and Robert Sheckley. **Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32132-3, 279pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) *11th February 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).

Cornell, Paul. **No Future.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20409-3, 272pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; the third "New Adventures" novel to have been written by Cornell, who seems to have emerged as the star author of this series.) *17th February 1994.*

Duane, Diane, and Peter Morwood. **Sea-Quest DSV: The Novel.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-205-3, 200pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV series novelization, first published in the USA [?], 1993; it's based on a script by Rockne S. O'Bannon and Tommy Thompson.) *3rd February 1994.*

Eklund, Gordon. **The Starless World.** "Star Trek Adventures, 3." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-505-9, 152pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1978.) *27th January 1994.*

Kubasik, Christopher. **Mother Speaks.** "Earth Dawn, 2." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-023356-3, 317pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world fantasy novel, probably

based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "FASA.") *27th January 1994.*

Lyons, Steve. **Conundrum.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20408-5, 261pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *20th January 1994.*

McCaffrey, Anne, and Jody Lynn Nye. **Tre-ty Planet.** "The compelling story of Doona continues." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-139-2, 441pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; sequel to *Crisis on Doona*; there is a simultaneous paperback edition [not seen]; it's copyright "Bill Fawcett and Associates," which is a packaging company, so we suspect this is really a sharecrop – i.e. written by Nye, with minimal input from McCaffrey.) *17th February 1994.*

Perry, Steve. **Nightmare Asylum: Aliens, Book Two.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-142-1, 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.) *3rd February 1994.*

Zahn, Timothy. **The Last Command: Star Wars, Volume 3.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40443-1, 428pp, £4.99. (Sf film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) *20th January 1994.*

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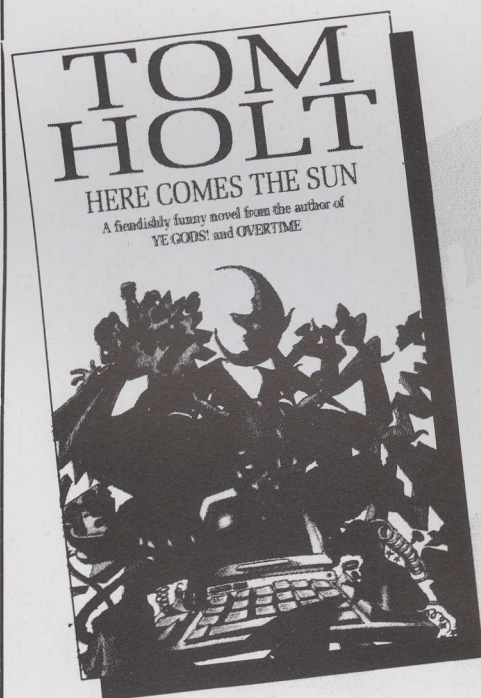
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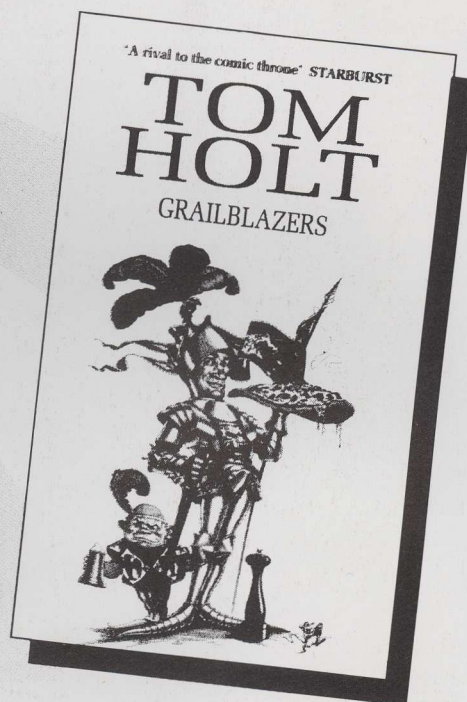
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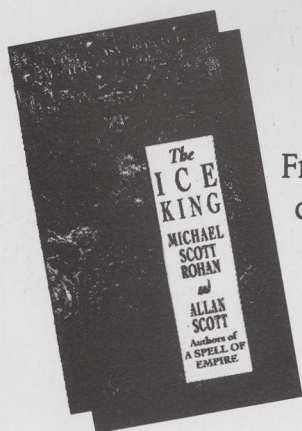
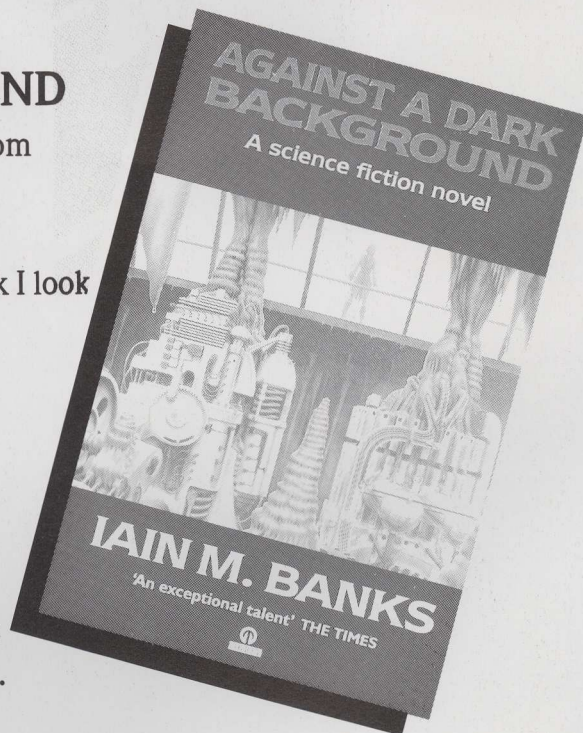
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